



NDRN-CAP & VR Moving Forward Together: Collaborati (USNDRN2306A)

>>> Caption test. Caption test. >>> Caption test. >>> Good afternoon everybody. Welcome to all of the representatives from state agencies, assistance programs and others >>> Good afternoon everybody. Welcome to all of the representatives from state agencies, assistance programs and others to this webinar cap and VR moving forward together, collaborative strategies. We have a very good program with very practical practices that will serve individuals with disabilities for the time to come. And my name is Felipe Lulli, I'm the project officer for the CAP training at RSA. I would like to introduce Jim Doyle who is the state liaison for RSA. Thank you for being here.

>> Very good. Thank you, Felipe and thank you to everybody who invited me. My name is Jim Doyle. I'm a vocational rehabilitation manager at RSA. I have the pleasure of speaking today in place of Suzanne Mitchell. Suzanne was unexpectedly called out of town a few days ago and was unavailable. Very happy to step in. And to speak on her behalf. I would also like to thank the members of NDRN, John Connelly, the colleagues for the administration services also participating. I'd also like to thank members of the panel for both the VR and climate assistance program who are assisting today as part of the panel representing from both Michigan, Rhode Island, and Minnesota. These programs to represent how effective a collaborative relationship between VR and the climate assistance program can serve and benefit the client, individuals with disabilities, to advance through employment through collaboration and partnerships mutually serving individuals with disabilities. I've worked at RSA for over ten years now and prior to that I've worked over ten years in the field with the Maryland VR. And while it doesn't necessarily make me an expert in VR, it basically just means I'm old. I still recall when I first was contacted by the representative who was contacting me about a consumer I was working with that had some concerns and I was totally caught off guard. I remember very clearly and I took great pride in working with every individual and it was probably a little bit hurtful because I felt that, I thought I was doing my best. And I probably was a little bit defensive. We ended up meeting all three of us, the individual, the representative and myself, it really turned out well. It actually did. And early on what I found out is that we all ended up on the same page. That my understanding of what the individual wanted was just not being expressed in the way that I was used to having people express themselves. So I walked away from that being able to understand a little bit more about the need for different forms of communication by different individuals and I believe I benefitted by learning how to listen a little differently to each individual. But what was I think more helpful in addition to being able to effectively communicate, I also learned that the client assistance program could be a very effective partner in the VR process. After that day, I often would suggest to the individual that we bring the client assistance program into the process, to be able to work with us to try to work out our differences and why we sometimes were not on the same page. And that became an effective part of the process and began to really serve in making sure that there was trust and understanding between me as the VR representative and the individual who was trying to make sure that their rights were being maintained and retained. So a couple of things I had learned from that very early on moment working in VR and has only been reinforced through my work as a program manager through my work at RSA still to this day; the first thing and most important thing is that both CAP and VR are working on the same role, they're all working towards serving individuals with disabilities. And I think sometimes we lose perspective of that. Like I said my initial feelings and thoughts were a little bit hurt. And after I got over that first time, I learned that they were doing the same thing I was doing. CAP was trying to serve that individual to the best of their ability. We all wanted the best for that individual. I also learned that disagreements were a natural part of the VR process. That individuals with disabilities that we serve sometimes it's helpful to have an outside perspective meet with us to share things that we might not even be

hearing from the other person share a different perspective. I also believe that for every successful VR agency, you will generally find a very well organized and run client-assistance program in addition to SRC or a board if it's an independent commission. The checks and balances that the CAP program brings to VR is necessary in its function of the program. It's clear that adversarial relationships between CAP and VR tend to hinder the relationship, the efforts, and it most likely will cost, hinder the individual who is being served. Working in collaboration such as VR and CAP, CAP can serve best by being introduced during orientations early on in the VR process. They should develop that relationship early on. Part of the policy discussions in addition to the SRC as well. Finally regardless of the role, it's important that everyone always be respectful and courteous regardless of differing opinions and different perspectives. It will only serve to accomplish what everybody is working to agree upon which is to serve the individual if they take a respectful role and try to at least -- I want to very much thank everybody for allowing me to be part of this and allowing me to speak on behalf of RSA in place of Suzanne Mitchell. But at this time I wanted to introduce John Connelly and Sheryl Bates-Harris. I think John, are you speaking first?

>> I can. I want to thank you, Jim. I want to thank RSA for sponsoring this effort in this webinar today, and also partnering at NDRN who've worked diligently with RSA and CSAVR to put this on. So thank you. Jim, I would go back to your remarks, I think VR and the client assistance project have a common goal, and that is to assist individuals who apply for VR services to access those services, to achieve competitive, integrative employment. Today we hope to share with you through the stories in three different states how they're working, how their VR agencies and their CAP are working to make that possible to ensure that individuals do have that access and can be successful achieving competitive, integrative employment. Whether it's retention, attainment, or advancing in that. As you listen to the presentations today, we would ask you to be thinking what additional things RSA, NDRN, and CSAVR can do whether it be webinars, materials, whatever would help you in advancing the relationship again to serve that common customer. So also at the end of the webinar, we will have a Q&A session and if you would please put your questions in the chat box and that will be monitored and we will get to those questions during Q&A and if we don't get to all of them, we'll follow up with you through your registration.

>> Thank you, John. My name is Cheryl Bates-Harris and I'll be serving as a moderator along with John. Before we ask the panelists to introduce themselves I'll ask my NDRN colleagues to introduce themselves. And we'll go in alphabetical order which should be easy. Amy.

>> Hi I'm Amy Scherer, I'm with NDRN, staff attorney there. Primarily working on the VR and CAP issues. So I'm very happy to be part of this presentation and I'm glad we're able to offer it to the participants.

>> Ron, you're on mute.

>> I know. I caught it. Trying to be polite. My name is Ron Hager, I'm head of the employment education teams. And I'm very happy to have all of you here today. I'm looking forward to a wonderful webinar. I'm going to be going off camera, lurking in the background monitoring the chat. Thank you everyone.

>> Now I would like to ask our panelists both from the VR agency and CAP to introduce themselves starting with the state of Michigan please.

