

Assessing Virtual Engagement Best Practices for Vulnerable Populations

Summary Report



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NJTPA - Support for Public Engagement

Introduction

The Rutgers Public Outreach and Engagement Team (POET) completed a series of interviews with staff at social service agencies and community organizations to better understand how virtual and other remote methods helped them continue to engage with vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limits on in-person services and the switch to virtual communication methods are particularly challenging for vulnerable populations, such as people with low incomes, seniors, and people with disabilities. Potential barriers to virtual engagement may include limited access to the internet, poor internet connection, reliance on a smartphone rather than a desktop or laptop computer, lack of other technology experience, skills, or devices such as a web camera.

Through these interviews, POET collected information about effective methods and tools, common challenges, and key considerations when planning and facilitating virtual and non-in person engagement opportunities for vulnerable groups. The immediate purpose of this research is to help the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) facilitate engagement in the development of its next Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP); however, the findings from these interviews can help further community involvement in projects across the NJTPA work program.

Approach

POET conducted 19 interviews with key staff at social service agencies and community organizations throughout the spring of 2020. POET sought interviews with organizations that serve one or more of the following populations: individuals with disabilities; seniors; individuals with low incomes; at-risk youth; victims of domestic violence; veterans; and immigrants or those with limited English proficiency. The focus on these groups was determined by the NJTPA's engagement priorities for the upcoming LRTP. POET completed an online scan of organizations that work with these groups and specifically pursued interviews with organizations that used virtual methods to continue their work during the pandemic. Interviews lasted approximately one hour via an online meeting platform.

The following sections synthesize the findings from these interviews related to each of the seven populations listed above. Each section provides a summary of key recommendations and considerations when planning or conducting virtual engagement activities with the population, an overview of the practices organizations have used to engage with the population, and an overview of the solutions organizations have devised to address common challenges. The appendix contains a detailed report on the interview POET conducted with each organization.

Women and Domestic Abuse Victims

POET conducted interviews with staff from two organizations and programs that serve women who are victims of domestic abuse or who are seeking assistance to transition into the workforce. The interviewees included staff from Women's Rights Information Center (WRIC) and Project S.A.R.A.H. (Stop Abusive Relationships at Home), a Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic program.

Recommendations and Considerations

- Engagement opportunities should be flexible, allowing women or victims of domestic abuse to participate when it is safe and convenient for them.
- Participants should have control over how much information they share and should have the option to complete activities privately or discretely (e.g. participating in an online discussion forum rather than a focus group).
- Phone calls, email blasts, Zoom video conferences, and Facebook are effective communication modes or platforms. Articles in local or community newspapers can help to reach specific populations with limited internet access.
- Organizations for women and domestic abuse survivors can make helpful outreach partners due to their established and trusted communications networks for client referrals and outreach/education programs.
- While victims of domestic abuse have a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and may not be impacted by the digital divide, women with limited English proficiency may be more likely to lack both access to as well as knowledge about technology.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Both WRIC and Project S.A.R.A.H. share their public-facing outreach and education programs on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. One organization primarily uses Facebook, because it is most popular among the 25- to 64-year-old female demographic it typically serves. The other organization has increased the rate at which they publish educational articles in community newspapers. Both organizations have also hosted online fundraisers using a combination of Zoom and Facebook Live.

To facilitate regular communication with clients, including sharing resources, promoting program offerings, and conducting wellbeing check-ins, both organizations use phone calls and emails. For regular programs, events, and meetings, they use video conferencing platforms. While one organization exclusively uses Zoom for all its online classes and workshops, it also offers workshops on how to use technology. The other uses a telehealth platform for its online therapy sessions.

Project S.A.R.A.H. also engages with specific members of the Orthodox Jewish community who are positioned to intervene or provide referrals in domestic abuse situations. They offer educational programs and outreach to women who can act as liaisons to impart information

and give support to at-risk women and children. While this outreach strategy is not limited to virtual modes of engagement, it suggests the importance of identifying and reaching out to key community members who can further transmit information to others.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

Victims of domestic abuse face unique challenges with virtual communication. They may be unable to find a private place away from the abuser to talk, or the abuser may use tracking technologies to control a victim's use of a phone or computer. To address these challenges, WRIC provides prepaid phones to some clients and prepares safety plans for clients to deploy if needed. WRIC has also developed a robust protocol for using Zoom that includes the use of coded language and consent forms that allow clients to decide how much information they are comfortable sharing.

Lack of access to or knowledge about technology also pose a challenge, particularly for women and domestic abuse victims of lower socioeconomic status. For example, while online classes at WRIC are seeing increased participation, the number of students in their online ESL program fell from about 50 in-person students to 15 online students due to the students' lack of access to a computer or unfamiliarity with using one. Some families served by Project S.A.R.A.H. also lack internet access or enough devices for the whole family to use. To address these challenges, these organizations have paid for Wi-Fi utility bills, secured donated devices or rental computers, and offered technology workshops.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

WRIC has experienced greater participation rates in its online classes compared to in-person classes. Online classes are more convenient, eliminating transportation and parking costs, and the fear of crowds or social interaction. Project S.A.R.A.H. raised the same amount of money from their virtual annual fundraising event as from in-person events, in part due to the lower cost of holding an online event. While the NJTPA is often able to hold meetings without paying venue rental costs, other costs associated with in-person meetings – such as materials, printing, and travel – can be reduced or avoided by holding virtual events.

Seniors

POET conducted interviews with staff from three programs and organizations that work with seniors. These included the Club Sequoia program at Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic, the Township of Montclair's Senior Services program, and AARP of New Jersey.

Recommendations and Considerations

- Outreach to seniors should seek to establish a personal connection. Phone calls are a good way to add a personal touch to participation.
- Seniors do not regularly check websites. Mail is a better way to share information.
- Seniors vary in their willingness and ability to use video platforms like Zoom, but many can and do use them. Seniors may prefer to call in or not display their video, so a Zoom meeting should not rely exclusively on visual activities.
- Before participating, seniors may need assistance or instructions on how to use a virtual engagement platform like Zoom. Have tech-savvy staff on hand specifically to address these issues or consider partnering with an organization, like a library, that can provide technical assistance geared toward seniors' needs.
- Choose a virtual engagement platform that is already familiar to a wide range of people.
- Consistency and simplicity are key. Use the same Zoom room for recurring meetings or use a platform that has straightforward steps to connect and a minimal number of buttons/options. Password protection may be unnecessary if it adds an extra step.
- Some seniors are very daunted by technology, refuse to try it, or cannot afford it. Senior housing may also lack building-wide internet access. Therefore, an engagement effort for seniors cannot solely rely on virtual methods.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Traditional communication modes, such as phone calls and mail, may be the most effective way to engage with seniors. Many seniors prefer the personal touch of a phone call. Mailing an information packet or a calendar to seniors is more effective than posting information on a website. JFS mails members a monthly event calendar. Early in the pandemic, AARP sent a postcard to all seniors to request a phone number or email, looking to transition these members away from mail communication alone.

Despite a preference for phone calls and mail, seniors are using virtual platforms. However, their comfort with and knowledge of technology varies. Some seniors are savvy and connect easily, some need a lot of assistance, and others refuse to try. Even if they have the equipment and knowledge to connect to Zoom, seniors often are uncomfortable being on camera and may prefer to call in or turn off their video. This may cause them to miss interactive activities.

Zoom is the predominant platform currently used for activities with seniors. Some organizations stream Zoom programs simultaneously on Facebook Live, broadcast their programs on a local television channel, or post the recorded event on YouTube. AARP chooses an event's virtual

platform depending on the content, whereas Montclair Senior Services exclusively uses the same Zoom room – and does not use passwords – for all events to avoid confusion. The goal is to minimize the number of steps seniors must take to join an online program.

Many seniors need assistance or education on how to use technology. At Club Sequoia, before the pandemic's stay-at-home order, a group of seniors requested a special training session with Zoom so they would be prepared. Montclair Senior Services has partnered with the local library to help teach seniors how to use their devices and access Zoom. The Montclair Senior Center has also created a "buddy" program that pairs seniors familiar with center programming with members who require more assistance. Seniors in the buddy program can assist their fellow seniors over the phone to resolve technology issues.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

Organizations that provide social and educational programming for seniors have had difficulty developing online programs that are as engaging as in-person programs. Organizations may not offer the same variety of programs, as some programs do not translate well onto virtual platforms. For example, Club Sequoia stopped offering popular classical music lectures because the content did not translate well online due to poor audio quality.

Due to lack of knowledge about technology, lack of interest, or lack of affordability, seniors may not have an appropriate device or internet access at home. Setting up at-home internet access for seniors in a remote, contactless way is particularly difficult. Senior housing may also lack building-wide Wi-Fi. When Club Sequoia received donated devices to distribute to clients, only a few members requested one. One woman received a device, and then did not open the package for a week because she felt daunted by the device.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

Virtual programs have made participation possible for some seniors – such as those with transportation barriers or physical disabilities – who would otherwise not be able to participate. At Club Sequoia, one man who was very ill and bedbound was able to participate in activities over Zoom, and a blind woman regularly participated in Zoom programs by telephone.

Participation has also increased for online activities and events. Online program registration at the Montclair Senior Center doubled between March and June 2020, and included participants from all over the country. AARP similarly noted that digital platform use has dramatically expanded its ability to reach and connect with members across New Jersey.

One interviewee noted an unexpected benefit of increased security in online platforms. She felt that Zoom is more secure than in-person events. Silencing or removing disruptive participants is much easier during online programs than in-person programs.

Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

POET conducted interviews with staff from five organizations that serve individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. These included the Alliance Center for Independence, Parker Adult Day Center, DAWN Center for Independent Living, Arc of New Jersey, and Arc of Hudson County.

Recommendations and Considerations

- Online engagement should entail extensive opportunities for socializing with others.
- Activities should be fun, stimulating, highly interactive, and personalized to reflect individual interests and preferences.
- To help acclimate participants who appear shy or uncomfortable to the virtual medium, efforts should be made to actively engage with them and ask them questions.
- Consider partnering with caregivers or staff who know participants well to facilitate activities and increase their comfort level.
- If using an online video platform, make sure the process for connecting is simple, with a limited number of steps for the participant. Choose a platform that allows the host to take control of a participant's screen to resolve technical problems and look for platforms that have a minimal number of buttons or options that can confuse users.
- Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities may be unable to use virtual platforms for a variety of reasons. Outreach should therefore include "low-tech" activities that may be mailed or dropped off where the individual lives or where they receive supportive services. Some organizations send an activity packet accompanied by a link to an online video with directions for completing the packet.
- Choose a virtual engagement platform that is widely familiar, such as Zoom, as learning how to use a new platform may be a participation obstacle for some individuals.
- Caregivers are an important part of the lives of individuals with disabilities. Outreach to this population is also an opportunity to reach caregivers.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Organizations that serve individuals with disabilities are continuing to offer social, fun, and stimulating activities for their clients using virtual methods. Activities vary widely, including exercise classes, virtual dance parties, game nights, arts and crafts, bingo, remote field trips, and discussion groups. Organizations that seek to build independence and job readiness are offering virtual resume writing classes, community service clubs, cooking classes, and voting workshops. The goal of many of these activities is to maintain social bonds between clients who normally socialize together in person, provide stimulation for clients who are homebound due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure that clients do not lose the skills they have built while regularly participating in the programs.

Zoom is one of the most popular video conferencing platforms, with some participants choosing to use Zoom exclusively as they do not want to learn another platform. The Arc of NJ first tried GoToWebinar and GoToMeeting but moved to Zoom because it is easier to use. In addition to Zoom, ACI uses Loom, an instructional video recording tool that staff use to easily record and disseminate meetings, workshops, and presentations via email and the ACI website. Organizations also use FaceTime, Hangouts, and GoToMeeting.

Organizations typically also offer a lower tech option for clients to participate in activities. Some clients only call into Zoom meetings. When the Arc of NJ sent a digital survey to clients, staff also made phone calls to collect survey data verbally. Those who cannot participate in online programs at all receive activity packets or care packages in the mail or from staff delivery. One organization has dropped off craft kits at clients' homes and follows up by sending a video link to the caregiver with how-to instructions that the client can follow along with.

In addition to online activities, organizations are communicating with clients in other ways. Many send email newsletters to clients and caregivers that include upcoming program calendars, COVID-19 information and resources, and other content. Parker Day includes a "community corner" section with details on client birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Sharing this information has offered a way for participants to remain connected and engaged with one another. ACI developed a COVID-19 resource guide that communicates information through plain language and graphics. ACI also conducts weekly wellness check-in calls or texts with clients who request the service.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

Online activities and weekly check-in calls are not replacements for the full-day programming and support services offered by some organizations, such as Parker Day. Some interviewees stated that virtual methods cannot achieve the "personal touch" of in-person interactions. Due to these limitations, interviewees saw virtual engagement as supplemental, and plan to resume some version of regular, in-person programs when feasible.

Individuals with intellectual or development disabilities may need help in acclimating to virtual modes. ACI staff have reported greater difficulty in engaging participants in virtual discussions than when conducting the same meetings in-person. Some young adult students in DAWN's employment readiness program do not feel comfortable participating in online groups, so staff have conducted some one-on-one meetings. When the Arc of Hudson first started Zoom programs in March, some participants were shy and uncomfortable being on camera. To overcome this, the facilitator specifically directed questions to those clients to help them overcome their shyness.

This demographic often lacks access to the internet or a device. Individuals with a disability may be low-income and unable to afford internet access, or they may not want it. While some individuals visit libraries or other community centers when they need to use a computer, this option became unavailable due to the COVID-19. Pandemic. A family may have a limited

number of internet-connected devices in the home. Caregivers may have competing demands during the day – such as a job or other dependents – and lack the time to assist the individual with an online program. To address the lack of access, some organizations secured low-cost tablets and laptop computers for clients through grants and/or donations and distributed them to clients.

In addition to a lack of access to the internet or internet-connected devices, individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities face unique challenges using online platforms. Some may lack the basic “know-how” or skills to set up and use a program like Zoom or Webex, while grasping the concept of virtual communication is more confusing than beneficial to others. One organization restricts online group size to avoid several recurring issues, including low bandwidth, participants needing assistance, and participants wanting to see and hear one another. Other organizations offer tutorial sessions for new participants, and “Zoom Etiquette” sessions to teach best practices – from how to position video cameras to the importance of being in a quiet place – on using Zoom.

Interviewees recommended several important functions or characteristics of an effective virtual meeting platform for individuals with disabilities. There should be a function that allows the meeting host to assume control of a participant’s screen to fix technical problems. A platform should also have minimal buttons or options to lessen confusion for the user. Ideally, users would simply access a website to join a meeting and not need any pre-existing knowledge of how to set up or use the platform.

Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have a hearing or visual impairment that can exclude them from fully participating in virtual activities. Several interviewees described the need for a tool that adds captions to online video meetings to assist hearing impaired participants.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities are experiencing important benefits from virtual engagement. Online platforms have enabled clients to continue socializing and building skills, rather than being isolated. One interviewee stated that offering virtual engagement opportunities opened a “world of opportunities” for transportation disadvantaged consumers. While noting that virtual modes can never fully replace in-person interaction, organizations plan to continue offering virtual activity options to clients.

