

HAMILTON RELAY-VA
SEPTEMBER 26, 2024
ENHANCING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY
11:00 A.M. CST

This text, document, or file is based on live transcription. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), captioning, and/or live transcription are provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. This text, document, or file is not to be distributed or used in any way that may violate copyright law.

[Event will start shortly]

>> RHONDA: Hello. Good afternoon, everyone. We're going to go ahead and get started. Thank you for coming out. Even though the weather is not our friend today, we'll make do. Those still on your way, please drive careful. Based on the weather and conditions, we want you to arrive safely. For those of you joining virtually, if your internet goes out, just rejoin.

The intention of the meeting is intended to provide important information on assistive technology options. The focus is to get the right information from the right resource. We have a roomful of resources. You're encouraged to focus on the main presenters and ask questions within the context of the meeting. If you look at your table, there's a QR code where you can scan and enter questions for the presenters and panel.

Ground rules. We have to have ground rules. Please be respectful of main presenters, panelists, and other attendees. Virtual attendees, your microphones will be muted during the presentation. Your camera is optional during the meeting. If you're attending virtually, please use chat for all communications and questions.

If you're attending virtually and are unable to type your question in chat, please use the raise hand feature. We will circle back to get your question. Please be advised, we may not be able to answer all of the questions that are presented today. But those questions will be included post meeting, minutes and video.

And if you have any questions unrelated to this meeting, you can contact IFSPCommunity@DBHDS.virginia.gov. And I completely forgot to introduce myself. I'm Rhonda Gaines from the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. Forgot about that.

And last, we reserve the right for anyone who may be disruptive during this presentation -- we reserve the right to ask you to leave. Because we want it to be a pleasant experience for everyone. I hate getting to that part. But sometimes it happens. And I am going to turn our meeting over to Shawn Kirk. He is one of our IFSP Council members, State Council from Central region.

>> SHAWN KIRK: Thank you, Rhonda. For your acknowledgement, this meeting is being recorded and will now begin. Good afternoon to the IFSP State

and Regional Council members, DBDHS employees, organizations, our guests, and panelists. Thank you for taking the time to join us virtually and in person in the conference space at Blue Ridge Community College at the Robert E. Plecker Workforce Center.

I would like to thank Lynne Fetter. We appreciate the coordination by everyone to make this a perfect environment for the expo. My name is Shawn Kirk. And I have been a member of the IFSP Council for three years. I'm employed by The Arc of Virginia as a logistics lead. And take care of all the behind the scenes stuff. Marketing social media, newsletter, or any other technical support during our virtual meetings. Technology is where I practically live.

We are excited about this presentation on assistive technology, led by the Assistive Technology Network. We anticipate learning more about the wide range of devices, tools, and equipment available to help meet the needs of many in our immediate communities. This event will be successful if we can help a few or many by sharing out the resources available today. This event will be successful if the organizations in attendance have an opportunity to connect, exchange information and share ideas; maximizing collaboration.

This event will also be successful if we pull information and resources to cast a larger net of supports to self-advocates and their families across Virginia. Welcome. We are joined by Christine -- I do not want to butcher the last name -- our captioner from Virginia Hamilton Relay. The link is put in the chat for those who need the resource during the meeting.

Please contact IFSPCommunity@DBHDS.virginia.gov for questions that are not related to this meeting. If you have questions about IFSP Funding, please visit the My Life, My Community website. This is a public meeting. Please do not share personal, private, or protected information.

Our topic today is Enhancing Independence through Assistive Technology. Our expert presenters are from the Assistive Technology Network, Sharon Jones and Matt Newton. Our panelists are Kaili Webster, Stephanie Webster, Meghan Hyatt, Brittany Howard, Matt Luther, Nickie Brandenburger and Lauren Whitlock. I will now turn the meeting over to our main presenters.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you so much, Shawn. Can you hear me in the back? Don't expect any singing or dancing. We are so happy to have you all with us here today.

We have really had a great deal of fun working with the IFSP group to plan this event today. We're thrilled to see you. And thrilled to have so many virtual attendees.

I'm Sharon Jones. And I'm with the group that represents TTAC, the instructional materials for Virginia, Center on Transition Innovations, Autism Center for Education, and others. And we have with us today our lead at the Department of Education over here, Samantha Gregory. She will be over here to answer questions, too.

Let me quickly introduce our network members here today. We have Matt Newton, the wizard behind the screen over here.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: Hi, everybody. Good to meet you today.

>> SHARON JONES: Yes. And Meghan Hyatt. She'll introduce herself a little bit. And then Lorna, where are you? From the JMU TTAC. If you have questions for any of us, please let us know. We're always happy to help you. TTACs, if you don't know who we are, come to our booth. We'll share more. We're located across the state of Virginia. We have seven TTACs across the state of Virginia. We're happy to be with you today.

When you registered, we have tried to embed those questions into our panel questions today. We know there's some that were very individualized and specific. And we hope you will take a chance to go to the booths. And have those questions answered. There's lots of expertise here with you today.

We're going to start with introductions from our panelists. They're going to tell you their name, who they are, where they're from. A little bit about their programs or themselves. So, we're going to start with our star -- sorry, guys, the rest of y'all. Our star. She will be using her eye gaze system to respond to these questions and introduce herself. And her mom is here to help her.

>> KAILI WEBSTER: My name is Kaili Webster. Because of my cerebral palsy, it is difficult for me to speak. This is why I use my communication device. Have you seen a device like this before? This is a GD pilot. I have used eye gaze since the second grade.

Now, I am in eighth grade. I am 14 years old. My favorite color is pink. My favorite thing about school is lunchtime. I'm excited to tell you about my device.

>> SHARON JONES: Good. We'll hear more about your device. Thank you, Kaili, for that introduction. She's decked out in pink and purple today. Stephanie?

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: My name is Stephanie. I'm also known as Kaili's mom. That's usually what people call me. I have the pleasure and joy of getting to go on this assistive technology journey along with Kaili and am excited to share that with you all.

My background is social work. Before I adopted Kaili, I worked in China with children with special needs. And had a lot of experience working with assistive technology. Currently I'm working with -- on the DD waiver.

If you're out there, feeling stuck or feeling discouraged, I would love to talk to you.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Stephanie. Nickie Brandenburger?

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: Yes, Nickie Brandenburger. I'm with the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Family Involvement. Prior to coming to VCU, I was in case management. I worked with families who had or were on the DD waiver. So I lived that life for a while. Then I became a parent. And both of my children have disabilities. And have accommodations in the school system.

Now I wear the parent hat as well. I'm thrilled to be here today to share the experiences I've had. But also the organization I work for. And how we can mentor and support other families.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: My name is Meghan Hyatt. I work at the VCU TTAC, the Training and Technical Assistance Center. I'm a teacher. I work in the elementary school. And I work with K-5 students of varying disability levels. And,

yeah, I did this about 14 years before I joined the TTAC.

Now I go out and support teachers and students in schools. To make sure we're using best practices in the school systems.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: My name is Lauren Whitlock. I do a lot of very similar things as Meghan. I'm a speech language pathologist by trade. I have been in the schools about 20 years before I joined TTAC last year.

I'm also part of the state project I'm Determined with Meghan and Nickie as well.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Good morning or afternoon. I'm Brittany Howard. I'm with Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I provide equipment for individuals who have hearing loss or speech difficulties.

