



HOW TO EMPOWER YOUTH FOR EMPLOYMENT & ADULT LIFE

A presentation by Christina Eagle (October 14, 2021)

RACHEL POLANSKY: Since most of you are here now, let's go ahead and get started. To those of you who just joined us, good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar, How to Empower Youth for Employment and Adult Life. My name is Rachel Polansky and I am your host for today's event.

It's wonderful to have you all here today. I have the distinct pleasure of introducing today's speakers, Christina Eagle and her student Alex.

Christina Eagle is the Program for Employment Preparedness (PEP) coordinator in Arlington Public Schools. She began her career as the first student to ever graduate from Marymount University with an undergraduate degree in special education. In 2008, she earned her Master's degree in Special Education, with an emphasis in adapted curriculum. And in 2018, she earned a second Master's in Special Education Transition Education from George Washington University. She has been teaching for the past 16 years. Christina has taught preschool, elementary, high school, and post-secondary levels. She is particularly passionate about transition education, advocating for work-based learning, and empowering students with self-determination skills. Having students discover and use their talents to better the world is her most important goal and greatest accomplishment.

Alex Keith is a student at the Arlington Career Center in the Program for Employment Preparedness. Alex is one of the most positive and kind students. He has a passion for transportation. He was a culinary arts student and attended the

PERT program at the Wilson Workforce Center and Fisher Isabel, Virginia. He currently works at Amazon and is seeking work at the airport with Southwest Airlines. He also has his own business called Keith Seasonal Service. And Alex collects lanyards. He's awesome.

So, without further ado, I will turn it over to Christina. Take it away.

CHRISTINA EAGLE: All right, well, first of all, thank you to the OAR for having us here. We're very excited to talk about empowering youth and getting them ready for adult life.

Today, we're going to talk a little bit about sort of, how do we do that? How do we get students ready for the next step in their career? Outside of school. And we're going to also begin that by doing a little bit of reflection as well.

RACHEL: All right, Thank you. So let's go ahead, and our first poll question is how many jobs have you had in your career?

So, select one of the following options: the same job for my whole career, between 2 to 5 different jobs, 25 to 10 different jobs, or more than 10 different jobs.

So, we'll leave that up for just a few more seconds. Please, go ahead and respond!

All right, they're coming in.

All right, 70%. We're gonna give it just a couple more seconds.

All right. So, it looks like we have about 73% have voted, so for those of you who have not responded, go ahead and submit your response now and we'll go ahead and close that in just one more second.

Alright. So, we are going to go ahead and close our poll, it looks about 83% of you voted. And it looks like the majority, 55%, have between 2 to 5 different jobs, and 42% have between 2, 5 to 10 different jobs. So, I will hand it back over to you, Christina.

CHRISTINA: Awesome. So, when we think about that, when we think about that, most of us have had a number of jobs and thinking about how did we start that?

And one of the things that we're going to focus on is these guiding questions today, like: What are our core values and our guiding principles when we're preparing youth for adult life? What are specific ways that we can prepare youth for employment, and for what we call "adulting"? And how does that role of a teacher or a parent shift when preparing youth?

So when we talk about core values, this is what is at the heart of our PEP Program. So first, we have self-determination. And what that means is that students to learn – they become more self-aware. They learn how to self-regulate. They learn how to problem-solve, and set goals for themselves, and how to self-advocate for their needs and their wants for their future, and for their needs or wants right now.

We focus a lot on interdependence. I tell my students all the time, we're not islands. I don't want you to be independent. I want you to be interdependent. I want you to use your resources. There's very little in my life as an adult that I do by myself. Parenting, working. There is pretty much no "me." I'm working as a team, with a team, with other people, with a variety of resources.

And then we focus on social skills and understanding relationships and how that translate to both... both working relationships, and also with relationships that they have outside of work.

And then we talk about the financial literacy of, you know, all those “adulting” things, fun stuff like paychecks and bills and all those type of things.

And also, literacy, knowing how to, you know, be a reader, consume all the different kinds of resources that are out there, news, those type of things.

