Making it Work - How Relationship Skills Support Economic Self-Sufficiency Conference

May 13, 2014

Operator:
Stand by. Good day and welcome to the Making it Work: How Relationship Skills Support Economic Self-Sufficiency conference. Today’s conference is being recorded. At this time, I’d like to turn things over to Ms. Jen McHenry. Please go ahead, ma’am.

Jen McHenry:
Thank you so much and hello everyone. I’d like to welcome you to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families May 2014 webinar, Making it Work: How Relationship Skills Support Economic Self-Sufficiency. Again, my name is Jen McHenry, and I’m part of the Resource Center team. I’d like to thank you all for joining us and taking the time out of your day.

Before we get started with the presentations, there are a few housekeeping items that I’d like to go over. For today’s webinar we’ll be broadcasting the audio through your computer speakers. Please make sure that the volume on your computer speakers is turned up so that you can hear the presentation.

Now, you should be seeing a poll questions pop up on your screen. Some of you may be participating in today’s webinar in a group while others may be watching alone. To help us get an idea of how many individuals we’re reaching today, we’re hoping that you could answer this question for us: If you are in a group, including yourself, what is the total number of individuals watching today’s webcast? Write that in for a minute. So, if there is one of you, you are one. If there are two of you, you are two. I’ll give everyone just a chance to answer that so we know just how many people we are getting to. Thank you for answering that, and I’ll leave that up for just another minute as we move on to another housekeeping item.

Today’s webinar will feature three presentations. At the end of those presentations, we’re going to conclude with a time dedicated to addressing your questions. We will be collecting your questions over the computer throughout the presentation. So if something pops up during the first presentation that you want to ask about, you can send that to us immediately. You don’t have to wait until the end to submit those. We encourage you to submit them throughout the webinar and any time you think of something, please pass it along. To do this, we’ll ask you to use a question and answer pod at the bottom right-hand of your screen, and it’s designated by the letters Q&A. You type your question into the open field at the bottom and then hit Send Question then, or you can press Enter as well. Your question will be received by the moderator here and passed along to be addressed at the end of the presentation. If for some reason there are more questions than we have time to address—and we’re hoping that there are—we will be following up with a question and answer document that addresses those questions that will be posted on the Resource Center webinar within the next few weeks.

There are a few additional features that will be discussed—excuse me—a few additional resources that will be featured and discussed in today’s webinar and will be available for you to download immediately from the pod on the top right of your screen. It’s labeled Files. You click on the name of the file you’d like to view and hit the Download button.
You’ll be able to open or save a copy of the resource to your computer. So there are a couple of different resources referenced. Those are all going to be available in that Files box as well as a copy of the presentation slides. There are a number of points that are available on the slides that may not be spoken to in-depth during the presentations. So you will be able to access those from that slide box.

Today’s webinar, we’ll be focusing on the connection between relationship skills and employment. And before we dive in too deep, we’d like to ask and get a sense of how familiar you as an audience are with that connection. So please take a moment to answer the poll question on your screen. It should be up in just a second, and it’s going to ask, “Does your agency or program currently offer access to both relationship skills training, conflict resolution, communication skills, and so forth, and employee assistance?” So things like resume writing, training, and job placement. And this again, access to both of these things, not necessarily that your particular program does both in full. And as you take a moment to answer that, we want to let you know that the material from this presentation, along with all of our previous webinars, will be posted in the Past Events Archive of our website, healthymarriageandfamilies.org, under the Training, Technical Assistance, & Events tab. So it looks like the majority of you are in fact offering access to both relationship skills and employment assistance, which is very exciting, and we promise to have some really interesting information for you and as well as those people who are not currently offering both.

So I’d like to now turn over the webinar to today’s host, Robyn Cenizal. Robyn is a Senior Manager with ICF International and the Project Director for the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. Robyn?

Robyn Cenizal:
Thanks, Jen, and welcome to everyone. Thank you all for joining us today. I want to start by telling you a little bit about our agenda. Today – the mission of the Resource Center is connecting healthy relationship education skills and safety-net service providers as an integrated approach to strengthening families. And we are going to—I’m sorry—and we use the term safety-net service providers as a collective term to address—hang on; I’m having difficulties with the slide. There we go. We use the term safety-net service providers as a collective term to address all of the federal, state, local and tribal government and social service agencies that support families in their efforts to gain, maintain, and regain self-sufficiency. And we hope through participating in webinars such as today that you will gain a better understanding of the role that healthy relationship skills play in strengthening families and their communities. We also hope that you’ll learn interesting strategies for integration that relate to your work with families.

I want to start by introducing our presenters. John Wilcox—and as Jen mentioned, we also have their complete bios in the downloadable box so that you can access that information. John Wilcox most recently served as the Executive Director for Corporate Voices for Working Families. A particular focus of John’s work has been on engaging the business sector on issues affecting lower-wage working families.

Dorian Friedman is a widely published communications professional, most recently serving as Director of Communications and Government Affairs at Corporate Voices for Working Families. She and John will be co-presenting on the Workforce Professional Guide, which is also a resource that can be downloaded today. It was co-authored in partnership with the Resource Center.
Avis Files serves as the Program Director for Toledo Area Ministries, Keeping it Together, a multifaceted program focusing on the family, providing services to youths, single adults, those interested in marriage, engaged and married couples.

And Dean Ma'ayan, our final presenter, is the Director of Development and Strategic Initiatives at PB&J Family Services, a child abuse prevention program for New Mexico’s most vulnerable families.

Today’s presentation highlights the connection between healthy relationship education and the workforce. We will talk about the *Workforce Professionals Guide*, developed in partnership with the Resource Center that speaks specifically to the impact of family stress on employees and their employers and how integrating supportive family strengthening programs can mitigate the financial impact of that stress on the business' bottom line. Then we will hear from two very different community organizations that partner with employers to provide job training and placement services. By integrating healthy relationship education skills into their programs, they increase the likelihood of successful and sustainable job placements.

Please use the box at the right of your screen, as Jen mentioned, to type any questions as we go through these presentations so that you don't forget them, and we will return after the presentations to facilitate a Q and A session and give the presenters an opportunity to respond to your questions. As I turn the time over to John and Dorian, thanks again for joining us, and I hope you enjoy today's presentation.

Robyn Cenizal:

John?

John Wilcox:

Thanks Robyn

Robyn Cenizal:

Dorian?

John Wilcox:

Thanks, Robyn. This is John Wilcox. And thanks also to the National Resource Center for making this opportunity available to everybody on the phone, and welcome everyone. I want to talk for a couple minutes about why we did this report, this *Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees: A Guide for Workforce Professionals*, and then Dorian will jump in with some specific examples about—that we found in big companies, which sort of underscore the findings.

And I guess maybe the best place to start is to say that I was struck by the graphic that Jen put up the circle of providers, because if you look at that circle, almost every single one of those organizations, those government and state—federal and state government agencies on that circle also have workforce connections. They’re either training folks to become employed or they have direct partnerships with employers or both. And that’s really the point of the work that we’ve done over the past year or two.

