1/30/24 LEVERAGING PERSONAL NETWORKS INTO SUCCESS

>>: Okay. We're ready to get started. I am going to start the recording now.

>>: Okay.

(Recording in progress)

>>: Good morning. This is Matt Dickens from the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Thank you for joining us for this accessibility and disability webinar. Today is personal networks. How to leverage that into success. We invite Jennifer Vincent from Texas parent to parent to share this exciting information with all of you. If you have any questions or comments to share with us, please go ahead and post it in the Q and A, and we will be answering those questions. Just so you know, some of those will be held until the end for Jennifer to answer because some of those questions might be answered through her presentation and some might be ‑‑ need additional information. Thank you for bearing with us. The interpreter will show up when possible. Thank you for bearing with us. So the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, our mission is to further opportunities for persons with disabilities to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, and self‑determination. GCPD recommends changes in disability policies and programs in the areas of accessibility, communication, criminal justice, education, transportation, and veterans. The committee also supports a network of committees on people with disabilities, issues awards to promote greater awareness and promotes compliance with disability related laws. So now we are ready to turn it over to Jennifer, who will discuss about personal networks. Thank you, Jennifer.

>>: Thank you. Very excited to be here today. So we're going to cover introduction to personal networks. This is a program for Texas parent to parent in the Texas networks connection program. It's about creating communities for people with disabilities of all ages. So as parents, we say how are we going to make sure that our son or daughter with a disability has a good life both now and after we die. I know that's the burning question for all of us. Who will make sure that the plans we have arranged and services are implemented and functioning well after we are gone? How do we make sure our child is not lonely, isolated, or neglected? How do we give caring friends and family the opportunity to have a fulfilling relationship with our child? How am I, a person with a disability, going to achieve these goals for myself? The answer is, we are not alone. This is a personal network called BAKON. The idea is for our children not to be isolated and lonely and to have a community and people who care about them and support them. So what we'll cover today is what is a personal network, key principles of personal networks, how to start a network, testimonials, ways Texas network connections is helping families start personal networks. Then we will have Q and A. So what is a personal network? They are intentional communities of friends, family members, and acquaintances who assist and collaborate with a person who may be at risk of isolation because of a disability. They promote planning and social opportunities, assist with decision‑making, and goal setting and work with a person at the center to be a sustainable resource after the parents can no longer be available. So this will be a short video we're going to watch.