And then, we also focus on universal working skills. And those are those career skills that students need to be successful.

So, when we talk about our guiding principles, there are two main principles that I want to focus on.

And the picture is actually my dad and my uncle's business that they had for 50 years. And one of my first jobs I had – I've had many jobs in my career, and one job that I did have is was with many of my cousins and brother. We worked at my dad's auto repair shop and gas station, and we pumped gas. And that was a part of our upbringing and being a part of a family business.

And on the first day of work, everyone in my family, would go, and my dad would give you the same speech that he gave to all of our family. And he would bring us out onto the busy street, and we would watch the cars go by. And he would say, you know, “Lots of people come into this, into our shop and they will have great cars, fancy cars, and they will have lemons, and you treat everyone with respect.”

And my dad would always say that we get people where we're going. And that sort of has been my philosophy with working with transition-age youth is that I get students to where they're going and that it is a great privilege and honor.

And what I hold to be true is that every person has something meaningful to contribute to the world, and there's no qualifiers to that statement. That every

student, no matter what kind of needs that they may have, they have something to contribute to the world. And it's our duty to help them achieve that.

And that every job has meaning and value. So there might be jobs with better pay, or better benefits, or those type of things. But every job serves a purpose, and every job has meaning and value. And I think that that's one thing that in our society, we need to really honor that. Especially as we're seeing in the current job climate is that people are leaving and quitting because they don't feel valued. And so that's something that we need to also make sure that we honor for all of our students and for everybody, because it's just good being a nice human.

So, a lot of times, like, where do we start? How do I get started with transition-age youth, and helping them sort of figure out where they want to go next? And what we start with is building self-awareness. Talking about what you like, what you don't like, how do you spend your free time? What does a good day for you look like? I always start with, like, how do you spend your free time and getting to know them in terms of that. And that can usually lead to something.

And then as I'm working with youth, I'm pointing out what is a strength for them. So even with my own children that I have at home, they were telling me about how they were helping a friend in class, and I said, oh, you really have, you really care about that person. Caring is a great strength of yours.

And I think that one thing that I have learned about working with high school students and post-secondary students is that they're looking for that validation of... That a student who really likes video games and spends a lot of time doing that, you really like problem-solving and figuring out how to get to the next level. That is a great strength. So trying to find and work with them where they are.

Also, we also help them become more self-aware through interest profiles. ONET is one of them. I put links in the handouts to some others. CareerOneStop is another. And in Virginia, we use Virtual Job Shadow as well. There's lots of tools out there that, sort of, that you can do at home.

But working with students, and trying to figure out what they like – because, with a job, you want to be doing something that you enjoy as well. This picture is also from a previous student who had awesome artistic talents. And so, one of the things that we do in PEP is also trying to get them to use their talents in a meaningful way. And so we connected this student with an art group, and they had an art show with a couple of other students who participated. And it was really cool to see them use their talents in meaningful ways. So, that, that's another way. There's lots of avenues, social avenues out there. It's just a matter of connecting those students to those things.

Another way to really get a – have our students use their talents is just to allow them to engage with the world. And experience tells us so much. And a lot of the things that we learn about students in PEP is from their experiences in their working environments at their internships. We had a student one time who, he told me that he liked to work inside, he wanted to work in customer service, he liked to lift heavy things. And so we found him an internship at a grocery store, and what we learned is that the smell of some of the fruits did not – were not great for him. And we wouldn't have known that, if we did not place him in that environment. So environments are really powerful tools in teaching us.

Also, having students engage in different clubs, passions, and interests. Starting there, right? Having them... there's lots of jobs in every field. And so even with even with... I know some students who are really active in theater and they spend time

doing singing and dancing and musicals and all that kind of stuff. And there's a whole field of customer service and even working with that, students who love movies, working in that industry. And it might not be at first working with, like, producing films but it's a step in the right direction of getting within that field and moving in that direction.