At-risk Youth

POET conducted interviews with staff from five organizations that provide support services to at-risk youth and their caregivers. The organizations interviewed assist youth with behavioral or emotional issues, youth in the juvenile justice system, youth impacted by domestic abuse, and youth in foster homes. The organizations included Embrella, MonmouthCares, Goodwill of New York and New Jersey, Bergen Family Center (BFC), and Youth Advocate Programs (YAP).

Recommendations and Considerations

- When using an online video platform like Zoom, youth may migrate towards communicating via the chat feature rather than verbally. Incorporate the chat feature into a planned meeting agenda, perhaps by assigning staff to moderate the chat or by posting discussion questions in the chat.
- The virtual platform that youth prefer to use may differ from what is popular with adults, and their preference may change depending on newly trending mobile platforms.
- Youth may be comfortable receiving formal communications, such as an invitation to take a survey, via text rather than email.
- It is important to establish trust during interactions with at-risk youth.
- Ensure online activities are well-designed and hold the users' attention, by including video clips from YouTube or popular movies.
- Give youth the opportunity to engage with each other over virtual platforms.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Flexibility is important in communicating with and providing services to at-risk youth and their families. Organization staff use a variety of platforms including Zoom, FaceTime, Microsoft Teams, Instagram Live, Facebook Live, GoToMeeting, and WhatsApp, according to client and family preferences. Each organization also makes frequent check-in phone calls or sends emails to clients' families.

Youth often have communication preferences that differ from those of their older family members. Young clients prefer communicating on Instagram Live and Zoom, while older family members prefer email and Facebook. When using Zoom, youth use the chat feature frequently and seem more willing and open to sharing their experiences over chat, rather than verbally. Many prefer to turn off their video connection and join Zoom by audio only. YAP has also found that youth prefer to stay in touch with staff through texting. The organization has found that when distributing a survey to its clients, the response rate is best if they send the survey to youth via text instead of email.

Time of day is another important factor. Youth generally prefer to be online later in the day or during the evening. Finally, online learning modules are especially effective when they are well-designed and use engaging video clips from YouTube and popular movies.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

While youth may be more experienced with using technology and communicating virtually than other demographic groups, nearly all organizations interviewed described a decrease in the quality of their engagement with clients after switching to virtual modes. BFC has observed that, because of increased scheduling flexibility, programs for families and young children have been easier to convene virtually, while engaging with teenagers has been more difficult.

At-risk youth often live in households that lack access to the internet or an internet-connected device due to economic hardship. While Goodwill has continued to offer programming online such as virtual job and resource fairs, participation is much lower than it might be due to a lack of internet access. At MonmouthCares, nearly 70% of clients qualify for Medicaid and have required assistance to pay for internet access or a device. At YAP, the level of service staff typically provide has been noticeably impacted by client lack of internet access.

To address the digital divide, organizations are securing funding to purchase devices and pay for internet service for families in need. Embrella received Chromebooks from their funding agency, the state Department of Children and Family Services, to give to each household that needed a device. Goodwill and YAP have applied for or received funding through grant programs such as the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund to purchase devices or pay for internet access for clients. For these organizations, increasing client access to technology made staying in touch with them easier.

In the first few weeks of the pandemic before funding programs enabled technology purchases, organizations used “low-tech” approaches to communicate with clients, especially those at risk for domestic abuse. Goodwill created packages of printed materials in different languages and sent them home to clients. YAP staff sometimes conducted curb-side visits during which they talked with clients in person but from a safe distance. Most organizations also conducted check-in phone calls.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

Organizations described how virtual meetings have enabled them to reach a broader audience and create new relationships. BFC has used virtual meetings to bring together teenagers in programs across different towns that otherwise operated separately. A youth participating in Goodwill’s programs was connected to a remote internship opportunity in California, for example. Using virtual modes, the organization has also been able to expand its services to support not only youth, but all family members and has been able to educate family members about additional available support services.

Virtual engagement has also removed a variety of barriers, including transportation, for youth and families that make joining in-person activities a challenge. Clients and families seem more willing to organize -- and attend -- meetings when travel is not a barrier. In addition, virtual engagement removes other barriers, such as childcare, scheduling conflicts, lack of access to

services in different languages, and anxiety about social interactions or meeting in groups. Two interviewees shared that some youth are more likely to open up when communicating virtually.

Immigrants

POET conducted interviews with staff from two organizations that serve immigrants with limited English proficiency. Both organizations provide support to immigrants to help them improve their employment options and understand their workplace rights and responsibilities. Organizations included are *Comite de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agricolas* (CATA), otherwise known as the Farmworkers Support Committee, and Workforce Advantage.

CATA is a non-profit organization located in New Jersey, Southeastern Pennsylvania, and Maryland's Eastern Shore. It works to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements to the legal and economic systems for the farmworkers. Workforce Advantage, Inc.'s comprehensive services include basic English and computer skill classes designed to help and overcome employment barriers. Offices are in areas with high immigrant populations, such as Elizabeth, Paterson, and Union City, New Jersey.

Recommendations and Considerations

- Information about engagement opportunities should be accessible and available in native languages.
- Engagement should be supported by traditional communication modes such as phone calls, email, and printed materials to provide meaningful language access to virtual engagements.
- Email, Zoom video conferences, internet-based radio programs, text messaging, and Facebook are effective communication modes or platforms for this group.
- Engagement on virtual platforms is most effective when a person from the community is part of the support system.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Both Workforce Advantage, Inc. and CATA are conducting outreach and providing services/education on online platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, as well as on dedicated platforms. These organizations are complementing virtual engagement by also continuing to communicate through more traditional modes, such as email, mail, text messages, printed materials, in-person visits, and phone calls. Workforce Advantage used a dedicated internet-based platform for their English classes known as *Newrow*, which supports virtual classroom video collaboration between teachers and students.

Both organizations had to train staff on virtual/distance outreach techniques in order to keep operations at a normal level due to the pandemic. Their continued use of email, phone calls, flier dissemination, and word-of-mouth provided continuity for organizational outreach and overall functions. Neither organization emphasized using their website as a recruitment tool or contact point between the organization and new members. Regular communication with these organizations' members has primarily been via phone calls, text messaging, and e-mail, including using phone calls and texts to provide technical support for services/classes offered online. CATA also uses its online radio program to disseminate information.

Workforce Advantage noted that their clients prefer to receive traditional mail rather than e-mail in specific situations. Traditional mail offers a greater sense of security when sharing personal and sensitive information versus e-mail or internet-based registration forms. Many CATA members reside in areas with low connectivity, making electronic communication very difficult. Instead, they often turn to and work with community leaders or liaisons who share information via word of mouth.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

Most clients served by these two groups have limited access to internet connections and the equipment needed to be online and/or lack technical knowhow. In addition, organizations serving immigrants face the unique challenge of a language barrier. Both organizations rely on other members or employees with proficiency in Spanish to serve as liaisons who can guide clients through the virtual engagement experience.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

CATA has noticed greater participation by additional family members in the virtual membership meetings compared to the in-person meetings. Workforce Advantage has expanded its reach by allowing students residing in distant areas to join the on-line classes. In addition, both organizations have benefited from a reduction in transportation and parking costs – both for staff and participants. Online engagement has also reduced operating costs, ranging from staff travel and transportation expenses to event materials and printing costs.

Low-income

POET staff conducted interviews with staff from four organizations and programs that serve the low-income population. These range from organizations serving immigrants with limited English proficiency, women who are victims of domestic abuse, and veterans. This review intends to identify the commonalities among the low-income population, served by these four organizations.

The organizations included are Workforce Advantage, Inc., Women's Rights Information Center (WRIC), Farmworker Support Committee (CATA), and Department of Housing and Urban Development- Veterans Affairs (HUD- VASH).

Recommendations and Considerations

- A lack of internet access, hardware devices, and technical knowledge are often deterrents to participation in virtual engagement.
- Low-income residents often rely on and solicit non-virtual engagement methods first. Traditional low-tech/no-tech methods, such as phone calls and mail, are the best ways to maintain communication and share information about programs and services at times when in-person engagement is not possible. Many low-income residents rarely check email or look for information on a website.
- Low-income residents' readiness, willingness, and adaptability to engage virtually varies among age groups. Overall, younger people with low-incomes exhibit a greater willingness to engage virtually, while older adults are frequently more resistant to change. They are also more likely to incorporate changes into their routines at a slower pace than younger people.
- Some non-English speaking immigrants do not trust online platforms or technology and are reluctant to share any personal information this way.
- One-on-one technical assistance over the phone has helped to increase the participation and engagement of those who may have been reluctant or who have lacked the technical savvy to do so.
- Organizations serving low-income communities should train all staff on virtual engagement models and practices so they can effectively troubleshoot clients' difficulties.
- The choice of a well-known virtual engagement platform increases the likelihood that participants may have had some exposure to using it in the past.
- Engaging respected community members as community liaisons or trusted advocates to help encourage residents' participation in the virtual engagement activity is key. Maintaining a personal connection with an organization representative or a member of the community both helps with recruitment and also improves overall communication.
- For residents whose English proficiency is limited, information should be translated into the participants' native language whenever possible. Non-English speakers and people

with low English language proficiency often feel intimidated or discouraged from participating when information is not available in their native language.

Virtual Engagement Practices

Many organizations serving low-income individuals use well-known public-facing platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams to provide services to their clients and/or members. A number of them also use text messaging to communicate regularly. For the most part, the organizations also relied on low-tech communication means, such as phone calls, texts, or printed materials, to supplement online virtual engagement practices. These methods allowed the organization to support and include participants who could not connect online.

Challenges of Virtual Engagement and Solutions

Lack of knowledge about technology and lack of access are the main challenges for low-income residents that contribute to the digital divide. Although some residents can connect remotely, many cannot and instead must rely on basic/low-tech modes of communication. In addition, some low-income communities have poor infrastructure and limited wireless connectivity. In the case of CATA, many members reside in remote areas, where connectivity is not available. To overcome this barrier, CATA has relied on community leaders or representatives to disseminate information.

Adequate staff training and preparedness is another important factor in engaging with low-income communities. Working to help organizations that support these residents' efforts to become proficient in online engagement will be key to fostering community connection. For example, while Veterans Affairs has a designated online platform, staff members were not properly or sufficiently trained to use it effectively. Ultimately, they resorted to basic non-tech traditional modes, such as phone calls and selected home-visits, to service their clients. Well-trained staff are also poised to better support clients and participants who need technical assistance. CATA, WRIC, and Workforce Advantage all deployed staff members to help address participants' technical questions and troubleshoot their problems.

For low-income residents with limited-English proficiency, language barriers may also obstruct and delay participation in virtual engagement. In the case of WRIC, participation has increased for most online classes, but the number of students in the ESL program has decreased.

Benefits of Virtual Engagement

Virtual engagement offers the benefit of reducing costs associated with transportation, parking, or childcare. Additionally, virtual engagement can reduce anxieties caused by public crowds or social interaction. Organizations working with limited-English proficient/immigrant communities noted that a fear or anxiety are often associated with attending in-person events.

Many organizations have seen increased participation rates, and participation from new types of residents, due to virtual engagement. Registration and participation for WRIC online classes

is significantly higher than for its in-person classes. CATA has experienced higher participation levels as well, with additional family members often taking part in virtual engagement activities from home. Workforce Advantage was able to expand their client base by offering services and classes to new students in locations beyond their normal service areas.

Interview Summary Report: Workforce Advantage, Inc.

Interviewee: Gilberto Romero

Interviewer: Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: Wednesday May 20, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Workforce Advantage is a non-profit organization that provides comprehensive services designed to help overcome employment barriers, such as computer skills, basic English and job readiness soft skills. It has three branches located in Elizabeth, Paterson and Union City. These are areas with high immigrant population, mainly Hispanics from Central and South America. Most of the adults it serves are heads of households or part of three-generational households.
- Workforce Advantage's Union City branch provides services mainly to immigrants, and low-income adult students. It offers courses including: Certified Nurse Aide, Job Readiness/Soft Skills, Computer Literacy, English as a Second Language and Basic Skills for the Workplace. Staff work closely with employment partners such as Alaris Health and Elizabeth Nursing and Rehabilitation Services.
- Gilberto Romero is the director of Workforce Advantage's Union City branch, known as Union City Center. He oversees the operations and management and also teaches computer classes at this site.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Before the pandemic, Workforce Advantage provided all services on-site; from orientation and registration to daily classes and individual career placement meetings.
- For recruitment, Workforce Advantage primarily used printed materials to publicize services, participated in select grassroots events, did outbound calling and e-mail blasts. Also, its Facebook page was used to promote services. The immigrant community it serves relies mainly on in-person interaction and services as well as social media.
- Workforce Advantage distributed copies of flyers and brochures in the community including local libraries. It relied on printed materials and referrals from community partners and alumni to increase registration.
- Orientation, registration, meetings and classes were all done in-person.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Since the start of the pandemic, Union City Center has transferred all classes and services to a virtual platform and has focused on maintaining student retention by offering the curricula online.
- Because it requires hands-on training, the Certified Nursing Assistant certification program had to be postponed indefinitely due to current mandates of social distancing.
- During registration, many new students did not feel comfortable submitting the necessary documentation via e-mail. Staff members in charge of registration had to rely on traditional mail to continue the registration process.

- Classes were immediately transferred to the Newrow Video Collaboration platform. This platform is built for online instruction – helping remote staff members and teachers effectively engage with Union City Center’s students. This platform offers real time audio and video; it has a suite of collaborative tools that helps teachers upload videos from their playlist, among other features. The objective is to make the learning experience as engaging as possible. Newrow Video Collaboration offers robust on-line training. In addition, teachers were individually assisted by office staff members on using the online platform, as needed. Workforce Advantage will continue to facilitate online classes using Newrow Video Collaboration platform. However, Romero said some teachers decided not to continue offering classes because they weren’t comfortable using the platform or had other priorities at home.
- To promote registration, Union City Center used e-mail blasts and followed up by phone to the contacts in its database. The community has reacted positively to these phone calls and regular one-on-one conversations have increased registration and participation. The Center does not have a strong social media presence or social media following and has not increased this during the pandemic.
- Staff members visit the virtual classroom and assist teachers by addressing students’ questions. In addition, staff are often on-call to help participants use their devices and connect to the Newrow platform for weekly classes.
- During COVID-19’s early stages, the Center noticed a higher registration rate, but the retention rate is lower. Improving student retention is more Challenging and requires additional staffing time.
- Romero said technology challenges during the pandemic are significant: lack of technological knowledge, having access to the appropriate equipment, poor connectivity and inadequacy of the space used for home study. Most of the Center’s students own a cell phone with internet access. Often, this is the only exposure they have had to technology. If there is a computer at home, often there is only one and it is shared by everyone in the household.
- In addition, almost all students do not have a designated place to study at home. For example, often during an online class, students must share their learning space with other household members. This often compromises the student’s class engagement and attention.
- Workforce Advantage is funded by several grants. The grants are for specific training programs, not equipment or internet connectivity.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Romero said, looking ahead, classes will be offered both online and in-person. ; students can choose their preference.
- Romero noted that students using the new platform have enjoyed the benefits of studying remotely. Some have mentioned the benefits of saving time and money on transportation and related expenses such as gas, parking, etc. It was also noted that virtual platforms would prevent cancelations due to inclement weather. Romero also

said the pandemic helped adult students engage with technology, something many never considered.