>>: For parents of children with disabilities, this is what happens when I die. We all worry so much there will be no one there to oversee, to advocate, to fight for, and to care in that way. We all build networks informally through life, but sometimes a personal with a disability has a hard time building community. This is the intention of working toward building that community. We realize it was hard for us to figure out everything on our own. Having a child with a disability is tough in itself, but planning everything that's supposed to happen with her and to her is overwhelming sometimes. We're wired for connection as humans. I worry about his ability to get out there in the world and have enough people around him of his own choosing. Because parents are by and large doing it all themselves, that means that the kids are around their parents an awful lot. Now that he's 18, he does not want to be around his parents all the time. I don't think he wants us to be setting up a system where he has to feel like he can't live without us. A personal network is like an extended family. It's a group of people who commit to being involved with that person and caring about their quality of life. I like to call a network a project. You think of a project as something that you're not quite sure where it's going to go and it's something we're all working on together and we're figuring stuff out together. We worried about Social Security at 18 and Medicaid. We started a network of friends and family members, friends that have known her for a long time, most of her life, actually. It was a big leap of faith for me and Steve to make that first step to invite people into our lives to be thinking about him in a meaningful way. The hardest thing about starting a network is the courage to ask. The courage to ask other people to help. In our society, nobody wants to think they can't take care of everything in their loan life. Starting a network was pretty hard for us. Especially more so for my husband than myself because he did not want to ask people for help or to take their time with us or to even learn all of the things they needed to learn about her in order to help her later on in life. It took me a couple of years to get to where I was going to do that ask of inviting people to come into our home to help. That was terrifying. I think what we all have in common is that tension as a parent between wanting to help and letting go. Who would we talk to? I mean, trying to figure out what friend would be best when they say yes, would they say no? You have to prepare for the possibility that someone will say no. If they say no, you don't take it personally. Say, oh, they're too busy right now. Maybe they'll find another way to be in my child's life. Over the course of the last several years, the conversation has become a little heavier. We've started to have conversations about what happens when parents aren't here anymore. We want to make sure that she has a network of friends and family that know all about her, knows her likes and dislikes, knows about her medical history, her financial situation. So if something were to happen to us, they can pick up and take care of her for us when we're gone. You think, this is such a big imposition, why would anybody want to join a network? They discover that they gain so much from being in a network. They learn about that person at the center. They become friends with the other people in the network. It gives them a sense of purpose, of commitment. It comes from the heart. They know that they're doing something so worthwhile, that they're working for this person's quality of life. This is part of our network. They're our next‑door neighbors. When they told us what the personal network was and asked us to be part of it, we immediately said yes. We've been learning about different aspects of your life, right, and all of the different components of healthcare to school to wheelchairs and equipment. It's been an easy natural way to deepen relationships with people we have relationships with. It's really about how to build community and be together. So personal network is a tool, a method of really replacing that deep care that a parent has. Knowing that we have a network in place that she has a job, that she's happy, that that ‑‑ that part of things we planned out are going very well. He's 18 now and when I think about a network, and when I think about his good life, I always think about this picture of these old men who are just friends and living their lives together and that's what I see ‑‑ that's what I see for him. That's what makes me really hopeful. So this is a win‑win. It's really good for the personal at the center. It brings peace of mind and support for the family. It creates a new avenue of fun, of commitment, of joy for the members of the network. Go to the Texas parent to parent website. Click on pathways to adulthood and find tools, ideas, links, concepts to help you plan for a good life for your child at graduation.

>>: The key principles of personal networks are relationships are the key to a good life and the foundation of all networks. Networks are volunteer‑driven and directed by individuals and/or families. Networks are for anyone, any age. Let me clarify that. So you know, I really think it's a great idea to start networks at a younger age because imagine these people growing up and seeing your child over the years and when developing a network, think about your Special Ed teachers, paid staff, and unpaid staff, when they become older, your vocational rehab specialist to include them and even to come to a meeting and know who is involved in your child's life or the adult with disabilities life and what resources are out there. I have a network for my daughter. We include her specialists to come and be resources and educate the network on programs, on disability services, on disability issues. Just to add that in there. Networks are volunteer‑driven and directed by individuals and/or families. Networks focus on contribution and everyone benefits in a network. Relationships are the foundation of all personal networks. This is just some pictures of people in networks and we think of ourselves and we develop relationships naturally and easier than ‑‑ but a person with a disability, unfortunately, we often hear about the isolation and the loneliness and the lack of community support. So this is just helping that along that for them to develop those relationships in their community. The three phases of starting a network are exploration, development, and then the maintenance. This is a picture of a network called Lucas' lineup from 2018. Networks have been around for a while. This is a video from Lucas' lineup. I believe it's a video. Is it going to play? There we go.