And then one – a lot of times parents asked me like, how do I get them experience? Volunteering is a great way to start. I always suggest making the time that you volunteer short in duration and building up. Don't, you know, volunteer for eight hours in one session. Start with an hour and then build it up.

And that is one thing that I think even with the shift from the pandemic and being at home to then coming back to the working office, you know, there's been a change, in even my colleagues, our work endurance. And so, everybody's been pacing themselves and working on those type of things as well.

Next, I think it's also really important that we put the youth at the center of it all. So we have, as a part of our policies and sort of procedures within PEP, is having students, you know, practice calling out to their supervisors when they're not going to be here. Practicing that travel training. We do that in both as a part of our routines, but also, we practice things like getting lost and how to handle a late bus and all of those type of things.

And asking for help, or asking for more work. Those are all things.

And then also handling that feedback. And that is, like, one thing that I think is difficult for anybody who's trying hard at their job, is getting feedback and applying that feedback to their future work.

So that brings us to that shift from teacher or parent, to coach. And I think with, you know, post-secondary students, it's really important to move into that coaching position. Because one thing with our students, who have been in the K-12 academic area, right, before, a lot of their experience, is we focus on their areas of growth. But in the post-secondary, especially in PEP, what we work on, is like, what can you do? What do you want to do? And how can we make that happen?

And so, taking that shift and moving them is having them do all this work, but also coaching them through it. We still have to teach, and we have to teach them through that coaching model.

And so, a lot of times, is with communication. And so, like, talking about how do you want to handle an exchange between co-workers, or between a supervisor and that person. So that's one thing.

And then problem-solving is huge. How to think through problems. One year, when I was a teacher, I just focused on problem-solving. We do it all day, every day, all the time. And so giving students also that language of helping them to identify a problem, to think through possible solutions, and then pick one and reflect on it – did that work? Did that not work?

And so when, you know, when students were asking me, “I need a pencil,” I was like, “That's a problem. How are you going to solve it?” And I – and the more we use that language, what I was noticing is that I would be at an internship with the student. And I remember we left a key somewhere. And they said to me, “That's a problem! But I know how to solve it.” And I think that becoming, using those terms, making it a part of our vocabulary is like super important for students as well.

And then navigating social dynamics. And how to think through boundaries. You know, a lot of times our students struggle with the social skills aspects to a job. It's not that they can't complete the work's task. It's the social dynamics of getting along with all of their co-workers and their supervisor, and all of those things. So, you know, practicing those things in isolation, also trying to apply it in other situations.

As I've been putting the presentation together, that's one of the things that I've been thinking about, is that some of our work skills are not necessarily work skills, but all of these other self-determination skills or social skills.

OK. And so, one thing that parents or teachers might be thinking about is, what can I help with? And we can help with support, helping with navigating all the supportive agencies. And so I've listed some here.

So many of our students get connected with the Department of Rehabilitation Services in Virginia. We call that DARS. And I think in Maryland they call it DORS. But that is one area that provides job coaching or career assessment to find out more about their interests in a more formalized and structured fashion. Alex is going to talk a little bit about PERT and his experience with that.

And then there might be county services as well. So, county services can provide more ongoing support. DARS provides a little bit of more immediate services in terms of getting an individual going with work and giving them to be stable within their work. And sometimes county services can provide support on a more ongoing level, or even housing, or those type of supports for some of our students. They work with mental health services.

There may be more employment supports out there that are specific to – So in Arlington County, we have the Employment – the Arlington Employment Center, that is open to anybody. And they provide supports of, like, job fairs and workshops on resumes and those type of things that can be beneficial to our students as well. In fact, we've had a couple of students who found an alternative to an Early Childhood Certification through our Employment Center.

And so there's these wonderful opportunities that exist outside of the school system and disability-specific supports that anyone can access, and that can be a really great thing.

And then there's also Social Security. And, you know, that – there's Ticket to Work, and lots of ways that we can support our students, and our youth, in, in ways to make sure that we're working with benefits to understand, so they don't lose their eligibility with Social Security as they enter into work, as well.