Interview Highlights

- Romero provided a variety of helpful insights into the challenges and benefits of engaging virtually with mainly the Hispanic population. A generational gap was noted: younger generations adapt quicker to distant learning than older generations.
- Besides the generational gap, there is the cultural gap resulting in a lack of trust using the internet, many students prefer traditional mail for registration. To mitigate this, staff is on-call to help and also participates in select online classes, which helps build students' confidence.
- Workforce Advantage exclusively uses the Newrow Video Collaboration platform for classes, Zoom to host internal meetings and Teams for one-on-one meeting. Social media platforms do not play an important role due to a socioeconomic, cultural, and age factors rather than lack of internet access.
- Workforce Advantage has been able to address some challenges with using technology by making Newrow its official virtual platform for class delivery. It has partnered with a selection of NGOs to promote program registration although person-to person phone calls continue to generate more results. This suggests cultural roots or the group's environment are important elements to consider when engaging virtually.

Interview Summary Report: Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic

Interviewee: Shaina Bodenheim, LSW

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Tuesday June 2, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic is a comprehensive social services and mental health agency. It is part of the 12-agency Jewish Family Services network that covers all of New Jersey. JFS of Clifton-Passaic provides a broad range of services for all life stages and supports populations including seniors, victims of domestic violence, children with special needs, and holocaust survivors.
- Bodenheim coordinates programs for seniors through the agency's Club SEQUOIA senior wellness center.
- Club SEQUOIA offers daily exercise classes, social activities, and cultural programming for seniors. Approximately 100 members participate in these activities. Some members regularly participate, while others only attend large parties/gatherings hosted by the center five times per year.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- The center offers health and exercise classes, lectures, arts and cultural programming, and social activities. Members typically learn of the center's activities through word-of-mouth, information/calendar postings at the senior center, and direct phone calls to invite members to events.
- The center is a hub for socializing. Pre-COVID-19, they held social lunches every Wednesday. Typically, the same people regularly attend these events, mostly to socialize and check on each other. The center also has parties throughout the year, including an Independence Day party.
- Many seniors regularly use the center as a gym.
- The center offers unique cultural and arts programming, including a twice-monthly lecture on classical music and a monthly book club. It received a grant to expand arts programming and had been scheduled to begin a poetry-writing workshop in the summer 2020.

Engagement: During Covid-19

- After the center suspended in-person activities amid the pandemic, the Bodenheim called each member by phone. She continued to check in with them often, mostly through phone calls. A few members prefer texts or e-mails. She found that members are generally appreciative of the phone call, as it provides a personal connection with the center. The center also began distributing a monthly calendar to members via regular mail. Staff found that members would not regularly check the website and sending paper copies has been much more effective. However, they also have been advertising the center's programs on social media to attract new members during the

pandemic. The center also successfully used social media to recruit volunteers to conduct phone check-ins with seniors.

- The center has transitioned most of its programming from in-person to remote Zoom meetings; however, it does not offer all of its regular programs, as some programs do not translate well onto Zoom. For example, Bodenheim said the center's classical music lectures are not well-suited to Zoom due to audio quality issues. Bodenheim said about one-third of the center's members participate remotely by phone, but thus cannot join in on visual activities. Despite this, she said remote programming seems to work well and she noted that one blind woman has been participating "religiously" over the phone.
- The center's younger staff members were responsible for assisting seniors with learning to use Zoom. Bodenheim noted that staff has generally seen three types of reactions by seniors to virtual activities: some refuse to try them; some need a lot of help to connect; and others are technologically savvy and able to easily connect. In March, before the pandemic's stay-at-home order, one group of seniors requested a special training session with Zoom so they would be prepared. Others were less enthusiastic or felt daunted by the technology. Some lack an appropriate device and/or do not have internet access at home. In fact, when the center received a donation of devices to distribute to clients, only a few members requested one. Bodenheim mentioned that one woman received device and then did not open the package for a week because she was afraid to try it. Another woman who had been calling into Zoom tried to use the video feature after receiving help from her daughter, but she quickly reverted to calling in.
- Bodenheim stated that she is constantly looking for new and innovative ways to use technology to offer programming for her members. At one point another staff person suggested streaming movies online for members, but she declined because she wanted to keep the programming interactive and stimulating for seniors (many of whom were probably already spending much of their time watching television).
- When a key staff member passed away early in the pandemic, Bodenheim called each member individually to tell them. She did not want to share the news in an impersonal way. She spent about 20 minutes talking to each person.
- The center often finds out about resources and services for their clients through information that is forwarded to them by staff at other agencies. There is a lot of inter-agency information sharing, she said.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- It is important to connect with seniors as much as possible, ideally over the phone. Even though it is tedious and time-consuming, phone calls are more effective than e-mails.
- Technology has also provided options for some who otherwise would not be able to participate. Bodenheim noted that one man who was very ill and bedbound was able to continue to participate in activities, including a discussion group. Center staff observed that he would not have been able to continue participating without virtual programming.

- Bodenheim stated that she doesn't think that most members will want to continue with remote activities once the pandemic is over. They miss the human connection. However, she noted that those who have disabilities or difficulty traveling may benefit from continued virtual programs.

Interview Highlights

This interview highlights the importance of phone calls in outreach to seniors. Bodenheim emphasized that telephone calls provide the opportunity for more personal connection with seniors. Furthermore, when given the option between using Zoom or a phone call to join activities, she estimated that one-third of seniors select the phone call. However, phone calls are extremely time consuming for her and her team, so she plans to train incoming student interns to make calls on her behalf. Still, most seniors have been able to access the center's programming using Zoom, suggesting online platforms are a feasible outreach mode for this population. However, the center's success with Zoom has involved considerable assistance to teach members how to use the platform and ensure they have access to a device and the internet.

Based on these observations, outreach strategies that involve the use of an online platform should include clear instructions for connecting and some degree of technical support to resolve connection issues. An effective strategy should also include the option for calling into the meeting. Also, using a platform that is already familiar to a wide range of people, such as Zoom, can increase participation and reduce the need for technology assistance. In the end, the most important aspect of outreach to seniors needs to include some way of forging a personal connection.

Interview Summary Report: The Arc of Hudson County

Interviewee: Yvonne Rosa

Interviewers: Sarah Tomasello, Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: Friday, June 5, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The Arc of Hudson County provides supportive programs for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers. Programs include a day program and an evening program for adults, an after-school program for youth, and family support groups. These programs seek to promote social interaction, peer support, and job readiness. They also provide hands-on activities, and day trips.
- The interviewee is Yvonne Rosa, the Executive Director of the Arc of Hudson County.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Prior to closing in-person operations due to the pandemic, the Arc of Hudson County (the Arc) engaged with clients through a variety of in-person events, classes, trips, and activities. The purpose of this variety it to ensure clients have opportunities for fun and socialization. Some examples of activities include shopping trips, bowling trips, outdoor activities, and arts and crafts.
- The interviewee stated that the clients prefer in-person engagement over virtual engagement. Regardless, the Arc has continued providing daily online programming for clients and ensuring continued access to resources and care.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Since halting in-person programs in March, the Arc is holding all regular programs and activities with clients via Zoom – up to six hours of programming per day. The Arc is exclusively using Zoom to facilitate these programs. Because the Arc is not a residential organization where clients reside on-site in supportive housing, it had to use unique strategies to keep clients who are at home engaged throughout the day.
- The interviewee plans a variety of activities for the clients in her programs, and she often plans activities in response to their requests. Activities have included playing games such as bingo and show-and-tell; going on virtual adventures to places such as Seaside Heights; having conversations about how their days are going; and sharing information on safety and hygiene. The interview said that the clients participating in these online activities have maintained the social bonds they had when together in-person.
- Some clients in the Arc's programs have had trouble accessing Zoom, and others still have not managed to use Zoom or participate in the Arc's virtual programs. The interviewee applied for and received a grant through the Arc of New Jersey that enabled her to purchase and distribute tablets to clients experiencing technical difficulties.

However, most clients have been able to connect to the Arc's online programming and typically use laptops to do so.

- For clients that have trouble using Zoom and cannot participate in the virtual activities, the interviewee sends them at-home care packages that include toys, puzzles, movies, games, and other activities. She personalizes the care packages based on her knowledge of her clients' interests and favorite things. She also makes individual phone calls and sends e-mails to check-in on clients.
- When the Arc first started using Zoom in March, some clients were shy and uncomfortable being on camera. The interviewee specifically directed questions to those clients to help them overcome their shyness. After being acclimated to using Zoom and being on camera, she said even the shiest clients cannot wait to join the online meetings and virtual discussions continue for a long time.
- The interviewee mentioned that she has been learning sign language in order to communicate over Zoom with a client who is non-verbal. She said that she has found it very rewarding to be able to communicate with this person.
- Due to the pandemic, the Arc has paused publicizing its programs. However, current clients have been inviting their friends to join the virtual activities. The interviewee plans to reach out to these new participants and invite them to join the organization when the Arc reopens for in-person programs.
- All the organizations within the Arc of New Jersey, which is the umbrella organization for the Arc of Hudson County, have a weekly Zoom call to give updates, share resources, and describe the virtual programming they are facilitating. The interviewee stated that some of their peer organizations are only offering minimal programming to stay in touch with clients.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- In order to reopen, the Arc is planning to split clients into two groups that will participate in alternating virtual and in-person services. The purpose of splitting clients into two groups is to create enough space to follow physical distancing requirements during in-person programs. The Arc provides transportation services to clients, and the interviewee is particularly worried about keeping enough space between passengers when transporting them to and from home.
- Overall, the interviewee has found technology such as Zoom to be very helpful because it has enabled her to continue with her normal work, including fundraising.

Interview Highlights

The interviewee's extensive experience planning online activities for her clients provides useful insights into best practices when planning engagement activities for people with intellectual and development disabilities. Based on the types of successful activities that the interviewee has planned, engagement with these groups should entail extensive opportunities for socializing with others. It should also be fun, stimulating, highly interactive, and personalized based on individual interests and preferences. The interviewee stated that some clients at first felt shy and uncomfortable using Zoom and being on camera, but she acclimated these clients

to the new experience by actively asking them questions, and now they are enthusiastic participants. The interviewee knows her clients very well, evidenced by the personalized care packages she has sent to them during the pandemic. In order to replicate her success engaging with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, engagement activities may need to be facilitated or co-facilitated by someone who knows the individuals well.

Interview Summary Report: MonmouthCares

Interviewee: Chad Majczan

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Monday, June 8, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- MonmouthCares is a non-profit Care Management Organization that manages the provision of services to children and young adults up to age 21 who have physical or intellectual disabilities or behavioral and substance abuse challenges. It facilitates the progress of a plan of care for each client, coordinating with the family and many other organizations within New Jersey's statewide children's services system.
- MonmouthCares provides services to roughly 960 families at any given time.
- Chad Majczan is the director of community relations and resources development.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- MonmouthCares has a formal process for following up on each referral it receives. Before the pandemic, it would reach out to a newly referred family by phone within two days of receiving the referral. It would set up a meeting with the family within a week to discuss a plan of care for the client, usually at home, at school, or at juvenile court, and would sometimes include other organizations providing support to the family. Following this initial meeting, MonmouthCares staff would typically visit the family at home once or twice a month, or several times per week if there was an issue that needed more frequent attention.
- When first contacting a family, MonmouthCares always asked the family to provide a preferred method of communication.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Most meetings are being conducted virtually. In the past, MonmouthCares thought telehealth services could be valuable to its work, but there seemed to be a lot of barriers to implementing telehealth for clients.
- MonmouthCares is using a variety of online platforms to connect with the families it serves, including Facetime, WhatsApp, and Microsoft Teams. Overall, the organization tries to be flexible so that families can use whichever platform works for them. The most important thing for MonmouthCares is that staff are able to establish a private line of communication with the family so they can continue to keep patient information private. Texting typically does not meet privacy standards.
- MonmouthCares most often works with low-income families. Seventy percent of the families qualify for Medicaid. The organization has helped families receive free or reduced-cost internet. For families that had trouble using technology, staff have tried to help, teaching them how to use the technology. However, if it is easiest, they will work with clients over the phone. Older caregivers are not as comfortable with being on

video and prefer audio only communications, while younger people are more comfortable on camera. Staff honors whatever works best for the family.

- Staff have observed that “one-click” options work best for those uncomfortable using technology. Ease of access is most important.
- Virtual communication is not a replacement for in-person meetings. There are aspects of care that get lost on virtual platforms.
- MonmouthCares uses social media to promote the continued availability of its services to the general public. It also operates MonmouthResources.net, which lists all relevant children’s services resources, including a separate page for COVID-19 related resources.
- A good source of knowledge is the Children’s Inter-Agency Coordinating Council; there is one in every county. These are monthly meetings that bring together all the organizations within the children’s system of care, from the YMCA to teen suicide prevention. There are often 30-40 people in attendance representing 30-40 different agencies.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- MonmouthCares will likely continue to offer telehealth in the future, especially if travel is difficult for the family. Also, if a client needs services in another language, it is easier to connect them to a provider in that language using telehealth.
- While the interviewee does not envision telehealth replacing in-person meetings, he thinks it is useful in specific situations. Some youth who were difficult to engage in person, such as those with autism or who feel awkward in person, have opened up over telehealth calls.
- Staff are still learning how to best use these platforms. Often, they conduct practice sessions to familiarize everyone with the platform before a meeting starts.

Interview Highlights

A clear takeaway from this interview is the importance of being flexible in the options people have for virtual engagement. MonmouthCares has had success allowing clients to choose which online platform they want to use for staying in touch. Flexibility includes allowing those who are uncomfortable being on video, particularly older caregivers, the option to call into video meetings or simply have a phone call. Another notable point is how quickly MonmouthCares transitioned from offering no virtual communication options, to almost solely using telehealth to communicate with a population that is largely low-income. Finally, virtual engagement can make participation easier for those who are uncomfortable being in public or in-person meetings.

