

Closed Captioning Transcript:

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION
EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA CELEBRATES MENTORING

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All event-related materials and recording are available at

<http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/mentorship>

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>> Hello, everyone. I hope you are having a good Wednesday. Welcome to the 2018 of Employment First Florida Grassroots Group. My name is John; I will serve

as facilitator for today's discussion. As a reminder, this event is sponsored by the Developmental Council as part of Florida First Effort. Thank you for take the time to join us. Before we begin, I would like to take a minute to do introductions. For those on the website, look at the pod on the right center of your screen and share with us a quick introduction with your name and agency, the group of people with disabilities that you represent. I would also like to take a minute to introduce project staff and partners. As I mentioned, I'm John Kramer. I'm with the Institute for Community Inclusion for the University of Massachusetts.

Sheila, would you like to introduce yourself?

>> This is Sheila. I do the tech help for the webinar, which you should know, because I communicated with you over the last few weeks. Welcome.

>> Thank you, Sheila. If any of you have problems with your connections, definitely reach out to Sheila, and she can help get you reconnected. Allison, did you want to do a quick introduction?

>> Hi, everybody. I'm Allison Hall I'm a colleague of Sheila's.

>> Thanks, Allison. Your audio cut out slightly. I will turn it over for you to
Thanks, everyone I wanted to run through the list here and see if there are any project partners or staff that wanted to say hello on the Employment First Florida? I don't see any that I recognize offhand. Well, welcome to any project partners
So, stay tuned. Just as a quick note for our next event, which is all the way into next year into January, we're determining the date, but we will make sure to

follow-up with you and the rest of our mailing list about future plans for the event coming up in January.

So, today's topic, however, is on mentoring. We're doing this in honor of Disability Mentoring Day. Those who may not be familiar with it, it is a semi well-known event in disability circles. It was last Wednesday, October 17th.

Today, we have Christine and Damien here to talk about mentoring. They will explain what the Keiser University Multi-Disciplinary Center. Post-secondary planning is what they do in their programs. For those of you who might not be familiar with KU, the university's multidisciplinary center is one of six diagnostic systems -- you might hear the acronym, FDLRS, multidisciplinary centers providing a range of services including screenings, assessments, mentoring and counseling and intervention for youth and children at-risk for who have been identified as having complex medical, educational and emotional or behavioral problems and other risk factors for poor educational outcomes. We have two speakers, Christine Benes works with career mentoring in small groups, which can include career interest areas, experience, hygiene, communicating with coworkers. Groups meet when students are investigating future plans, making plans when students are in actual work situations. Damien mentors students individually in person and on the computer through Zoom. They have been identified through the schools as needing additional support in dealing with issues and he is the person who is there for them who is not a parent, teacher or administrator. Thank you both Christine and Damien for joining us today.

Before we turn it over to them, I wanted to hand it over to my colleague, Allison Hall who will say a few things about Employment First Florida.

>> Hi. Can everybody hear me okay?

>> Yep.

>> Great. Hi, everybody. This is Allison Hall. I wanted to give you -- I realize there are new people in the room who maybe aren't familiar with Employment First Florida. I wanted to give you a little bit of background about it. Our work started with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. We've been working with them around this initiative since 2011. We started working with them to understand -- to help Florida stakeholders understand what other states do with respect to Employment First. We started with state-wide data collection. We traveled all over Florida hearing from stakeholders and produced some recommendations. That was back in 2011. From there, there's been so much progress in terms of collaboration and moving forward to support employment for people with disabilities.

I just want to talk for a minute about Employment First and what it is.

Employment First is kind of a national movement, and almost all states have some type of Employment First policy or strategy. Employment First means that real jobs with real wages should be the first choice for all people with disabilities who are receiving services from a state agency. That's what we mean when we talk about -- when we say the term Employment First I just want to acknowledge all the partners who have been so critical in this initiative. There are nine partners up on your screen. Florida Commission on Jobs, Career Source, Department of Education. Florida DD Council, agencies for persons with disabilities, a Division of line services, economic opportunity, the Association of Rehab Facilities, but I do

know that there are all these nine partners, but they are nine agencies with one mission, and that's how they identify themselves with economic self-sufficiency for people in Florida.