So this is an area that I think that is really where we need to work together in that interdependence piece and in helping them navigate all that. Because all of these things sort of weave in together for individuals.

So let's talk a little bit more about PEP and how we prepare our students for work and for adulthood. Like I said, we get students to where they are going.

And so a little bit about our makeup is that we run Monday through Friday, just like a regular school system, and we are a part of Arlington Public Schools. And we provide – Our students come to school every day, and then from school, they go either into the community or into their internships.

And so Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, they have class time in the morning. Many of our students take career and technical education courses. And then, after our first period, they go into their internships and they're there for a portion of the day, and then they go into class, class time in the afternoon as well. And then on Mondays and Fridays, we do community-based instruction. Students will go out into the community to learn about hands-on education with like banks or visit grocery stores and do price comparison shopping, and all those type of things. So we focus on both. And also, it's huge – we do a lot of travel training of getting them used to public transportation, using it, and all of that problem solving that goes along with public transportation.

Some of our business partners. We have about, if I counted all of our internships up, we have about, like, 24. We have – these are some of our major ones that we have.

And then PEP also has our own businesses that we run. So we have a brown box kitchen where we make made-to-order salads, wraps, and sandwiches for staff. And we also have an office squad which will – we do the work for you, so that you can – we do copying and laminating and making a variety of classroom materials or other needs. We make buttons and t-shirts in office squad. And then we also have Designs by PEP, which is, we make artisan gifts. And we also have PET Love, which is pet-related things. And those – Designs by PEP and PET Love – were sort of what we were working on during the pandemic when we were home, like, these entrepreneurial ideas. And students sort of guide everything and are involved in the decision-making process from there.

All right, so, we're going to do another poll.

RACHEL: Awesome, thank you, Christina. So our next poll is, Did you learn something about yourself from all your jobs?

So, we have two options here. We have either Absolutely or Nope. Nothing. So take a little bit of time to think about this one. Got 50-50 shot. Alright, looks like the results are coming in.

70% of you, 72. Great, so we'll just give it a couple more seconds before we go ahead and share those results.

All right, it looks like we have about 77% in, so we'll give it about five more seconds and then we'll go ahead, and get your answers in if you haven't already, please. And then we will go ahead and show.

All right, So we are at 81%. So let's go ahead and share those results. So, it looks like we have 100% across the board, Absolutely, people did learn something from all of their jobs.

CHRISTINA: Absolutely. And I think that, you know, when we talk about, especially those early jobs... I wouldn't say that I am the best gas pumper in the world, and, it wasn't even about that. It was more about learning how to engage with people, take direction, you know, work with people, and my family, at the same time, And, and all those jobs have meaning and give us a takeaway that we can give to our next career move.

All right. So, I want to talk a little bit about these universal working skills.

And one thing that I think about all the time with our students, you know – there are job-specific skills that we have. You know, today, I visited an internship over at

the country club, and they were doing a variety of tasks related to the restaurant business. And those are great skills to practice.

But, working as a team, receiving that feedback, asking for more work. Those are skills that, no matter what actual task you're doing, they're going to be at every job site, and those, I will say, are the main skills that employers are looking for.

So those are things like communication skills, those interpersonal skills. Also, like, you know, understanding how to communicate an e-mail and text. That's one of the things that we address a lot with our students of knowing who to text and who to e-mail and when and how much to take a break. We have a 24-hour responding rule of knowing how to regulate that.

And then those social skills and social boundaries. Both in the virtual world but also as we're working with people. And, you know, there's a lot of savviness that you have to have with working with a team and working with a variety of people and in different ways.

DBO, the ability to follow directions and maybe ask questions when things are not clear, or to know how to alert a supervisor when you're needing help.

And I've already talked a lot about, you know, accepting feedback and applying it.

Teamwork is especially – is really important. Especially, we've had a lot of our classrooms focus on teamwork and working with each other. Our school is a project-based learning school, so it's a huge focus for us to learn how to accept everybody for where they are, and trying to use talents in – different talents in creative ways, so that everybody is participating and giving equally and, you know, putting their best efforts forward.