>>: This is Lucas. Lucas is eight. Age three, he was diagnosed with a syndrome. (Hard time hearing) Roughly 3 ‑‑ we have ‑‑ very ‑‑ one of ‑‑ he had an aggression which they like to ‑‑ nonverbal autism. ADHD sensory processing disorder. I know. I know. TBRS also can affect the heart, seizures, scoliosis, and it's now been linked to different blood cancers. So with that, we, at age five, we're still going through the cycles of learning everything about the syndrome and how we can help our child who once was verbal and more high functioning to lower functioning autism due to TBRS. I heard about the lineup. I thought ‑‑ in which we call Lucas' lineup. We started at age five. You can go, baby boy, if you want to. Initially, my thought was, if something were to happen to myself or my husband, I need to ensure that my guardians or Lucas' guardian will have a full support system, let alone just having to take care of our children, but special needs and potential future medical needs. They needed a support system. That is what intrigued me initially about the network. Also, we wanted everyone to have a glimpse into our world. It is such a different world and we're still navigating it. He's eight now. It was much ‑‑ it looked different and we needed people to understand ‑‑ it's not because we don't want to go. It's difficult for us. We wanted our close family and friends just to have a better idea of what our ‑‑ and then later, I thought that the network would be good for Lucas to have his own circle of friends. What I have realized later as we continued our network is it's good for Lucas now, even though he might not necessarily understand like why would ‑‑ he knows his favorite people. We're coming together and he gets to see them. At the end of the lineup, we ‑‑ throughout the quarter. He loves doing that. He loves that. It's already become wonderful for him. Then for all of our loved ones to understand us better, to understand our life, I personally have been able to release a bit of control and ask others to help because it's very difficult for me to do. I've been able to lean on those in the lineup. Now they have a better idea of understanding when I ask ‑‑ and so it has been ‑‑ it's been wonderful for us. So it was pretty exciting when we started. Lucas was the youngest to have a network in Texas. We're still going strong three years, and it's great. So I just want to thank y'all so much. Have a wonderful conference and we appreciate the time and have a good day. Thank you.

>>: Phase one, when you're starting a network, is exploration where you're trying to figure out who you want to invite to your network, which could ‑‑ you know, family, friends, professionals, paid staff, but it is volunteer. You're not paying people to attend. People that care about your person with a disability or want to learn more. This is a picture of the Wacos from 2001. You'll see there's interesting names because you do name the network. That is part of the beginning. So what do you explore? Why do you start a network? Who will you invite? What do I want the network to accomplish? How big should the network be? What are my hopes for my daughter's future? What scares me about my son's future? What are my apprehensions about starting a network? What excites me about starting a network? What else? These are questions that you think about and they're all valid and very important questions, but these are the big things. Then the other thing is, what is important to the person at the center? So one of the important things when exploring is to think about the family's dreams and visions for their child and then the person at the center, what do they want to accomplish, whether that be work or college and then what supports do they need, and that's where the personal network comes in as well. So phase two is the development which is the invitation meeting and then the following network meetings. This is a picture of snapshots from 2014 which is a network, and so the invitation meeting is where you invite people into your home. You create a list of who might be interested, and then you would invite them and tell them about what personal networks is, tell them about what your goals are, what you're wanting to accomplish, and why you're wanting to have a network. Then once you do that, then people either ‑‑ then you give them time to process it, and then come back later and ask them, you know, who is interested in actually committing because it is a commitment to be a part of this person's life, and then you meet every three to four months and have a meeting and have an educational piece and make it fun, learn about the person at the center and about their disability and what supports they need. So this is a picture of invitation meeting from MAV men in 2010. You saw Denise and maverick in a video before. So what do we ask of members, of people you invite in the number one thing is that they care about the person at the center and his or her family. You're not only supporting the person with the disability, but you're supporting the family because it is a lot on parents, especially when we are care givers 24 hours a day and making ‑‑ trying to make every decision for our loved one, so you're caring about them. That's a big key. You're building relationships with each other in the network. So the other thing is for people ‑‑ when you develop your network, we all have people in our lives and in our child with a disability, they have people in their lives that they are connected with, but they might not know each other. This is a way for them to get to know each other and become connected so they can all figure out how to help that person at the center. You make time to meet for about two hours three to four times per year and more often if their need arises. Serving in a network organization role such as a facilitator, a meeting organizer, or a scribe. When you have your meetings, you are assigning roles, or you're letting them know what roles are available and then they choose what their strengths are. We all have strengths and abilities. Then they can say, you know, I'll take on this role and the key is to ‑‑ for the parents not to take on these roles, but for other members, so that way the parents can step back because the key is to develop a support system for the person at the center long‑term. You're willing to learn about the person, the interest, disability services, and supports. Like I said before, one of the things is your disability services and support people, maybe they won't be part of the network that attends every meeting, but they could be a resource to the network. So they could come in and know who the network members are and present on what services they provide and how they help the person with the disability and then the network could know that that is a resource to them for the person, if needed, and when needed for the person at the center. Network members, the key is to ensure that the network keeps meeting. Even when you don't know why you're meeting, you're meeting because you're building those relationships. You work with a group to replace yourself, if you have to leave the network. Life gets crazy for you, something happens, and you're no longer able to serve in your role, you don't want to abandon the network and the person at the center. You want to find a replacement for yourself. So we do ask network members to do that as well. Invitation, is it easy? Sure. I have to say, personally, that was the hardest thing for me to start to think about who am I going to invite to my home, to share information about my daughter, to share about behaviors or things that I don't always share publicly, but they need to know. They need to know the hard stuff, too, not just the easy stuff in order to support the person with the disability. So the invitation is not always easy, but I promise you, once you get past that hump, it's a huge relief that's off your shoulder. It makes your life easier. And like I said, or is it hard? Asking is the number one challenge to start a network. Just remember that. Once you get past that hump, life gets better. Network meetings, the journey begins. Blake's buddies 2021. That's just ‑‑ and you can see these pictures here, but one thing I like to add is, since COVID, we were doing these Zoom meetings and one thing is I do a lot of hybrid meetings where some are in person and then you have family members that may not live in the state, but they can join via Zoom or you could just do meetings via Zoom, too. It doesn't always have to be in person. That's a great thing. I wanted to add that in there. And this is a video from Blake's mom, from her group, Blake's buddies.