Interview Summary Report: Alliance Center for Independence

Interviewee: Luke Koppisch

Interviewers: Andrea Lubin, Sarah Tomasello

Interview Date: Monday June 8, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The Alliance Center for Independence (ACI) is a 501(c)(3) community-based, grassroots organization that supports and promotes independent living for people with disabilities in Middlesex, Union, and Somerset counties in New Jersey. ACI is one of 11 centers for independent living in the State.
- ACI serves persons with any disability, of any age. As a center for independent living, it provides five core services: advocacy; information and referral; independent living skills; peer support; and transition services, the latter supporting young adults transitioning from high school or those transitioning from nursing homes or other institutional living centers to their homes or community-based residences.
- The interviewee, Luke Koppisch, serves as Deputy Director of ACI. He oversees ACI's independent living and transitional programs and works with the executive director and staff on many other initiatives including grant writing and overall center management.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Koppisch estimates that approximately half of ACI's consumers have internet access through a home computer and/or smart phone. He reported that the digital divide impacts many of ACI's clients; some do not have internet access because they are low-income, while others are simply not interested in having internet access. He said other clients lack the "know-how" to connect and use various online platforms.
- Pre-COVID-19, methods used by ACI to communicate and engage with clients included the following:
 - Email via Constant Contact
 - Online newsletter that provides information on upcoming events; advocacy updates; and other related news (distributed every two weeks)
 - Phone
 - Mailings (e.g. flyers)
 - Social Media – ACI uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube
- Koppisch said most common communication channels used by AIC prior to the pandemic varied. ACI has been interested in reducing mailings due to cost, environmental impact, and time required to produce mailings, but the center has not pursued doing so at this time. Several months ago, it conducted a poll to determine preferences regarding mailings vs. email notifications, but few clients responded. Several did inform ACI that they preferred mailings because they sometimes overlook/miss email notifications.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- The ACI office has been closed to the public, volunteers, and clients since mid-March due to the pandemic. Staff are currently working remotely, with several going to the office weekly, primarily to assist with the ACI's food pantry which has continued operations.
- During Hurricane Sandy, many ACI clients experienced suffering from isolation; thus, ACI staff determined at the pandemic's onset that they would engage in wellness calls as a "low-tech" means to engage and connect. This practice has been successful with certain clients. Specifically, at the onset of the pandemic, ACI reached out to everyone on their contact list to gauge interest in receiving regular telephone wellness checks; as a result, some clients are contacted weekly and others less frequently.
- ACI staff also text clients to keep in touch and convene telephone conference calls for some of their advocacy work.
- ACI has shifted its meetings, classes, and workshops to virtual methods, specifically using the Zoom platform. ACI staff had acquired some familiarity with Zoom prior to the pandemic through meetings they convened on advocacy and emergency preparedness. Staff also uses a platform called Loom, which is a video recording tool that enables users to share the videos they create instantly. ACI uses Loom as an instructional tool that enables the center to record and disseminate meetings, workshops, and presentations via email and the ACI website.
- During COVID-19, ACI offers 6-7 standing programs weekly via Zoom, including a community living skills class and two weekly peer group meetings; one session focuses on discussing a specific topic and the other provides social/recreational opportunities. Additional ACI offerings via Zoom vary and include resume writing; a theater group; a choir group; one-on-one and small group pre-employment classes; a voting workshop; an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) basics workshop; opportunities for one-on-one singing lessons; and cooking classes. ACI has also hosted a successful "Fun Friday" virtual event that included games and dancing, with music provided by a DJ.
- Koppisch said Zoom is "working well for the participants who participate," with some expressing gratitude for the availability of online programming. Approximately one-third of ACI's consumers have difficulty accessing the Zoom platform for reasons including bandwidth, technical issues, and not knowing how to use the platform. . ACI staff speak one-on-one to assist those experiencing difficulties engaging virtually
- Koppisch said one group of students ACI was working with in-person prior to the pandemic, have had difficulty making the transition to online Zoom lessons, primarily due to technical reasons (e.g. difficulty accessing the platform).
- ACI's other virtual communication methods include social media (e.g. Facebook) as well as the ACI online newsletter. Prior to COVID-19, the online newsletter was produced and distributed every two weeks; it's now distributed weekly to maintain more frequent contact.
- To inform clients about services and health advisories related to the pandemic, ACI developed a COVID-19 resource guide that uses plain language and graphics. ACI also lists numerous COVID-19 resources on its website and includes many of these resources in the weekly online newsletter.

- Engaging low-income clients virtually without home or cellular internet access has been a challenge; this been compounded by the simultaneous closing of community resources with internet access (such as libraries).
- During the pandemic, new clients are being directed to ACI primarily by word of mouth and through social media. Many also learn about ACI via the center’s event fliers.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Koppisch said he's eager to once again interact with clients in-person. However, while virtual engagement is not a substitute for in-person interactions, it does provide a “good alternative” that facilitates engagement with those who may otherwise be isolated, enabling them to make connections and friendships. Virtual classes and workshops have permitted many of ACI’s consumers to continue their path to skills development. He added that virtual engagement also bridges the transportation issues many people face in accessing in-person activities. Plus, Koppisch noted that virtual engagement can also be helpful in engaging persons with social anxiety and/or shyness. Thus, ACI will continue to utilize virtual engagement, primarily Zoom and Loom, as these channels offer an opportunity to alternatively reach persons who may not be able to, or wish to, engage in-person.
- While remote technology has enabled ACI to remain connected to many consumers during the pandemic, the center noted its limitations. For example, staff have a more difficult time engaging participants in discussion virtually than they do when conducting the same meetings in-person. Koppisch did note that staff have not tried features Zoom offers that may promote increased physical participation, such as the whiteboard feature, but he expressed interest in exploring these. He also noted that virtual communication methods should include an easy-to-use captioning feature to better support disabled persons.

Interview Highlights

This interview is notable as it presents an example of a robust New Jersey grassroots, disability-focused organization that has successfully transitioned to offering diverse virtual programming via the Zoom platform during the pandemic. While recognizing that some ACI clients don’t have internet access and others with access still have difficulty using virtual platforms, Koppisch noted several positives aspects of virtual engagement. These include minimizing consumer isolation and enabling program continuity. Other virtual engagement benefits include bridging the transportation issues many consumers face in accessing in-person activities and facilitating participation among those who experience social anxiety or shyness with in-person gatherings. “Low-tech” remote strategies employed successfully by the center include phoning members directly and text messaging.

The center plans to continue offering some level of virtual engagement after the COVID-19 pandemic because staff see its value as a viable alternative or complement to in-person communications.

Interview Summary Report: Caregivers Coalition, United Way of Northern NJ

Interviewee: Stephanie Howland

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Monday, June 8, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The Caregivers Coalition of United Way of Northern NJ provides those who care for a sick or disabled loved one with support services and programs, including support group meetings, educational events, social gatherings, and informational resources.
- Stephanie is the manager of the Caregivers Coalition.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- The coalition held five monthly in-person meetings, one in each of the counties within their service area. These meetings brought together both caregivers and professionals from support service agencies. The coalition also held evening workshops and classes, as well as caregiver support groups.
- To attract attendees to those meetings, the coalition sent out announcements via both e-mail and mail. The interviewee noted that there is a certain population that still prefers printed, mailed materials.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- The Caregivers Coalition stopped sending materials in the mail and now sends all information via e-mail. She found that those who preferred mailed materials also have an e-mail address.
- The five monthly in-person meetings were combined into one monthly online meeting using Zoom. Attendance has declined from 30-60 people at each of the five in-person meetings to 60-90 people at the single online meeting.
- The coalition had received requests in the past to offer online meetings and had started showing its meetings online using Facebook Live in April 2019. It was free and easy to set up. However, there was some resistance to Facebook, due to lack of trust.
- The coalition chose Zoom because it was well-known as a platform for virtual meetings. The organization did not have the time or funds to test out other platforms. It paid for a full Zoom license.
- Some attendees have said that they wouldn't have been able to attend an in-person meeting right now due to caregiving responsibilities or work schedules. Online meetings made it easier for these individuals to participate.
- During the five in-person monthly meetings, attendees would customize the content and resources to a specific local area. Because these sessions are now combined into one single meeting, they are less able to do that now. They need to make sure all the information is relevant to all attendees at the virtual regional meetings. As a substitute, the coalition shares local information via e-mail. However, the interviewee noted that

caregivers seem to need more information that is regional because they are often looking for information on responding to COVID-19.

- They created a program that provides assistive technology, such as Amazon Echo and the Ring doorbell, to caregivers and training on how to use the technology. This technology can give a caregiver flexibility to monitor their loved one while outside of the home. They found that there is a wide range of comfort/familiarity with this type of technology. Some caregivers were resistant to the technology at first, fearful that they didn't have adequate time or knowledge to set it up properly.
- Staff that provide technology support to families have found that it requires patience and handholding. Many staff are learning technology alongside the families, in addition to their other job responsibilities. In the past, they would send devices to caregivers and simply include a help number for setup, but that was not working. The support assistants also include a tip sheet for using Zoom along with every Zoom meeting invitation.
- Internet connectivity has also been a barrier. Some of members cannot afford an internet connection, some do not know how to use it, and others do not know how to troubleshoot if there is a problem.
- The interviewee noted that there is a certain comfort when meeting someone in person and that it is difficult to replicate this virtually. Furthermore, in-person meetings provide time to socialize – before and after – which helps to build a sense of community and comfort.
- Stephanie suggested reaching out the Dawn Center for Independent Living, Jewish Family Services, and the county offices for aging and disabled services.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Online meetings have reduced barriers to attend for some participants. For example, caregivers do not have to find someone else to stay with their loved one; the coalition can present a wider variety of speakers from farther distances; there is no need to find meeting space; and meeting attendees do not have to worry about transportation.
- Caregivers Coalition will continue to offer the virtual meetings, even after the pandemic.

Interview Highlights

- This interview highlights the challenges that caregivers face when asked to leave their loved one, even for a short period of time. Information shared by the Caregivers Coalition points out that tens of millions of people across the country act as caregivers for loved ones who are chronically ill, have a physical or developmental disability, or suffer from mental illness or addiction. Virtual engagement platforms have expanded the opportunity to participate in United Way programming to more caregivers.
- The interviewee also touched on a key challenge of virtual methods, noting that virtual events do not provide time to socialize with other attendees before or after the meeting. Though the main purpose of an online meeting is to share information or listen to a presentation, socializing is still a valuable component of the event. There may be

ways to facilitate some additional information communication between online meeting attendees to mimic that aspect of in-person events.

Interview Summary Report: Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic, Project SARAH

Interviewee: Shira Pomrantz

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Wednesday, June 10, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Jewish Family Services of Clifton-Passaic is a comprehensive social service and mental health agency. It is part of the 12-agency Jewish Family Services network that covers all of New Jersey. JFS of Clifton-Passaic provides a broad variety of services for all life stages and supports special populations including seniors, victims of domestic violence, children with special needs, and holocaust survivors.
- Shira Pomrantz is the director of the JFS of Clifton-Passaic program for domestic violence victims, called Project SARAH (Stop Abusive Relationships at Home). The program especially seeks to help orthodox Jewish women who are less likely to access services. Project SARAH includes outreach, preventative programs and clinical therapy.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Project SARAH conducted in-person outreach on a variety of topics related to healthy relationships and domestic abuse. Staff also frequently attended community events to network with key organizations or community leaders. Project SARAH received referrals to women experiencing domestic violence through their well-established connection in the community, the court system, or other social service agencies.
- Prior to COVID-19 the organization had a minimal online presence, primarily just a Facebook page.
- As its support services target the orthodox Jewish community, Project SARAH relies on community members (including rabbis, school and summer camp staff, ritual bath attendants, wig makers, matchmakers, and others) to intervene or provide support in domestic violence situations.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- In response to COVID-19, Project SARAH now offers telehealth therapy appointments. It's also building up its social media presence (Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp), recognizing the effectiveness of these tools. Staff also reaches out to clients via phone calls.
- Project SARAH held its annual fundraiser online instead of in-person using both Zoom and Facebook Live. In fact, they were able to raise the same amount of money, partly because the cost of holding the event was lower. The fundraiser is typically a breakfast; instead, attendees participated in an online cooking class.
- Some families Project SARAH serves lack good internet access or enough devices for the whole family; this has been a challenge. One staff member coordinated donations of devices to give to these families.

- Childcare has also been a challenge. Clients are now at home caring for their children all day. Some also are forced to spend more time in the presence of an abuser. Many have had to reschedule therapy appointments and try to find places to communicate privately.
- Domestic violence has increased due to stay-at-home orders. In order to remind people about available services and reach out to new clients, Project SARAH has increased its use of social media and the rate at which it publishes articles in community newspapers.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Pomrantz noted that Project SARAH still plans to return to in-person services in the future. But she imagines that it will offer a hybrid program enabling clients to access therapy and other services both online and in-person.

Interview Highlights

Project SARAH held a successful annual fundraising event online, and it resulted in the same amount of donations as in previous years. Pomrantz attributed this success in part to the lower cost of holding an online event. While the NJTPA is often able to hold meetings without paying venue rental costs, there are other costs associated with in-person meetings (materials, printing, travel) that may be avoided with a virtual event.

Project SARAH's outreach is also notable for how staff engages with specific members of the orthodox Jewish community who are best positioned to intervene or provide referrals in domestic violence situations. The organization provides educational programs and outreach to those who can best impart information and support to at-risk women and children. While this outreach strategy is not specific to virtual modes of engagement, it suggests the importance of identifying and reaching out to key community members who can further transmit information to others.

Interview Summary Report: AARP NJ

Interviewee(s): Christine Newman

Interviewer(s): Karen Alexander

Interview date: Friday, June 12, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- AARP serves the age 50+ population and its mission is to, “empower people to choose how they live as they age.” AARP offers a wide range of programs designed to strengthen communities, enhance health, and support financial stability and personal fulfillment. The motto of AARP is, “What we do, we do for all.” AARP is a national organization, with chapters in each state; the organization is 60 years old.
- Christin Newman is the Director for Outreach and Volunteer Engagement for AARP-NJ, she has been with AARP for five years. AARP has 1.3 million members in New Jersey, and a staff of 11 people. Membership focus is somewhat segmented, with some activities targeting the age 50-64 demographic, while others are more oriented towards members age 65+.
- With a limited number of professional staff, AARP achieves much of its work through coordinated efforts of volunteers and large-scale community events. AARP has a presence statewide, with central offices in New Brunswick.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- With AARP’s work focused on the 50-64 cohort, its used the website and internet frequently. For communication targeting those 65+ AARP would layer in e-blasts, Tele-Town Halls, postcards and robocalls, to reach older members. Members would select the channel they preferred for contact – often selecting mail or phone.
- AARP used postcards to nudge members towards email and participation in virtual events. In addition, events were publicized via social media, and especially on Facebook. There was a significant AARP following on Facebook.
- Attempts had been made to use Skype and WebEx, but Zoom was the preferred platform for those AARP volunteers with digital skills.
- Prior to COVID-19 there had been no public facing events conducted on Zoom, only with AARP volunteer leaders.
- There was an awareness that Facebook and Zoom might be good for programming that supported health and activity, such as dance classes and yoga, but no programming had yet been developed.
- Events were large, in-person activities, especially in spring and summer months – with fairs, gatherings, AARP booths at community events, and community programs.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- All in-person programming was cancelled through the end of 2020. AARP is operating under a total shift to virtual platforms.