We put together this *Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees* workbook with the intention of providing really, three goals. We wanted to show employers why they ought to care about healthy relationships in ways that perhaps they haven't before. We wanted to give potential employees ways to communicate with their employers about healthy relationships, and to acknowledge explicitly to their employees the need that
they have for communication and help with their relationships. And we wanted to provide a whole set of resources—and really a mode for approaching employers for the universe of service providers that are out there who are continually dealing with workforce education and dealing with employers, either directly or tangentially and who might benefit from the perspective that we at Corporate Voices for Working Families could bring to the question of—well, how do you get employers to talk about work—who are used to talking just about workforce issues to shift gears and talk about relationship issues, too? So the guide addresses the importance of promoting healthy family and marital relationships as an effective strategy to improve interpersonal relationships and productivity in the workforce.

And what that really means is that when it comes right down to it, when you take away the bottom line and you don't think so hard about the setting, relationships are relationships. And if your employee is suffering because of lack of relationship skills or because of a crisis that they're going through, your employee's work is going to suffer. And once a business makes that leap, then most of the conceptual work in this piece that we are presenting is done, at least from a business perspective. Because what that means is that the employers realize that, "Hey, wait a minute the work that I have to do to help my workers work together well, doesn't just stop at the business' front door, but in fact extends out into the home, into the community, and into the sphere of relationships."

So the guide, Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees, focuses on a series of specific steps that employers can take to support their employees—to help their employees build the skills they need to work better together, and that really means generically work better together. That doesn't just mean work better together on their home relationship skills, and it doesn't just mean work better on working with their folks in down the production line or across the cubicle. It's really the same. And not incidentally, help those employees reduce their family stress.

It turns out that the skills it takes to reduce family stress and to have better relationships at home—things like communication and conflict resolution, healthy parenting, and financial management—it turns out that not only can those skills strengthen families and strengthen communities they can also improve business outcomes. And from a business perspective, that, that really is critical.

When we ask the question in the report, you know, "Why American businesses should care about healthy relationships," what we're really asking is, you know, "What's the bottom line for business here?" Because, as many of you know who work with business, whether placing some of your clients in employment relationships or reaching out to businesses as partners, you know that in order for a business to actually commit to a course of action, there's got to be a business case for them. The individual business leader you're speaking to you may be completely committed to helping you out and may really feel that on an emotional level, on a moral level, on a community level – but in order for that business leader to convince his supervisors all the way up the chain that this is a good course of action for the overall enterprise, that business usually frequently has to come up with a business justification for it. And that's really what this report that we've put together is all about—helping businesses talk about human relationships, family relationships, marriage, the home life, in business terms, so that they can better engage.

So looking at that whole universe of issues from a business perspective, it turns out that employees' stress cost American businesses literally billions of dollars a year. Now, where does that come from? Well, if you think about your average employee who's
suffering through issues at home, no matter what they are, chances are they are not going to be as productive when they are at work. They may not come in: That's absenteeism. They may just have to leave their job for reasons unconnected to the job. To an employer all that stuff is a red flag and anything employers can do to reduce those sources of stress means in turn a good business justification for acting.

So there's a set of good research and there's a whole list of resources in the back of this guide we put together and more up on the Center's website, who have gone into uncovering just exactly what the results are of employers who invest in healthy relationships. An overview of all that work is that employers that start in logical spots, like improving communication and conflict resolution, better parenting, financial literacy, see returns on those investments, not just in terms of better employee performance on the job but also better stability at home, and the two are correlated.

So I mentioned stress a minute ago. Stress is literally a killer. The American Institute of Stress estimates that stress costs American business – directly in absenteeism and just lack of productivity and bad decisions – something between $150 and $300 billion dollars per year. Even in a $17 trillion economy, that's a large number. And it makes an evocative case that you can make to your business partners for committing to this sort of course of action. Increased stress drives employee turnover, diminishes productivity, affects medical and legal insurance costs.

Several studies have found upwards of 46 percent higher healthcare spending for stressed employees. For many employers, increasing healthcare costs are a significant financial factor in their—in their annual planning, their quarterly planning. So making the case to employers that you can reduce those healthcare costs by some relatively lower-level investments like this, that's another powerful argument. It's no coincidence that the World Health Organization recently called stress "the health epidemic of the 21st century" and they meant that phrase deliberately.

One of the reasons why Corporate Voices embraced this project was because business has not, as a rule, uniformly embraced anti-stress measures. There's been a tendency in the business sector, as in all sectors, to think about the work that they do as really ending at the line where they demark between business and home life. And what this research that is highlighted in the paper and which some leading companies have seized on demonstrates is that there really isn't that firm line between home life and business life and that stress that affects folks at home carries over into the business and vice a versa.

And companies that are committed to their employees' health and to providing resources for employees who need assistance really need to consider enterprises that affect both home life and work life. So to underscore that a series of surveys have been carried out. In one something like 22 percent of employees said their biggest distraction at work – the number one thing that got in the way of them doing what they were supposed to be doing at work – was relationship issues, personal relationship issues. And if you think about your work experience, I imagine that everyone on the line will be able to quickly recall some example of a co-worker who's upset or disturbed or bothered, for one reason or another, about something that had nothing to do with work. And that's just human. But realizing that and focusing our collective attention is —is, we think, one way that companies can positively proceed forward.

A startling statistic that we uncovered during the making of this toolkit is that divorce could cost employers, for an employee making $20.00 an hour, $8,000.00 in a particular
year. For employers who employ folks at that level, that's a staggering sum. That's equivalent to, you know, a quarter of a year's pay. So, in business terms, why should business invest in—why should business invest in healthy relationships? The answer is that employees who are in healthy and stable relationships tend to be more productive — more committed to their employers — and commitment is a measure that many employers use, whether it's from employee surveys or other measures, that roughly estimates, you know, how likely it is that their employees are to remain employees, to stay with the employer, and to go above and beyond—above and beyond the call of duty to further the employers' needs. So it's an important measure and one that employers pay attention to.

So when you talk to your employer-partners, sooner or later, you'll hear the term return on investment come back from them. The reason for that is that by and large, across the business sector, return on investment is the number one metric by which employers decide whether or not they're going to make a particular decision. It doesn't matter whether it's, "Are we going to paint the factory a different color?" It doesn't matter whether it's, "Are we going to give employees a raise?" Or "Are we going to invest in healthy relationship programs?" If return on investment is positive—in other words, if they're going to make something more back from it than they're going to spend or if it's neutral, then the way is clear. If it's a negative ROI, if they will lose money at it, then the way gets much harder. It's easy for business to say yes to positive ROI and very difficult for business to say yes to negative ROI. So the good news about companies who are interested in investing in the physical and emotional wellness of their workers is that the ROI, according to several studies, is positive, ranging from a $1.50 to $6.85 for every $1.00 the company spends. As a general rule for especially big companies—but small ones too that take care to pay attention to this level of granularity—for big companies, a $6.85 to $1.00 return is a slam dunk. If managers can identify, you know, $6.00 or $7.00 to $1.00 investments they can make, that's how managers become vice presidents; that's how companies make lots of money. That's an incentive for every company that you deal with to make—well, to take dramatic steps to make sure that they're actually realizing that return.