And then problem-solving is huge. You know, when you come across your problem, that you're able to think through, it to have the willing, the resilience to carry on after a problem happens.

And also, for a lot of our students, and also for anyone, a lot of times with problem solving, I try to emphasize that there's not just a right way and a wrong way. It's not black and white. A lot of problems with adult, with, you know, adults is that sometimes you have to pick the best or better solution. There's not always a right and a wrong. And it's not always clear. And you're going to try to pick the solution that is best for that time, or for the best for those people are, for you. And problem solving can be really complicated, and that's when we can use our team of support.

And so, and then time management is another big thing of knowing how to use your time, and well at work. Also, like there are downtimes at work, where you need to know how to use your time wisely, and then also the idea of work endurance. So, maybe you're not ready to do an eight-hour day. Maybe you're ready to start with just working for 20 minutes, and then we're going to add on from there. And so we talk a lot about that. We are in the first couple of weeks of internships, so when our students return from an internship, they're usually pretty tired, which is always a good sign.

So when we talk about instructional goals, I've talked a little bit about like practicing literacy skills and applications are in recipes and practical ways. Engage with the community in meaningful ways. We teach leisure skills a lot, of how to use your time when you're not working, because that's just as important. Where can you spend your time? What do you like to do? How do you access them? We partner with our Parks and Rec department in the county. We bring students to community

centers, we do a variety of things, and provide experiences in the community to learn.

So, this was my classroom, a couple, well, more than a couple of years ago, but, it seems like a couple years ago to me. And we did a project where the students raised money, and we took that money, and we bought gifts at the holiday times to donate them to a local elementary school who was in need. And so, it was all student driven. We did a class project of writing the letter to gain fundraising money, and then we went to Target, they shopped for students, we thought about what other students would want, elementary, and then they shop for them. They had to stay within their budget. We had to talk about more and less, and that type of learning, and doing something for someone else, is all part of being a good citizen. And so they have to utilize their resources in doing that.

And then a major part of our, PEP's planning is our transition planning, thinking about what the next steps are. We have a transition coordinator that works with our families, and with our students, and helping them to connect to those adult services and getting them connected, and then putting those into place. And so, in the transition time, where they're getting closer to exiting mandated services, that we're doing as much as we can to provide a seamless transition into their adult life as they move forward.

And then, one of the things that we do in PEP is also, we have the Order of Self-Determination. My colleague Deb Hammer, did a present a presentation about this not too long ago, with some of our students, but this is a picture from when – We have a group called the Order of Self-Determination, and we meet together and plan events for the school, and this was at one of our conferences. And the students here were presenting about how do you set goals, and, and they did

poster presentations and breakout sessions, and most of all, we had pizza, so it was a lot of fun.

And then, you know, as I've talked about with that transition piece is that connection to next steps of looking at community college, or even college. Looking at apprenticeships, job coaching services, transitional programs, and employment services is really important, as well.

All right, and next, I have the honor of introducing Alex, who is a great example of interdependence as well. And so, Alex, I will move it to the next slide, you can take it away.

ALEX: So, I went to PEP – no, I went to PERT twice, and I did forklifting, welding and material handling. It's like where you stock shelves and do, like, using hand trucks, all different stuff. And it was a 10-day program there and you stay by yourself with three other students there. And you do, it's fun activities with them. You make soap bars. You go to the mall and, like, practice with pretending you're shopping for a gift for someone. And we did organizing the room to make sure, over the week, we got graded on it. So like, we got a piece of paper and see if we did good job on cleaning the room. We had to clean everything. We did laundry, we went – we had a movie day, we went fun activities for outside and we did a lot of stuff there. And then add and parent can pick up the students, and I took Amtrak all by myself, there and back, from Union Station and the Amtrak station was Stanton Station.

CHRISTINA: Awesome. Do you want to tell me a little bit about work now?