>>: Name is Kimberly Johnson. My son is Blake. He will be 18 in a couple of months. We started the Blake's buddies network this past spring. We've had a couple of meetings so far. I am so relieved that we finally started this. It is like a weight has been lifted off of my shoulders to be able to share our fears, our medical information. I have a care notebook that's about 3 inches thick, and we've made it digital now because of the network, and I was able to share all of that with the group. Also, to be able to share waiver information, financial information. So just so my husband and I aren't the holders of all of this information. It feels really good to have it out where other people can explore and understand and understand what he ‑‑ we're going through and all of the changes that he's going through. I am extremely excited that we finally started this group. So I encourage you to do the same when you have the ‑‑ when you have time. No pressure. Just really happy that we started one.

>>: So network meetings are not just about business. They are also about socializing and eating. Typically, you would have a meal and once you ‑‑ you know, usually, the invitation meeting, we ask the families to provide either a light meal or snacks. Once the meetings get going regularly, we ask the network members to take that off of the family so it's one less thing that they have to be responsible for and pot luck works well. You can celebrate birthdays and then everybody socializes usually at the beginning and then they get down to business and then they have business or you could just do a social event with your network as well. So network meetings, this is a picture of people taking care of business. Usually, we have an agenda. The facilitator, not the parents, whoever is taking on that role, will go over the agenda and go over whatever business you're going to talk about at that meeting. There's an educational piece to each meeting or upcoming events, what's going on with the person with the disability, what kind of needs they have coming up that maybe the personal network could provide some support to them. So network meetings, taking care of business. This is a sample agenda. So the first part would be introductions. Especially your first couple of meetings, you have everyone introduce themselves because everyone doesn't know each other and how they know the person at the center and they know the family. Then you talk about what's new with other members, not just the person with the disability, but what's new with everybody. Then you get started developing the network, what we talked about, you think about a name, so everybody votes and comes up with a name, and then you assign the roles, a communication tool, whether you, as a network, you choose to do e‑mail, text, website, Facebook. I always say, a younger person is great with the communication tool because they have ‑‑ are more tech savvy. We use group me to communicate. That works well for us. Some people use Google docs to put information in for the network to access. Decide when to meet, how often, and where. The network goals. You develop short‑term and long‑term goals and update them annually. The goals are ‑‑ could be, gosh, you know, the network will learn about vocational services, the network will learn about disability issues, we'll learn about diagnoses, behaviors. It could just be anything. Whatever is needed. In the network agenda, you would go over updates. For example, they have medical issues or appointments, employment, what's going ‑‑ if there's a change in employment or new employment, what's going on with the schools. Benefits, learning about Social Security, SSI, disability, how to access those things. Then you would get to know the person at the center's interest, what's important to them, what they like or dislike and learn about their services or supports. Then last on the agenda is schedule your next meeting. We all know we get busy and we think, we'll schedule that a month from now and then it could be a year before you meet again. Even if you are not going to meet right away, you may have to reschedule it, you still want to get a date on the calendar for everyone because everyone does need to commit. Then if you have to reschedule, go from there. And then you adjourn. It is business during the meeting as well. You have an agenda. So some of this, I've covered. What do networks do? Meet for two hours three to four times a year. Provide social opportunities for the person at the center. If somebody ‑‑ a network member could say, I can take your loved one to the movies or take them on a walk or something like that. I mean, just simple things are very helpful. Help the person at the center to identify and articulate the needs from this network. All of our children are different. Every person with a disability is different. They all have ways to articulate their needs. We need to know what's important to them and we need to make sure that, during the network, it is about the person in the center. Offer guidance and mentorship. Assist with goal setting. Network members can come up with goals on things they would like to learn. Support families during time of crisis. That's a big one. Monitor public benefits and services. Learn about the disability issues. There's always a hot topic with disability issues, but a lot of people in our community and family members that aren't directly living our life every day, they have no clue. I can say with my daughter's network, one of the first things I did was go through her history, and some of my family is like, oh, my gosh, I had no idea because we don't share that all the time, but ‑‑ and they're more willing to help when they understand what's going on. This is kind