So that's an overview of not just the basic findings of this toolkit we put together but also the perspective with which employers will try to bring to the question of whether they ought to be investing in services for healthy relationship initiatives.

Next, Dorian Friedman will run through a series of case studies we put together about five pretty large companies who have made investments in healthy relationships that benefit their current workers. In many cases, I think what you'll find from these is a genuine commitment from these big companies to try to be helpful but also a range of ways of talking about healthy relationships that may or may not mirror the language that you use in providing the services that you do to your clients. And I encourage you to put on your translation hats as you listen to Dorian's examples with the fact that if this is the language that these big companies use to talk about these valuable services, whether the language—what sort of language can you use with your business partners to echo the success that these big companies have had? Because I think we can probably agree that the optimal outcome for both business and service providers and employers and employees is that the employees' needs get met through providing these healthy relationships initiatives, and the business has their needs met as well. So to list some case examples, here's Dorian Friedman. Dorian?
Dorian Friedman:

Thank you, John, and hello everybody. Thanks for your time this afternoon or this morning as the case may be. Um [clearing throat] excuse me. Let me just take a minute to provide some sort of framing and context before we dive into the five case studies.

Um [clearing throat] when John and I and our team began our work in this area, we surveyed the landscape of other employer organizations who promote an active business role in supporting the well-being of American workers, and we quickly saw that there were—while there was lots of good research in the field demonstrating employer best practices on issues related to healthy relationships, there was very little, if anything, specifically on the business case for healthy families and relationship skills.

For example, our friends at Working Mother Magazine had been doing it for years and continue to do great work on top American companies offering life skills training and supports, including supports like conflict resolution, stress management, parenting programs—obviously, that's their core. Another group here in Washington, D.C. where John and I are based, called the National Business Group on Health, had been publishing great research on stress and workplace stress and resilience and how employers can help mitigate those costs for their employees. The Business Group on Health also promotes—had been promoting annual rankings and giving out awards to the best employers for healthy lifestyles. Interestingly, the American Psychological Association even featured an annual Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards Program—that's a tongue twister—showcasing diverse employers who help their associates achieve emotional well-being on the job.

And finally, several leading business groups—most prominently, the U S. Chamber of Commerce—have offered valuable resources on the role of business in workplace wellness, which remains one of the hottest topics in the employer community today. [Clearing throat] So to fill the niche and kind of hone in on companies who are trying innovative approaches to promoting healthy relationship skills specifically, the topic of our report, we informally polled lots of our Corporate Voices’ member companies. We came up with a list up of I think a dozen or so interesting prospects and then narrowed it down to these five diverse companies that we're going to spend a few minutes talking about now.

Um [clearing throat] so our resource guide profiles these five companies: AOL, Bon Secours Health System, CVS Caremark, which we all know as CVS, Ernst & Young, and PNC Bank. Their experiences off—offer valuable lessons for other employers, we think, both large and small, who are committed to adding or expanding healthy relationship education to their existing programs.

So let's start with AOL. Um [clearing throat] from its start in the 1980s, AOL has been associated with creativity and innovation. We found that the company still brings that corporate culture to its support for some 6,000 employees. AOL’s initiatives are grouped under the umbrella of Get Fit!, its broad wellness program. Through its employee assistance program, company staffers and their families can access an entire team of professionals to help with challenges like marital and relationship problems, troubled children and adolescents, anxiety and depression, and more.

I want to underscore a point that I just sort of glossed over. The—the services are available to AOL employees but also to their family members. We thought that was really important, and we were pleased to hear that was the case with pretty much every company we profiled. Um [clearing throat] often, the companies make these services
available to employees' family member—spouses and family members, on a completely confidential basis, so they're really trying to get holistically at the problems that may be affecting the whole family, not just the employee him or herself. [Clearing throat] Excuse me.

So for ongoing problems, employers and their families can get services through in-person counseling or through a 24-hour sort of phone access hotline to an employee assistance program that is contracted by AOL. For other ongoing problems, AOL can refer employees to trained professionals in their community. In addition, the company partners with a parent—parent coach who is a contract child psychologist at its Virginia corporate headquarters. That person offers individualized counseling, parenting seminars, webinars, and more. The company's well known in the business community for providing generous childcare benefits, offered through both on-site childcare centers and through subsidies to other employees who work outside of the Virginia-based...the AOL corporate campus is headquartered in Virginia. The company's popular WellBaby program also supports expectant mothers through seminars, lactation coaching, and even financial awards for moms who meet program milestones along the way.

What's the payoff for AOL? We asked them directly. While the company couldn't share hard metrics with us, AOL executives agreed that these investments have made their employees more loyal, less distracted, and more productive at work. As one manager told us, "If our employees are not happy at home, they're not going to be happy and productive at work. So from a bottom-line standpoint, it completely makes sense." Again, echoing the point that John made earlier that their bottom-line business benefits to this whole [clearing throat] undertaking.

Bon Secours Health Systems—Health System, sorry—is a $3.3 billion network of hospitals and healthcare facilities headquartered in Maryland but operating across the East Coast. Bon Secours' corporate philosophy is to provide holistic care to meet the total needs of people served through its continuum of care, and it applies the same philosophy to its 22,000 employees.

Incidentally, this is the only faith-based company we profiled. Bon Secours was founded in the Catholic tradition of offering quality healthcare to the poor, and its mission is still rooted in that—in that founding purpose. [Clearing throat] Today, it offers a wide menu of programs for its employees, including parenting, financial support, stress reduction, and more. Importantly, the hospital system understands the unique stressors weighing on nurses, doctors, other healthcare professionals, such as treating life-threatening conditions and regularly dealing with patient deaths, and the company offers lots of supports to help.

For instance, it recently began offering a program called StressFree Now. This is an online program developed by experts at the Cleveland Clinic. It's a six-week, self-paced course based on mindfulness practice, which has been shown to have great results on emotional health and quality of life. Bon Secours [clearing throat] has also undertaken a big push recently around depression awareness, offering workshops and webinars designed to address social stigmas around the disease and to encourage employees to ask for help for themselves or for their loved ones.

Here too, we asked—we asked Bon Secours' executives about return on investment from these programs. In early results, the company has been able to document almost—almost a 5 percent drop in its employee healthcare costs. That's from its overall wellness initiative that includes physical health and wellness. But anecdotally the company has
told us that they’re enjoying real cost savings by offering their own wide range of
emotional health and relationship supports for their employees.

Let's go on to CVS Caremark, a name we all know. CVS [clearing throat]—CVS’ motto is, “Dedicated to helping people on their paths to better health.” It extends to the
company’s diverse workforce of more than 200,000 associates nationally. Under new
corporate leadership in the last couple of years, CVS has made preventive health
initiatives the centerpiece of its program for its employees.

Its WellRewards program [clearing throat] promotes healthy physical lifestyles through
screenings, assessments, even financial incent— incentives for healthy behavior. The
drugstore chain relies on partnerships with several national providers to ensure that it
can meet the needs of its diverse workforce. Among them is LifeScope, its employees’
assistance provider. LifeScope can provide CVS associates with help over the phone at
any time.