>> This is Bill Robinson, I'm the director of the bureau of services for blind persons in Michigan.

>> Lisa, you're on mute.

>> I love it when I talk to myself. I do it so much. I'm Lisa Kisiel and I'm the field services division, I was a counselor for about 15 years.

>> Hello I am Elham Jahshan, I am the director of CAP, Client Assistance Program in Michigan.

Thank you.

>> Good afternoon, I'm Chelsea Chamberlin I'm a CAP advocate in Michigan.

>> I'm Sigrid Adams, I'm director over policy at Michigan General.

>> Okay. How about Minnesota next?

>> Hello, Dee Torgerson. I'm the director with Minnesota VR General. I know Ann is having trouble with her video but I see her now so I'll hand it over to Ann.

>> Good afternoon everyone. It's super to see everybody and such a beautiful day here in Minneapolis before it gets hot again. Just happy to be here and great to see my colleagues, Dee and Natasha. We work together every week in fact even today. It's great to have that collaborative relationship that we've built over the years.

>> I'm Natasha Jerde, I am the director of the blind VR agency in Minnesota. And again I echo what Anne said it's super to see you all and be here in front of you today.

>> All right. And last but not least we have Rhode Island.

>> And we're little but we're not last all the time. I'm Joe Murphy, I'm the administrator at the office of rehab services. I've been working for ORS for 20 years.

>> I'm Cathy Sansonetti, I work at Rhode Island's CAP program. And I've been here just about as long as you, Joe, 20 years.

>> I got you beat. I've got 25. Has everyone introduced themselves on the panel? I want to make sure I didn't miss anyone. Okay, well we're going to move on to the discussion point. And we kind of arranged this into background questions. So the first question that we asked our panelists were how did the working relationship between CAP and VR develop within your state, and I'd like to start with Minnesota and I want to remind people that you need to keep your remarks to two and a half, 3, three and half minutes at most. Thank you. So Michigan, I'm sorry, Michigan.

>> Hey, I would start as a CAP director. And I'd like to say that there is a history between the client relationship has evolved. We do not always have a good relationship. We had many challenges. And I can say I was an advocate for a long time and before I promoted to be a director of Client Assistance Program. So I learned from my experience. I learned from my mistakes. At the same time I learned from my managers what to do and not to do to have a good relationship or to improve our relationship with VR. At the same time when I was -- when I was a counselor -- I hear myself, I don't know why. When I was a counselor I worked with Sigrid and I worked with Lisa, when I was an advocate, I'm sorry, I worked with them when they were a counselor. And that has led to better communication between us to have really open and working relationship. And our relationship as a counselor and advocate and as a manager has led to our staff that it's very important to serve our clients. I think also my background as a rehab counselor, this is my education background, helped me to understand the VR system and the role of VR counselor. So as a CAP advocate, I know it's very important to work together in a very effective way and our focus will be our clients. Thank you.

>> Bill, would you like to go next?

>> Yeah, let me just comment. I've been in Michigan for a little less than five years. So I didn't get to see some of that early background, but what I can say is that because of the leadership at the CAP in Michigan and the collaboration between VR and CAP in terms of meetings and get together, we've been able to develop a very close knit relationship that as John Connelly mentioned and Jim Doyle, really it's about serving the customer, and we're putting the customer first and understanding that CAP is part of that process. I would like to say too that Tina Fulton was in the waiting room and she is the director of the general agency, Michigan Rehabilitation Services. And Tina may be able to come on now with video or unmute herself. So I'm going to bounce it over to Sigrid next and Lisa.

>> I want to quickly second what has already been communicated. We've worked out a lot of kinks over the years, and I think we have finally gotten to a place with CAP where we can resolve issues rather quickly, respectfully, and just have a better overall understanding of what the end goal is. And that's pretty much how we come together and approach challenges.

>> Yeah, and this is Lisa. And I absolutely support that. And as a counselor, CAP I really view them as a resource for us. Like Jim said, the first time CAP is approached by a customer, it's like oh my gosh, what did I do? And you really learn we all have the focus of the customer in mind and that is the goal. And I often say that communication can create and solve most problems. So I think a lot of it is just coming to that understanding and I do joke that I actually had called CAP myself because I had a difficult customer situation that I was managing. And they said no, the customer has to call first. So I really appreciate, I was a young counselor at the time, but I really do appreciate the relationship and I think leadership has supported that and that's why it works because we work together.

>> Great. That's good information. Let's hear from the folks in Minnesota.

>> Sure, I can start. So I really resonated with what Jim has said and Lisa about getting that first phone call from CAP when you're a counselor and I felt like I was in trouble, that I did something wrong. But then I learned more about the process, but even more importantly, I formed that relationship with CAP. And after that, whenever I would get a call from Anne or someone else, I didn't take it personally. And it immediately became a collaborative, solution-oriented conversation. But that doesn't happen overnight and it doesn't happen with everyone. And it really is two-fold. It's leadership at the top working together, but also field staff really getting connected with their CAP representatives. And it does take time, and it takes work..

>> You want to go ahead Dee, and I'll finish up?

>> Yeah, thanks, Anne. Echoing what others have said, a couple of things stand out to me in helping with that relationship building piece. We've looked for other opportunities to informally connect, not just when something goes awry or goes badly and CAP is intervening. But again how do we look to them as a resource, so we've had Anne and others come and present different types of trainings to our staff. They're embedded in some of our policy and other work we'll talk about a little bit later. And we do a quarterly leadership meeting just checking in, what are you hearing, what are the hot topics, what are the changes. And I think it's really important to seek out those other informal ways to build those relationships. And then I would say the other piece and Natasha touched on it is we worked really hard with our leadership and our field managers to build that culture of seeing CAP as a resource and not being fearful or thinking something has gone wrong, but as a way to informally resolve our problems. We're not always going to agree on everything, but it's just a way to get towards resolving issues and I think building that culture with our managers is vital to having that at the other level. The other piece I'll say is we don't, if there's an issue, CAP will call, they'll call one of our counselors. Like we don't have a formal process like you have to go through these, you have to go through a supervisor or manager first. They can call up the counselor first and just talk through it and resolve it. And then if it needs to elevate to a manager it will. Very rarely do things come to my attention on my level as a director. So I think that's a testament to that relationship building at the local level that CAP and our staff have been able to do. Go ahead, Anne.