of a safe place to do that. Then explore employment, housing options, what do you want ‑‑ what does the person at the center, what do they want to do for employment, what's important to them, do they want to work, do they want to volunteer, and how do you access that. Housing options, looking at the future, when they ‑‑ maybe they want to live independently or semi‑independently. How they can make that happen. The network can help with that. Research and bring things to the meeting. The key is to always have fun. It's always about having fun together. But remember, relationships are the foundation of all personal networks. So you can see these networks, the one in the middle is someone going rowing. The person at the center loved to row, and instead of having a meeting, they all went rowing one day because that was important. So it doesn't always have to be business. You could do ‑‑ I have a network that I'm facilitating now, and the young lady loves to go bowling and so we decided one of the next meetings, we're going to meet at the bowling alley and the network is going to go bowling together. How do you learn about someone but socializing and seeing what they enjoy. That's a key way to learn about each other even better. Phase three of the network is maintenance and sustainability. This is MAV men in 2010. We are in 2024. They're still going strong, which is amazing. That's the key, maintain, keep meeting, and sustain that network over time. Eventually, the parents won't be here, and you still want that person at the center to have that support system. This is a snapshot. That's the ‑‑ I'm sorry, that's not a snapshot, but the snapshots is the name of the group, and this is from 2014. They celebrated another year and overcame network hurdles. This is just for Jaclyn. We have a lot of pictures because we want to show that networks do work. This is a picture from 2015. Then another picture from 2019 where they're still meeting years later, going strong. And the Wacos take charge in 2018. If I'm not mistaken, this picture is the family was going to go out of town, so they were going to ‑‑ the parents were going to go out of town and cancel the meeting, and then the network members said, you know, we don't need you here, we'll have the meeting without you, which is ideal. That's the whole goal is to sustain without parents being there. The cavern club keeps on rocking, 2008. As you can see, they have a good time in their network meetings. So Texas network connections is helping families and self‑advocates start personal networks. Texas parent to parent has network facilitation services. We have facilitators who are paid facilitators, but currently, there are grants that Texas parent to parent has that is covering the facilitation services. Facilitator will help a parent develop a work plan and the person at the center develop a work plan and go over their goals, their services, and supports, create an invitation list, invites, and help them start a meeting, which would include an invitation meeting and then the first two meetings and then they follow up a year later to see how the network is carrying on on their own. They have transition action groups and monthly Zoom visits, Q and As, facilitator recruitment and trainings. We are looking for new facilitators. If anyone is interested, they can contact us as well. Starting a network with a Texas network connections facilitator. So these are just some more pictures. And this is a picture of a transition action group. You could start a personal network through a transaction group. It's a group of people that either have similar goals or maybe different goals, but they meet regularly on Zoom or in person, depending on where they live, and they just kind of hold each other accountable and support each other as they are developing and working through their transition goals. So it could be a goal of ‑‑ you know, you have a group of people that wants to start a personal network, so they meet and they talk about what their goal is and how to accomplish that and then they meet again and talk about the steps and where they're at on meeting those goals. And this is testimonials from BAKON 2019. What do families say about having a network? The crisis team was right there with us for back to back to back hospitalizations and the recovery from each. Bob and I have found this support to be a massive game‑changer. We felt part of a team of peers working together to care for Oliver, care for Apollo, and ourselves, put food on the table, stay connected, work, think about what we need, and rest. This is a night and day difference from trying to grit it out on our own. Our appreciation for the crisis team runs deep. That's a testimony there. Taking these first steps of starting a network leaves me feeling hopeful that we can build a strong community of support for my daughter. I know that this network will be such an important and special part of my sister's life, and I look forward to future meetings and all that is to come. I have to say, siblings love personal networks because oftentimes, we all know that parents rely on their siblings to care for the person at the center or the person with the disability after they're gone. That is a huge load on them. So siblings love networks because then they feel supported and they have the support system, too, so they don't feel isolated and all alone, like, when something happens to my parents, I'm in charge of all of this. Meeting with the network has put a dent in my skepticism. I am so happy that I finally did this. Over time, I see network members becoming more invested in my son's future. That is what families are saying about having a network. And this is a video. McKenna's circle of love from 2021.