More recently, CVS decided to invest in a more extensive counseling through LifeScope.
So now eligible employees can schedule up to six annual face-to-face visits with a
psychologist, a social worker, a marriage counselor, or other mental health
professionals. While the information has to be kept confidential, CVS has learned that
stress and relationship conflicts are among the top reasons its employees seek support
through the employee—employees’ assistance program.

I think I’m going to skip over a couple of the other examples of CVS’s partnerships
[clearing throat] just to save time. I will note—I will make note that CVS does distribute a
stress toolkit—they call it StressAway—to its employees around the country. The toolkit
comes in a little shopping bag filled with tips on physical and emotional wellness, and it
features a workbook titled Relate: How to Make Any Relationship Work, which we find
very interesting. And they offer to make that resource available to other employers who
are interested; so it's probably a good—a good resource from lots of other employers to
provide their employees.

Let's skip next to Ernst & Young and quickly review that the company boasts a people-
first culture for its more than 160,000 employees worldwide, and its signature EY Assist
program helps provide a central access point to a whole host of resources for its
employees. A national database of counselors across the country helps employees find
a wide range of supports, including, as you see there, family and marriage therapists,
conflict resolution workshops, help with stress and anxiety. Um [clearing throat]
importantly, these supports are all offered to E&Y’s partners, principles, and staff as well
as to their family members. It's a point that I made earlier, and we were pleased to see
that other companies offered this—these supports to the dependents of their employees.

Let's see. The Parents’ Network for Families of Children with Special Needs offers a
valuable support network for those sharing the difficult challenges of raising kids with
disabilities. Last year, Ernst & Young's Parents’ Network for Families of Children with
Special Needs even included grandparents in a supportive company retreat that was
offered to its associates. Um [clearing throat] finally, we haven't talked much about
financial literacy, a subject that John quickly referenced in his opening remarks, but we
found that employers often understand that financial issues are a common cause of
family conflict. I think we all know that well. In all of the companies that we profiled,
financial literacy was a common component of employer supports for employees and
their families. And Ernst & Young, not surprisingly as one of the leading tax
accountancies in the country, offers lots of good financial literacy programs for its
associates.
The last company I wanted to reference quickly was PNC. The PNC, based in Pennsylvania, demonstrates its commitment to healthy employees through its Living Well program, its signature initiative. The program again offers a wide range of valuable tools: stress reduction, emotional health, stable relationships. Employees can access all of these supports confidentially through a vendor's website or by phone. And again, as we've seen with other best practice examples, so can the employees' spouses and dependents. A menu of monthly webinars offered to employees includes topics that address family and relationship challenges. Recently, for example, the course catalog included a course on communicating without conflict with your partner and another on the challenges of blended families.

Just let me take one more minute to outline a couple of steps that we thought were important for employers to take. The toolkit we published with the National Resource Center was designed to help more employers begin or expand efforts to promote healthy relationship skills for their employers—I'm sorry—for their employees. As workforce professionals, we encourage you to share this information with them and suggest that they can start with a few concrete steps.

First, they should understand what services and supports the workplace [clearing throat] may already provide to support healthy relationships. As you saw from our handful of best practice examples, even large national employers rely on key partners with expertise in the community. Small employers will also find valuable partners, many of whom who offer free or affordable supports, which include things like EAP services, health insurance providers, wellness consultants, lots of other community partners. And John mentioned that you'll find in our workforce—workplace toolkit—it's in Appendix B—you'll find a sample survey that you can recommend employee—employers use. They can customize it with questions of their own and survey their employees on their interest in providing and taking and availing themselves as workplace supports to help understand both the needs and potential interests within their workforce.

Finally, the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has a wealth of other resources related to this important subject. I think we'll skip over the very last concluding points because John already made them. And I'll just say thank you again for your interest, and please do feel free to follow up with us if we can provide concrete examples of the kinds of best practice programs that are underway today. Thanks. I guess I'll turn it over now to—to our next speaker, Avis.

Avis Files:

Good afternoon, and thank you guys for joining us. Thanks to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families for giving me the opportunity to speak with you a little bit about some lessons learned from the field. Next slide, please. I just want to talk a little bit about who we are, and I'll go through this pretty quickly.

Again, we're a multifaceted program that works with youths ages 9—[ages] 16 to 19, adults, and also with couples who are either married, dating, living together, or those who are interested in marriage. Next slide, please.

Part—part of our program components is that we work with healthy relationship education, economic stability, parenting, financial literacy, case management services, and also subsidize employment for our youth and our singles. We do not offer that portion to our couples because the statistics show that over time, couples earn more money and mind you I did say over time. Next slide, please.
How our program works: We do—we have a robust case management services in that we do home visits with our participants. We have tiered incentives, critical work supports, which is transportation and clothing assistance, and along with the other things that you see there. I don't want to take a lot of time talking about our program but more about the employer piece, so I'm just going to ask for the next slide, please.

The population we serve—so that you know the type of people that we're working with are people who are 200 percent below the poverty level. Eighty-five percent of our participants are African-American. Eighty percent of them have mental health issues, low or no risk—work skills. We work a lot with the reentry population. And again, we work with lots—with families so you have all those things there—cousins, aunts, and uncles—because a lot of times people will refer—once a mother or a father or a cousin comes through the program, they will refer their family members. So sometimes we end up serving the entire family. Next slide, please.

Our employment training includes soft place work skills, mock interviewing skills, and mock interviews. We do mock interviews; but with our employers who work directly with the participants who they're looking to hire, they actually come in and do the mock interviews with us as well. There's a model format that we use for participants who are felons and who have had criminal histories because that seems to be our biggest population that's hard—that it's hard to place them in employment.

We teach them how to admit that they've made a mistake, and that's very key that we teach them to do that. We ask them to share this is—this is, "I've committed a crime." Not necessarily the specifics of the crime but we do have them admit that to the employer. They talk about what they're doing now, goals and things that they've learned with the program, and the positive things they're doing their in life. So they kind of talk about where I am and where I'm going. And they talk about their future goals and things like that when they're interviewing. And that's been most effective with our participants who have criminal history. We do provide interview clothing. So for men, we provide them with a shirt and tie and slacks, which is very helpful, and also for the women as well. One of the most important methods that we use in working with our participants is called the POCS method. It's Problems, Options, Consequences, and Solutions. So we teach them, and we, we actually take—we've learned from our previous participants, mistakes that we've learned from the field. Say, for instance, someone had trouble finding daycare, and we didn't know that when we hired them because we thought that everything was solid. And then they'll get employed. And then they're like, "Oh, my goodness, what are we going to do?" So we'll take that problem and say to the entire group that we're teaching, "The problem is that you're having trouble with daycare. What options do you have? What's your consequences?" And we really hone in on the positive and negative consequences, and then from that we draw our solution. And that's called the POCS method.