>> Sure, and my background I didn't mention before is a civil rights attorney especially in the area of employment discrimination especially for persons with disabilities. And before coming to the Client Assistance Project work, I had a background in administrative and regulatory advocacy. So coming into this work, I saw immediately here's a program that puts people to work. What are the areas where I can impact decisions being made in individual cases and also systemically. And right away I see wow the law allows us, we get a state on the state rehab

council. That's a great opportunity to be in on grass roots organizing, folks from the community, from all parts of the community meeting monthly, what's going on with the agency, what kind of experiences do people have, what kind of advice do they have for how VR can do their job better. And I also, the CAP representative who I had actually succeeded had a seat on the internal policy committee and I just thought to myself, wow, there's an opportunity to almost be embedded in the work of the agency and to be able to see what's happening and affect things very early, especially rule making and other regulatory activities where it's so important that a CAP representative who has a very different perspective than everyone else at the table can contribute to the discussion and understand what's going on and perhaps put in a pitch or an argument to try thinking about it another way. So that's kind of how I came to it and what I kind of saw when I first started doing this work. And seeing also the opportunities for more informal advocacy than what I had been doing before in a litigation career in making use of all of the different tools available to us, informal advocacy, mediation, informal appeals. And just figuring out who makes the decisions at the agency and calling that person and trying to have a conversation about here we have a problem, how can we resolve this in the most efficacious and efficient way possible? So that's kind of how we've treated things in Minnesota. And then on top of that having the quarterly meetings or the semiannual meetings with the VR leadership has been really helpful to establish relationships outside sort of the tumult of individual case work or systemic case work and to just get to know each other as people, we all care about this issue so deeply.

>> Great. It's good information. Now we'd like to hear from Rhode Island.

>> Like a lot of the other states VR and CAP had not had a good relationship. But over the last 20 years or so, we've really made a concerted effort to work together and to iron out issues and work together in a more respectful manner. I'll let Catherine talk about how we provide messaging to staff.

>> Just to echo some of the other comments that Anne had made, there are lots of things we do as CAP that are involved at the policy level and SRC does provide us with a really useful mechanism and highlighted that very beautifully. For those CAPs who are not as involved in the SRC, you are missing a very good opportunity to shape policy and to really get into the weeds too. I won't go off on a tangent about that, but some of the things we've done in the SRC over the years is say to our VR agency, hey, we don't want to hear this data, we don't like what we're seeing. We want you to take the lead on this issue or that issue. And we'll deliver messaging on that level as well. Getting just back to our main question about how our relationship grew to be what it currently is as Joe Murphy mentioned, it wasn't always a positive relationship. And in fact could be quite contentious. And that has been something that we have really both agencies have said from the leadership level and at the advocate level in the field, and someone else raised that earlier, that you really have to stop, take a few steps back and say we as lawyers tend to be adversarial and sometimes advocates working with lawyers are also coming to the table immediately with a fight mentality. And with CAP work, we really dial that back a bit. And we work on consistent messaging with staff and with each other. And we often will say, you know what, we're disagreeing but what is this really about? It's a policy dispute. It's really not about what we believe the client can do or can't do a lot of times. It may just be an interpretation of a policy. And that's where I think CAP can really approach on so many levels to work towards looking at the policy, not just for the individual and maybe you lose on that individual's case or maybe you win, but if the policy issue is still there, you can come up with different creative ways together to get at that. And we have had policy changes in Rhode Island doing that work without litigation. And sometimes we do do litigation and we still like each other. I think that's again getting back to the respectful, courteous messaging, the professional demeanor we maintain

with each other, we really work on not taking things personally and trying to engage new staff both with our CAP advocacy as well as the VR from the beginning so that that narrative starts to change. And we do see that. Newer staff are really approaching it in the ways that we have been working hard to do. All of these years so thanks.

>> John, do you want to take the next theme?

>> Yes, thanks, Cheryl. You've heard some great ideas about how the different states are building and developing and maintaining that relationship, especially at the leadership levels. And our next question is about how do you build and maintain positive relationships at the leadership level and also at the counselor level? You've heard, I think it was Natasha who said, when I got that first call from CAP as a counselor it was like oh what did I do. And I've heard that from other counselors. So how do you prepare counselors to be comfortable to embrace CAP and work with CAP as Lisa and others were saying. So we'd like to turn to Minnesota first again to talk about how you deal with and maintain those positive relationships at the counselor level especially and also at the leadership level?

>> Yeah, I can start off our group on this one and I began talking about it earlier. In Minnesota we've had a focus on kind of the clinical supervision model too and we dove deeply into that particularly with our managers. And it has to start with them. Like think can't be reactive or fearful or defensive when CAP comes in and they need to help their staff through that. We do a lot of work and a lot of training with them about that whole culture and sort of that philosophy. And I talk about it a little bit as being comfortable with others coming into your cases that you may be deeply embedded in. You're on the dance floor with those cases. And being able to allow and not get reactive when you have somebody come from the balcony and give a different view of that. Not that people don't never get reactive, certainly that's human nature. But we really, really work on that culture to be respectful in terms of giving and receiving feedback. We've done a lot of training around that. So that's one thing I think that's been helpful for us. I'll turn it over to Anne and Natasha to add to it.

>> For us much of what Dee said, there's kind of two levels for the relationship building one is the connecting on a leadership level and as Anne mentioned we meet either semiannually or quarterly to share updates, potential challenges. If we are thinking of instituting this policy, can you give us feedback on that. What are some things we're not thinking about? What do you think the impact is going to be with the people we're serving? But the whole field staff relationship building I think is even more important. And Dee had mentioned this too, it's finding a space outside of the dispute process to have CAP and that team together. So Anne has come and done presentations and usually it's been annually she shares stories, she kind of dispels myths. It's like you're pulling the curtain back and there's the wizard. It's a little less scary if you're actually meeting Anne and you're meeting Christina and you're seeing them in a different way. And a lot of it is how we as leaders communicate that to staff. Having CAP's involvement is a positive thing, it's a great thing. This is an opportunity to look at things differently, to have someone come in and give thoughts and ideas, especially if you're in a time of conflict and you just can't find the way out of that. This is a relief of having someone else come in and give you a different perspective.