I found this position while I was going to school to become a sign language interpreter. I needed an internship. And I kind of fell in love with our equipment program. Because it was providing communication access in a different way. I'm really excited to be here with everybody today.

>> MATT LUTHER: I'm Matt Luther, the transition manager for DARS, Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services. And I just want to extend the thank you for inviting me to be part of this wonderful presentation. Myself and the rest of the transition team are responsible for DARS pre-employment transition services and the continuum of transition services between DARS counselors and all the high school, private schools and alternative schools. And any other placement you can think of in Virginia that has a student with a disability. So thank you for allowing me to be part of this.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, all, for those introductions. As you all go along today and hear what they have to share, you'll have more questions. Matt will introduce that idea of submitting questions today.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: Sure. Everybody had a chance to send questions in ahead of time. If you're like me, you're not going to think of a question ahead of time. You may think of it now while one of our illustrious presenters are bringing something up.

However, to keep decorum, we're not going to take questions directly from the audience. We're not going to pass around the microphone or put anybody on the spot. However, if you're sitting at a circular table, in the middle of it is a QR with a link. If you scan that, you can submit a question for the panel.

We can't guarantee we'll get to them all. I will see those pop up here. Those of you on Zoom, of course, you have the chat. Rhonda mentioned earlier if you drop the questions in the chat, we'll do the same thing for you to get those curated for our panelists.

If you're not able to type that, we can work something out for you. Whether answering your question later or directing you to talk to one of our panelists after the meeting is over.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Matt. Can you hear me okay again? They said I needed to speak louder. We're going to start with Kaili and Stephanie. We have a list of questions. They've seen these questions ahead of time.

They've had time to think about their responses. Matt, if you don't mind going to the next slide there. Although they can't see these questions, you all can follow along with them as they answer them. We'll start with Kaili.

Our first question for you is, tell us about your device and some of the things you're able to do with it. How does it help you in a typical day?

>> KAILI WEBSTER: My device is more than just talking. I can use Google Docs. I like my device. It's like a phone. I can text message on my device. I can look for things on Safari or Google Chrome.

I can shop at Amazon. But I don't have mom's password.

[Laughter]

I can watch YouTube and Netflix. I can also do my school work on it. I can read books on it. I like to play games on it, too. My device can do a lot of things. These are just a few of my favorites.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Thank you for that. I learn so much when I'm talking with someone who uses an eye gaze system. And to see the effort and the skill that she has. To be able to seamlessly progress through her responses is quite amazing.

If you've never had a chance to try it before, I encourage you to try using an eye gaze device. You'll learn a lot about yourself. The next question is for both of you all to answer there. Stephanie and Kaili, can you show us a little bit how the device works?

You can see we've set up a camera over here that's focused on her device. You can see it up on the screen.

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: So, we feel like seeing is so much easier than explaining. We wanted you to be able to see what we were looking at. Kaili uses her eyes. There's a panel right down here that reads her eyes and where they're looking.

If you want to go into snap and core first. This is how she does all her communication. Go to core first. This is her home page. It has all the basic parts of speech she would need to use.

For general communication, she can do a lot here. If the words aren't on the core page, there's a whole lot of category pages. There's thousands, and thousands of categories. You can program more categories in. So all the words she wants to use, she can put into all these different categories.

She also has a keyboard. So if she can't find a word or wants to use a new word, she can spell it on the keyboard. One thing Kaili really likes -- you're going to tell that story? It has predictive text, like your phone. If she can't quite spell a word, she can get it started. It will find the word for her.

When she was taking her spelling test, she was using the predictive text. So we made that other screen she was showing -- do you want to go back? The alphabet screen. That does not have predictive text. That's what she uses when she does her spelling tests.

I don't know if you could see the screen when she was talking. But she has this. She doesn't necessarily have time for all the buttons. She can program the buttons ahead of time. So she can say what she wants to say pretty quickly.

Something you want to say?

You want to show them the other screen? Let's finish this. Then you can show them the other screen, too. She programmed all her own buttons. I want you all to know that. I think sometimes people think we put all the stuff in there. And then she goes by button and says it all.

Kaili picks her own buttons. All these colors she picked for her talk today. She's able to design and program everything herself. The only thing I helped her with for this, I gave her some suggestions. A lot of which she rejected. Didn't you?

[Laughter]

>> SHARON JONES: Mom.

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: She's very self-willed. If there's anything we couldn't quite understand, I helped her make it more understandable. I didn't correct grammar or anything. That's all her. Did you want to show them the other thing?

Outside of this, this is an iPad. She's able to text message. She's able to do anything that you can do on your iPad. She can do with her eye gaze. Which has just been such an incredible world that has been opened to her.

She text messages her friends. She watches Netflix. She plays games. She can do all those things with her eye gaze. It's been an incredible world that's been opened up for her.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Thank you for helping us understand it. And thank you for showing a little bit, Kaili, of your device. And how you set up your words and vocabulary on it. Thank you so much.

Kaili, can we also ask you, what other assistive technology do you use throughout the day? That helps you at school, at home, in your community.

>> KAILI WEBSTER: I have a power wheelchair. Because I can do it by myself. I can even stand with it. I use a tablet for talking when I couldn't take this one. But I have to use my fingers.

I like to talk. But some people don't understand my device sometimes. I have switches by my bed to turn on different lights in my room. I think I have more. But that's a lot of them.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you for sharing that. Okay. You also have the next question. Okay? Can you tell us about getting your first communication device? And what it was like to learn how to use it. And who helped support you with it?

>> KAILI WEBSTER: Miss Lorna helped me get my first AT device. Before I pointed my fingers and answered yes or no questions. My device is faster. And I can talk more.

First it was hard. And I got frustrated with it. Later it was easier. But (indiscernible) was hard. It was a lot of buttons. After six months, I got it down.

>> SHARON JONES: Six months is not long. You're a fast learner. Ready for the next one? This one goes to your mom.

Stephanie, what was it like for you as a parent when Kaili started using her communication device? And what advice do you have for families as they begin their AT journey?

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: This has opened a whole world for Kaili. It was

incredible. When I first adopted Kaili, she didn't have the ability to communicate outside of pointing. She was very good at pointing to things. We would ask a lot of yes or no questions. Do you want this or that?

She was amazing at that. It was like we lived in the world of 20 questions. We still kind of do. Don't we? But if there wasn't something in the immediate environment that she could point to or that I could suggest, she had no way of generating that.

So, there was a whole piece of Kaili that I couldn't know or see. And she couldn't express. So, as soon as she got this, she could talk about things that were ethereal that weren't here concretely. She could share emotions. She could tell me about her experience before I knew her.

There was so much she was able to express at that point. It's just been incredible to know Kaili more through this device. And through assistive tech. It's been a journey. We've been blessed by incredible people all the way through.

Lorna is the one that helped. She's over here today. Still loving and supporting Kaili. We had a great assistive tech team that came along in second grade. As soon as we got her fixed up. Not everyone has that experience. Which is really hard.

I want to encourage parents, push for assistive tech. Find out who your assistive tech team is. Say we need this. We want this. We can help you to advocate to get assistive tech if you're needing it. It just opened things up so much.

When we first started, Kaili was figuring it all out. I think we have this idea like, they're going to get the device and all of a sudden say all these amazing things they've always wanted to say. It doesn't happen that quickly. It takes time. And even just the understanding of the device.