- Early in the pandemic, AARP sent a postcard to its members without email addresses on file, informing them of hotlines, caregiver supports, NJ 211, and other resources available by telephone. AARP encouraged those members to provide email or phone contact information for future communication.
- AARP determined that different strategies would be needed for volunteers (who had routine, often weekly, communication with AARP) and members, who participated in events programming more generally. Volunteers needed to be updated, provided with feedback, and stay connected with each other. AARP worked with a selection of volunteers to pilot and test new approaches and to help streamline communication and messaging for the target audience. For member, AARP developed virtual programming including webinars on resiliency, yoga and Zumba classes, self-care strategies, Facebook Live videos on fraud prevention, education on scams, and more. In particular, programming with a healthy living theme seemed to resonate with the membership.
- AARP adjusted platforms based on the activity. For example, telephone was used for Tele-Town Halls with elected officials and Zoom for exercise classes. Overall, Facebook Live and Zoom quickly became the preferred platforms. They also experimented with timing for activity-based offerings like yoga and Zumba (mid-morning and early evening) to see which gets the most attendance.
- During this transition AARP relied on its network of partners as well. It reached out to other organizations NJ for programming ideas and examples, including NJ Foundation for Aging, the Healthcare Quality Institute, and the NJ Chinese Chamber of Commerce. AARP used recommendations it gathered to improve webinar formats, including an introductory slide, a moderator welcome, and assigning a host to manage logistics. AARP also partnered with subject matter experts from the IRS, NJ Department of Community Affairs, and the US Postal Inspection Service to provide training for members. These agencies/organizations benefited from having access to AARP's members to expand their reach, as well.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- The interviewee noted that this experience will change AARP permanently. The transfer to digital tools has dramatically expanded the organization's ability to reach and connect with members across New Jersey. AARP NJ will be continuing Facebook Live programming, healthy living opportunities through Zoom, and Tele-Town Halls via phone. However, extra effort is still required to reach the most vulnerable older adults.
- Nationally, AARP is supporting this digital effort, as it has enabled the organization to reach many more people, with larger scale and more coverage. For example, AARP nationally has observed that chat/text is an effective method for connecting with Hispanic/Latino communities, and AARP NJ is now exploring this.
- Digital connectivity has further propelled AARP NJ's collaborations with Rutgers School of Social Work, the Asian-Indian Chamber of Commerce, Statewide Hispanic Latino Chamber of Commerce, and collaborative statewide efforts on age-friendly advocacy.

Interview Highlights

AARP was thrust into a digital universe, and quickly had to re-tool to stay connected to volunteers and members across NJ. This was accomplished using traditional outreach methods (such as post cards, phone calls and eblasts) to nudge members to newer platforms, and by developing engagement offerings on user-friendly platforms. Content was developed that would attract members, with information that was timely and immediately relevant. AARP volunteers tested platforms and provided feedback, which helped AARP identify Facebook and Zoom as preferred platforms. However, multiple channels were used, so that older adults could still be connected to AARP offerings and programs via phone, text, tablet, laptop, etc. AARP NJ provided a platform and used its national resources and state-specific partners to develop content and messaging; this approach was local, symbiotic, collaborative, and effective.

Interview Summary Report: Montclair Senior Services/Lifelong Montclair

Interviewee: Katie York

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Monday, June 15, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The Township of Montclair offers a variety of services and programs for residents who are seniors, including transportation services, a senior center, food assistance, educational programs, and informational resources. In 2014, Montclair established Lifelong Montclair, an aging in place initiative, to address seniors' unique needs. The township's senior services are part of the Lifelong Montclair initiative.
- Katie York is the director of Montclair Township's services and programs for seniors, including the Lifelong Montclair initiative.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Before the pandemic, the Montclair Senior Services office primarily used printed materials to publicize services and programming for seniors. The office would leave copies of the newsletter or flyers for upcoming programs in community locations such as the senior center, the library, and the YMCA. The office relied on these printed materials being distributed more widely through seniors sharing copies with their friends.
- The office would also frequently share information regarding upcoming events or ongoing initiatives during recurring stakeholder meetings with community organizations.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Since the start of the pandemic, the Montclair Senior Services office has primarily focused on online programming and food distribution. Online program registration has doubled since March and participants are registering from all over the country. The food distribution program reaches approximately 500 seniors each week through a network of community organizations.
- The office is exclusively using Zoom to facilitate online programming for seniors. The office made this decision after noticing that slight differences between different online video conference platforms can be confusing for participants. Some participants only call into the programs. The facilitators design programs to be only partly interactive to accommodate those with only an audio connection. In addition to conducting programming on Zoom, the office broadcasts its online programs on the local television channel and posts them on YouTube. However, those that watch via broadcast or YouTube cannot actively participate.
- The interviewee uses the same Zoom room for all the office's online programming, and none of the online events are password protected. She was initially concerned about the security of Zoom but now feels that Zoom is more secure than in-person events.

Silencing or removing disruptive participants is much easier during online programs than in-person programs.

- It is challenging to help participants learn how to use their devices and how to connect to Zoom. Montclair Senior Services has partnered with the local library to help teach seniors how to use their devices and access Zoom. The office may also refer program participants to companies like Candoo Tech, a paid service that offers lessons on how to use technology and technical support appointments specifically geared toward seniors.
- Connecting seniors to the internet has been the greatest challenge. Setting up a device or acquiring a donated device is comparatively less challenging than setting up internet access. Specifically, setting up at-home internet access in a remote, contactless way is difficult. The interviewee ascribes the digital divide and lack of internet access among some seniors to a socioeconomic gap, not an age gap. They also frequently encounter the issue of a lack of building-wide Wi-Fi access in senior housing.
- The interviewee said they have not experienced pushback against the switch to online programming because the seniors understand it is the only option right now. She finds all the participants are more patient because they are all learning how to use the technology together.
- In addition to offering the online programming, the office is using a buddy program to share information, assist with program registration, and conduct check-ins for seniors. The buddies are seniors who also participate in Montclair's senior programming but who have more knowledge and experience navigating the available services. The buddies call other seniors to check in on what they need. A senior services staff member also is responsible for making phone calls to the most vulnerable seniors.
- The office recently advertised upcoming senior programs by including a newsletter with groceries distributed through the food distribution program. For a time, the food delivery staff were some of the only people out on the street. This increased the visibility of the food distribution program and it was quickly publicized by word-of-mouth.
- The interviewee suggested also interviewing staff at JCC MetroWest, a community center and fitness center that offers extensive programs for youth, people with disabilities, and seniors and that has been an active organization throughout the pandemic.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- The interviewee said that the seniors want the online programs to continue, and the office is planning to continue online-only programming through the end of 2020. The safety considerations involved in reopening the senior center are less daunting if the office continues the virtual programming. Montclair's senior center building, where programs for seniors are typically held, is small and cannot accommodate the large numbers of people the office has been able to reach online.
- The interviewee finds that an additional benefit of telecommuting and online programming is that she now has more time to interact with her clients. She also thinks

that seniors have started using Zoom for personal interactions and not just to participate in online programming.

Interview Highlights

This interview provided a variety of helpful insights into the challenges and benefits of engaging virtually with seniors. Montclair Senior Services' online programming for seniors is popular and event registrations have doubled, suggesting that seniors are willing to use technology to stay connected. To minimize technical issues for participants, consistency is key. The office is exclusively using Zoom to host programs because differences between video conference platforms can be confusing to participants. The same Zoom room is being used for all programs so that the meeting information does not change.

The office has been able to address seniors' challenges using technology by partnering with the local library and referring seniors to technology support companies, however addressing the lack of internet access for some seniors remains challenging. Setting up internet access remotely is difficult, and many senior housing complexes do not have Wi-Fi access throughout the building. The interviewee attributes the lack of internet access among her clients to a socioeconomic gap more than an age gap.

Interview Summary Report: Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care – HUD-VASH Program

Interviewee: Scarlett Mera

Interviewer: Andrea Lubin

Interview Date: Monday June 15, 2020

Introduction/Background: About the Organization & Interviewee

- Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC) is a behavioral health system headquartered in Piscataway, New Jersey. It offers programs for individuals and families with behavioral health and addiction disorders. UBHC is part of Rutgers' Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and provides clinical services, performs research, and educates professionals nationwide. Services provided by UBHC include, but are not limited to, acute care, crisis, mobile teams, residential, outpatient, school-based programs, integrated physical and behavioral health care, and 24/7 national peer help lines.
- The interviewee, Scarlett Mera, serves as Program Coordinator for Rutgers UBHC's US Department of Housing and Urban Development (US HUD) and US Veterans Administration (US VA) joint federal initiative: the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing voucher program (HUD-VASH). Ms. Mera and her staff work in UBHC's outreach sub-unit, which is part of UBHC's outpatient services department. Ms. Mera oversees daily operations of the HUD-VASH program and provides guidance and supervision to the case management team.
- The HUD-VASH program is designed as a voucher initiative that combines housing voucher rental assistance for homeless veterans administered by HUD, with case management and supportive services provided through the VA. Veterans eligible for HUD-VASH vouchers have 70 percent of their rental costs covered by vouchers paid directly to a local public housing authority (PHA). The program employs the Housing First model, seeking to house veterans in permanent locations as soon as possible.
- Ms. Mera and her team work closely with veterans who are directed to their programs by the VA to help secure stable housing and provide case management support. The team follows-up to make sure participants are paying rent and utilities and are accessing daily living needs such as food. They also help participants link to any needed medical services. To accomplish the goals of the HUD-VASH program, Ms. Mera works closely with the NJ Department of Community Affairs (DCA).
- Ms. Mera and her team at UBHC are currently supporting approximately 180 veterans via the HUD-VASH program. The majority are African American males between 50-70 years of age, with most residing in Essex, Hudson, and Passaic counties.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Ms. Mera explained that pre-COVID-19, interactions with veterans were primarily in-person, either weekly or monthly. Staff also called some participants monthly. She noted that about 20 of their 180 current participants (11%) do not have smart devices or internet access, with the remaining veterans mostly having a smart phone. She added

that very few veterans they serve have access to a desktop or laptop computer or tablet.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- At the onset of COVID-19 in mid-March 2020, UBHC HUD-VASH staff performed an inventory of veteran participants to determine smart phone and computer access. They also identified participants who were high-risk for COVID-19 and those who were not taking COVID-19 precautions seriously. These participants have been contacted by staff through proactive weekly phone check-in calls during the pandemic. Other participants have the option of also receiving weekly calls or less frequent bi-weekly or monthly check-ins. In-person staff visits during the pandemic have been limited to those veterans in need of food (staff delivers food during these visits).
- Initially during the pandemic, Ms. Mera's staff was asked to connect with veterans using a VA video call platform. However, since training was needed to acquire familiarity with the platform, the decision was made to rely primarily on phone calls.
- To inform veteran clients about services and health advisories related to COVID-19, staff directed participants to the NJ Department of Health website and to the NJ Department of Military and Veteran Affairs website.
- Engaging some participants remotely during the pandemic proved challenging, but Ms. Mera noted that these individuals were primarily the same people staff had difficulty reaching prior to the pandemic as well. The protocol during COVID-19 when staff cannot reach a participant after a few days requires staff to contact next of kin, local hospitals, and/or local detention centers. She noted staff offers to deliver food are often an incentive for participants to return staff calls. Also, participants with financial issues tend to be easier to connect with, as they are interested in receiving assistance from their case worker to resolve these concerns.
- During COVID-19, new veterans are being directed to the HUD-VASH program implemented by UBHC primarily via word-of-mouth and through the VA benefits information line. She added that community partners, such as Middlesex County, also spread the word about their programs.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- The interviewee reported her staff is currently receiving training on the VA virtual platform and anticipates beginning to connect with veterans using this platform in July. Ms. Mera said she's uncertain if veterans, especially older ones who may not be tech savvy, will have challenges connecting with their smart phones. Her staff will continue to connect via phone calls with participants who have difficulty with the virtual platform.
- Ms. Mera explained that one potential benefit of connecting with their participants via a virtual platform is that many will likely appreciate seeing their case managers, especially veterans who are isolated or do not have family support.

Interview Highlights

This interview presents an example of a program that, even during a disruptive pandemic, effectively serves a vulnerable population: homeless veterans. These clients are reached primarily by the “low-tech” method of calling by phone, compared to the pre-pandemic in-person visits preferred prior to COVID-19. Notably, many of the program’s participants have access to a smart phone, but few have home computers, laptops, or tablets. Program staff are currently receiving training on using a VA virtual platform they will use to interact with clients beginning in July. Veteran clients, especially those who are isolated, will likely benefit and be motivated by these virtual interactions. Participants who have difficulty utilizing the virtual platform will continue to interact with staff via phone until in-person contact is once again permitted.

Interview Summary Report: The Arc of New Jersey

Interviewee: Céline Fortin

Interviewer: Karen Alexander

Interview date: June 16, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The Arc of New Jersey serves adults and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their mission is to advocate, inform, and educate so that their participants can get the best possible outcome in life. This broad mission encompasses people with intellectual disabilities including developmental disabilities like autism, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury. The organization is 70 years old.
- Céline Fortin, Associate Executive Director, manages development, fund raising, program development, public relations, and information technology. She has been with The Arc of NJ for 30 years, focuses on youth and children's programming and The Arc's relationship with NJ Dept of Children and Families and Department of Health. Tom Buttafuto, the E.D., manages public policy, government relations, and advocacy. He oversees external relations for the organization, and Tom focuses on NJ State Department of Developmental Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
- The Arc has chapters in every county in New Jersey. Chapters deliver services across multiple sites, and include group homes, day programs, supported employment, supervised apartments, independent living, in-home supports with respite to families, children services including after school programs, recreational programs and early childhood programs. The Arc of New Jersey enlists local chapters for targeted outreach and program to host in person meetings. Prior to COVID-19 in person meetings were the most popular way of engaging participants and families.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- In addition to the chapter structure The Arc also has the Self Advocacy Program -- there are 85 self-advocacy groups across the state, organized into five councils, and this also provided structure for ongoing engagement prior to the health emergency.
- Pre COVID-19 Arc used mail, newsletters, conference calls, and phone calls as well as its network of chapters to reach many participants and families.
- Access to computers and smartphones was limited due to cost as well as the lack of technical ability or assistance to set up and use these devices.
- There was very limited use of virtual meetings and webinars before the pandemic. Digital platforms were focused on those who had a transportation challenge, or for events that would be held at night: mainly situations where transportation barriers could not be removed.
- One of the most popular activities coordinated by the Arc of New Jersey are luncheons and an annual self-advocacy conference. These events would be fully subscribed, with 300 people on a waiting list to attend the conference. Because transportation was

always an issue The Arc staff would coordinate vans and buses with drivers to facilitate in-person participation and encourage support staff to come and help Arc clients.