>> Yes, absolutely. I would just say I have tremendous respect for what the VR counselors and everyone involved at the VR agencies are doing. And we deal with the same consumers in sometimes very difficult situations. And I just try to have some understanding and respect and compassion for the difficulties that we all face in the inherently difficult task of going to work or going back to work. I've developed a kind of presentation over the years that I've tried to trot out yearly. I call it CAP chat, it's no big whoop. Let's chat. And just present kind of our data or trends that we're seeing and just try to have a report to both agencies whether it's SRC or counselor

team meetings or whatever. Here's what we are, this is what we're about, this is what we're seeing, here's the areas we're trying to focus on. I think that goes a long way towards having a constructive and collaborative relationship.

>> Thank you. I'd like to turn to Catherine and Joan, Rhode Island. What are you doing, maybe some extra things or additional things you would want to share on this topic?

>> I can start. When I first was a supervisor, I had a case with Catherine, it was a very difficult case and I was actually very happy to have the extra focus of somebody else on this particular case. I think that has allowed me to provide to my staff, just because disability rights is calling, don't always jump to you're doing a bad job, it's really a great thing to have them at the table at least to make sure we're dotting all of the I's and crossing all of the T's. To help us maintain that relationship, the previous administrative CAP had helped us set up meetings with disability Rhode Island and CAP. Catherine and I continue to do that. It's a way of discussing trends, problems, and trying to figure out if there are things that we want to focus on for the next coming year with our staff, their staff and all of that. Catherine probably has a bunch of other things to talk about too.

>> I think taking the opportunity in the quarterly Natasha mentioned taking the conversation outside of the dispute. I think that's important and I love the way you phrased that. It is getting to know the people that work there, letting them know you and your human side, being on the SRC, doing different activities. I work within the PNA and I work cross programmatically which a lot of times brings me to different areas that intersect with ORS and helps me in my other work. And I think of them all the time and it's really because of that great relationship that I'm able to have counselors tell me other things. I can give it to other team members, I can look at CAP issues in a different way because those conversations are occurring outside of the dispute when I'm representing a client and that is like my mission in that transaction. I think also getting back to some of what we do is cross training. We definitely go out every year if we can and we do an update. We remind from our perspective, from CAP's perspective what is this about, what is CAP, what are VR services? What does the enabling legislation allow CAP to do. What is the expectation that we have for VR services. What are the different types of advocacy? How can we work together on those different types of advocacy in when I first started this people were very fearful of mediation. Now it's like oh mediation is a really great way to go to the table. Sometimes we've sat down at a mediation and gone this isn't going to work bye and go to a hearing. But we didn't start that way, it was like oh no the client filed for mediation, it was scary. We also take the opportunity because we're a PNA we let them know what we're doing. And here in Rhode Island we've had a lot of changes over the years with our leadership and our staff and our PNA and I really look forward to this July being able to highlight some of those things. And also as I always think about this not just for CAP but as the PNA, what other things am I going to gain from these people that will help me on policy issues, on issues that are facing people with disabilities in Rhode Island. We do a lot of work also on the comprehensive needs assessment with our SRC. That is a really great place too to get involved with other people and I forget who said it but at the grass roots level talking about the issues outside of that dispute again. We kept up with our quarterly meetings through Covid. We were really quick to get on virtually and say what are the struggles you're having, how are your counselors handling it, what are people telling you when they're coming to you and sharing what people were telling us. Now as things were getting back to a little bit more normal, we're hybriding a lot and really fascinated with what is your job developer doing? What are your placement services looking like and what are your plans. So if we didn't have a good relationship, we wouldn't really get to those topics. We would always be in that dispute. So we try to really take advantage in any way that we can think of to promote moving that relationship forward always.

>> Thanks, Catherine and Joe. We're going to turn to Michigan. We're running a little behind so we have about, if you could take about two minutes and really drill down to are there some strategies or tips on this topic that you haven't heard from either of the other states. So I'll turn it over to the Michigan folks.

>> Go ahead, Sigrid. I was going to say we need to wrap up.

>> Just rather quickly, trying to build a relationship with someone can be facilitated sometimes by having an event. So we have bimonthly coffee with CAP meetings. And it's just an opportunity for our staff to let down their hair, for CAP to let down their hair and just engage in a get to know you session. So it's an awesome opportunity to kind of learn what is CAP's role but who are they as people, as individuals, and that seems to be very successful. We also make the effort to get CAP in front of our new counselors, our new hires as quickly as possible so they are introduced to CAP and what their responsibilities and roles are very, very quickly. Just some additional strategies I wanted to share from the general program in Michigan. Bill?

>> Yes, so I think it's important as everyone mentioned about communication and trust and respect and also keeping the customer up front. But to create that communication and trust at the ground level, we really believe in resolving at the lowest level. I think it would be helpful for Chelsea and to take a second and talk about the fact that you really need to understand VR and we really need to understand CAP. If you don't understand each other's programs, it's hard to have trust or respect. So Chelsea.

>> Yeah, as Sigrid mentioned, I've really enjoyed the coffee with CAP as well. I think about 180 people for the first one, it's a newer thing that we've rolled out. And I also, I think showing your humanness is so important to develop that rapport and trust. Because a lot of the counselors, especially if they've never dealt with CAP before or they're newer, they might feel intimidated. I know I was honored to be the first CAP advocate to go to the new counselor's training with MRS and it was really helpful for me because I was a brand new advocate. So that was really helpful for me to understand the VR process and to be able to speak to the new counselors about what our role is. And also from the case level, I kind of developed this habit of telling counselors that I've not worked with before, just kind of starting the conversation in an introductory fashion, introducing who I am and what my role is and just reassuring them that look, you're not in trouble. This is a collaborative, I'm here to work alongside you, to come alongside you with this difficult case. And even sharing with them, sometimes it's the hard cases that they get are also our hard cases. If the client is upset with the counselor, the likelihood that the same client is upset with us if it's a matter of policy and we have to explain it to them and the client doesn't get exactly what they want, the likelihood of them lashing out at us is also very high. So just even from that advocate to counselor rapport development has been really helpful. Even just meeting with the districts and the upper management too because part of the relationship building really does come from the top down. If the management understands our role, then that's also a trickle down to the individual offices and the counselors themselves.