Next slide, please. We also use what we call a SMSS Service Model Delivery, and we've included this in the presentation, so you guys will have that to load. But what we use, we use the Online Work-Readiness Assessment, and that identifies barriers to workplace—with participants right away. So we use that, and we include it in our intake process. And when we do that, we're able—our case managers are able to see exactly what the barriers are in that participant's life that's keeping them from working. So we screen that, and we also screen their skill set as well. Then we do some amount of matching, not all the time with matching because some of our participants have again low to no work skills. So we do some amount of matching when we find participants who have skill sets.
for certain jobs. Then we put the support system around them. A lot of our participants don't have support systems. That's the main thing that keeps them from staying on track. And so our case managers become the support system and our employment specialists become the support system to the employer. And then we put the subsidy, which is that component—that portion of the employee that we pay back to the employer as the subsidy. Next slide, please.

Job placement: We have over 15 employers who are invested in our participants' work so that they actually help them to be employed and to work with them in the community. We also have what we call revolving placement. Once someone held a job for 90 days, because our placement is for up to 90 days at part-time employment, they can be replaced with another participant. So we have those employers who will hire someone for the 90 days. When their term is up, they're willing to write them a letter of recommendation, and also they can be used as a reference when this participant is looking for another job. And then we have—we have youth placements. We contract with our local McDonald's, which is just suitable for youths because they're in a learning process. McDonald's teaches a lot of teamwork building and skills and things like that, and our youths are able to be retained in those positions because of the skills that they learn. Next slide, please.

Relationship skills and job placement: I really want to focus in right here. The biggest thing that we've learned is that the transferable work skills—they can be—the relationship skills can be transferred into the job skills. Relationship education includes the conflict management style. So we have lots of fun in our groups, and one of the things that we do is that we can teach them what their conflict management style—all of us have a style that we have a personality style—but when conflict happens, we kind of change it up. So we talk about it, and we have no frame of reference for what's good and what's bad. We just talk about what your style is, and how you can manage your style. For instance, if someone has an aggressive conflict management style and they're aware of that, when they're on the job and something happens, they can learn how to manage their own style and not worry about what's happening with the—with their supervisor, the same way they won't have to worry about it if they're with their spouse. So we really do hone in on that. The same thing with the personality test and style, who are you? You know, what's going on in your head that actually helps you to become who you are and people are aware of that.

We do a lot of what we call baggage releasing. We talk about, “What baggage do you bring to a relationship? It's the same baggage that you take into work.” A lot of our people have criminal history as a baggage. Some people like to use the children as a baggage but we always say children are never a baggage; they're always a blessing.

And then of course blended families. We really spend time with the blended families because there's 50 percent divorce rate nationally, so we know that more than likely if you're not in a blended family relationship and you're single, you're going to probably be in a blended family relationship. Blended families are very difficult, a lot more difficult than just a normal family. And not that blended families are abnormal but just the fact that there are different challenges that blended families have to face. And so we focus in on that. We recognize the distractions and how to overcome them.

And then the key thing is always how to surrender. We teach people that in relationship-building. And we know that if you learn how to surrender in relationships, especially in your personal relationships, it's much more easier when you're at work. Next slide, please.
The benefits to the participants is that they get to learn soft skills training, and that's so important in an atmosphere—in a group setting—in an atmosphere that is comfortable for them: That they can begin to talk about some of their fears, some of their problems from the past, and we can really be able to relate with them and speak with them about that. It's the opportunity to work and gain work experience and work history to utilize the skills that they've obtained from the training. They get to have open and honest communication with case managers. And again, this is that piece where the robust case management—case managers going into the home. It eliminates a lot of the barriers because then they have someone that they can look at their—looking face-to-face, someone that they can trust, be able to tell their fears, and be able to work those fears out in individual service plans and things like that. Oftentimes, people can obtain full-time and permanent employment with pay increases from going through the program. It's a referral source, so they refer others to the program. And they have—give back. Our participants actually come back to our program and they can be able to then encourage the other participants who are just at the starting gate about what they can do. And lastly, they can receive reference letters from their—from their employers that helps them to be able to achieve their future goals. Next slide, please.

Benefits to the employers: And this is the piece—and I did want to take just a few minutes to talk about the fact that the subsidized employment piece has—I said to someone earlier was kind of like a thorn in my side. It's something that we want to focus in on. It's been very difficult to do it—to really manage this program and be able to handle the subsidized employment piece. But it's also been the piece that has been the most beneficial to us. The—the main thing that employers—some of the concerns that employers have had, has been that they're concerned about people with criminal backgrounds. They really wonder if people have changed. They also didn't really trust us with the subsidy payments. We said, "Yes, we pay a subsidy." They were concerned about where we're getting the money from and how is that coming? So we had some issues there. We—we mainly use mostly small, local businesses. And we talk with the employers about giving back to the community and giving the people in our community an opportunity for change, because once their employed they can see their hard work. So the employers also get to give back to the community by hiring one of our participants. It gives our participants a fresh start. The employer is getting someone that's already coming in able to handle and problem-solve issues at home and issues that can come up at work. And it gives them the ability to have someone who knows how to do that and then can share and teach others that are on the job as well. Next slide, please.

This is just some employer feedback that you'll see there. We just wanted to include that in there, and it's just showing that we also go to other nonprofit organizations and ask them to hire our participants. And this is just one of our local agencies that—that works with youth in our community and works with youth who are—who have drug and alcohol issues and suspension and behavior issues. They have hired three of our employees who have been—they're now hired full-time with upgrades in their pay and with benefits, and this is the ultimate goal of what we're about and what we're doing in the relationship skills as it relates to work experience, is the fact that we're trying to show that our participants—if they are given a chance, they can change their lives. They can make a turnaround, and they can become contributors back to the community. I'd like to thank you for your time. And you will see my contact information. And if you have any questions or anything like that, please feel free to give me a call, and I'm more than willing to share with you some of our ups and downs and our insights and out of what we've learned and gained from our program. Thank you.
Dean Ma'ayan:

Great. Hi, my name is Dean Ma'ayan, and I am speaking to you from New Mexico—from a program that we have called—an agency, PB&J Family Services. We are a child abuse prevention program and been around since the—since 1972. And as I listen to this robust conversation and I think about, you know, there's about 127 now of you all over the country. And we all have in common is that we're working with populations that are—adults that are vulnerable, that have barriers, and what we're trying to figure out is how do we help them become in the most healthy relationships that they can do—that they can have, so that they can succeed better in the employment world. And so the impact of healthy relationships on the population that we work with is sort of our overall theme.

And a bit of my own personal background is I'm a fundraiser. So I started at the—you know, at PB&J, our child abuse prevention program, asking people for money. And when I started working directly with our program that focuses on fathers who are coming out of prison to get jobs and to turn their life around, the fact that I am a fundraiser really served me. Not to ask people for money but what I was seeking out was, I wanted to find the most healthy people in our community to find that desire that they can connect with one of our clients, directly one-on-one. So it was still that sort of asking people for something, and I think that's just, you know, it's sort of has served me well.

So I wanted to do is share with you a little bit about the specific program in New Mexico and then give you some real takeaways because we're all doing things that are different but I'm hoping to give you either some nuggets or some tangible pieces that you can take to the business and employment community in your own place. So—so if you're a multi-tasker, you will see on your screen that there is a—it says PB&J Employer Training. It's a tab that you can, in the files, that you can tap on and you can open. It's a totally different PowerPoint that we can review afterwards. Okay? Or that—or you can sort of peek through that because that's something we share with employers that we'll get to.