I'm going to talk a minute about the framework and the infrastructure that makes it work. All part of the Employment First initiative are efforts by the Governor's Commission for Floridians with Disabilities, Employment First and partnership coalition, the Employment First collaborative team, the grassroots group. This infrastructure brings together multiple stakeholders. It focused on collaboration bringing all relevant partners to the table, having a common vision and agreement on desired outcomes and agreement upon the definition of employment, and it remains a priority among all these agencies because they have a process for resolving issues and reaching consensus. They meet regularly. There is a concrete plan of action and accountability. Florida has been really successful in bringing stakeholders from multiple agencies together to increase employment for people with disabilities.

I just wanted to talk very briefly about some important milestones. In 2013, there was an Executive Order that reaffirmed the state's commitment to employment as the most direct and cost-effective means of helping an individual achieve independence and self-fulfillment, that it should be. In 2014, the Employment First Initiative Interagency Cooperative Agreement was signed. That was exciting because it was an unprecedented interagency collaboration among those nine state agencies and organizations that I referenced in the previous slide. Then, finally in 2016, Governor Scott signed the Individuals with Disabilities Act which established the Employment First act, financial literacy for individuals within the state personnel and the Florida Unique Abilities Program. So, that 2016 Act was

really important in just from a legislative standpoint to solidify that commitment to people with disabilities

I had briefly mentioned before that what's really important is a common definition and all of the Executive Order, the Interagency Agreement and the Employment First Act all share a common definition of employment. I think it's important to point out that when we talk about employment, we're talking about integrated employment, including supported employment, and self-employment, where the individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or through self-employment is fully integrated in the community with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency. I'm going to stop there, and I wanted to give you all some just some background around Florida's Employment First effort. Now, I'll turn it over to our speakers on mentoring.

>> Christine and Damien, it's all yours.

>> Awesome First of all, I would like to thank Employment First for allowing us, as school liaisons, for being a part of this great event today. My name is Damien Hunte. I am one of the school liaisons, also known as the Multidisciplinary Center. John has an eloquent way of speaking exactly what we do. We are a grant that was awarded by the Department of Education over five years ago. Very fortunate -- I was the very first hire, and I'm still here. KUMDC, as John said, we do screening, assessing, mentoring. We're doing student seminars where we're explaining a lot of things as far as mentoring is concerned within transitioning, career and other ventures. We're very excited to be a part of this initiative, and we believe that people with disability have a voice, and they have the ability to

work right alongside any of us that may not have the label of having some form of disability. There you see, one of the six multidisciplinary centers of the FDLR grant we're part of for the University of South Florida, University of Florida in Gainesville and Jacksonville, University of Miami, Keiser University. It brings scholarship -- it's not a fly by night program. We're in it to make sure we are available and accessible to serve the community at large.

And then, there you have it. These are the areas that we are so honored to provide services to: Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Indian River -- hopefully, you're in one of our deliverable counties that we can serve. If you're not, maybe we can eventually get to that area once we expand more. We're always looking for new opportunities and new ventures to embark on, and we want you to understand these -- with these areas, we're going into the schools and communities. We are trying to make sure we help young people with everything they have going on. It should be something of grand exploits. We're very excited about what we're doing in the communities now. Christine?

>> So, some of the things -- hi. Some of the things we do provide in these counties is two of our colleagues put together with Keiser which can be done in the morning individually with a student -- comes up with a detailed report of people's proficiencies in areas they need to work on. We can go in and do student seminars. We can do all kind of work with programs on transition. We work with interagency councils. Of course, we work on mentoring, which we're going to discuss today.

First, we have a poll question. Did you have someone who was important to you when you needed support? So, if you could get us some answers on that. We're

getting some good responses here Teachers. Older adults. Yes, which is definitely an answer. I'm sure many of us can think of people who are important to us at one time or another. So, while people are answering, Damien, can you explain what mentoring is?

>> Absolutely. Thank you for manning the poll there She's right. These are absolutely amazing answers I see that you have mentors from outside of my work who have helped me to reframe things. Colleagues at work who supported you. These are important, very important. When it comes to mentoring, mentoring may not be a friend or a spouse or even a parent. This person is not obligated to be there. What we mean by that, they're not obligated to be there. Basically, it states that we are, as mentors, this is a deliberate and intentional part that you play in someone's life. This is not necessarily something that you're going to get paid for. You may get paid for it. It's ironic that I'm actually getting paid to be a mentor. For the most part, this is a program that I developed within KUMDC. It's mainly because we want to be sure we're not just people there. We want to be an ear We want these young people to feel they have somebody who supports them. Mentoring is a significant development tool that empowers individuals to reach untapped potential. It's a partnership between two or more people with shared experiences. It's a helpful relationship based upon mutual respect and trust. Mentors guide the individual towards the right direction, help them develop solutions toward personal and professional solutions That's exactly what some of you guys are saying within the polls here. Did you want to add anything to that, Christine?