>> I just want to add and for everybody else we also are involved with many meetings with VR. So we're also involved with the policy, we meet every month and review and update the policy. We also are meeting with the SDP manager every quarter and discuss issues and cases with them and how we can improve our relationship with that. Chelsea was involved with many groups like diversity group, and she also assisted the VR team to update the blue book which we usually send to the clients to understand the steps where we are. So we were involved with many, many meeting and to involve our relationship with CAP and the focus.

>> Thank you. Let's go back to Cheryl to move on to our next section.

>> You have got to unmute, Cheryl.

>> Can I just mention, this is Lisa from Michigan. It seems that our microphones get muted even

if we don't ask them to be.

>> Well I take after Ron, I talk to a dead microphone. You've talked a lot about the importance of relationships and understanding that things, it's always good to meet people in a non-threatening kind of environment and whatever. You all know that the purpose and goal here is to work together. I'm wondering how does that relationship actually translate when you've got a difficult client and/or a counselor who has dug in their heels. How do these relationships actually translate in resolving disagreements between CAP and VR. We're going to let Rhode Island start this time.

>> I think that Rhode Island will be having a really good relationship with our CAP. We try to keep the line of communication open. We had many cases, at one point we were on a wait list for all categories and part of our documentation and letters to our clients was to reach out to disability rights Rhode Island if you have any questions you want to see if you need any of your rights looked at as part of that putting people on a wait list. I think just having that open relationship and being able to communicate allows us to resolve some of the issues at a smaller level. I think as many people have said quite a bit here today, not having to go to a hearing on every single matter is probably best interest for the client, for us, and for the CAP as well. I'll let Catherine talk a little bit more about the other issues involved.

>> I think I can speak for myself as a CAP advocate. I'm not afraid to go to the higher levels. But like everyone else, I really do, for the sake of the client, I try to resolve things at the lowest level. So sometimes just explaining the policy to a client or explaining what we think is wrong with the policy to a client can help them to make a decision that's informed on whether they want to take that next step. And I think that while it is important to keep those lines of communication open, it's also really important for me and I remind myself of this all the time in my practice, my job is to represent the client. It's always for the client and I will do anything I can for the client to try to resolve their issue. And that's where I think sometimes where I mentioned earlier, I'm always thinking ahead, I may not resolve the policy issue for a particular client for their issue because maybe they don't want me to or they don't want to -- sometimes people tell us they just want to have the information about their rights and they say thank you very much but I don't want to do anything. I always find those a little weird because then it's like I drop off. Don't make an assumption if CAP comes and asks for things and looks at records and talks to you and then you don't hear from us again. That may be that the client said I don't want to do that, the client might not like my advice, might fire me. There's so many reasons why we might not go back. So again that's part of the relationship building. I think going at it on the multiple levels when addressing what we see as an issue and just being out there to VR on what we see the problems as being really transparent about that has worked well. I mean I've got cases pending in court right now where we're in a big disagreement and we just, we bring those issues up, we continue to talk about them, we can't talk about the scope of the ones that are pending, but they know what the issues are and they know where they stand and I know where I stand and I don't care if I win or lose, I want to win, but if I lose I'm going to keep trying because I really strongly believe in the policy interpretation and sometimes I think the policy interpretation is wrong or they may take a whole other way of looking at it. So I just think that's part, while we're building relationships, we also have to remind ourselves of our roles and our tools in our toolbox and that's why explaining that to the VR staff about the different things CAP can do in the informal and formal ways of dealing with advocacy helps them to understand and feel comfortable in reaching out to us in those non-dispute dialogues.

>> Michigan, do you have anything else to add that's a little different in your experience?

>> This is Lisa from Michigan Blind. And I'd just like to add, one of the things that we teach our customers is how to advocate for themselves. And so utilizing our client assistance program is

part of that too. So helping our customers to understand that they have the right to ask for the assistance and appreciative of the advocates who respond to those requests. And then educating our team, and I've had many conversations with counselors like what happens, and it's like this is about feeling out how best to work together. And I agree and I echo what Bill said and others that we try to reduce all of those problems. I oftentimes might be made aware that there's a CAP concern or whatever, but I let my team work through that. If it comes to me and Chelsea knows, we worked on cases together, we'll work together to resolve that in the best way possible. But we want our teams to work together without worrying about not being able to talk and not being able to resolve. So I think that I always remind our team that our customers, we're teaching them how to advocate and they're doing that. So even though we may not always agree, that's okay because that's part of figuring out how to move forward in the best way possible and we all learn, I have never been involved in a CAP case where I have not learned something..

>> I think I would add to that is normalizing CAP involvement. So expect the expected. And when that happens it becomes less of a big deal for that newer counselor or experienced counselor to get a call from CAP. When you ask counselors well I'll just say it this way, it's just interesting and the irony is that we are in human services and some of us have been in this field for many, many years, have been around for 20 years. And it's just odd sometimes when I realize how much our staff fear conflict and fear disagreement and do almost anything to avoid it because we're working with humans, right. And that just guarantees that there's some conflict, some disagreement that is going to emerge. So normalizing CAP has been part of the process. And I was sitting here just recalling the words of a former state director many years ago when I was a counselor. And he said something to us at a meeting that went something like this, if you're not getting at least six CAP calls a year, you're probably not doing as good of a job as you can. And his point was expect disagreement and if you're not getting complaints or calls from CAP, you're probably capitulating to customer's requests inappropriately. So a CAP call is an opportunity for you to hone your conflict resolution skills, but it also supports our customers rights to be represented and to make sure that their rights are not being trampled.