So what we have here in New Mexico is a fatherhood reentry program. We work only with dads in this program who are either at the county jail or they're serving time in prison. They're all fathers. They all have desire to connect with their children. We start with them while they're incarcerated and we work on the therapeutic issues, helping them to understand the choices that they've made in their lives, the relationships they have with their children, their own childhood upbringing, and that we use that time before they get out to sort of begin on their paths of healthy relationships. As someone—as Avis was saying—or and others, some of them might be married. Many of them have children from multiple partners so it's really healthy relationship over healthy marriage because they have to figure out how to navigate all that.

And when John spoke in the beginning, he said this: 22 percent of employers—22 percent of employers or 22 percent of the issues of why people are distracted is because of family issues. And that is absolutely true when we talk about reentry and people who are incarcerated and why they go back and what they're struggling with. In fact, so much that the head of corrections here in New Mexico once said—he said to us, "You know, as long as I'm here, I will always focus or allow you guys to focus on family issues because it's the only thing that works." So if we get a person before they're even released to work on their family issues and take responsibility and to figure out their role as a parent and their role as a provider, then when they get out, it's going to be a lot better.
So one of the things that we have done in our program is we have started—certainly, as I said, before that they get out, they have a pre-release program. We work on all those issues. And when they get out, they actually have a job waiting for them. So it's 7½ months of auto detailing, mobile power washing, graffiti removal, and woodworking, and this is not a phone call about that. If you're interested in that, I can give you the website, and it's a fascinating way to sort of use grant dollars and to give back to our men and make a difference. And I think it's been wisely spent. But what we're doing is giving 7½ months of soft skills. It's an absolute therapeutic environment so that when they get mad that they just got their first paycheck, and it's they can't live on that livable wage—they're used to make a lot more money selling dope—and it becomes a financial education issue right away, we're actually right there and able to sort of break that down and talk with them.

You know, someone mentioned financial education was actually very key since we run a business, and we actually employ them. We're pulling out child support, which is 50 percent, and that becomes a financial education as well as a healthy relationship issue. We also make sure that banks are actually on-site during payday to make sure that everybody has a bank account and some place to go. And all of that banking and financial education is terrific but what it really comes down to is actually relationships, which is—I'm going to sort of summarize over here and then move to our next slide so that you have a little bit of a picture of what we're doing.

We start a business where the focus is let's get them stable with their family; let's get their confidence up; let's get real training; and we're not keeping them forever. The idea is that we're starting so that the soft skills therapeutic environment and then they're moving on to permanent employment with our assistance. And the entire goal is, you know, reducing recidivism. Really we're increasing fatherhood responsibilities. And businesswise, we're either making people really good employees and in some cases we're even making them employers. And we actually have track to—for those who are interested—we actually support them becoming their own business.

What I wanted to do on this call is to talk about our philosophy of, you know, it's actually not about jobs. Like getting someone a job is one piece but the much deeper and richer piece, which is why think we were asked to even be on the call, it's because actually about relationships. And I've, you know, I've been part of, you know, nonprofit work for a long time. And I see, you know, sometimes we get the shortsighted piece where's it's, "Ah, I got to get someone a job," and there's that pressure. And when we pull back and actually we really revel in us, the mission that we have, the relationships that we have, it's actually a lot further. And that's sort of what I want to use my time to talk about.

You know for all of us, and there's you know—we're all doing different pieces, you know, of this work but we all have really specific missions that if we're just talking about getting jobs, we're sort of missing the boat. And the people that we're going to talk to about jobs miss that, too. They don't necessarily want to just hire somebody. They can hire lots of people but it's really different than if they can partner with you. And whether it's child abuse prevention or building up fathers or building up relationships or taking care of children, that's a much meatier mission to be around. And so the first is just for all of us to make sure that we know our mission, that we know how to talk about it. And I put in some, you know just, for us, you know, it's child abuse prevention, which sometimes is just doesn't really ring for people, so we talk about keeping kids safe, breaking multigenerational cycles of abuse, incarceration, addiction, and violence. So just to make sure that all us sort of know our mission.
The thing about relationships is that it takes time to blossom over time and it's testing. And this is probably the very core of my piece. And to show you, you know, PB&J, you know, we employ 157 men a year, you know most of them are finding jobs through us afterwards, permanent jobs. And these are hard-core felons. You know, these are hard people to employ. And so the first place that we went to when thinking about all this was to talk to our donors, and I shared with you, part of that is because I'm a fundraiser, but that's about our mission. So going to sort of that low hanging fruit, going to the people on our Board of Directors, in these small groups, or those donors that would volunteer, maybe they wouldn't donate, but their business would come volunteer with us, or their church was connected. We would just talk with them. And asking them, "Don't hire anybody. Don't donate anything. Just become our advisors. Here's what we're thinking about." And people love to give advice and the biz people in the business community love to give advice.

So we really genuinely started from that place. And for us, as I shared, we actually started a business so we actually really did need business advice. But even if you're talking about, you know, "How do we help people get hired?" here's their barriers. We started, you know, these small groups. And then we sort of grew it. And then we started then with mock interviews, as my colleague, Avis, has shared. Mock interviews are great because there's no pressure for hire but there's pressure for, "Can you show up and give real feedback afterwards?" And I think either Avis or I offline would be more than happy to share, you know, the questions that we used or how we set up mock interviews so that they could lead to jobs. And I—and sometimes when it's looking for actual jobs, there's a temptation just to give—for reentry, for felons, there is a temptation to hand out lists. So here's the list of businesses that will hire. Well, a list is not a relationship. And those lists are actually really harmful because you see, "Oh, wow, the Jiffy Lube down the block actually hires felons." Well, once Jiffy Lube finds out that they're actually on the list to hire a vulnerable population of any sort, and certainly felons, they get upset, as I would too. So it really shows like it really is about relationships. It's different when you actually have a relationship with Jiffy Lube.

So when we started with talking first with our donors and then broadening it to others in the business community, we asked for smaller conversations. And we grew it so we really learned from something. Then we found out we were sort of on a track for actually giving wisdom, and we stumbled onto HR—human resources. You know, every HR department wants to, you know, make a great hire because it's too expensive for turnover. And if we could guarantee, you know, a good process of where they're going to get a good employee, well, now we've got their attention.

We've had to prove ourselves awhile but the other PDF that I have for you on there that says—that I was pointing to before that says PB&J Employer Training is actually a presentation that we did for—to HR companies, you know—HR associations here in New Mexico. And what we talked about was the benefits of hiring felons, and that's our niche. You know, if it wasn't felons, we could, you know, supplement that with whatever, you know, you all are working with, but our niche was felons. And so we went in there really well-prepared with facts about tax credits, about bonding. We brought in two different clients—one was actually male, one was actually female—and talked about, you know, the success that they're—that they're having on the job. And we were asked to, you know, come back again and again, and that was really helpful. And that wasn't necessarily about, here, "Let's hire our people." It was about relationship training. We also made sure to contract—not to contract—to partner, collaborate with an employee —
sorry—an employment lawyer firm, and that was really great. So that’s up there. And if there’s time, you know, we can look at it.