We actually have one over here you can play with later. But just like figuring out how to read without -- like when you're looking at each thing, it's selecting it. You're just trying to read the words. And it's saying all of those words. You're like, oh, no!

It takes time to figure everything out. It takes a lot of motor planning. When Kaili first got her device, she would go button, by button, by button strategically. If you didn't know, you would think she was playing with it. She would go into food. We would be sitting there. Apple, orange, pear, banana.

But what she was doing was learning every category, where everything was. How it was all laid out. So then she can go in quickly and find what she's looking for. If you have a child and they're going through all the buttons, don't stop or discourage them. Don't play with your device!

They need to do that. They need to push and explore every single button out there. They're figuring it out. The other thing I learned is you think it would be really helpful to go in and put new buttons in for them. But for Kaili, if you think about when you're typing on a keyboard. You learn where all the keys are. You can type. Then you don't have to look anymore.

This is like an enormous keyboard with thousands of keys. She has learned where they all are. If I put a key in the middle, then all the other ones shift and moved around. And then it's like I moved your entire keyboard around. So

whenever we program Kaili's device, she does it with us. So she knows where things are.

Kaili often wants things in a totally different place than I would put them anyway. But they need to be in the place where they know where things are. And that makes sense to them. The other thing we did with the assistive tech team and our teachers all together, we had a system. So we all understood it.

So if they were putting things in, we knew where they were. If I was putting things in, they knew where they were. We color coded. It's important to be working together with all the people that will be using the device with whoever you're working with. That everybody is kind of on the same page.

And Kaili then turned all of her buttons pink when she had a chance. Didn't you?

>> SHARON JONES: That's great. Thank you so much. And thank you for your willingness to share your journey with us, too. We have one last question. And Kaili is a member of the I'm Determined project. A very important person there. I know you'll talk about the I'm Determined Project. Help us understand more about it.

This last question says, do you have any stories you could share about how AT has influenced your ability to be more independent and to advocate for yourself?

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: Kaili wanted me to tell the story for her. But she picked a story and I picked a story. She will definitely help me if I say anything wrong. She's very good at correcting me if I get details wrong. If I get anything wrong, you tell me. Okay?

But this one she wanted to share, she loves the new -- they're not new. The Billy shoes where they zip around your AFO. They're so much easier. Target started to carry them. She was really excited. Because then we could get lots. They have them at Target.

When summer came, they had these really cool sandals that have straps that go across the back. But they only had them for toddlers. When you got into larger size, they didn't have the straps across the back anymore, the sandals. Kaili really wanted those sandals. But she couldn't use them because they didn't have the strap across the back.

She decided to write Target and tell them they needed to have straps for older kids, too. They got her letter. They replied to her. They sent her a gift certificate to Billy shoes. So she could get herself a pair of sandals. And they also said they would take that into consideration.

She did a great job of advocating for herself. She wrote her email on her device. And then the story I wanted to share quickly, Kaili goes to the doctor a lot. She sees a lot of different doctors for a lot of different things.

For a long time, we couldn't bring her device with her. So it would just be her. And I would be saying most of the things to the doctor. And the doctor -- sometimes they would ask Kaili questions. Most of the time, they would ask me questions.

And, again, she could only say yes or no. She could bring her tablet. But it was a lot harder to use. Yeah. She got this. Which is cool. She can take it with her now.

We went into the doctor's office. She had her device. She started talking to the doctor herself. She was asking questions. The doctor stopped and said Kaili, I really underestimated you.

It was so neat to see other people finally get to see who I know Kaili is.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Thank you for sharing those stories. We'll have one more question for you at the very end. But Nickie is next.

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: Great. I have to follow this. My gosh!

[Laughter]

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: Just kidding.

>> SHARON JONES: If we can go to that slide there, so folks can see. And I'll call these questions to you. What is the Center for Family Involvement?

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: I'll try to be brief. We are a grant-funded organization. We are free support service to families across the State of Virginia that have loved ones with disabilities. We are comprised of 18 staff. And we're all parents to children and adults with disabilities.

We run that full age range. And lots of different disabilities are represented within our team. We also have parent volunteers around the state that we call family navigators that go through intensive training with us as well. They also can provide family-to-family mentoring. The whole meat and potatoes of what we do at the Center for Family Involvement is mentoring for other parents.

We live in those same regions you all do. We're accessing those same services. A lot of our children are on DD waiver. They're getting support from DARS and everything in between. We live it and breathe it. We also have live connections also with the state organizations that many of you work with.

We have resources to help families get connected in their family. Sometimes it's emotional support that we provide. Especially if you remember when you got that first diagnosis for your child. Sometimes those first few days are a little scary, right? When you first get the diagnosis.

And being able to talk to another parent that has that same lived experience. Perhaps with that same disability. Can really help. That, in a nutshell, is what we do.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. So what CFI services might benefit our group today related to assistive technology?

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: When a parent comes to us looking for help, we get information and sort of an intake. Then we match them with somebody. Either one of our staff or our parent volunteers that has a similar experience. So we match based on what we call perceived sameness, right?

Sometimes that might be a disability. We need to match with a parent that has that same lived experience with Autism or Down Syndrome. Sometimes it's related to the district or region they live in. They need to connect with another parent in that same school district.

In this instance, if we had a family looking at assistive technology and they don't know where to start -- maybe they think their child isn't quite appropriate or eligible for AT. We can connect them with another family member that has that same lived experience. Has already gone through it before.

We really believe in paying it forward. At the Center for Family Involvement, we've been doing this for a while. We've learned a little bit. And we want to help others. The best way to use us is reach out. We can try to connect you with somebody.

The other benefit we have at CFI, even though we're spread throughout the State of Virginia, we have networks around the United States. We have some other sister organizations in almost every other state in the U.S. So, sometimes we have families come to us. And they have a really unique genetic disorder or unique need.

We may not have a match in Virginia of somebody that has that same lived experiences. But we can reach out to our friends in the other states. We might be able to contact you with somebody in Alaska, if they have the same lived experience. We have the resources to help families. When they're trying to figure out how to navigate and where to go.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. We have a question.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: I think Nickie answered the question. If there was a program that helped parents.

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: We have connections with the Department of Education, with Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services, DARS, we have those materials. We have guides, too, that can help get them started. Our job, we see ourselves as a warm hand-off. We don't provide the direct service of assistive tech. But we can provide a nice warm hand-off to those who can. And get them where they need to.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Nickie. And CFI is spread everywhere. Everywhere we go, we see our colleagues from CFI. Which is wonderful.

Nickie, next, what are some effective communication strategies families can use when working with schools in identifying assistive technology and using it?

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: One thing I've learned -- I will say, my children -- every year when we have my children's 504, I get emotional. I know you've been to your children's IEP meetings. Collaboration is the key.

Make sure you're communicating effectively with those teachers and professionals. There's so many wonderful resources on the Department of Education. I encourage you to stop by and talk to them. Great errors are on their website about assistive technology and how to go about it.

I recognize as a parent, sometimes there's so much information out there, you don't even know where to start. Sometimes having another parent that can sit down with you and help you take one thing at a time -- sometimes that's all I can manage. Is one step. We can support a family by saying here is your end goal.

Today, you're going to do this. Let's do this. Touch base again tomorrow. And we can take care of stuff, too. We can coach that parent through that process.