>>: Hello. My name is Cassey carter. I wanted to tell you about our network for our daughter, McKenna carter. We started it about a year ago with Texas parent to parent. They've been gracious to help us get our network started. For Shane and I and McKenna, it has been something that's been positive and we started it simply because we had visited the online conferences for Texas parent to parent and learned about a network and how valuable it can be to a person with disabilities. Our daughter has epilepsy. She's on the autism spectrum. She has intellectual disabilities. She's high‑functioning. We have managed to take care of everything on our own until now. She's 21 now. As we're looking into launching her into independence, we decided that, through seeing the seminars on Texas parent to parent that we could use help on some of her major decisions and things that we are looking to do for her and with her, and also, we want that security and the peace of mind of knowing if anything ever happened to Shane and I, that McKenna would be not just existing, but well taken care of in not just her needs, but her desires are going to continue. As parents with young people and children with disabilities, sometimes the burden is very, very heavy on all of the decisions that we have to make, all of the forms and things that we have to fill out, all of the different agencies that we are looking to to help our person with disabilities, it can get so overwhelming and the burden can get so heavy, but through learning about a network with Texas passionate to parent, Shane and I have begun to feel that burden lift off of our shoulders. It's slow. We just got started. We see that there is a group of people that we have assembled around her that care about her, care about her future, they love her dearly, and they want to help. One of the things we were most scared of is asking people to help. Once we started asking, the response was overwhelmingly yes. We have wondered what we can do, we've been waiting on you to ask us to help, and so the network was a great place to get these people involved in her life. We are looking ‑‑ they are helping us make pretty big life decisions right now about guardianship and other things. They are all taking on roles that are amazing for McKenna's future, especially if something were ever to happen to her father and I. A network has just ‑‑ in the fewest word, it has released a burden off of our shoulders. We know that it's getting started and it's going to get better and better. Currently, McKenna doesn't participate in her own network because she is exerting her own independence, but we look forward to a time when she depends on the people in this network for advice, for companionship, just for anything that she might need someone besides mom or dad to turn to. So we are excited about where the network is going to go and what's going to play out for McKenna in her future. So I highly suggest, even if you just have a child that's very, very young, I suggest you go ahead and do the work now to get a network started because it is a huge relief off of parents with children that have disabilities to just allow others to share that burden, and they want to do it, and they're excited to do it, so no matter where you are, no matter how old your child with social needs is, I suggest you dive in and get a network started because it will be beneficial for your special needs child and for those who are caring for that special needs child. I highly recommend it. Thank you.