And the other one is, you know, all of us are nonprofits or, in some way or another, we have our own vendors. We’re you know—we have our own customers—people who we pay to provide our paper or to provide our food or to do our cleaning of our buildings. All of those are potential business people to talk with when it comes to hiring. And so we made sure to do that as well and included them in also those small focus groups. So that—that’s my piece on just stepping back and thinking about who are your relationships, and how can each one of those be cultivated to the next step and to the next step? And that’s a tremendous strategic planning with your staff and your clients and your board and your leadership to really break that down.

And with that, to remember, you know, it’s our clients’ story. It’s actually not ours. When somebody—in fact, I’ll show you the very next slide. Okay. So here’s a picture of one of our dads. It’s his mug shot, and it is now, you know, his story now. And, you know, Joseph has a great job and he just gave birth to his second child. And he’s married to his wife and they’re doing great. And he can speak a lot better about his life than I can. When we asked an employer to meet with him for a mock interview and to get to know him, they did it not because they wanted to hire a felon but they believed in PB&J’s mission. And so we brought them through the door but then we made sure to remove ourselves; and we left them talking with Joseph. And because really when people want to come in the door to help, they actually want to do it because they’re moved by the clients that we work with. And sometimes I think we stay in the room a little bit too long so it becomes about us and not them. And that’s important to make sure that we’ve got all the ways for, you know—whether it’s their photos or their testimonials like Avis provided.

And so the last piece that I wanted to share goes back to making sure we’re telling their story, and that’s outcomes. And I’m not saying this because we’re all grant-funded. I’m saying it because we’re grant-funded—because we know what we’re doing. Because there’s so many stories to tell that thinking about how we do it will actually help with those relationships. And whether it’s in a video or making sure its articles are on the web or Facebook or any sort of data— making sure that we can tell the stories between the employers and our clients and outcomes. And I’m happy to talk with you offline because we’ve been really learning about this the past three years: About what’s the best way to do that and to make sure that we’re actually in the business newspaper, make sure that we’re on Facebook, make sure that we’re doing shoutouts on local businesses that have actually made—then become our partners.

And it’s not necessarily just about hiring. It’s actually—maybe it’s about—maybe it’s just about mock interviews. Maybe it’s about a bank that actually comes to do—on payday. Then we all know about the business venue, civic groups, economic development officers who would love to be able to—everybody being able to, you know, get their feedback n’ such. And one of the things that we were able to do in the past two years is actually create a Greater Albuquerque Economic Development Office that focuses on returning citizens. And it’s PB&J partnering it with our local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. And that didn’t happen in year one. It took us sort of proving ourselves over time and testing ourselves, and so that now we’re in a place to do that and has tremendous leveraging for us.

And lastly, to remember that the employer is a business. So to giving shout-outs and marketing them in any way is always, always, you know, appreciated. And so let me
close with two things as takeaways. The last piece of this slide is—it says, "Extra Items: PB&J's Employers Pre-Survey." We don't necessarily do anything with this yet but over the past couple of years, whenever we present to one of our small groups, whenever we press to a human—to an HR group in any other way, we ask these three questions. And what we're trying to track is, you know, how are people hiring people with criminal records and is our impact changing the dial at all in New Mexico? And so we ask, you know, "Does your company have a written policy? To your knowledge, does your company currently have employees on staff with a criminal background? And if someone fit the criteria, would you likely hire them or not?" And so it's a pre-survey, and then one year later or two years we would do a post-survey. And this way, see of the 50 or 60 or 80 organizations that we've engaged with, have we made any difference? And people would only fill that out if they really got the mission that we're doing, you know. And they trust that we're not taking their survey and putting it on some list somewhere that says, "Oh, they love hiring felons" but rather they really trust us in that process. And I think that's a great example of that partnership.

So, you know, that's my piece I'd like to share, and then again to point you to the PDF—to the PowerPoint that talks about—as a presentation to your human resources, and I'll just—anybody who's opened it—I'll just point to you—I actually changed the first slide. It used to actually focus on Wal-Mart, which I didn't want to actually put Wal-Mart publicly out there to 127 people. But in New Mexico, for example, Wal-Mart hired in the state 700 people last year with a criminal background. And then in Albuquerque, it was 400 people with a criminal background. And the reason why we know that is that information on who uses the WOTC tax credit is public information. You can get that from your Department of Labor. Here, it's called Workforce Solutions. And so rather than highlighting Wal-Mart, we just went more broad and actually—which—and so those numbers sort of correspond to who is—gets that WOTC credit.

And the rest of this is a great piece that is much better when it parallels with, you know, a firm—attorneys that work with employment issues that can also speak to the EOC recommendations for interviewing felons. But what we tried to talk to is, you know, we're on the same side as the business. We want business communities to thrive so we want to make sure that they're hiring motivated people. So it's not like, "Hey will you do us a favor? Will you be our charity case, and hire our vulnerable population?" No, it's that we are in touch with actually highly motivated employees and we want to make sure to get them to you. And so, you know, I'll just sort of leave that PowerPoint for you. And you're welcome to, you know, contact me with any questions online or offline. And thank you very much.

Jen McHenry:

Great. Thank you so much, Dean. This is Jen, and we want to thank all of you – John, Dorian, Avis, and Dean – for your presentations. That was fantastic. I think there's a lot of really, really interesting information that you all just shared with us about your programs and about your findings. And we're going to ask just a couple of questions before we wrap up. And again, if anyone has anything that they would like to ask and like to share with the presenters, please send that through, again, via the computer on your Q&A box. Anything we're not able to talk about here, we will address after the close of the webinar. So my first question is to ask Avis and Dean to give us an idea of the size of the population they're working with. Particularly for Avis, a question came in about your caseload size.
Avis Files:
Our participants—our case managers have a caseload of up to 33 participants, so that’s at any given time they could have 33 participants on the caseload. My case managers also facilitate curriculum. They purchase food. They do home visits, so shout-out to them. I don’t know if anyone’s listening but shout-out to my staff who works very hard. And I only have five case managers so you can imagine how much we’re running around and working.

Dean Ma’ayan:
This is Dean Ma’ayan, and similarly, we work with, you know, we’re working in the prison, and then we’re working with home visits, and we’re working with the entire family. And so—and then they’ve got to be available to like—on the job issues when they’re having issues there as well, we need to call them in. And so the caseloads will be, you know—they’re all in different stages though, but it’s about 15 to 17 people. But some of those people are also,—some are varying in need—high need. Yeah. So we work with about 157 annually, which is a real pilot project. I mean, it’s not a very large number for this scope of work that’s being, you know, that’s provided to them. So the idea is to get it then scale it.

Avis Files:
If I can jump in, too, that some of those—again, like Dean said—the people, the participants, are at various levels. So I may have someone working with someone who’s just completed an intake, and, to someone who’s in the middle of classes, to someone who’s working and just started working, and someone who’s on their last part of their 90-day term there. So the participants have—I mean, the case managers have a wide variety of participants they’re working at either at start, middle, or at the end.