Collaborative communication is the key. Document. It's always best to send something in writing, as an email. Reach out to those connections that you have.

>> SHARON JONES: That's great. And we know that things don't always go smoothly. Sometimes there are disagreements. Do you have anything to share.

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: Again, when you follow protocol, the Department of Education, we work collaboratively with them, too. They have

fantastic resources. They even have what's called the special ed ombudsman. If you have a concern -- let's say there's an agreement with the school. You feel there's a particular assistive tech that they should provide. And they don't agree.

We support families a lot through that process. They call us, upset and frustrated. Of course, when you're angry, it's hard to think rationally. We can sort of validate their feelings. Acknowledge where they are.

And when things kind of calm down, say, here are your steps. This is the first thing I would do. Here is some contact information. But follow those protocols. Instead of jumping straight to the top.

I get it. You're frustrated. Sometimes those things happen. Collaborative communication is the key. We can certainly help families with that.

>> SHARON JONES: It takes a team.

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: It does. And don't be scared to ask somebody to come to a meeting with you. They're really intimidating. I have a wonderful husband who is very supportive. He comes to all those 504 meetings with me.

But I've been to a couple by myself. It is intimidating. I encourage you to bring somebody. Whether a connection with a local TTAC or another person that has this lived experience. You have a right to bring somebody with you. Just to have them sit with you in a meeting.

Sometimes it can mean the world to you. There have been times I've gone into a meeting prepared to ask questions. And then I forget. My husband will nudge me and say, remember the question you wanted to ask? Having the other person there is key.

>> SHARON JONES: One more question. How can families integrate AT into family life?

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: Consistency is the key. My child -- my son utilized more low-tech -- not high-tech stuff you would see today. When he was little, we did pencil grabbers. His fine motor skills were really poor.

We used those a lot at home. And with art. And continued to use it through high school. He had a lot of fidget toys. He couldn't sit still. He always had these bands across his desk.

We had low-tech things when he was younger. One wonderful thing you'll learn is that your children, as they grow older and evolve, they may not need some of the assistive tech anymore. Or it may evolve. And they'll figure out what's helpful to them.

To this day, my son uses voice dictation as reminders. He has poor executive functioning. If he didn't have that phone or Alexa, Echo in his room, he would forget a lot of things. For him, that's how he manages himself.

You have to roll with it as your child gets older. I'm sure you've noticed that, too, with your daughter. As she gets older, every year, there's something new. Matt will probably address it when he starts talking about Department of Rehab Services. When they leave school and they're adults and working.

Just talking to other parents who have been through that. And make sure you have your team around you.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. Transitions happen throughout our lives. Thank you. Meghan, would you like -- there's a slide after this that Nickie put in here. It has a nice little visual of the CFI.

>> NICKIE BRANDENBURGER: There's a QR code that takes you to our website. We have a helpline phone number and email address. Those help lines are monitored 24 hours a day. We will get back to you as soon as we can.

Visit us today. My colleague, Renee, is wearing green as well. We did not color coordinate. It looks like we did. We'll say we did. We even have a green table cloth. Stop by to get some information.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. We'll pull this slide up at the very end. Or go to the CFI table to ask more questions. Meghan is next.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah.

>> SHARON JONES: We have a list of questions for you. The first one is what is TTAC?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Everybody here is TTAC. They're like, what does that even mean? I kind of mentioned it earlier. TTAC stands for the Training and Technical Assistance Center.

Like Sharon said earlier, they're all over the state. At a lot of major universities. JMU, Virginia Technical, ADU, William & Mary, VCU. I think I got all of them. There's so many.

We do work together in some of our networks across the state. The AT Network, I'm Determined. We go out into schools. Primarily, we help teachers. Make sure they're using best practices.

By supporting teachers, we're also supporting families and students. Because we know that, you know, the teachers are directly impacting families.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. You answered the second question as well.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Oh, good. I did a good job. Gold star!

>> SHARON JONES: What recommendations do you have about how students can get the AT that they need?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah. So the best thing about AT is that it's literally everywhere. We just don't realize it's AT. AT is just anything that a person with a disability needs. To be able to do something better or more independently.

I think what we forget a lot -- we love high-tech devices like eye gaze. We're talking a lot about those right now. It's grown so much in the last several years. Even from the time I first started teaching till now. I didn't have eye gaze for some of my students.

Because it wasn't as prevalent. And it's changing so rapidly. There's a lot of low-tech stuff out there. One of my favorite examples is we had a parent of an I'm Determined youth leader, who had a cup. And I was like, I need to take a picture of that. It was such a great idea.

She put a binder on the cup and a straw through the binder. Because it needed to stay where it was supposed to. That's AT. Even a straw can be AT if someone requires a straw to drink out of their cup. Anything you need can be AT.

In terms of the high tech, you know, it's really important to work with the

school-based related service providers or speech pathologists. Your OT, PT, and your teachers. They might know something you don't. They might be able to provide some information that you may not have. Or connect you with people that can get you that information.

We have people who are not in school anymore. We work primarily with schools. There's a lot of agencies around the room today that you can reach out to. I know Matt is going to talk about DARS. Like that's a really good place to reach out to. Your community service board if you have one. Those are places you can go if you're out of school.

>> SHARON JONES: I love that you shared different types of AT. From very low-tech things like the binder clip to help with the straw. And pencil grips. Low-tech things. Piece of tape to hold a note on a table is a low-tech assistive technology.

You have so much technology embedded in your cell phones. How many of you use that voice dictation? Sometimes it comes out okay. And sometimes not so great for your text messaging. Yes, your cell phone with lots of things on it.

Organizational supports. GPS systems for those that are needing.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Directionally challenged is a nice way to say that.

>> SHARON JONES: We know AT is not just devices. It's services, too. It's that whole assessment piece. How do I get that device? How do I know what's going to help me? It's programming devices.

It's customizing devices to meet your specific needs. And it's also training. That's a piece the federal government told us is not as addressed as much. We should be training our students, our family, all of our staff and others to use that assistive technology and how it works.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: That is part of the IEP. The training piece is in the IEP. I think it gets skipped a lot. Way to go, Sharon. She knows more than I ever will about assistive technology.

>> SHARON JONES: No, no. This is a question that came in from you all. What kinds of assistive technology are available that does not require internet services? We learned during virtual instruction, during the pandemic, how critical it is to have internet services for communication and access.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah. We kind of already talked about a lot. Any low-tech or mid-tech things, most -- all of them don't need internet at all. A talking calculator. That's not going to need internet. Or ruler. Or erasable highlighters.

Those are all examples of low-tech or mid-tech assistive technology that don't need the internet. Even in the high-tech side of things, you're going to need internet for certain aspects of it. But you're not always going to need it. If you have it downloaded on your iPad or eye gaze device, it's there.

Kaili can use her eye gaze device when she's out and about. Because she's already downloaded it when she had internet. So, yeah. There's lots of things.

>> SHARON JONES: Great. Thank you for answering that. That's great. What are some of the greatest challenges you see students and families have with assistive technology?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah. Nickie touched on it already. I was like, oh,

good. We're going to piggyback off each other. The consistency is so hard.

I saw with my own students while I was still in the classroom, it's really easy as families to not require those things at home. Because you know your children so well. And you don't -- they don't need that communication device. Because I can understand them.

A lot of time, that was my experience with parents at home. But that consistency of generalizing that skill from school to home. Or from the workplace to home. Is really, really important.