>> No, but sometimes, in terms of work, I've learned through experience a lot of people don't understand how to work. It seems like it's a natural transition, from school to work. But people don't understand what to do when they finish one responsibility. There's no supervisor standing there telling them what to do next. Sometimes they need somebody to help them just understand what's their responsibility. They have a group of things to do and a certain amount of time and have to figure out how to work all that in. So, sometimes we can set up small groups that can work with that, and we'll get into that as we go along. Thank you for moving the screen. So, who can be a mentor?

>> Not a problem.

>> Well, when it comes to who can provide mentoring, just about anybody can. Any person or organization can provide mentoring. The roles vary. We consider mentoring an unsung hero. I believe that if you really thought about someone that maybe has crossed your path or maybe someone crossed your path, that's the very person you needed in your life. The roles vary. It's not a one size fits all type person. You have to be available; make that person feel accepted. You can't identify those people with a disability -- you can't be the person who identifies that particular person as a special needs person or an ESE person because they know exactly where they fall short. They don't need someone that they confide in as being -- as having a label such as special needs. We understand that's who they are. We understand they need some extra attention. But for the most part, they don't need to have their disability thrown in their face as this is a negative thing. As a mentor, your job is to make sure that you're there to do the things that are

proper and to make sure that you're in place for them to have an outlet. Also, when it comes to being a mentor and who can provide mentoring, you actually have the ability to energize them to do their best. Most mentors don't understand this -- or people that call themselves mentors. There is so much power in the word of being a mentor. Being in the education realm and being a teacher for years, one of the things that I found out was that a lot of young people would not listen to their teacher. But if you put a mentor, someone that could speak their language, someone that's able to go down to the level without demeaning and berating the person and really get them to understand and hone in who they are as a person and individual, you have just made that person have superpowers. You've given them some form of identity. And so, one of the things that we tell the young people that we're charged in mentoring is that it's an acronym AND; it's all about ability not your disability. We want to focus on what you're able to do well. We're going to focus on how you see yourself.

Just today, I had a young man who has a speech impediment. He does not like to speak up for himself. These are things I have to make sure that he understands because he has a stutter; that's just a bump in the road. That's not going to stop you. What I have this young man do is recite to himself, my name is -- we'll say Billy -- and I have a stutter. I want him to take ownership of that particular disability. I want him to take ownership of the other disabilities that his IEP says he has. Just because he has it doesn't make him less of a person. As a mentor, that's what you are charged to do. Do you want to add anything to that?

>> Just that in being a mentor, it's also important to be clear as what your role is; that you're setting up a time to meet with people, that you're setting a specific

goal that you might be working towards or a type of issue and making a commitment to taking on this role and having a certain commonality to people that are working on this. It's not just your buddy who is going to talk things through with you. This is somebody who can really offer a little bit more direction in terms of issues or making things clearer, reframing some ideas. If we -- so, do people have to have some kind of conflict or an issue in order to go for mentoring?

>> In my experiences, I don't think anyone necessarily has to have a conflict in order to have a mentor in their life. You could actually just be looking for someone to assist you in life toward a career goal, an academic goal. Not to say that you're not doing well at the time. That's not necessarily a conflict. There are times where just a little bit more information can carry you a long way. As a mentor -- I see the slide here -- Great minds do think alike. Christine said it best you find that common interest or experience that you can share with that person. I had a young person that I was actually mentoring, and he was telling me that he felt a certain way. I remember, as a teenager, you know, he thought that he had to look a certain way in order to get the attraction of a young lady. I remember, as a young person, when I was around his age, I remember thinking yeah, you're supposed to look this certain way. You're supposed to be this height. You're supposed to look this big, and you're supposed to do all these things. I put myself in his shoes, and that was something that we had a common goal to go towards. It's not necessarily a conflict. Sometimes you need a push to get you over a hump. It's not that you're not doing well. You're seeking --