Jen McHenry:
Great. Thank you so much. So one of the questions we got in was, "What is the best way to reach out to a human resources department to promote parenting and family education?" And I’d like to start with Avis and Dean and then ask John and Dorian, sort of from the flipside, their view on: From talking to human resource departments, what is it that they want to hear?

Avis Files:
I think that from—I have two employment specialists who—man, it’s just—no, I don’t know if there’s a certain answer for that question. They do things from cold calls to going out in the community and just dropping off packets to using our board members, who may give a referral, or a staff member who may give a referral. In our region—and we’re in Toledo, Ohio—just a small city about 45 minutes from Detroit, Michigan. But we ran into several issues and concerns with getting employers because we—our Department of Child and Family Services runs what they call a W-E-P program—a work experience program. And we were—we were—we couldn’t—we couldn’t tap into employers because they had already had those participants going out. And it’s similar to when people work for their food stamps. So we were in—we were having some difficulties with that. But our staff—just the two staff that have just kind of stayed on it and stayed on it, and they just kind of do a combination of anything. And oftentimes employers will call us because we’ll ask them to give us a referral of someone that they know. So it’s just been a wide variety of guesses and mistakes and lessons learned. We never lose but we do learn. That’s for sure.
Dean Ma’ayan:

You know, I heard in the question about parenthood so I’m just going to make an assumption, since I don’t have the person in front of me—is that it sounds like it’s an agency that also might be an expert. They might be providing education to the clients on healthy parenting. So one of the things that I actually might do is—I mean the human resources association—you can Google it in your town. They’re like, you know, they do open trainings, right? So maybe to go to one of those. And because you just need sort of one in. But it sounds like you’d be offering something, you know, and to be able to say, you know, "Here we are, experts in parenting. We actually provide parenting education to a very vulnerable population. Let us bring that expertise to you." And use John’s 22 percent statistic. I mean, what a great one. If you take the 22 percent statistic and you also take domestic violence—and even if you’re not a domestic violence expert, bring that in also. I think HR—an HR association would love to have, you know, how do you bring down—how do you respond to employee issues around intimate relationships and domestic violence on the job so it doesn’t cost the employer so much money, right? And that’s your—that’s your angle of expertise. Even if you don’t have all of that on your own, that you’re partnering with someone else, absolutely. Then you’re getting in front of them as an expert. And then they’re getting to know your mission and who the clients you serve secondary, and that could actually lead to other great outcomes later.

John Wilcox:

This is John. I’d be happy to talk a little bit from the employer perspective. And if I were to give you the short version of what you know, years of experience trying to connect nonprofits and for-profit entities, it’d be there’s really three things to think about going in. The first is to make your case clearly. The second is to speak their language. And the third is to follow up, to do what you said.

When you go into an HR director—and whether you’re asking for them to hire your clients or to establish a partnership or to give you a donation—it doesn’t matter what the ask is really—what you need to do is put yourself in their shoes and immediately make the case for why it makes business sense for them to help you. And I do mean business sense. Your client caseload could be the most heart wrenching that you can imagine. There could be all of the great personal reasons in the world for them to help you. They could be old friends from, you know, from preschool. It—none of that really matters too much. What really matters is that you give them a clear business case. If you can tell them, "I know you need—you’re having trouble hiring people. I can guarantee you good employees. I can guarantee that you will save X number of dollars for every dollar you invest in this program." Those are the kinds of arguments that will really resonate. Because no matter who the person is you’re talking to, they’ll have someone higher up to them down the chain and auditors that follow along after. And they have to make the case to each of those people that the decision that they make on your behalf is a good one for the company. Not just a good one, you know, because it’s innately good or because it makes them feel good or because it’s the right thing to do, but because it’s right for the company. And so that’s the core of what you’ve got to come to them with.

If you have a clear vision of what you want out of the conversation that really helps because what you’re doing when you’re talking to that HR director is convincing them that you’re going to be a good partner. So if you’re organized, you can see things from their perspective. You can clearly present what you want and what’s in it for them. All of that sends the message that "Hey, these folks are worth working with. This relationship won’t backfire on us. This will work out for everybody."
If you can, understand the business culture. If you’re going to talk to a production shop, a line manufacturing unit, understand they’ve got shifts, for example, and they’re looking for shift workers. If you’re talking to a retail employer, understand that they have some contingent workers and they have some full-time workers and some part time—understand the setup. Avoid the jargon that they might not understand is the flip side of this point. If you are a TANF outfit and are used to dealing in TANF terms, recognize that whoever you’re talking to in the business world may vaguely know what TANF is but will probably have no idea about half the things that you’re, you know, up to your hips in every day.

And finally, the third key point is once you’ve established your bona fides, once you’ve laid out the plan, once you’ve demonstrated to them why they ought to do what you want them to do, then you’ve got to follow up. Then you have to actually produce what you promised. And you have to remind them that you produced what you promised because from a business perspective, the question isn’t just, well, is this a good decision now? It’s: Three months from now is this still a good decision? The next quarter is this still a good decision?” And so if you want this to be a sustaining relationship, if you want them to keep hiring your clients or keep partnering with you or keep funding you, you’ve got to keep reminding them of all the business reasons why this makes sense for them. I hope that was helpful.

**Jen McHenry:**

Dorian, did you want to add anything?

**Dorian Friedman:**

Thanks, Jen. I completely agree with John’s key points. I would add one thing, which is—in our experience, it’s—obviously, the first point of contact is the HR department in any local business or large employer in your community. But very often, the people who will be most receptive to your message, to your pitch, I think will be the people in the community, the corporate social responsibility or community outreach sort of—section of the corporate food chain so to speak. [Clears throat] I think it’s a good idea to do some research and understand where the corporate social responsibility priorities are—the CSR priorities are for each of the employers you want to approach. You may find, for example, that they’re very interested in disconnected young adults. And they may be willing to—they may be eager to partner with your organization and your clients around specific populations like disconnected young adults or TANF recipients or people with disabilities or reentering individuals in your community. So do your research. I guess just reiterating the point John made about understand their business needs and go in with a specific pitch.

**Robyn Cenizal:**

Thanks, Dorian, and thank you all for that wonderful information. And I would just like to—This is Robyn again. I just wanted to add that, you know, in keeping with all of the things that we’ve heard about the information that you need to be armed with when you go into make your pitch, I would like to encourage you to let the Resource Center help you with that. We have a tremendous amount of research-based resources in our library and on the website that can be very helpful to you in making the case why relationship education is important. Whether you’re thinking about the communication skills, conflict resolution skills, parenting or financial education, we have a tremendous amount of resources that can be helpful in making that case as well as free resources related to curriculum and other informational handout materials that could be used with families and clients themselves. So take advantage of all those free resources and follow the guidance that you received from our fabulous presenters today. And with that, I just want
to thank you all for joining again, and ask you to hang in there and complete the survey that Jen is going to be bringing up in just a moment. Thank you all and have a fabulous afternoon.

Dorian Friedman:
Thank you.

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