So as consistent as you can be with using it in all places. The other part of it is as families, you get the opportunity to go places that teachers and students can't go from school. So, I mean, we got to go on community-based instruction. That's only one time a month, you know, we're going out into the community.

You're going to restaurants. You're going to the grocery store. You're going to go to Target. Right, Kaili? All of those places. You need to also consistently use the devices and AT that you're using.

Because it's for life. It's not just for this one thing that I'm doing.

>> SHARON JONES: Now, we get to talk about your very favorite subject here, self-determination.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah.

>> SHARON JONES: And Kaili's favorite subject. We have a graduate of the I'm Determined Project in the audience as well.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah. I'm Determined is literally my favorite thing I get to do. We get to work with youth. Which is really nice. I'm Determined is a state-funded project that encourages and teaches youth with disabilities across the state about self-determination.

So self-determination is a big concept. But it's based on three psychological needs. Confidence, autonomy and relatedness. You need to know how to do things. You need to have the freedom to do things. And you need connections with people to help you do those things.

Students or people really need to know what they need. They need to know what they need. They need to know who can help them when they need things. Or are trying to do something.

They need to be able to self-advocate. They need to be able to speak up. Just like Kaili did. That was a great example of writing that letter to Target. And it made a difference.

And just because someone says they need something -- just because a teacher says you need to have Read Aloud doesn't mean you want to actually use that. You get choices. I think we leave that out a lot. Being able to make your own decisions.

A lot of us grew up in a time where it was like spare the rod, spoil the child. You just sit and you listen. But we need to be able to speak up for ourselves. And I think that people often hold more power than they think they do.

There's so much. There's so much more. We did an 8- 1/2 hour presentation about self-determination. We could talk all day about that. You can learn more if you go to ImDetermined.org.

I've even recommended the tools to a friend who lives in Canada. Who is working with her elderly parents. Who need a lot more care than they're used to. There are lots of different things on there that can help you.

>> SHARON JONES: Great. Do you have one or two ideas about how to teach a student how to advocate for their AT needs? One or two? Or 20 or 30?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Oh, gosh.

>> SHARON JONES: So much. You think on that one. We have a question from the audience.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: We do. That dovetailed nicely into what you were talking about. With self-determination and challenges -- it's not one you haven't heard before. I know you're going to have a good answer for it.

How should families deal when the school is reluctant to embrace AT for a student?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Okay. Everything that we do is about relationships. And I know that it can be really challenging. I think, too, it's hard to remember for both sides -- teachers and families. We've had a lot of experiences. It's important to come in with an open mind. And have those conversations.

All the time. Not just in an IEP meeting. You need to keep talking to the people you're working with consistently. Consistency. Yeah. Anything else to add?

I'm looking at my friends over here. I feel like they may have something else to say. I lost my train of thought.

>> SHARON JONES: Anything else want to jump in?

>> I was thinking about the ones before. Having great discussions early on about what their disability may be. And how their disability impacts them. Because when you have ownership of that, you begin to have that autonomy to advocate.

We have a youth leader in the project who needs a space to pace. So, he knows that. He advocates for that for himself. His one-pager, in his IEP, he needs to process. He does that by walking back and forth.

He wouldn't be able to do that if he didn't understand what his disability was. And how it really impacts his life.

>> SHARON JONES: One of the things that we encourage everyone who uses assistive technology to do is to sort of create in your mind a little elevator speech. Something quick and short that helps you describe your AT. And why it helps you. So you can use that when you're talking to other people.

Whether it be in school or in the community. People are going to ask questions. I'm sure people ask you a lot of questions. Like what is that? How are you using that? Right, Kaili? So that's great.

Thank you very much.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: I was going to say, too, Sharon, on the AT Network page, we have a page about advocating for yourself using AT. That's a great resource. It's on the ATnetwork.TTAConline.org.

>> SHARON JONES: Want to say that one more time nice and loud?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: We can also tell you at that table.

ATnetwork.TTAConline.org. Yes. There's a thing that says "How do I?" You go

into that section. There's lots of different topics we listed there. How do I do this? How do I do that?

That's a nice bite-sized way of getting that information as well.

>> SHARON JONES: I will say, too, one of the joys of our job and the best part of the year is going to the I'm Determined Youth and Family Summit in the summer. It happens every June. You come to JMU. There's leaders here. They're called determinators. If you don't know about that, go to I'm determined.org.

Lauren and Meghan, can you share about the movie premiere tonight?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Oh, yeah! We're going to the movie premiere after this. I'm Determined made a movie called "Pulling Threads." Three main characters have disabilities in the movie. It goes through their experiences.

It was submitted to the Richmond International Film Festival and was selected. The premiere is tonight in the Richmond area at the Bowtie. If you live in Richmond. We could have a red carpet moment. I'll wear my tutu.

>> SHARON JONES: If we can't get to that in Richmond, is there another way we can see it later?

>> MEGHAN HYATT: I am unsure. I don't know the answer to that question. I'm sure it will be released.

[Speaker off mic]

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah. They've been submitting it to places.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you for all of that.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yeah.

>> SHARON JONES: We appreciate your energy and excitement about assistive technology there. Lauren, you are next.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Can I talk really fast about transition?

>> SHARON JONES: Yes. I thought you were on a --

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Sorry. I thought about this really hard. So in terms of transition -- Lauren already touched on it. Transition doesn't start in high school. It starts in preschool. There's no time too early to start having your child or you, as a person with a disability, to start attending your IEP meeting.

It's just how you're part of the IEP meeting that might change. And slowly releasing more of the responsibility, as your child gets older. I wanted to say that. I think it's an important thing to remember. And it really directly links to that self-determination piece.

>> SHARON JONES: It doesn't end when you graduate from school. Right, Mr. Luther? You'll be talking about that, too.

[Speaker off mic]

>> SHARON JONES: We do! We do! We can hardly wait. Right?

[Speaker off mic]

>> SHARON JONES: Exactly. Lauren?

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: I wanted to add one more thing to what Meghan said. With the transition piece of it, schools really have to start looking at that at 14. You may hear your case manager say, do you have connections with DARS? Have you reached out to community services?

Do that early. Because exit happens really fast. And sometimes it takes

years to get all the processes completed. So start the transition process as early as possible. When you are looking toward that exit out of schools.

>> SHARON JONES: Awesome. We have more experts on the panel about AAC. Lauren, could you address some of these questions? When should families begin to look at the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: I'm going to say as early as possible. AAC is really simply just a visual support system. And as soon as kids are learning language -- which is from the time that they are born. If we are speaking with them and they're just not showing they're able to communicate, we can do AAC as early as 12 months.

We want not only their expressive language supported but their receptive language. You learn those simultaneously. We wanted to make sure kids are given access to opportunities to communicate right away. We even see high technologies being used as early as 12 months.

We used to think you had to prove your way up to systems like Kaili's. But you don't. We want to give kids the best access possible the earliest way possible. Part of that is because we know AAC doesn't hinder speech development.

If you have a kid and you're hoping for that verbal speech, we still want to support their language development with their visual supports. And we also want to make sure that if your child or person is speaking and are a little hard to understand, we want to make sure they have that access to additional ways of communicating. We all use multiple ways of communicating every day.