- Clients who lived independently in the community and were dependent on NJ TRANSIT found transportation especially challenging at night.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- During the early days of the pandemic, The Arc was concerned about its in-person programming; clients had a hard time understanding the health and safety issues involved. Limiting in-person activity was crucial; there were no visitors, including family, and there was no in-person programming.
- Against this backdrop, Fortin challenged her staff to get as creative as possible. An initial outstanding example of The Arc's engagement effort was the stay Healthy at Home webinar series, part of its Healthy Lifestyles Project.
- Link here: <https://www.arcnj.org/information/healthylifestyles.html>. It included a wide range of subjects that helped clients understand COVID-19, how they could stay safe, how the world would look (for example, addressing questions like, "Why do my health professionals now wear masks?").
- The Arc's tried to keep people moving and connected with yoga virtually three times a week, virtual dance parties, and Facebook Live game nights on Thursday nights where clients could interact and play.
- The Self Advocates met on Zoom to provide face-to-face interaction and continued with virtual advocacy at legislative hearings.
- Advocates were surveyed electronically and by phone using SurveyMonkey and email to get input from individuals, group advisors, and group home managers. For those without internet access, staff made phone calls to take the survey data verbally. With 85 groups and five councils across the state staff was able to reach a lot of people at once.
- Grants from the New Jersey Council for Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD), ranging from \$250 to \$500, were used to purchase technology. The Arc processed 700 grants in a short amount of time for NJCDD and used its network to make sure Arc clients and service sites participated in the grant opportunity to provide technology to people with disabilities. The average cost for tablets was \$100 to \$125, and for a Chromebook it was \$180-\$190. In addition, many cable companies gave free internet service for three months.
- In-person meetings and trainings were moved to online platforms and offered information relevant to families regarding policies of state agencies like DDD, DVRS, Medicaid, and transportation resources.
- Zoom was the preferred platform; The Arc had been using GoToWebinar and GoToMeeting but moved to ZOOM, which does not require a download. Further, Zoom works on multiple platforms, regardless of a person's technical know-how; Zoom can be used via desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or landline phone through an audio link.
- The Arc still has a voice over IP conference call system that allows up to 20 calls at a time and Fortin said it used "good old" conference calls, as well.

- The Arc also maintained Positive Pulse – a newsletter focused on healthy living and leveraged its content to communicate more creatively.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- The Arc is encouraging its constituents to think creatively about using resources to access and use technology, and staff is helping by problem-solving; for example, connecting tablets to large screen TVs for household activities, and encouraging people to use new approaches, such as online shopping, ZOOM, etc.
- The Arc is part of a national network with 600 chapters, and it has looked nationally for ideas, inspiration, resources, and best practices. For example, in California, companies donated devices and internet access; this inspired efforts in New Jersey to find the same. Newsletters talked about sharing equipment and that was disseminated across the state as well. The Arc is always scanning for ideas that can be replicated.
- Looking within New Jersey, The Arc used the New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services websites to disseminate COVID-19 information, and shared information from DDD bi-weekly webinars on resources. This information is included in Arc’s monthly newsletters in a special section on resources that it expects to continue.
- The Arc is working to place Self Advocates into recovery committees, for post COVID-19 planning. This is direct engagement and participation – making sure people with disabilities are literally “at the table.”
- Next steps include moving the annual Arc conference to a virtual platform in 2021 (the 2020 conference was canceled).
- Issues regarding transportation are longstanding for people with disabilities, therefore the pandemic-driven fast forward into the virtual services has enhanced The Arc’s ability to connect without the barrier of “getting people there.” While the virtual world cannot really replace face-to-face communication, Fortin said it is a dramatic and positive enhancement of services.

Interview Highlights

This interview documented the success of an agency that was very quickly out-of-the-box in dealing with COVID-19. The Arc was aggressive in introducing new creative programming, it was proactive in finding funding and resources to connect people to technology, and it leveraged a young staff to help develop content, deliver programming, and problem-solve around technology barriers for many clients. The Arc recognized that Zoom was an effective platform as it allowed connection on multiple channels at varying levels of technology. If you had a telephone, a smartphone, a tablet, a laptop, a desktop, any of those technologies could connect you to programming via Zoom. Lastly, Fortin said, The Arc was resourceful in using its human network to continue to disseminate information, and continuing to utilize low-tech connections, such as conference calls. Even its e-survey methods were complemented by telephone contacts. Most notable regarding this interview is the awareness of the varying levels of constituent needs, skills, access and adaptive strategies used to “meet those clients where they were” to provide them with information, entertainment, education, and social connectivity.

Interview Summary Report: Embrella (formerly Foster and Adoptive Family Services)

Interviewee: Corissa Kazar

Interviewer: Karen Alexander

Interview date: Tuesday June 16, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Embrella is a non-profit agency, and a contractor for the NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF). It supports families in the child welfare system, those that provide foster care to related family members (e.g. an aunt/uncle to niece/nephew or a grandparent to a grandchild) and licensed resource family care.
- Embrella delivers training and supportive services to satisfy state-required continuing education licensure requirements for foster care. Training is for-credit classes for families via an e-learning platform as well as home correspondence.¹ The agency offers webinars to affiliated families, and additional support to youth who are not in a caregiver situation (such as those living independently in the community or at college).
- Corissa Kazar is the Director of Community Education; she has been with the agency for six years.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Before COVID-19, platforms were already in place for digital engagement, but there had been hesitation and trepidation regarding using them, and Embrella did not want to leave anyone out. Many families the agency serves have digital access but are not tech-savvy.
- Information was often delivered via postcards and mail, through an outside vendor.
- However, Embrella was moving to e-blasts and Constant Contact to send information out to families. It also maintained a seasonal schedule of activities (including webinars) on its website prior to March 2020. Embrella's website is regularly updated.
- Embrella's targeted audience ranges from youth to older families. It uses a variety of online platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook for outreach, along with a blog and podcasting.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- COVID-19 dramatically hastened Embrella's move to digital platforms. The agency quickly realized that it could reach more individuals using digital tools – such as live videos on Twitter, and its Annual Scholarship Awards as a virtual ceremony on Facebook LIVE (complete with caps & gowns and balloons),
- Access to technology was an issue for some of Embrella's clients. The state funding agency, the Department of Children and Families, provided each household served by Embrella with a Chromebook, if necessary, to ensure digital access. This removed the barrier of access to technology for many of Embrella's clients.

¹ Every licensed parent in the home must complete educational in-service training hours during each three-year licensing cycle while their home is open to ensure that children receive the best care possible.

- Many caregivers were also developing new tech skills as they transitioned to working from home. These new skills also help the caregivers feel comfortable connecting virtually with Embrella.
- Embrella’s staff went from being in the field to working remotely – which required additional tools for them, too – such as work cellphones.
- The agency continued to host monthly meetings for education and outreach on Big Marker, a browser-based, no-download webinar platform, that they love using. More information here: <https://www.bigmarker.com/>. Staff had previously used tools like GoTo Meeting, but much prefer Big Marker.
- During the spring of 2020, the focus of webinars has moved from disseminating information to connecting people with one another for support, socialization, and mental health. Embrella’s staff convenes people in groups of 25 for maximum impact and discussion with live video and audio.
- Embrella still does large webinars, and attendance has steadily risen during the past year, especially in the spring of 2020 as the pandemic peaked. In the past, Embrella typically would draw about 20 participants per event; now, it’s able to reach 100 or more. Embrella also hosts training for DCF staff on its platform a. Both caregivers and DCF staff find the technology very user-friendly.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Kazar noted that DCF has been effective with its communication, especially with Facebook and its website. The agency has become more approachable with a more conversational tone, better resources, and more visuals. This is something other agencies should consider implementing.
- The virtual engagement strategies that Embrella is now using will continue. While face-to-face will happen again when it is safe, Kazar anticipates digital engagement continuing, especially into the winter months (potentially reducing weather-related issues). She anticipates continuing in a digital-first communication and outreach model going forward.
- The digital and social media strategies have become the foundation for the new normal for the agency and its communication with constituents – at-risk youth and families, both an integral part of the child welfare system.
- Embrella’s shift to digital was strongly supported by DCF providing the tools people needed to make the shift (Chromebooks for clients and DCF staff). While there are a few (1-2%) Embrella families not using digital tools, 99 percent are participating digitally.
- Kazar did caution that digital engagement can lead to staff burnout – with remote workers online for much of the day. The tech-based environment can lead to overwork – and there is need to set a reasonable pace and workload and encourage staff to take care of themselves, as well.

Interview Highlights

This interview is notable as it offers an example of an agency that was poised to go digital before the pandemic that thrust them into this transition much more quickly. Embrella has

seen significant benefits in terms of expanded levels and modes of engagement, and at the same time, an appreciation of the “human” connection aspect of digital platforms – not just the broadcast/information aspects. This has led to using smaller group sizes for meetings to promote social engagement and an emphasis on fostering relationships. The ringing endorsement of Big Marker’s webinar platform was notable; Kazar is willing to discuss her agency’s positive experience with other agencies and organizations.

Interview Summary Report: DAWN Center for Independent Living

Interviewee: Carmela Slivinski

Interviewers: Andrea Lubin, Sarah Tomasello

Interview Date: Wednesday June 17, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The DAWN Center for Independent Living is a 501(c)(3) community-based, grassroots organization that supports and promotes independent living for people with disabilities residing in the northwest corridor of New Jersey in Morris, Sussex, and Warren counties. DAWN is one of 11 centers for independent living (CIL) in the state and their offices are in Denville. The interviewee, Carmela Slivinski, serves as Executive Director of DAWN. She joined the staff in 1999 and has served as Executive Director since 2001.
- DAWN serves persons with any disability, of any age. As a center for independent living, it provides five core services: advocacy; information & referral; independent living skills; peer support; and transition services. Transition services support young adults transitioning from high school to life post-graduation or those transitioning from nursing homes or other institutional living centers to their homes or other community-based residences. DAWN also provides employment network services to consumers. Slivinski explained that one of DAWN's key roles is to identify service gaps experienced by persons with disability in their region and to advocate for closing identified gaps, which in some cases entails DAWN directly providing services to meet those identified needs. Gaps often relate to a myriad of needs, including case management, socialization, and employment readiness.
- She emphasized that DAWN must offer a broad scope of services to meet the varied needs of its consumers who have a range of disabilities (e.g. physical, sensory, spinal cord, brain injury, developmental). Many of DAWN's consumers need intensive support, including individual case management. DAWN is one of several NJ CILs that focus significant effort on providing case management. For example, it delivers support coordination for the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), serving 630 families. DAWN also is the identified service coordination unit for early intervention for 1,200 families in Morris and Sussex counties. It coordinates Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) for these families with eligible children from birth to three years of age, helping to obtain special education services for these children in public schools.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Slivinski said approximately 30 percent of the people DAWN serves in Warren and Sussex counties, and 10-15 percent in Morris County, do not have internet access. She explained that this finding is due to income disparities, with a higher percentage of lower income persons residing in Warren and Sussex counties compared to Morris County.
- Pre-COVID-19, methods used by DAWN to communicate and engage with the consumers they serve included the following:
 - Face-to-face interactions

- Phone
- Email
- Mailings (recreational information, quarterly newsletter)
- Social media (Facebook)
- She noted that DAWN's older consumers; those in the independent living program; and the families it works with via the DDD initiative typically prefer receiving hard copies of information by mail. In contrast, the families DAWN works with via its early intervention program request email communications.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- DAWN's offices have been closed since mid-March, with staff working remotely. Slivinski noted that her staff has teleworking experience due to winter weather events in this part of the state. Therefore, the shift to telecommuting during the pandemic has not been a challenge.
- DAWN is using Zoom, GoToMeeting, conference calls, emails, and the telephone to interact with its consumers during COVID-19. Earlier this month, DAWN also transitioned its phone system to a new Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP system) that permits all staff to use the system's conference call platform,
- DAWN primarily uses Zoom or conference calls for case management meetings or sessions with students. Staff uses the phone to connect with consumers who do not have internet access or those who prefer not to connect online. Other programming DAWN has successfully transitioned to virtual via Zoom includes weekly lunch group chats, twice-weekly socialization/recreation offerings (e.g. bingo, trivia, origami), and an action club for young adults with developmental disabilities that focuses on community service.
- DAWN staff developed and implemented a 'Zoom etiquette' session to show consumers how to utilize the platform. For those consumers who have difficulty participating virtually, staff offer one-on-one support if requested. Those who cannot access virtually often choose to call-in via phone to join activities.
- A major challenge DAWN has experienced with virtual engagement relates to its employment readiness program for young adults. DAWN has encountered obstacles in getting schools on-board with using the virtual platform, as well as engaging students to log on to the platform. For a few students, lack of technology is the issue. Others have indicated they do not feel comfortable participating in group interactions online. In those cases, DAWN has conducted some one-on-one virtual engagement. However, schools not requiring participation has been the biggest obstacle.
- Slivinski said she received some beneficial tips on how non-profit organizations can engage virtually through the Morris Chamber of Commerce.
- To specifically inform people about services and health advisories related to COVID-19, DAWN developed a resource page that organizes information and related links from federal, state, county, and local sources. In addition, all DAWN employees include the link to the resource page in their email signature.

- During the pandemic, new consumers are being directed to DAWN primarily via word of mouth and internet searches. Slivinski explained that while the center does effectively support persons with disabilities, it is less proficient at directly marketing itself. However, DAWN is well-known in the counties they serve because the organization makes a concerted effort to become aware of local resources and to actively engage with community organizations and stakeholders. In fact, DAWN staff serve on at least 20 committees in each of the three counties in its service area.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Slivinski said DAWN anticipates continuing virtual engagement methods based on its success during the pandemic with some of the platforms and positive feedback from some of their consumers. Offering virtual engagement options opens a “world of opportunities” for transportation-disadvantaged consumers, she added. However, Slivinski pointed out that despite these successes, in-person engagement is often preferred, as it offers a “personal touch,” not achievable virtually. Ideally, she said virtual engagement should be offered “in addition to” other means of in-person engagement.
- She suggested that virtual communication methods should include an easy-to-use captioning feature and be ADA-compliant to better support persons with disabilities.

Interview Highlights

This interview presents an example of a New Jersey grassroots, disability-focused organization serving the northwest region of the state that has successfully transitioned to offering diverse programming virtually via several platforms – primarily Zoom and GoToMeeting – during the COVID-19 pandemic. DAWN also has continued to connect via phone to those without internet access or who have difficulty using or an aversion to using online communication methods. Slivinski said using virtual platforms has enabled DAWN to continue programming for many consumers and she noted that virtual communication methods eliminate transportation as an obstacle to accessing DAWN’s services.