>>: And as I talked about earlier, siblings love networks. I have a network that I'm facilitating, and it's just a single mom with two daughters, and the one daughter was always just ‑‑ and her daughter has down syndrome and the sister was going to manage her life after the mom, so that's just the plan for her to be in charge of her life, and so when they heard about networks, they were just ‑‑ that was the thing. The mom said it gave her and her adult daughter a sense of relief for her to build that community and that support system for the sibling, not just for the person at the center and the mom, but to know that when the mom passes on, that the sibling is not going to feel all of that responsibility solo, that she will have a support system as well. And so ‑‑ and you see here these ‑‑ the young kids ‑‑ you know, include your younger kids in the network because how do young kids learn about a person with a disability and differences in disability, issues, other than being present. They may not understand why you're meeting when they're two or three or four, but if they're always there, they're going to grow up knowing about it. Those young people are the next generation to be there and advocate for our individuals with disabilities and disability services and to understand what our community needs. Always include the younger children, too, not just us older people. I know I had somebody say, oh, well, I don't want to invite this cousin because they're in their early 20s, they're not mature yet. I said, but they will mature and they will learn by being part of the network. This is not something that happens overnight. You're not, okay, we have this meeting and now we have this perfect network. It grows. We all grow over time and make progress. That's something to remember when you're thinking about who to invite. Don't feel like, oh, I don't want to invite this person because they don't ‑‑ or they don't understand my child's disability or they don't understand disability issues. Well, you know what, they don't, but this is a place where they may start to understand more. So this is a great place to invite those people that you normally don't talk about things with because they don't get it, right, so this is a safe place for that as well. What do network members say about being part of a network? It's a great way to put our minds together and think about someone we all care about. It's given me a really clear way to be a part of his life and support his family. I wanted to support my best friend with her younger brother. We always know that there's going to be a group of people there for her. It felt like an honor to be asked to be included in the network. I like having a defined role in how I can support him. These are just great testimonies of what network members feel and it's just ‑‑ it's amazing. So developing a healthy sustainable network, again, it takes years. That's okay. Nothing happens overnight. You go to college, you get a degree, it's not quick and easy. Everything takes time and the best things take longer. Networks are a work in progress. Don't give up. Just keep working at it. That's a picture of a great network. Over time, as networks mature, relationships deepen, and members become more invested in each other's lives. This is a picture of Colter's intelligence agency, CIA, from 2017. I love all of the unique names that networks have. So this Texas networks connections program, that's our website. Then the link for personal network videos and planned lifetime advocacy network. Then for more information, Denise Sonleitner. I can put my e‑mail address also. I believe that is it. I think I did good for under an our. Any questions in the Q and A?

>>: I did not see any. I don't know how to post your e‑mail address. Maybe I could get ‑‑ do I put it in the chat?

>>: Should we put it in the chat? We're not sure how to put it in the Q and A.

>>: Yes.

>>: Okay. Do you want to do that? Do you guys have any questions or ‑‑

>>: Yes, I actually do have a question. I was wondering, do you have any network individuals that you want to involve that have already been part of other networks for their own ‑‑ so like if they're involved with a network already, should I invite somebody to be part of a network? Can they be part of the two networks? Do they overlap, do they coincide, how does that work?

>>: So the networks I wouldn't say that they overlap or coincide, but yes, I personally am a part of three networks. I mean, besides being a personal facilitator just because they're my friends, so I am part of their network as well. You can ‑‑ and you know, it is good to have maybe like another parent of a person with a disability, but you don't want just parents of people with disabilities to be part of your network. And you can have your ‑‑ the person with a disability, their friends can be part of it as well. Did I answer your question?