We want to make sure our students have that access as well. I also want to say it's never too late to start AAC either. So if you have a system, you need a system, consider looking into it now. Even if you've never used it before.

>> SHARON JONES: You never know what's going to happen in your life that's going to draw the need for an Augmentative and Alternative Communication system. I think we got a request the other day from someone who was 68. Is that right?

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: I think they were 86.

>> SHARON JONES: Got it wrong. 86 years old, looking for an Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Time has driven all these technology advances. So AAC has changed so much over the years. And it's complicated to choose which system is quite right. What's the process for identifying the right AAC?

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: That's kind of individual for the student or person we're looking at. A lot of -- particularly some of our high-tech options, they're all very similar. Some of them have slightly different features. But the best and the right AAC is the one we're going to use.

Whether it's communication pictures. Whether it's eye gaze. Whether it is anything in between, we want to find something that the person has easy access to. We want to make sure that they can press switches if they need to.

If they can use their eyes. If they have that index pointing piece. We want to make sure they have the proper access to it. But more importantly, that they find something that they can use. And that other people will use with them.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: And the situation. Absolutely. You're not going to use an eye gaze device in the pool. So you're going to have to figure out another option in those sorts of situation.

>> SHARON JONES: That's why we call it a system.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: The right system is absolutely right. AAC is never just one thing. It needs to be all things. Whether it's written. Whether it's pictures, a visual on the board. Whether it's your eye gaze.

Everybody needs something for every situation throughout their day.

>> SHARON JONES: Lauren, we have another question from the audience here.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: Question from the audience, Lauren.

>> SHARON JONES: Like a game show.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: You can't say AAC without talking about funding. We're talking Medicaid funding, private insurance. Can you address that a little bit? What that process would look like. How families can get that started.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: I will say, I am not quite the expert on the funding piece. As my experience has been through the schools. Each school division is very different. There are private therapy offices that families and adults can go to that will help with that process.

Also, if you look at some of the various AAC companies, like Able Net, they have started using some funding -- losing my water. They've started some opportunities for families to reach out directly to them. You still do need a speech pathologist to do an evaluation. In order for Medicaid and insurance to purchase those devices.

That is really the extent of my knowledge there.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Lauren.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Because I dealt with this personally with my father, not necessarily in terms of funding. Especially if you're looking on the medical side of speech pathology, they're not as familiar with AAC. You have to keep asking. My father had a trial device he got from a company.

He worked with his private speech pathologist. They reached out to the company to do a trial. The trial device was sent to his home. And he was able to try it out. When you're trialing it, you can prove to Medicaid or your insurance about getting one permanently.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. Thank you, both of you, for answering that one.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: We're a team.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: Always together.

>> SHARON JONES: Team work. That's right. How frequently should a team re-evaluate whether a new AAC system is needed? I'll share an experience for me. When I taught preschool, often we would identify a system for a student. And when I came back to see them in middle school, they had the same communication system in place. And their needs were quite different. I think that drives this question.

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: Absolutely. You need to re-evaluate when it's not working for the student or their needs have changed. I will caution not to re-evaluate too quickly. A lot of what happens -- and a lot of reasons why AAC is abandoned is there isn't enough time or training for the people using the AAC with the person.

So, I'm going to use Meghan as my example. If Meghan has an AAC system. I'm her teacher or family member, I need to be using Meghan's AAC system to teach her the language system she's using. It's like a foreign language. If I want Meghan to learn French, I need to speak French to Meghan.

If I want to speak TB Snap with Meghan, I want to use TB Snap myself to teach her how to do it. The AAC learning process follows the developmental process of language development. We're talking to our babies from the moment they're born. We never expect them to respond until about 12 months.

So, it can take up to a year or more, or six months when you're super advanced.

[Laughter]

But a lot of families give it a month or two. Oh, they're not using it. We're going to switch. Or the schools say they don't Tuesday. We need to switch. My question is, has it been modeled for a period of time?

Is everybody, everywhere using it to talk to them? If after all of those things are done and the system doesn't seem to work, then we look at trying something different. It may be that the buttons need to be slightly bigger, or smaller. Or they just don't have what they need programmed on the device.

Having that personal fringe piece of it is really helpful. Fringe is like all our great words and nouns that we use all over the place. So I'm a chocolate lover. So if I have chocolate every day, chocolate is going to be really quickly accessible for me, to be able to access on my AAC.

A lot of times AAC is rejected. Because they don't have what they want to communicate on there. There's a lot of things to look at before you try to change a system.

>> SHARON JONES: That's great. We appreciate all this time and attention to Augmentative and Alternative Communication from a TTAC perspective. Often the calls that we receive, after someone has graduated, relate to my device is not working. It's broken.

Who can help me with this? I don't have anything I need to communicate. We think that's an important topic. One last question for you. We'll blend these last two in here, Meghan -- I mean Lauren. How can families support the use of AAC in school, and in home and communities?

>> LAUREN WHITLOCK: Absolutely. The best thing, again -- I kind of touched on it before. Everybody using it all the time, everywhere. I know sometimes families, if they have a privately funded device through insurance, they're sometimes hesitant to take them into the schools. Because they don't want them broken. That's a very valid point. But our kids need to communicate everywhere they go. So we need to make sure we have other things in place if they're not having their primary voice with them.

But, like Meghan said, take them into the community. Reach and access

those places that they don't normally go to within the school experience. Using it in your home. If the bathroom is not the place you want to take your high-tech AAC, have a low-tech board on the wall. Anywhere.

Supporting the use in school. Please advocate for your students to have their device out of their backpack, on their desks, within arm's reach. And also, I think one of the things that I would like to ask parents is, if you do and have an outside private therapist -- we know speech and AAC needs lots of time and training.

Make sure your outside therapists are communicating with your school therapists and vice versa. A lot of times, things are happening in the school that maybe aren't translated to the private office. Or things are happening in the private office that aren't translating into the schools. It's almost like at times they're literally using different communication systems. And that's a lot of extra work for somebody to have to learn.

If you can bridge the gap of communication to the families, I think that would be the best thing. One thing I did not say with the whole right AAC, make sure that the system is robust. It needs to have hundreds of thousands of words. Even if they are 12 months old. We need to have all the access to vocabulary.

That builds autonomy. They can't communicate what they want to have if they only have four or five buttons to access.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Lauren. Appreciate that. Any other questions from the audience? Are we good? We have two people left on our panel. Brittany, if you want, we have some questions for you here. Can we move to the next slide, Matt?

Can you explain and help us understand the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Yes. We help individuals who have hearing loss or speech difficulties. We offer different programs like our interpreter services program. Which coordinates interpreter services for state government agencies.

Our community services program, which provides information and referrals to connect individuals to various resources they may need. They also provide evidence and training to individuals who may need to effectively communicate with someone with hearing loss. The Virginia Relay, which provides the telecommunications access for persons with hearing loss or speech difficulties.

If you've ever seen captions on a telephone. Or had a call with an interpreter on the line, that's an example of Virginia Relay. And our technology assistance program, which provides assistive technology equipment for individuals.

>> SHARON JONES: You have a wonderful table over here. With lots of different things to explore. I learn something new every time I visit your table. Before we move on, I want to do a plug for our Assistive technology Conference in November. It's November 18, 19th and 20th. We sponsor it as assistive technology.

We'll be right down the street from JMU. Lots of great sessions there. If you want information, just ask us at the table. We'll share that with you. Brittany, Matt, and I think others, will be there. Yes.