Interview Summary Report: Parker Adult Day Center

Interviewees: Samara Elis and Carissa Keil-Sweeney, Recreation Manager

Interviewers: Andrea Lubin, Sarah Tomasello

Interview Date: Thursday, June 18, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Parker Adult Day Center is a New Jersey non-profit aging services organization that offers: an adult day center, assisted living, long-term care residences (nursing), and post-acute and other rehabilitation.
- Parker Adult Day Center has two locations in New Jersey. This interview was with staff from the Highland Park center, which operates social and medical day programs for persons (primary older adults) residing in the community who are in need of some level of support whether due to cognitive, physical, developmental, and/or other conditions. The adult day social program operates Monday-Friday from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. providing support, socialization, and a diversity of structured activities for participants. The center enables participants to connect with peers and maintain independence. The adult day medical program operates Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-4 p.m. and provides added benefits of medication administration, nursing support, and personal (e.g. daily living needs such as showering) and therapeutic assistance (e.g. physical, occupational, speech therapy). Sixty individuals are enrolled in the social program, with 20 participating daily and 80 are enrolled in the medical program with 40 participating daily.
- The majority of participants in both programs are in their late 50's and older, with the youngest participant 35 years of age and the oldest participant 99 years of age.
- Both programs provide transportation within the service area to/from the center if needed, as well as a hot lunch. The program also recognizes the vital role that caregivers have in the lives of Parker participants and consequently, offers caregiver respite, including support groups.
- Two members of Parker Adult Day Center staff were interviewed: Samara Elis is a full-time social worker with the adult day medical program who focuses on supporting both participants and caregivers socially and emotionally; Carissa Keil-Sweeney is the recreation manager for both programs, creating, implementing, and coordinating diverse participant activities that focus on music, art, exercise, discussions, and cognitive stimulations.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- The interviewees reported that approximately 15-20 percent of adult day center participants have access to and can use internet technology independently. If needed, Parker can connect via email with about 80 percent of caregivers and in some cases, participants. They emphasized that tech literacy among most participants and many of the caregivers served is limited.
- The Parker adult day center has been closed to participants since the onset of COVID-19 in mid-March. Prior to COVID-19, the center primarily communicated and engaged

participants and caregivers in person. Other communication methods used were phone; limited email, and mailings (activity calendar). Non in-person communication methods preferred by participants pre-COVID-19 were mailings or phone.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Since closing in Mid-March, the center has undertaken a variety of virtual activities designed to continue participant engagement. Using the Webex platform, staff implement three virtual programs weekly. Activities include music, cognitive games, exercise, bingo, and crafts. Parker social workers are also using Apple FaceTime and Google Hangouts for one-on-one services. Every Monday since closing the day center, staff also send an email message reminding participants and caregivers of the virtual activities planned for that week, share caregiver support group information and caregiver education, and notify participants of virtual classes available through Parker's Health and Wellness Center. The emails also include a "Community Corner" section, which highlights program participant birthdays, anniversaries, etc. The interviewees noted that Community Corner has offered a way for participants to remain connected and engaged with one another.
- The interviewees explained that it took some time for staff to familiarize themselves with Webex and understand the platform's capabilities and limitations. For example, they learned to restrict group size for virtual engagement, as larger groups pose various challenges including bandwidth issues, difficulty helping participants troubleshoot technical issues, and limitations with participants being able to see and hear one another in large virtual groups.
- It also took time for participants and caregivers to familiarize themselves with Webex and to adjust to the new virtual engagement schedule of offerings. Some participants participate alone, while others participate with support from their caregiver. Many faced technical difficulties using the platform – at least initially – including downloading the app. Many participants and caregivers are "tech phobic" and are not interested or comfortable learning to use virtual platforms. For some participants, grasping the concept of how to use the medium is more confusing than beneficial. In some cases, they have become familiar with using Zoom, and do not wish to learn an additional platform (Webex). To address these challenges, staff offer a tutorial session for all new users. Staff also seek troubleshooting guidance from Parker IT staff. The interviewees emphasized that with time, both staff and participants who have been engaging in Parker's virtual activities have all improved their technological capabilities with virtual engagement.
- Parker's virtual engagement has been "invaluable" for program participants who can take advantage of these resources. It provides participants with a means to stay connected and gives structure to their week. However, staff are cognizant that only a limited number of people are participating in virtual events. For example, many participants cannot access the internet without support and their caregivers are faced with competing demands during the day, such as teleworking, and may not be available to aid their elderly charge to participate in virtual programming. Another challenge is that caregivers who are telecommuting may be using the only device in the home with

internet connection, thus making it unfeasible for Parker participants to join daytime virtual events. So Parker staff are also communicating with program participants in other ways. For example, they contact interested participants via phone on a weekly basis to check-in, placing less frequent calls to those not interested in a weekly check-in. They mail activity packages to participants that include puzzles, daily chronicles, and coloring sheets. Staff drop off craft kits to interested participants at home and email a video link to the caregiver with how-to instructions for the craft project. They have mailed cards with staff photos to participants and delivered flowers on Mother's Day to participants who are mothers. They also organized a staff bus tour, making socially distant visits to about 80 percent of participants homes to let them know that they missed them and would see them again soon.

- The center has sought guidance from the Alzheimer's Foundation of America regarding best practices to conduct virtual caregiver support groups, as the Foundation focuses on providing non in-person support to the caregivers they serve. Parker is currently implementing those support groups via Webex and phone (for those without internet access, interest, and/or familiarity with engaging via the virtual platform). They convene two monthly phone groups with four persons in each group, as well as two monthly Webex groups with about seven participants in each. One of the Webex sessions is convened during evening hours to accommodate caregivers who work during the day. Ms. Elis noted that when they conduct these sessions in person, they are able to accommodate larger groups (12-15) than they can effectively implement virtually or via phone.
- The interviewees shared that Parker has opted not to serve as a resource for disseminating COVID-19 health advisory information. Instead, they direct participants and caregivers to other resources for that information, such as the CDC. However, they do disseminate caregiver specific tips related to coping during the pandemic by sharing links to resources available through AARP and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- While the center is closed due to COVID-19, it is not accepting new participants. They are maintaining a list of interested prospective participants to reach out to post-pandemic. At this time, Parker Adult Day Center does not know when it will re-open.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Parker Adult Day Center staff said the level of telephone and virtual engagement they will offer once the day center re-opens will be dependent on re-opening restrictions. For example, if they are only permitted 10 in-person participants, they will likely continue with virtual events and other forms of outreach. If they are permitted 30 or more participants at the center, then they will need staff to focus on providing in-person services. Regardless of re-opening restrictions, the interviewees shared that they will likely continue offering virtual sessions for caregivers to some extent, primarily for caregiver convenience. For example, they noted limited on-site parking poses a challenge for in-person caregiver programs.
- Overall, participants indicated that virtual engagement is fantastic for those who can access the programming, as it helps to elevate their mood, affords them an opportunity

to engage with peers and staff, and also provides some caregivers with a break. However, for those not participating virtually, a weekly phone check-in is not a replacement for 40 hours of in-person programming and services. Technology is helpful, but it cannot be a full replacement for in-person engagement with the older adults they serve. They also added that prep time for several remote activities is extensive compared to prep for the same activity offered in-person. For example, in-person, staff can arrange a game of bingo for a group in about 10 minutes. Remotely, staff must print and laminate boards that they drive and drop off to 25 participants' homes. Then during the virtual game, they have to troubleshoot both tech-related and other issues participants encounter, which can be challenging.

- Interviewees shared several suggestions related to improving virtual communications for older adults. They explained that the Webex platform is difficult to learn how to use, with too many buttons and options. Some have difficulty turning on their video and audio capabilities, while others have trouble joining/accessing the platform. Also, completing the initial required platform download is often a challenge for participants and caregivers. They added that participants sometimes experience difficulties muting themselves or they open multiple windows, etc. Webex should add a functionality whereby the host can take over a participant's screen to help resolve those issues.
- The interviewees shared that many virtual platforms seem to be targeted to offering presentations or engaging very collaboratively. They feel the seniors they serve could benefit from a virtual platform that offers an in-between functionality and is designed as a one-stop shop, where they simply access the site and can join without needing to be familiar with any other features or requirements of the platform in order to engage.

Interview Highlights

This interview is notable as it presents an example of a day program for older adults and others residing in the community that need support. Support services are also made available to participant caregivers. Interviewees explained that since the center's closure due to COVID-19, they have transitioned from primarily offering in-person interactions to now offering a mix of both virtual and "low-tech" remote engagement strategies. Using the Webex platform has proved somewhat challenging but has benefited those who have been able to access Parker's virtual programming, primarily by affording them an opportunity to continue interacting with their peers and staff during the pandemic. One interviewee noted that being able to see one another virtually has boosted the mood of participants. Despite the benefits of virtual and other outreach, including phone calls and mailings, interviewees emphasized that the majority participants are not attending virtual events and that weekly check-in calls are not a replacement for 40 hours of in-person programming and supports. That said, the center will likely continue at least some level of virtual programming for their caregivers post-COVID-19 and may also continue non in-person engagement for participants as well, depending on the restrictions related to re-opening the center.

Interview Summary Report: CATA (El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas)

Interviewee(s): Manuel Guzman, Lead Organizer, community outreach; Kathia Ramirez, Food Justice Coordinator

Interviewer(s): Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: June 22, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA) otherwise known as the Farmworkers Support Committee, is a non-profit organization founded by migrant farm workers. Its main service areas are New Jersey, Southeastern Pennsylvania, and the Delmarva Peninsula in Maryland.
- CATA works to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements to the legal and economic systems, which often adversely impact the Latino community. Some recent undertakings include promoting the 2020 Census, as well the promotion of sustainable agriculture practices.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- The interviewees stated that prior to COVID-19 they used in-person meetings, community outreach (farms visits), Facebook, radio station (internet-based in some areas, 102.5 FM in others), a weekly bulletin and traditional mail to communicate with their target audience. February 2020 was the last monthly in-person meeting.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CATA struggled to communicate with its members due to the sudden restriction on in-person meetings. CATA relied, and continues to partly rely, on one-on-one phone calls with its members. In order to disseminate more information to its members, CATA boosted its presence on Facebook and began doing outreach through the same platform. CATA also uses a radio station (102.5 FM, Bridgeton) to share information/updates on COVID-19 and how members can seek proper care, financial assistance and more. It also used printed materials, and asked members to share the information with others who might need assistance or be interested in the organization. Many CATA members lack access to technology. They live on farms in remote, rural areas where there is limited internet signal. Also, many members simply do not have a smart phone or a laptop capable of video chatting. CATA provided some technology support to members with internet access, providing help via phone calls and selective visits. They also communicated via text messaging.
- Language proved to be another barrier. While CATA is a bilingual organization, many members come from remote areas of Mexico and Central America where indigenous languages are more commonly used. Even translating COVID-19 information into Spanish was difficult for the staff, because the new policies and regulations are often technical and difficult to understand, even for CATA leadership. CATA relied heavily on

certain team members with more advanced knowledge of the Spanish language and spoken dialects to act as liaisons to the other members.

- Beginning in May, CATA organized its first video/online meeting. Twenty members joined, representing all three regions CATA serves. The interviewees noted that one benefit of the online meeting was that family members could also participate, something that had not happened with in-person events. They also noted that travel was no longer a barrier to participation. CATA believes the use of technology has helped make the organization more unified, as members from all three regions could easily meet and communicate. They also suggested that larger agency-wide meetings could possibly be held online going forward, as the large service area sometimes makes in-person meetings difficult.
- Recently, CATA resumed farm visits, which has traditionally been the primary method of outreach. During the farm visits CATA provides printed materials/information and personal protective equipment (PPE) to members. The interviewees also noted that they use the in-person visits to teach members how to more effectively communicate with the organization online.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Because of the community CATA serves, in-person meeting and written materials are still at the heart of its communication to members. It hopes to continue conducting farm visits in the meantime, in addition to utilizing social media, phone calls and Zoom meetings.
- CATA's management and administration meetings are now all conducted via Zoom and it likely will continue.

Additional notes

- Interviewees mentioned members have limited access to public transportation. CATA representatives stated that better transportation is needed, as there are informal private services that take advantage of the farmworkers by over-charging them.
- The organization also advocates for sustainable farming. The prices for many of the Mexican products at stores are often grossly inflated and overpriced. CATA helps members get the culturally relevant vegetables at a lower cost by growing the produce themselves.

Interview Highlights

- CATA serves a community with low access to technology. Its membership consists of farmworkers, some living in remote areas where connectivity is often not reliable. Those that had access to technology relied on phone calls from CATA to learn how to use Zoom and Facebook. CATA also reached out to members via text messaging. In-person meetings, farm visits and printed materials have been and will continue to be an important part of CATA's communication tactics. CATA's management will continue to use Zoom conference calls. It makes it easier to meet, especially since its offices are in

Maryland, Southern New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Zoom also facilitates larger agency-wide meetings.

- CATA continues to face a language barrier due to the myriad of dialects spoken by its membership. IT relies on other members with the most proficiency in Spanish to serve as liaisons and community contacts.

Interview Summary Report: Women's Rights Information Center

Interviewee(s): Lisa Maurer, Program Director

Interviewer(s): Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: June 25, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Lisa Maurer, Program Director of Women's Rights Information Center. She joined the team at Women's Rights Information Center in 2017.
- Women's Rights Information Center (WRIC) serves women transitioning from home to the paid workforce following separation, divorce, disability or death of a spouse or significant other; the Center's programs and services are available to help them become financially self-sufficient. WRIC serves domestic abuse survivors, displaced homemakers, veterans, LGBT, and others. The Center is a member of the Displaced Homemaker Network of New Jersey.
- The Center's mission is to help women learn and develop the skills they need to become financially self-sufficient and to provide for themselves and their family. Services offered include providing clients with funds for training programs, legal consultations, advocacy and victim services for people suffering from domestic abuse. Clients participate in classes, workshops, programs and services to improve skills and enrich their lives. The Center also has a successful home sharing program for Bergen County women in.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Prior to the pandemic, most of the Center's services were offered on-site through in-person meetings. For example, the WRIC receives referrals from Bergen County's Human Services Department, often from the welfare program. Potential clients would visit the Center for a 45-minute orientation, offered weekly, during which services were described. The Center also scheduled an appointment for the intake process. Intake would match the client's needs with the WRIC's services and review program criteria, etc. For example, the ESL classes, job-search assistance, resume writing, etc., were all done on-site.
- The Center also staffed tables at Bergen County events and visited Bergen County schools and churches to promote their services. WRIC had an open-door policy before the pandemic; clients would come in and complete an intake that was immediately reviewed and put into the WRIC's main database.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Overall, since the start of the pandemic, the digital divide has become wider. The WRIC's 45-minute orientation and summary of services has shifted to online. Because of the digital divide, some clients have not been able to receive services. For example, because the welfare system is operating in an online platform, if/when the client cannot reply to a follow-up email, the system might eliminate the case or categorize it as inactive.

- In some programs, participation has decreased; in others it has gone up. For the ESL classes, which usually had 50 students in the offices, the online classes only had 15 students. This is attributed to participants not having access to computer or not knowing how to use one.
- Technology, however, has had some specific benefits. For example, WRIC workshop and seminar participation rates have increased because of the convenience of going online. Maurer noted that services offered online reduces or even eliminates some clients' fears of crowds or social interaction; it also means there are no transportation or parking costs. The WRIC also is now offering technology workshops which have drawn clients. The WRIC team has consistently used phone calls and e-mails to stay in touch with clients. Staff regularly sends emails about available resources. Also, welfare case managers call everyone twice-a-week to stay in-touch and identify clients' needs. Similarly, they set up a group of volunteers to call older adults.
- WRIC is also active on social media (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) for community engagement and receives referrals from other agencies and through word-of-mouth marketing. Facebook is WRIC's most-used platform; most clients are between the ages of 25-65 and prefer Facebook to other platforms.
- Maurer noted that some clients can barely text, pointing to a lack of familiarity with technology that has been a barrier. Further, she also noted the challenges that technology brings to victims of domestic violence (i.e. technology facilitates abusers, using tracking technologies to control their victim). To address this issue, WRIC provided prepaid phones for some clients and developed a coded language protocol for using Zoom. WRIC also prepared a safety plan for clients to use if necessary. The Center also provides consent forms before Zoom meeting; this allows clients to decide how much information they are comfortable sharing.
- As previously noted, Maurer said many WRIC clients have limited access to technology. In response, the Center is pursuing funds for rental computers and Wi-Fi bills.
- WRIC had planned a gala prior to the pandemic. This event was offered virtually via Zoom, though organizers didn't realize participation would be limited by Zoom to 100 people. However, Maurer said the gala also was offered on Facebook Live and she said it was a success.
- WRIC exclusively uses Zoom for all online services. It has not been able to provide virtual services for shared-housing and its "career closet." The career closet program provides clothes for job interviews, while the shared-housing matches empty-nesters, usually landowners, with displaced women looking for a room or home to rent.
- Maurer said WRIC is experiencing an increased demand for services, and she expects this demand to increase even more as the pandemic continues. Unemployment, food insecurity, and lack of internet connectivity are resulting in difficult domestic situations for many during the pandemic.
- WRIC has partnered with Bergen Family Center to deliver goods to clients. Bergen Family Center assists older adults, young mothers, and children.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- During the pandemic, the digital divide has become wider and some groups and programs have adjusted while others could not. For example, offering computer workshops has become popular; However, the lack of connectivity due to financial constraints and lack of knowledge has impacted other services. This has prompted WRIC to apply for specific grants for home computers, classes and connectivity.
- The Center has incorporated social media platforms in its communication efforts. Zoom has become the principal platform used for workshops, orientations and support groups. In terms of being in contact with clients, email mail blasts and outbound calling have been the principal modes of communication.
- WRIC plans to keep almost all virtual services running until next year, as its office is only going to be open 4 days per week with capacity limit of 5 staffers out of 20. The impact this transition is yet to be determined, Maurer said.
- WRIC is conducting a focus group to help determine how best to deliver its services virtually.