ALEX: Yeah, Sure. So right now, I'm working at Amazon at Springfield, at the warehouse, and I'm stocking. Stocking, storing – not storing. Picking, packing, what was the other one, sorting, bringing them packages, picking the packages, stowing

the items on the shelf, and they have robots at Springfield. And that Amazon at Springfield is the newest one, because they opened 2021. And I used to work at Amazon at the Whole Foods at Ashburn, and then now I could transfer to a different location. So, I worked at Arlington, Ashburn, Crystal City/Pentagon, City, what was the other one? That's all I know so far. So now I applied for Southwest Airlines at BWI, but I might get transferred. Like, if I work for that company, I might get transferred to DCA because I could just bike there or walk or take the blue line.

CHRISTINA: Yeah. I definitely know. I think Alex is, like, can teach anybody having use public transportation, he's so good at it. Alex, what else? Is there anything that you've learned in PEP that has been helpful to you as you have gotten employment?

ALEX: Practicing money skills. So I used to work at AMC Theaters at Courthouse and I was a bit rusty on coins. But then, over time, when I was at the PEP program, I got better on coins.

CHRISTINA: Yeah. Yeah. And that is one of our instructional goals. It's working on giving students, you know, time to practice with different cashier experiences in some of the internships, even with our own internal businesses as well.

Awesome. Is there anything else that you wanted to add or talk about?

ALEX: Not really. That's all I know.

CHRISTINA: Alex will be available also to answer questions as well.

All right. So, I want to sort of sum it up so that we have time for questions as well.

So, this was at graduation, one of our students, wore this on their graduation cap and it really warmed my heart because it was summed it up perfectly, that our students are on to their next dream.

So when we're talking about empowering youth, we really want to build that self-awareness for them to really own who they are and what they like, and how does that apply into the world. Giving them experiences, and evaluating those experiences with them. Why was that good? You know, what made that such a great experience for you?

I know that, even in my own life, I got into working with students through volunteering as a high schooler and I ended up spending like most of my time that summer between volunteering and working. And my parents had that conversation with me of, you know, you're spending all your time either working or volunteering. What is it about volunteering that you like? And I was like, I don't know, it's just, that's how I want to spend my time. I feel like I belong there. And in those conversations, that's what really helped me sort of work through and finding my vocation of being a teacher and working with youth.

So, I can't emphasize enough the role that a parent and a teacher can have in helping them have those conversations or those reflections, pointing out their strengths, helping them to find viable paths forward, so that they can utilize their talents and abilities in real ways.

Coaching youth to understand, and really understand their experiences, and then helping to facilitate all of that interdependence with needed adult services. That that can be a maze. And, like anything, there's a lot of frustration that can come with calling agencies and navigating all of that. But that's an area of helping them to

understand who are the people in their life that can help them, in moments in notice. And it doesn't have to also be adult services. It could also be, you know, a friend of the family, or their friends or other family members who can provide support to them. Those are all wonderful ways of helping them to understand that they are networked and they have a bunch of social capital that that can be used in useful ways.

And then making sure that we're putting the youth at the center of it all, that they're doing, the work. That they're, you know, engaging with the community, and having them experience those things. and then connecting them with the next steps. That is really important. So, putting the wheels in motion for their next dream.

So, that is all that, I believe... I hit the wrong button. That is all that I have in terms of presentation, but I'm happy to answer questions.

RACHEL: Thank you, Christina. That concludes the presentation portion, and begins the Q and A session of today's webinar. As a reminder, you can submit your questions through the questions pane in your control panel.

Because our time is limited, we may not be able to get through all of your questions, but if there are any questions that we do not get to today, we will try to get back to you by e-mail.

So, our first question is from Melanie, and her question is: What is the name of a picture inventory you have used? Do you feel ONET is the most user-friendly website for career exploration? I have found that students get overwhelmed with all of the content of these websites.