>> And I would say, I would add too that when we have those cases where the counselor kind of digs in their heels, usually what it looks like, we try to resolve things in an informal manner. But I think also when we look at things from a systemic standpoint, when we meet with division directors and districts and in my case meeting with the diversity team to present issues that we see come up in our cases related to systemic equity when we engage in like the policy to make sure it's compliant with WIOA regulations. That kind of empowers us to be on the same page about what policy should be, what the client's rights are. Maybe if the counselors dig in their heels, the upper management is more likely to see where we're coming from as we engage in those more systemic activities as well, the cross trainings.

>> Okay. Let's give Minnesota an opportunity for just a couple of minutes. Because again we're running far behind.

>> I'll start this time. Just a few words as a guest attorney, my responsibility is to work with a client like any other client in law practice to use the toolbox available to help the client understand their options, help them in making informed decisions about their situation going forward. And then we're working with them to achieve a resolution and including if a case, if what the client is thinking is not going to fit within the law and the rules and regulations and state rules and policies, letting them know that, advising them of that. And again giving them the tools and the resources that they need to have going forward, whether or not it will involve CAP legal representation. Everybody gets something, advice or maybe a brief investigation or a legal evaluation but everybody gets help.

>> Anybody else from the Minnesota VR side want to say anything or shall we just move on? All right good. We're learning certainly a lot of information here so I'm going to pass it back to John for the next topic.

>> Thanks, Cheryl. And I do want to note we're following the chat box, there are a lot of great comments there. I just would remind you that if you have questions to please put them in the chat box. We've heard a lot about building and maintaining relationships in all levels in the agencies between CAP and VR. And right now the VR program has a big challenge. For the last three years, the outcomes have been dropping and Congress is starting to ask why, why is that? And why aren't you using all of the money that's available for you programs and your customers? I think a lot of agencies are looking at their policies and so forth. In this next section if our panelists could talk a little bit about statewide initiatives or initiatives they're working on together to improve outcomes for our customers. And I'd like to turn to Michigan first.

>> I think it would be helpful maybe for to weigh in a bit because she sits on the SRC. We were talking the other day about some of the challenges of these performance metrics and she can comment on some of the training she's received as well as when WOIA first came into being, it was a new experience for CAP to really understand some of those key components including things like Section 511. You can maybe comment on the fact that we've been able to work together to inform each other especially in how that helps us.

>> That's true, Bill. So CAP started working with VR to understand workforce innovation and opportunity act, WIOA. And one of the to understand the act and be involved in it, one of our advocates, Liz Chow, she's really involved with two committees. One its Michigan interagency transition team. It's called MITT. And this company -- committee has been developed between all of the state agencies to develop a state model for transition that's supported by all state agencies. So CAP are involved with this committee and start working with other state agencies to understand and work with the transition with the students with disability and transition secondary transition to them. Liz also, she's a member and she again involved as a CAP advocate, it's Michigan association on higher education and disability. So they meet every month, they meet with professionals working with a student with disability in higher education. They provide information about appropriate transition services for the professional, they bring concern about the transition services, and at the same time they work with professionals so they can assist you with disability to be successful. So the school will be like a bridge for them to become employed. So involvement with the state agency committee and being part of it, it was very helpful for us as a CAP.

>> John, you're breaking up.

>> I'm sorry, Bill. Thanks. We turn to Minnesota.

>> Okay, I will start with this one. I think all of the comments so far have been spot on and this probably leads to what Anne was talking about earlier when she was talking about her involvement on our SRC and in our policy. She's there to bring in that perspective and always help to keep us focused on the customer when we're deep into the weeds on some of these issues. We've had big projects we've been working on in Minnesota employment first Minnesota coordinating services with people and waivers with their large departments. It's been hard work. Anne's shaking her head so she's been involved in the weeds of that. And one of the things I know about Anne is she challenges our thinking on these things. And we don't always like that, but we need that. We need to hear that and we need to be challenged on our thinking. And we need to know that and we need to respect that. So again, we don't always agree with her, but we need her to be there. So that would be my perspective. Go ahead, Anne, or Natasha.

>> I'll go ahead. Awh, thank you for your kind words, Dee. And Natasha, you too. I want to put in a pitch also for being a resource to the VR agencies in bringing a different perspective, but

also for being a part of the PNA and also having a connection to legal aid organizations because with that and like somebody mentioned before, the cross training and the cross pollination is just invaluable. No consumer lives in a VR vacuum, I mean they will have problems are rarely limited to employment, typically or often there's a housing problem, there's a benefits program, and maybe a familial problem. Having some experience is super helpful. And what I've done is I've developed practices in housing and housing discrimination and also with our paths program in employment discrimination and reasonable accommodations, I can pull the training on those issues to VR team meetings or agency-wide meetings so I can provide that kind of information so that they have a better sense of some general topics, how does somebody ask for a reasonable accommodation, what's the interactive process, what should we do here in Minnesota about the eviction moratorium, what is it? What if somebody can't pay their rent? All of that stuff, I've got access to instant information about. And it's one of the real pleasures of my work is to be able to kind of be a conduit for all of that from legal aid to our PNA, the disability law center and then to all of the folks I work with all over the state on vocational rehabilitation issues. So that's something that's been super cool that has developed over the years.

>> This is Natasha, I don't have too much more to add other than there are other opportunities that disability partners may have in the state, not just specific to VR, but oftentimes VR is the bridge. So for example our big work around the MOU with our human services department that we have, they built an interagency advisory committee to help shape that work. And VR was one of the people that said hey, you need to have CAP at the table. It had a little bit to do with VR, but it was a larger systemic change, and we really advocated for CAP to be there and they are on a seat on that advisory committee. So there is a lot of ways to bring CAP in more than just VR only. But really disability in general.