>>: Yes, you did. Another question that I had was, if a family is interested in getting people who are professionals to be involved with their network, like let's say VR counselors or teachers, and understanding that they are only in that person at center's life temporarily, only while school is in session or whatever, or the VR case is closed, then they're not their counselor or teacher anymore. How can they work out a situation where those individuals will continue to be members of that network?

>>: So of course it is up to that professional if they would like to continue to be part of that network. For instance, I have a network of an adult who is probably 23 now that I'm facilitating, and his ‑‑ used to be his Special Ed teacher who is now a diagnostician who is part of the school she's at. She's chosen to continue to be part of that network. Sometimes professionals will maybe choose to be a resource or be in the network temporarily and with that understanding, but other people may choose that they just love the person at the center and the network and they want to stay on because this is not ‑‑ it is a commitment if they choose to, but again, it's a choice.

>>: I do have a few more questions, if we have time, but we do, so great.

>>: Absolutely.

>>: Another question that I have is, this network, I mean, we see a lot of benefit for a lot of different types of disabilities. I was thinking about a deaf individual who is in the network. I mean, obviously there will be communication barriers with some other network members. Do you have any suggestions how to ensure that all members will be able to communicate with the person at center?

>>: I think in that situation, you know, it's one of those where you think outside the box, so it depends on the individual that's deaf, if they rely specifically on sign language, if you would have an interpreter or if you would do something written, and I do have a personal network that I'm working with that the person uses sign language and they're actually working on the network learning sign language. So as one of their goals to be able to better communicate.

>>: Right. I think that's definitely important because I think if we can expose children to various social communications, not just in sign, but other methods of communication, it will really help them in their intelligibility, when they go into a job place, or different situations and meeting different individuals to have that practice when in the network can help develop their social skills, so I think that's a great opportunity.

>>: Absolutely. I will say, a lot of times with individuals that don't communicate verbally, maybe it's ‑‑ they use an augmentative communication device, including behaviors, we all know behaviors is communication, so a lot of times, a goal will be to learn how that individual communicates, how that individual with a disability communicates their needs, their wants, et cetera.

>>: And this is my last question. So have you seen networks benefit employment, or has that led to more employment opportunities for the person at center?

>>: I have to say that the short time that I have been doing networks, we have not had specific employment in the networks that I've been involved in, but one of the networks that I am working with, that is one of the goals is employment, and a supportive employment person, I guess you would say, that works in that capacity is a part of the network. So ‑‑ and that is one of the goals that they are working on is to figure out how to help the individual with a disability find and hold a job, and that is a discussion in the network.

>>: And I was asking those questions because we do know that, in Texas, especially in Texas and I'm sure in other states as well, that we don't just need to know the skills and have the education, but it's also who you know that is really crucial when it comes to finding employment opportunities. So somebody who can make a suggestion who's employed at said place, I think it's beneficial. When we look at networks, that's a part that can help them. They have those natural barriers, and so this is a good opportunity for them to alleviate that barrier and work within the networks for those various employment opportunities.

>>: We do that naturally as well. I mean, I ‑‑ over the years, I mean, I have to say, I haven't applied for a job in years, and I am a nurse, but once you develop relationships, whether it be in your work or your personal life, then people just contact you and go, oh, well, you know, this job is available, I think you'd be great about it, but the same thing, when you develop this personal network and you have this group of people and they know what your goals are, what your visions are, what your wants are, they're going to be naturally looking to where like, I think this would be a great opportunity for this person because I know what their skills are, what their abilities are, what their needs are, and so they're going to be on the lookout and you're developing those relationships in that setting, so I think this is a great opportunity for that to occur. Any other questions? I think those were all great questions.

>>: Well, I think we're about out of time, so thank you so much.

>>: Thank you.

>>: Will you be able to put your contact information in the chat?

>>: I believe it is in there, yes, it is.

>>: Okay.

>>: Thank you.

>>: And your contact information is also posted on the website. So thank you so much for your time and sharing this information with us and the audience. You have a wonderful day. Thank you.

>>: Thank you. You have a great day, too. Bye‑bye.