CHRISTINA: Yeah. So, that is a great point. So there's a couple of different picture inventories we use, in our school system, a program called Unique, and they also have a picture inventory that we've used. There are some picture inventories if you do a Google search that has actual pictures of people doing those careers. And there's also the reading free picture inventory as well. That's like a more formalized assessment. But I feel I have mostly used a lot of picture-based ones, ones that I've created on my own, ones that I've used from a variety of sources.

In regards to your point about ONET, there are some assessments that are shorter. So, in the handout, if you look at CareerOneStop, there is a shorter – there are different lengths. And also, I, most recently, our school system, but also our state, has a connection with Virtual Job Shadow, and that uses the ONET assessment, but there are, it's called an E-Z assessment, and they only give students one question at a time, and they use emojis to rank their preference. And so I found that to be a little bit easier and user-friendly for students.

RACHEL: Awesome. Thank you. So our next question is from Lynn, and she says, I work in a job training for young adults, age 19 to 38 teaching video production. We have a PIP program starting. Do you have any suggestions on convincing employers that our participants would make a positive impact on their business? They are learning video production, communication, social skills, social media, lights, camera, et cetera.

CHRISTINA: Yeah, so that's a really great question. One thing in my... sort of having an elevator speech to businesses is really important. Of knowing sort of what you... knowing what you're going to say ahead of time. Because I think in that conversation, you want to be really concise and powerful in that communication. So I highly suggest like practicing it and knowing what you're gonna say.

In that, I always include that one of the purposes of our program is that we're here to help you and your business get the unmet needs that you may have done. And that has been one selling point in sort of negotiating and navigating that relationship. Our students have really great talents, and they can do things that maybe that a business may not have time for. And we can spend some time focusing in on that and getting that done, and that can create a like, really a mutual benefiting relationship between the business and your program.

And then, and also, I think it's also really helpful is when you're making those connections of having in mind the student's strengths and talents and how that might benefit. Because a lot of times when we talk to businesses, they're like, "I'm not sure how I would use you." And then I ask, like, "What are some things that you're not getting done that that you struggle with, that you just don't have time for?" And then I use that and try to also, in my head, think about students who have those skills to make a really good match.

RACHEL: Great. Thank you so much. Our next question is from Jaya and they want to know: can you talk more about the Virtual Job Shadowing and also how many individuals are in the PEP program at any given time?

CHRISTINA: That's a great question. So we have students...we have, our program is about 65 students. And we have a varying spectrum of abilities and talents in our program.

And what was the second part of the question?

RACHEL: How many students are in the PEP program at any time? Like what's your maximum?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, so. It varies depending on need in our program. And then there was a question about Virtual Job Shadow.

Yeah. And then Virtual Job Shadow is a pro- it's an online program, we have licenses through our state. But I'm not sure if, you would have to look on the website to see it might be, or, you know, that you would have to pay.

But what that program is – and there's lots of programs out there like this, this is the one that we happen to use – where it assesses students' interests, and then it matches them to career clusters and pathways. And then students can go and see video, actual videos, and they're current videos, they're not, like, videos from 1950, but they're current videos of people working, and it's like an informational interview library of all different kinds of careers. That program also matches, like, it matches the career pathways to also count post-secondary programs that have, you know, those programs, and college information about that as well. And, there's other features to it in terms of like employment and things like that, if people are interested in that. but that's one service. There's plenty of them out there. I'm just, that's just one example.

RACHEL: Great. And a follow up to that, one parent wants to know, is this only school-based for Virtual Job Shadowing or is that also available at home?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, so... if the student is a... it depends on the school system. In Virginia, in ours, we have access to it through being a part of the VDOE, the Virginia Department of Education, and then we get licenses for schools. And the student can access it at any time, as well.

RACHEL: Great. Thank you. Our next question is from Carrie, and they want to know: a lot of focus through the years, focuses on what students cannot do in order

to receive services. What have you found to be most beneficial to assist families, teachers, et cetera, to shift from the “can’t do” to the “can do”?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, I mean, I think that one thing that is a really great resource is the I'm Determined stuff. That's also through, it's a part of the Virginia Department of Education Initiative, but there's lots of self-determination things. As a part of the PEP program, we have students to present at their IEP. They present an “all about me” presentation and identify everything in a very positive light, and they present about what their needs are, who can help them, what their preferences are, what they like, what they don't like, and what their goals are.