>> If I could just put in a quick word also, one issue that we've seen just enormous development and positivity around is small business development and using resources available on the state rehab council to just rocket fuel the VR agency's ability to develop services. That's been something that's been really neat to watch over the last ten years. We had somebody on the SRC with a lot of experience in small business development. They were willing to hang out with us for a couple of years and really contribute to that policy development piece and now I think we have a much better situation for consumers wanting to, who are realistic in starting small business and utilizing all of the resources available to them including from VR to make those small businesses happen.

>> Thank you. Let me give a minute or two here to Rhode Island. Catherine and Joe, are there other things in terms of your partnership you're doing working together to improve opportunities and outcomes for your mutual customers?

>> I'm going to pass it off to Catherine, she's our vice chair of our SRC and she has a great way of making sure that some of the things she wants the focus on, we focused on.

>> So we do a lot of work with the SRCs. I wasn't always in the leadership role. That's something that I did as the years went on and we had new people coming on to the SRC, I stepped in to do that and we are still trying to develop new leaders. But being the vice chair for the last couple of years has really been, it's really helped me to just create a narrative that I want as the CAP advocate for the issues I like and then I think our wearing my hat at disability rights Rhode Island I'm also the intake director so every call on every program I usually know about. And I think bringing the CAP aspect, Anne mentioned working with her attorney and legal services and stuff, that is also something we can do. And we're able to really use our CAP advocacy hat to really do a lot of that, making the SRC bubble up the issues we want, working with independent living and other service providers, working with other groups. And I realize not everyone is with the PNA and you have to, CAP is limited with what we can do with that funding.

But within that, there is a lot. There's tradition work as Chelsea mentioned working with transition in high schools in our state, the VR counselors are present in every high school. So I usually want to know who those people are so that I know what's going on in the way of special ed and transition. And also again those multiple layers that I believe it was Anne mentioning, our clients come to us with many barriers and work is the one thing that can really help get them out of poverty, get them off of benefits, get them to have a living wage. That's really what this program is about and being able to shape policy and the ways that we do it by sitting on the SRC and being involved in so many different things and using our CAP funding where we can to do that can really help to shape especially in Rhode Island where our state is small we're able to really shape things for the better.

>> Thank you. I'm going to turn it back to Cheryl for the next section.

>> Okay. Well we are moving right along here, so we're going to give each of the states about a two-minute opportunity to tell us what are your bottom line key principles and practices for successful relationship building and if somebody has already said what you need to say, just pass on to the next person because we are really getting short of time here. So let's start with Minnesota.

>> I can start with that one, so I wrote a few things down for this underlying philosophy, but I think the first one was the person centered was a big piece. And really just working to maintain it, working to maintain the relationship, trying not to take it or make it personal and bringing again back to person centric. And finally it's not just leadership that needs to be a part of the leadership building and relationship maintaining process. It's people at all levels.

>> And I guess for me, it's some of the things that Sigrid and Catherine talked about earlier that resonated with me. I actually have about 25 years of experience in the workers' compensation system, highly litigated. When we're working with CAP that are clients and attorneys and you get that conflict resolution and you're in that every day, our counselors are not. So that's something I've been trying to bring to our agency. Again others have said this too, normalizing that. It is a way to resolution, to try to resolve, we can have disagreements and we can try to resolve it at the local level. It is okay to go to mediation. We sometimes need to request mediation to get to resolution. And beyond that it is okay to go to a hearing. Again sometimes we need that level to make some changes in our policy or how we're viewing it too. And again that is a way to get clarity and resolution. So there's a philosophy I feel is important. Go ahead, Anne.

>> I would say my general philosophy is to keep on keeping on. And also think beyond what's happening immediately but kind of look towards the future. We operate in a very challenging funding environment, both the VR agencies at the federal and state level and locally our PNA agencies or our CAP agencies or however it's organized in each state. So just trying to look to the future and anticipate a little bit, making the best use of limited resources that we can to meet the goal of sending folks with disabilities to work or back to work.

>> Great. Thank you. Rhode Island, you're up next.

>> I think it's just you have to keep working at it. You just can't ignore things. You have to make sure that there's something, some problem that you're propping up, you've worked together on it. I think that's one of the reasons why this quarterly meeting that we have works. That's why the CAP agency presenting to our staff on an annual basis works just to put faces where they should be so everything knows what their job is and it's basically about helping the client, improving their lives as well. So Catherine has more I'm sure.

>> Just very briefly, I will say I agree with what's been said. The relationship is constant cultivation, chemoon keeping on was a great way to phrase it. Successful collaboration to me is really grounded in the belief that we both have at both of our agencies that we are here to serve

our clients. We are here from the advocacy point of view, we're here as advocates, nobody ever said that work was easy. Nobody ever said that work would be done in a minute. We just have to keep on pushing forward and recognize that we have flaws as does the VR agency and we may not see them at the same time or we might see them at the same time. And so being cognizant of that and knowing we're not perfect and knowing we can keep going and doing what we're here to do for our client, we will make a difference together..

>> Thank you. And last but not least on this one, Michigan.

>> In maybe in the interest of time unless anyone else from Michigan has something to add, it's all been great comments from the other states and we should allow some time for questions.

>> Okay. Well then not hearing any objections from the other people on that, we have about 13 minutes before we need to end this. So we had people monitoring the chat box behind the scenes and if they would like to unmute themselves, I know that some questions have been asked and answered along the way in the chat box, but let's see what they have to say in terms of questions. Amy or Ron?

>> So this is Amy and actually I'm happy to say it was a really active chat box with some great questions and some great feedback. And again we will do our best to share that information with everyone that's currently on the panel or currently participating in the webinar in case you weren't able to read all of the comments. But at this point all of the questions that were asked have been sufficiently answered both by participants in the webinar and also the panelists also jumped in and asked all of the questions or answered all of the questions as well. So I don't think we have any outstanding questions although I wanted to check in with Ron to see if he saw something that I may have missed..

>> This is Ron . I haven't seen anything. Just so you know, panelists, I did a running word document of the chat. We'll share that with all of you so you can see the chat. I'd like to say the chat has been phenomenal. It's been great. Felipe did you notice anything that needed to be commented on?