I think you talked a little bit about the services that were provided to students,

youth, adults who are deaf and hard of hearing?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Yes. One thing I want to build on, we did just recently launch a deaf mentor program. Any families who have a child age birth to 8, if they're feeling lost. They're not sure what to do with language access. They can be assigned a deaf mentor to help them connect with resources and provide guidance on that.

And sometimes you'll see the students will have their AT taken care of at school. And they have communication access at school. But sometimes they go home and they don't have anything in place. So TAP is a great resources for at-home accommodations.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Do you also provide services to the elderly population as hearing changes across the years?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Absolutely. TAP has no age restrictions -- the agency in general has no age restrictions. For TAP, if we're working with a minor who is wanting equipment -- ooh, sorry. We ask that their parent or legal guardian signs the application on their behalf. And they're present during the process.

>> SHARON JONES: Helpful to know. Very helpful. Can you describe some of the common AT tools that you use?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Yeah, absolutely. Within our program we have amplify phones, caption phones, cell phone amplifiers, personal amplification devices. It's kind of like a headphone that will amplify sounds for an individual.

Depending on the applicant's needs, a special alarm clock that will vibrate. It gives that tactile notification. Hey, it's time to get up. And doorbells that may vibrate as well for someone who is low vision or blind. They have that tactile notification again.

Did we go to the next question? I've got notes on other topics. I wanted to make sure.

>> SHARON JONES: Absolutely. This was a question from the audience as well for those that do not use American Sign Language, what are some other recommended communication strategies?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Absolutely. So, it depends on the individual's preference. Some individuals might want CART services. Much like you see up here today, the captioning services. That's an example of CART services.

They may be using a personal amplification device. When you are working with individuals who are using those kinds of technology, it is important to just remember lighting. Make sure everyone can see each other. Make sure you're facing the person. You're talking to them. You don't have your back turned towards them.

You want to stay at a good talking place. You don't want to quickly -- hi, my name is Brittany, anything like that. Sometimes it's helpful, too, to take some very brief pauses in between your sentences. To allow some processing time as well.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Wonderful strategies that we all kind of have to remind ourselves. Thank you for that. You may have answered some of these questions here. About some of the tools needed for young adults, who are transitioning out of school and into adult employment. Anything else to add to that

one? She was very thorough. She typed out all of her answers. That also helps our captioner.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: I wanted to make sure I had time to practice. So I could stay within our timeframe.

>> SHARON JONES: I told them, you have eight minutes.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: I am a planner.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Brittany.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: You're welcome. Again, alarm clocks. To make sure they can wake up for their classes on time. Or independently for work on time. Having telecommunications access at home. So if they're applying for a job, they have ways to follow up with the employer. To get the status of their application.

If we are at work settings, something that's low-tech that could be in place is a mirror outside someone's office. They can see if someone is coming down the hallway to visit them. Or standing at their door to visit them as well. There are specialized doorbells as well that would flash and vibrate as well. In case someone is visiting them at their home, dorm, or their office.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. I feel like you also covered some of those independence-related assistive technology, too. We talked about training a couple of different times. Who provides training on the use of these tools?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: Typically from my experience, in the school settings, the AT team will train the student. Sometimes there's support service providers as well, like the teacher. If there's a malfunction in the middle of class and they need to be able to troubleshoot. For anyone outside of school settings, if anyone receives equipment from our technology program, our specialists do provide that training to our consumers.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. And then we can also go to the table and ask them other questions about that. I think you've got a lot that you can share over there. Some of you are not as close to that as I am, the aging. We also think about those things, some of the tools they might need.

Can you describe one or two challenges you've seen with those who are deaf and hard of hearing?

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: One of the most that I see for the students -- this one comes up often. When summer break comes, having a way to connect to their friends. And be able to communicate with their peers while school is out of session. Sometimes it's helping the families connect to a video phone provider.

They can get a video phone or caption telephone inside their home. So they do have access. And can stay in touch with their peers.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you so much for sharing all of that. And now, last, but not least -- did you promise you were going to sing and dance for us?

>> MATT LUTHER: I don't think anyone wants that. I hope I live up to the hype. I'm trying here. I will try.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you, Matt. We have a list of questions we had sent to Matt. Maybe you could start with how does DARS support individuals with their assistive technology needs?

>> MATT LUTHER: Sure. DARS is all about employment. We try to help

individuals with competitive and integrated employment. We're always looking at what accommodations individuals need to perform the essential job duties that they're applying for, they're hoping to get.

And if someone needed assistive technology, then I would recommend we would do an assistive technology evaluation within our own office. We have folks to do that. Then our MacGuyvers, hopefully I'm not dating myself. Or Inspector Gadget people. They help navigate things so people can perform their job.

In Sentara Hospital, we had a person pushing carts. The carts are pretty high. If you can't tell, I'm a pretty tall guy. I might need a little modification to the cart. They modified the cart. So it would be lower. So the individual could maneuver around the hospital and perform the job more efficiently.

>> SHARON JONES: That's great example there. The next question is, do you have any recommendations for students and families to prepare for the transition out of school?

>> MATT LUTHER: I think you heard it from multiple people. It's get connected. Get connected with DARS or our pre-employment transition services starting at the age of 14. Just a consent and release form. And then we have to have a documentation of disability.

Could be in a public school, private school, home school. It really doesn't matter. That's all we need. There's no eligibility component to receive services. But whether it's DARS or Community Service Boards, or any of these wonderful agencies.

I know everybody keeps saying relationships and collaborative communication and partnerships. But we're all on the same team. Trying to help your son and daughter with what their goals are. That's what we should be looking at, how we can work together to help people.

>> SHARON JONES: What age do you suggest people apply for DARS services?

>> MATT LUTHER: This is always a good question. We are strapped with capacity of counselors throughout the commonwealth. I tell people when they're coming into the ninth grade is a great time. Leaving middle school, coming into ninth grade. We want people to feel like they belong in school, that they're part of the school.

If we can do anything to help them with their freshman year, feeling more comfortable achieving some goal. You talked about advocacy and self-advocacy. Maybe it's just one goal in their freshman year. And what we could do to help them with that. That's what I would recommend.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you.

>> MATT LUTHER: Sure.

>> SHARON JONES: We heard Lauren say oftentimes the school division purchases some of the AT that a student is using throughout their time in school. What happens when they graduate and don't have access to that assistive technology? Any thoughts there about how they can get their AT?

>> MATT LUTHER: Let me back up for a second. When they're in school, if they're allowed to keep their AT over the summer. They want to participate in an

activity. And they need that AT, we would work with them.

If they don't have that AT in the summer and needed it to participate in an activity, we do try to find loaners. Thank you our automation or the Virginia assistive technology system. We have some loaners. I don't know the exact term.

The young man at the hospital that used a wheelchair, his wheelchair broke. I don't know what happened to the tire. Medicaid said it would take a month to get that fixed. I took him over to the hospital and got him a loaner wheelchair for a month.

When they get out of school, the first step we would do is an AT evaluation. To take a look at what their needs are. We always look at third-party payee. If somebody had an ABLE Now account. Or are receiving Social Security and have a plan for achieving self-support.

I was in a meeting yesterday. ABLE Now account, all they had to do was tell the individual how they were going to use those funds. Whether it be for vocational training or help them in life. That may be another way to make it happen.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. Good to here. We have Children's Assistive Technology Services here, right?