And so, having them own that process, right? Disability services is complex, because in one, in one regard, in order to get services, you have to show need. And then, when we talk about employment, we're doing the opposite. We're talking about what your strengths are and what you can do.

And I think that we can talk about both things at the same time. And we can talk about what you need to be successful, and we can talk about what you can do at the same time. Those things don't have to run separately. And I think it's really important for... to have parents and have students sort of charge that and own it and present it.

And we've been really, it's been really awesome to watch students present their presentations, and talk about that, and sort of own who they are and present it to the whole team. That's really special.

RACHEL: Great, thank you. And also, I just wanna give a reminder to the audience, we have about six more minutes left. So if you do have any questions for Christina or Alex, please feel free to submit those into the chat function.

So our next question is from a parent: I am starting at the beginning with my child, how do I know what he qualifies for in adult services?

CHRISTINA: Yeah. So one of the things that I think about in terms of education, on the education side of it, is that we're not the gatekeepers. We, we sort of can show you all of the things that exist in the adult world, in terms of Department of Aging and Rehabilitation Services, county services, those type of things, employment services. But it's really taking that initiative to also go and sort of see what is available too, and we help along the way and help guide you through that.

But that's one thing that is really important because sometimes students will qualify for things that maybe I didn't think about or think that they would and those are great things that they can – if that's going to support them and get them to the next step. So I think it's really important for anyone not to stand in the way of those services, but also see what sort of casting a wide net and seeing what would benefit your child.

RACHEL: Great. Thank you. And I think this is going to be one of our last questions: how do I build work endurance?

CHRISTINA: So that's a great question. So starting small is really, really something that is important in helping to build success, right? So even starting really small, with just a small session, it can even be within your house, of asking them to do a set of chores and giving them feedback in that, and then expanding that to other things.

And those are great experiences to learn that, you know, even as a parent, I like to give chores to my kids and also say, like, you know, "This is not the way that we said,

that we agreed upon, that the table would look like when you set it. So I want you to do it again and do it the way that we agreed upon.”

And I think that those experiences, although frustrating, are really important to have that, to have that feedback and experience to apply that knowledge.

RACHEL: Great, Thank you. And this is going to be our last question that we have time for today. From Stanley, What resources would be needed from those who want a full-time position based on a career path?

CHRISTINA: So, hmm. So when you're looking at, if you're looking at full-time employment or that... so it depends on what career you're looking for, and what you want. If you're looking for full-time employment, you know, making sure that you have the skillset and the qualifications for all of that. There are some really awesome programs out there that help meet, that meet those qualifications.

For example, I know that there was a grant-based program out of Melwood called abil-IT, ability IT, and where they prepared individuals for certification in a plus hardware and different computer, CompTIA I think. But I'm not a computer expert, so there's probably other technical terms that I'm missing. So those certification help get better, better paying jobs, or more full-time work in that, those type of career pathways. So that's something that we can, that people can look at.

And also, the community colleges. If you look at their workforce initiatives, those are great areas to sort of find out what qualifications you would need to move forward into that employment. A lot of times, many of our students take career and technical education courses. And knowing the certifications and the credentialing that is needed for those different pathways can help individuals have full-time employment in the career that they want to be in.

RACHEL: Wonderful, thank you so much Christina, and thank you, Alex. Thank you everyone for joining us today.

If you found today's event helpful, we encourage you to register for OAR's next webinar event, Employment Supports For Transition-Aged Autistic Youth on November 17th at 2 PM Eastern.

On the closeout of today's event, you'll receive an exit survey. We would appreciate if you would complete that and provide your feedback.

Everyone will receive a follow-up e-mail with a link to today's webinar, video recording, and materials within the week.

On behalf of the Organization for Autism Research, thank you for joining us, and have a great rest of your day.