Interview Highlights

- This interview provided a variety of helpful insights into the challenges and benefits of engaging virtually with women in transition. WRIC has experienced first-hand the impacts of the digital divide (lack of connectivity and computer literacy). Computer and smart device users have taken advantage of WRIC's online services, and, as a result, some programs have had increased participation. Clients who don't have computer or smart devices have not been able to access many of WRIC's services, such as virtual workshops. WRIC is pursuing grant funding for rental computers and Wi-Fi services for clients. While online services eliminate transportation and parking expenses and alleviates some clients' social anxieties, privacy issues at home have made accessing services more difficult for others, such as domestic violence victims.
- WRIC has used Zoom to provide workshops, support groups and planned events, such as a fundraising gala. It also incorporated social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Moving forward, and to enhance services, WRIC is conducting a focus group. This will help identify and confirm new and arising needs their clients might have due to the pandemic. It will also help dictate and reshape future services to be provided.

Interview Summary Report: Youth Advocate Programs

Interviewee: Fred Fogg

Interviewers: Nieves Pimienta, Sarah Tomasello

Interview date: Wednesday June 25, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) is a non-profit organization that serves youth involved with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems and youth who have behavioral health issues or developmental disabilities. YAP provides and advocates for community-based alternatives to care for these youth within a home, school, and community setting rather than an institutional setting. The organization operates more than 100 programs in 29 states.
- YAP staff work with children and families to develop a service plan that balances the requirements of the juvenile justice or child welfare system with the family's goals and priorities. Each service plan is unique, however YAP assistance for youth and families typically includes case management, crisis intervention services, skill development programs, and educational and vocational training.
- Fred Fogg is the Regional Director of Operations for YAP in northern and western New Jersey and parts of Delaware. In this region, YAP typically serves up to 600 families at any given time.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- YAP typically works directly with youth at home and in community settings. Most meetings between staff, youth, and families occurred in person at home, at school, or at court. YAP staff typically spent 10 to 15 hours per week with a child and family.
- One primary way YAP engages with youth is through the school system. YAP often receives referrals for new clients through schools, and YAP has satellite offices in several schools where children families can receive on-site, drop-in mental health services. The pandemic has greatly limited referrals through schools and YAP is considering how to modify on-site school mental health services if schools will be closed again in the fall.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Since the start of the pandemic, YAP has adapted all interactions between staff and families to virtual mediums. Fogg said that while there are benefits to virtual communication, the amount of time staff typically spend with clients has been cut in half.
- Staff use a variety of virtual formats to communicate based on a child and family's preference. The most popular online platform with clients is Zoom, however YAP also is using GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, and FaceTime. FaceTime is more popular for clients that do not have access to a computer.

- The youth in YAP programs prefer to stay in touch with staff through texting. YAP has found, when distributing a survey to their clients, the response rate is best if the survey is sent to kids via text instead of email.
- Lack of access to devices and the internet has impacted YAP's ability to maintain its usual level of service. Some households may have only one device that has to be shared, and sometimes that device is a mobile phone or a work-issued laptop. YAP received funding through the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund to purchase devices and internet access for clients in need. In the first few weeks of the pandemic, before most families had access to a device and an internet connection, staff would either facilitate check-ins via phone calls or curbside visits during which they would talk with clients in-person but from a safe distance. These initial check-ins were important, as some clients are in the child welfare system and, being out of school, lacked regular supervision for signs of abuse.
- Another challenge is clients' discomfort or lack of familiarity with using technology. While most families are comfortable with virtual meetings, some family members, particularly older adults, prefer phone calls.
- YAP has also experienced internal limitations on technical literacy, especially with older staff who are uncomfortable using Zoom and other online platforms and prefer to work with clients over the phone. In response, YAP is pairing staff together to work with clients so that at least one staff person is comfortable working with the client virtually.
- One of the ways staff have continued to successfully work virtually with clients is through well-designed online learning modules. YAP's online curriculum, on topics such as conflict resolution and violence de-escalation, consists of hour-long modules that keep clients engaged using YouTube videos and movie clips.
- Fogg suggested also interviewing Rebecca Escobar, a New Brunswick councilwoman, who works with at-risk youth and has connections to many other organizations working with youth in the city.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- YAP is currently attempting to assess digital divide's impact on its services as the pandemic continues into the fall and perhaps beyond.
- One benefit of the YAP's increased use of virtual platforms is the ability to communicate more effectively when families are busy, or kids may not be in the mood to talk. In those situations, a virtual meeting is an effective supplement and YAP may continue to use virtual platforms even after in-person meetings resume.
- Another benefit of virtual platforms is the potential to increase telehealth therapy services. Those who are unable to attend in-person sessions due to transportation problems, lack of childcare, or anxiety about in-person interactions can still receive counseling using telehealth.
- YAP staff work directly with the most vulnerable and at-risk children and teenagers and Fogg provided insights into effectively communicating with them. . Texting appears to be a reliable way to communicate with these clients, even for more formal communication such as to request participation in a survey, as YAP has done. When

communicating with youth or families, flexibility in the online platform used is key as individuals have different preferences for, or greater familiarity, with one platform over another. Fogg also noted that YAP staff most commonly use Zoom to communicate, while FaceTime is popular for clients using a mobile device only. While most families are using online platforms to communicate with YAP, some continue to prefer phone calls. Finally, staff are overcoming the challenge of keeping youth engaged in YAP programming by using online modules that feel fun and relevant with YouTube videos and movie clips.

Interview Summary Report: Bergen Family Center

Interviewee(s): Liz Corsini, Vice President, Director of Programs; Mitch Schonfeld, Presidents/CEO

Interviewer(s): Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: June 29, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- The mission of Bergen Family Center (BFC) is to strengthen communities by providing services to individuals, families and children that enhance their ability to function independently, manage challenges and improve the quality of their lives. The BFC provides programs for all ages, from infants to the elderly and has a staff of over 130 people. BFC has five different service branches: counseling, community programs, children's services, adolescent services, older adult services. The interview focused on BFC's work with at-risk youth.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- BFC's teen program is a school-based program, aimed at reducing drop-out rates in the state of New Jersey. Most of these programs are in high schools, and offered in-house/on-site for the middle schoolers. During the school year, students visit the Center to get support on educational issues, get information on healthy habits, address traumatic or stressful events in their lives, etc. About 30-40 middle-schoolers visit the Center every day after school. Also, BFC offers transition and leadership programs during the summer.
- Staff members are licensed counselors. Parent engagement is integrated through specific programs, like the family-success program.
- Interviewees said relationship-building is one of the organization's core values.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- The organization transferred to providing services via FaceTime, Zoom, Instagram, and Facebook. The young like Instagram Live and Zoom, while Facebook is mostly used by families and parents. E-mail has also been part of the regular communication flow. As a standard procedure, parents receive a weekly email with program updates and information. BFC noticed an increase in e-mail users during the pandemic. Staff also follow up with phone calls.
- The interviewee noted that relationship-building is important for the success of the programs and that these relationships are best maintained with in-person engagement, not virtual. However, virtual engagement is currently the only option for connecting and maintaining counselor-youth relationships.
- They have noticed that many participants prefer to join Zoom by audio only, disabling the camera. The Zoom chat feature is also frequently used. The interviewees noted that young participants seem to be more open and willing to share experiences with the Zoom chat feature than with on-camera participation.

- Time of day is also a factor. Young members prefer to be online later at the day or during evening hours. This has been a challenge for scheduling.
- There is now a greater demand for family-based services as a result of the pandemic and the resulting life-style changes in the household. In response to demand, BFC developed new programs, such as the virtual mom support group.
- The organization has been able to increase its reach as a result of the new virtual engagement practices. It has been able to connect teens across different municipalities (Teaneck, Hackensack, Englewood, etc.) and host virtual town hall meetings, something that they were unable to do under regular circumstances. According to the interviewee, people seem to be willing to organize meetings because travel is not a barrier.
- The interviewee mentioned connectivity and privacy as main challenges when servicing at-risk youth. Some of youth do not have a private space or private time to openly talk to their counselors.
- BFC's staff members have also struggled to adapt to the new technology. In order to serve members using technology, the organization needs to improve staff speed and comfort with technology. The organization is planning to increase training and equipment for staff in the near future.
- Many of BFC's senior citizen members are visually impaired or physically handicapped. The organization has used Zoom with this group with great success. BFC received a grant to purchase Echo Show devices for many of the seniors. The devices are being piloted by a group of 30 seniors and BFC is in the process of creating a more comprehensive online program.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

The interviewee feels strongly that nothing can replace the in-person methods of counseling and student support. In-person methods bring specific values/intimacy that are lost on the online communication. Although virtual accessibility has been important during this difficult time, the organization recognizes the in-person connection is vital and irreplaceable. Overall, the programs that served families and young children have been easier to convene virtually. Engaging with the teens has been more difficult.

Interview Highlights

Bergen Family Center transferred to using FaceTime, Zoom, Instagram, and Facebook. It noticed preferences by age group for specific virtual platforms. The organization has adapted the use of platforms accordingly. Overall, it uses Facebook for families, Zoom for group events, FaceTime for one-on-one counselor-client engagements, and Instagram Live and Zoom are preferred by the middle-schoolers. This interviewee identified important behaviors specific to the young when engaging virtually with their counselors and support groups. Time of day, subject matter and engagement mode are important and affect the level of engagement. In their experience, youth tend to share more when using Zoom's chat feature. Hence eliminating the visual aspect of the virtual engagement. Although, virtual platforms have helped the continuation of services, the organization understands the use of virtual platforms will not replace the one-on-one engagement with younger clients.

Interview Summary Report: Goodwill New York/New Jersey

Interviewee(s): Beatriz Baldwin

Interviewer(s): Nieves Pimienta

Interview date: June 30, 2020

Introduction/Background: About Organization & Interviewee

- Beatriz Baldwin, Senior Vice President, Northern NJ Division, Goodwill Industries Greater New York/Northern New Jersey
- Goodwill Industries empowers individuals with disabilities and other barriers to gain independence through the power of work. As an agency, it serves all vulnerable populations with career training, transition services, placement services, and job support programs.
- Goodwill Industries of Northern NJ/NY does not offer services for at-risk youth in New Jersey. Therefore, the interview focused on the at-risk youth programs in New York. The program serves individuals between the ages are 16 – 24.

Engagement: Pre-COVID-19

- Goodwill Industries services are traditionally offered in-person, as required by its funders. For at-risk youth, the organization deploys services in a one-on-one and group setting. For example, its offers a one-day orientation for all individuals prior to entering the formal training and support services program.
- Partnerships with community organizations, participation at several workforce development boards, and grassroots events have been the main tactic in disseminating information and generating referrals. Goodwill Industries also has an online and social media presence. The Department of Rehabilitation Services also refers people to Goodwill's programs.
- Program enrollment occurs on a rolling basis throughout the year, including summer. Typically, participants complete all core services in about four or five months. However, the timing varies based on the youth's interests and the needs of employers in the communities.

Engagement: During COVID-19

- Goodwill Industries has continued offering all of its services online, such as virtual job fairs and virtual resource fairs. During these fairs, held on Zoom, different employers and providers offering free resources participate. Constituent participation is a lot lower due to lack of internet access, or other difficulties. Goodwill estimates 40 percent of its constituents do not have internet access.
- The organization uses Teams, Zoom and FaceTime in continuing its services. It varies depending on participant needs. For example, FaceTime has been particularly successful with deaf participants. According to the interviewee, Microsoft Teams is more secure when compared to the other platforms. They organization trains constituents to use

Microsoft Teams and Zoom. It was noted that many employers are using these two platforms for interviews.

- The interviewee noted that there are some benefits of the use of technology, including enhancing the organization's reach. For example, a constituent was recently connected to an internship in California, where he is now working in video editing. This valuable experience will provide him with skills to bolster his career in the future. In addition, technology removes the need for transportation. Prior to COVID, customers were unable to access Goodwill's facilities due to lack of transportation. Remote services have also given the organization an opportunity to engage family members, which hasn't always been the case. As a result, the organization has been able to promote its services to the entire family.
- The interviewee noted constituents have a varying degree of access to technology. Some have their own internet access, others have access through a family member, or they may only have limited access to the internet through a family member's smartphone.
- For those without internet or technology at home, the organization has packages of materials as needed and one-on-one meetings are done via phone calls. The organization provides printed materials in the participant's preferred language. As a standard procedure, Goodwill conducts bi-weekly follow up phone calls to all consumers.
- Goodwill organizations across the country seem to be using similar strategies. Colleagues have been meeting to share experiences.

Looking Ahead & Conclusion

- Funders have temporarily relaxed the requirement that services be provided in-person due to the situation. However, Goodwill anticipates being required to provide services in-person again in the future. In the meantime, the organization understands virtual engagement is the best alternative and has applied for a grant to laptops and tablets for constituents. The technology is expected to help increase virtual participation rates.

Interview Highlights

- Goodwill Industries of Greater New York/Northern New Jersey has traditionally conducted meetings, trainings and counseling in-person. Not only is it required by its funders, but the organization values the benefits of socialization as a critical element for training the young participants.
- The organization was able to shift to online engagement quickly and successfully. Zoom and Microsoft Teams are the preferred platforms; Teams being viewed as the most secure.
- Online engagement has helped Goodwill in reach family members, offer more options for internships and promote its services to new members. It has also eliminated the transportation costs and barriers for many.

- Although the virtual engagement has been working well, it was noted that young participants preferred the in-person services. The advantage of socialization is lost, and young people are easily bored being home with little to nothing to do.
- Notably, lack of connectivity has been a barrier in providing services to many constituents. The organization plans to address this by seeking grants to purchase equipment that can narrow the digital divide.