>> MATT LUTHER: Yeah. I came in late. As I always come in really organized and efficient. I think I need AT. Thanks.

>> SHARON JONES: Nice to see you back there. If you have questions about accessing assistive technology services -- I mean devices and materials, they are quite amazing. And quite quick to help anyone who asks for that support. I think there's an age limit, too. Go back to the back. And ask some of those questions there.

Okay. Just a couple more questions for you. Something about funding. Do you have anything that you can share with us about how DARS supports funding? I think you talked a little bit about access.

>> MATT LUTHER: Yeah. We always look at third-party payees. People mentioned Medicaid and things like that. But we also look at financial participation. Some of the services are no cost. And if the parents claim the son or daughter on their taxes, we look at the parents' income. If they don't, we look at the students' income.

It's based on needs. What does the individual need? Then we try to see how we can make that happen.

>> SHARON JONES: Do you have specific recommendations for AT that will enhance independent lick?

>> MATT LUTHER: I don't know if there's anyone here from the Department from the Blind and Vision Impaired. Okay, great. I don't want to speak for you. They have mobility specialists. We've shared cases before.

They come into the house. They look at the living situation. Lowering cabinets. Putting larger buttons on a stove top, microwave. Whatever they can do to help that individual be as independent as they can.

If you look at home modification shows, like my wife makes me watch every night. Just because she knows I don't have any of those skills.

>> SHARON JONES: HGTV.

>> MATT LUTHER: Please don't come to me. I'll be no help. Those are the kinds of things. Lowering cabinets. Grabbers. Honestly, the same things as we get older. Right?

>> SHARON JONES: Exactly, yeah. You all described those things.

>> MATT LUTHER: I was trying to look at Brittany while she was talking. I can't hear anymore either.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you so much. So we did have another question from the audience that came in. And it is how can families get access to internet services and an iPad to access telehealth appointments? That's a real reality.

>> MATT LUTHER: You know, sometimes we have counselors in different -- we have counselors throughout the commonwealth. Sometimes they share when there's free or reduced internet. They can get it through some of their local community agencies. We try to share that.

As far as iPads, a lot of the loaners -- the gentleman back there from C.A.T.S would probably be a better expert at giving you advice than I could. We do have loaners that we could loan out to people in our program.

>> SHARON JONES: That's great. That's good to know. Thank you for that.

>> MATT LUTHER: Sure.

>> SHARON JONES: This concludes this part of the panel presentation. We do have two more questions. And one is going to Kaili and Stephanie. And that question is -- Matt, if we could change the slide here. What would you like people, families, teachers and the community to know about AAC and individuals who use communication devices? What would you like for them to know?

>> KAILI WEBSTER: Please be patient with AAC users. It takes time for us to say everything. Please wait and don't finish our sentences for us. Thank you to listening to my AAC panel.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you so much. Thank you, Kaili. All righty.

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: I just wanted to kind of add to that. Wait time is so important, if you're talking to any AAC user. Whether it's eye gaze or any other AAC. It's going to take some time. We're uncomfortable with silence. Don't be uncomfortable. Everybody has something to say. And they want to tell you.

Maybe we won't tell that story right now. Kaili had a good story to tell you about her substitute. Kaili wanted to put on her button, don't give up. Don't give up on AAC users. If you want to communicate with them, they want to communicate with you, too. Give them time. And keep working with them.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you so much. We need to all listen. Thank you. There's a question from the audience.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: Not so much a question but comment for Kaili and Stephanie. Somebody from the chat said their 16-year-old is going to be getting an eye gaze system soon. They're very happy to be hearing about the positive experience that both of you have had.

>> STEPHANIE WEBSTER: Wonderful.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: That was great news to hear.

>> SHARON JONES: Wonderful. That's great. Great, great, great. So we have time for maybe one person to respond to this question. What would you like

people -- families, teachers and the community -- to know about AT and how to support individuals who use it? Anybody have a burning design who answer that question? Meghan Hyatt.

>> MEGHAN HYATT: Yes and I also want to put in a plug for the AT social medias. There's so much information that's constantly, every day, being posted about assistive technology. It will kind of give you some information. And one of the most important things about AT and supporting individuals with AT is giving them the space to use it.

And also supporting what they have to say about it. That's that self-determination piece. And, really, the biggest part of giving our students or those using AT the ability to speak up is giving that space.

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you. Anyone else have anything to add as we close out? Yes. Thank you, Brittany.

>> BRITTANY HOWARD: I just want to add that if someone does have AT, please just don't assume that that means that the person has 100% access to communication.

>> SHARON JONES: Excellent. Good point. All right. Last look at everyone. Make sure I don't miss anything.

>> It's VDOE AT Network.

>> SHARON JONES: Come see us at our table. Let's give a warm round of applause.

[Applause]

>> SHARON JONES: Thank you very much. I'm wondering if someone else wants to speak to close us out here. Okay, good. Again, we are excited that we learned all of this great information today. We have tables for you all to explore. We will be around to answer questions.

Kaili and Stephanie, are you all going to hang out a little bit? If you have questions you want to ask them. She has a lot of stories to share. Thank you, all.

>> I just wanted to introduce our team. Heather Heinz is our program manager. And Rachel, deep in her laptop. She ignores us. She's our program and communications coordinator. Communications and program coordinator. And Lynn Fetter. Lynn found this wonderful space for us. And has been very instrumental in helping us organize. We put in a lot of time. We want to extend a great appreciation to the Assistive Technology Network. Believe it or not, we started this last year around the same time. It was going to be just a very intimate kind of presentation. And now here we are. I think this is much better. Yeah.

And all of the panelists who attend. There's a lot of people. Please circulate. We brought -- if you look over at the IFSP table, we brought bags for everyone. You can grab a bag. You can put all of your stuff in there and take with you.

In the back, we have Clinton and Justin, the Health Integrated Network. Is that correct? Say it again, Rachel.

[Speaker off mic]

They have two mobile units. Two mobile rehabilitation units, rehabilitation engineering units outside of the doors. It's a free service across Virginia. They will come to you to do repair. Yes.

Repair to equipment is free.

[Speaker off mic]

>> Yeah. We have the blinds closed. We need to open the blinds. The two units are out there for you to explore. Justin and Clinton can answer your questions. You can get cards and pamphlets from them.

We also have the demo team. They're from DBHDS. They have a mobile unit for dental services. And our community nursing team will answer your questions about whatever.

So, please. They're standing up. But great information. We'll open the doors. You can go out and explore the units and ask questions.

And, last, we have refreshments and drinks. And we don't want to take them back. So please help yourself.

[Speaker off mic]

>> VirginiaNavigator that has all the information about the event. Give them a hand over there.

>> MATTHEW NEWTON: I don't want to interrupt you, Heather. We did have 55 virtual participants today, too.

>> Wonderful. Thank you, everybody, who has attended virtually. And last, but not least is our council members. If they could all stand up. We would like to give them a round of applause for all they've done to help us.

And one last thing. If you're interested in getting involved with the Individual and Family Support program, come to our table. I think that is the last thing. Enjoy, everybody. Thank you.

[Event concluded 12:37 P.M. CT]

This text, document, or file is based on live transcription. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), captioning, and/or live transcription are provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. This text, document, or file is not to be distributed or used in any way that may violate copyright law.