>> No, I agree. All of the questions have been answered and there's further collaboration. There's one dialogue regarding tribal VR and I thought that was interesting, that had not been covered during the webinar so that's something of note. But in general I encourage all of the participants to take advantage of the resources that NDRN will make available to you to read through the chat. I think you will learn a lot more by going through that. I did.

>> And we will make sure that that gets sent out afterwards. So I think that one of the next kind of questions for open discussion is how might RSA, CSAVR and NDRN best promote your efforts to promote CAP and VR cooperation in your states? If people in the audience have a question or a problem or a thought or an idea, I think if you go down to the reactions in your lower right hand corner you can raise your hand to ask a question which will raise you up and our producer will be able to unmute you.

>> And we would love to hear feedback from people about that. So this would be a great time to provide any comment that you might have because we actually do have a couple of minutes.

>> While you're waiting for a question, I would also like to ask John from CSAVR, I would like to ask whether or not there would be plans if we were to meet in person or virtually for the next conference or leadership forum, would CAP, would NDRN, RSA, CSAVR be willing to do some kind of short presentation?

>> Yeah, Bill, that's a great question. Certainly if there's interest in that, we can do that. I don't know if folks would be interested in some sort of workshop type program along those lines too. But I know at CSAVR, we haven't begun to plan the program for the fall leadership forum or the conference in Savannah, but I'll take that back to the table and also talk to the folks on the work group here, my partners. So thank you.

>> This is actually I think the first time that the CSAVR and the NDRN for the protection and advocacy programs and the client assistance programs and RSA have actually actively worked together. We have lots of meetings behind the scenes to talk about this and flesh it out. And I think it was a really good process. I think initially I would not be misstating the fact that there were perhaps some misunderstandings even between us as to what was the real role of CAP. CSAVR works with the VR agency and is does a lot of training for them. NDRN trains the Client Assistance Programs and who was training what on what was a little bit different. So I think it's helped us working together.

>> We do have a question, a couple of them now, Cheryl, in the chat.

>> Take it away, Ron.

>> First question is from Edwin, what questions do you have about ongoing outreach efforts to increase the number of people using VR services? Any of our panelists?

>> I'm going to say something here because I see those as two distinctly different questions. I think that outreach to unserved and underserved populations is countrily important and I'm not always sure that CAP and VR necessarily talk to each other about what they consider the unserved or underserved populations to be. I think if there's having the regular meetings that we've heard discussed several times, talking about and looking at the statistics of who is getting serve and had who is getting into the eligibility process and actually getting services and looking at what kind of services they get could provide some very interesting data on where some targeted outreach and targeted advocacy needs to go. John, I don't know if you have a different opinion?

>> I certainly want to give the panelists time if they have thoughts because they're in the thick of things. But two thoughts here, you heard a lot this afternoon about the value and role that CAP can play on the SRC. So I think that's one vehicle that CAP can provide assistance and input and take an active role in this area. The other is the development of the statewide plan for VR. So that would be another area where this issue comes into play. To me I think with any referral source it's having that good communication, good working relationship and understanding between the VR agency and the referral source which I think goes back to a lot of what's been said this afternoon in terms of what makes the relationship work in the throe -- three states that have been represented on our panel today. But we turn it over to the panelists if they have other thoughts or ideas.

>> I think Sigrid could speak as well as Chelsea to both how CAP is involved in the comprehensive statewide needs assessment as well as Chelsea mentioned the diversity council I think is maybe what it's called.

>> The diversity steering committee. Chelsea, do you want to speak to those?

>> Yeah, so one of the things that we are looking at in my participation in the diversity advisory team is we do take a look at that statewide needs assessment report and kind of look at the data to see the makeup of the people who are being served within the state of Michigan, the ones who are underserved and I have an appreciation for that rapport as well because it kind of has a definition between the underserved and unserve populations and the distinction. So we're kind of in the thick of that right now and just kind of brainstorming how we can better collaborate to improve outcomes for those different populations.

>> Anybody have anything else there to add? I think we have another question which we probably only have time for one more question and then a wrap up. Ron, am I wrong on another question?

>> There is a question about the CAP view on whether or not this is the right call. This is on SSI recipients paying college tuition. At NDRN we have a pretty strong view on that. We are in discussions because we do believe it is something that is of critical importance around the

country. And that it would be helpful to have something from VR on that. I could answer from our perspective if you'd like or we can wait for another day on that one. But you can see how things can be, you can see very clearly from that question how there can be disagreements between the VR agency and client assistance program.

>> I think since we are working with RSA to develop some clarity and guidance on that that I think that could be a whole topic for another webinar which we would be happy to host. So I think --

>> In the last minute or two if it's okay, I wanted to make a comment about the survey so to switch gears a little bit, but we do have a survey that was actually included, the link to that was included on your registration confirmation that had the link to get you to this webinar, but I think also Charles can put the link to the survey in the chat box and we really would just appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill it out. A few notes about it because this is more of a standard evaluation we use for a lot of our webinars. It's going to say PNA in a lot of the questions. But this applies to everyone involved in the webinar today whether you're with a PNA, whether you're with a non-PNA cap. Whether you're with a VR agency or another organization, just fill it out from your perspective the answers to the questions. There's also a question included in there about voting. That's something we have to collect in another context. You can skip the voting question altogether. But take five minutes to fill it out because this is the information we have to report back to RSA in terms of our training and technical assistance and the feedback we received on it. So that would be great, and we also had some more open-ended questions just about next steps after this webinar and other specific goals for this topic. So more than likely there will be a follow up survey in the coming weeks to everyone here just to get some more feedback on what we can do next. But just again really want to thank everyone for participating. We had great participation from the people attending the webinar and especially great thanks to the panelists who put time and effort to be able to provide such great feedback to us. So we really appreciate it.

>> And also I'll say we also want to thank everyone who made this webinar possible. The distinguished panelists, and also all of you who listened to this and especially those of you who provided excellent comments in the chat box. The RSA looks forward to additional opportunities in the future to support your collaborative efforts on behalf of individuals with disabilities in all of our states. So again thank you. Stay tuned.

>> Thank you everyone. That's it for today.

>> Thank you.

>> Bye everyone.