>> In terms of getting a job. Everybody knows eventually one is supposed to get a job. You go to work, but you can have small groups of people who are starting to work. Just having a place to ask questions, to brainstorm with each other on different issues. You might have a supervisor who is making a light suggestion, and you take it as strong criticism. If you've got other people working in a mentoring situation like this, you can discuss it; see what kind of way to deal with it. Because everybody is not going to be warm and fuzzy and caring when they're telling you something to do on the job, as we all know. But this is a place where people can come in with questions. Because you're supposed to know how to work, but you don't necessarily know how to work. You're supposed to be able to take the suggestion or criticism or whatever it is; how do you deal with that? Do you quit and walk out that day? Or do you figure out how to work this through with some other people? So, we have another poll question: Is there a time you wish you had extra guidance? While you're looking at that, look at our leaf. I be-leaf in you

>> I love it.

>> I lost my job and decided to make a career change. That's probably been true for a lot of people.

>> That's a deep one.

>> Yeah. We all have degrees. Now, we're supposed to do everything. What are you supposed to do with that?

>> Oh, man Wow.

>> It's interesting a lot of this is all job-related stuff You know we go to school; we have to pay attention When you go to your job, it's another situation, and we're supposed to understand how to deal with these situations. It is important to have additional guidance during transition periods. Absolutely I know, Damien, you talked about this moving from middle school to high school.

>> Absolutely. I think a lot of people tend to forget, being a parent now, also going through it. One of the biggest things, first of all, we need to understand, as adults, how we felt when we were the young people's age that we're mentoring. Even as teachers, one of the things I found out is that teachers that tend to lose their students and their class and have very low class management styles are those teachers that forgot what it was like to be a teacher Those administrators -- the teacher forgot how it felt to be a student. As administrators, they forgot what it was like being a teacher on the front lines dealing with 25 different forms or 25 plus different forms of people with disabilities. So, you know, me starting off as a new teacher, and we had what we call new teacher academy. You're supposed to be linked up with a more vetted teacher that's supposed to help you, show you the ropes. I remember getting started, and they couldn't find a mentor They didn't know who the NTA person was for me. I went half a year without even just winging it. So, luckily, being a military Army vet, I went back to what I knew in making sure how to manage my soldiers. That's what I went to. That was my classroom style. I was a drill sergeant in my classroom, and no one was going to

slack off. Then, I started getting more guidance from friends of mine that were well seasoned teachers. When it comes to being mentors and looking for that extra guidance, it is so pivotal and so important that you guys make sure you understand what it was like when you were a teenager. I get it that times have changed I get that these young people are probably a lot more -- they know a lot more because this is the first generation that has information at their fingertips. They will never understand the struggle of having encyclopedias and having that swell in your bookcase because they were so big. Because that's how you got your information was having an Almanac. They don't know what an atlas is; how to read a map Understanding with that particular culture difference and generational gap, how can we mend those things? That was done right along with those that have lost their jobs as a teacher.

As a certified teacher, I was laid off three years in a row. They would bring me back just before the summer ended every time. So, I get it. Yes, you need guidance because you're doing everything to make sure, you know, you're not kicking and screaming and pulling down books on top of yourself. I definitely get it and career changes. So, yeah; I agree with Christine. A lot of these examples and answers coming from when it comes to transitioning of careers. Absolutely

>> We have a question that came up and wanted to know if our organization matches mentors with students. We work in the counties that were on the original map. And a lot of times, schools will contact us and say that they have a student who needs a mentor, and we're on it very quickly. We just need to get signed parental consent. But if you're in one of those counties and can contact us, we can probably set something up. Our grant does limit us on the number of

counties that we can deal with. But yes, we can if you're with one of our counties, we can certainly work with you on that. So let's take a look at -- it will all work out. Remain calm -- different types of the need for mentoring. I think we've talked about that a lot. Let's look at the types of mentoring that we have.

Damien, can you explain the different types we have?

>> Absolutely. We're also going to talk about the advantage of each as well. We do what we call E mentoring; that's the virtual component. We use a platform similar to what we have with Adobe Connect; we use the Zoom platform. For the most part, that allows us to work remotely. I am in South Florida, in Coral Springs. Christine is in West Palm Beach. The director is in Fort Lauderdale. We are all over the place. It allows us the opportunity to chime in with the student, almost like a business Skype type platform, but it is through Zoom where the kid is able to see us. All you need is internet, a web cam and speaker and microphone access. We send you over -- we give you an invitation using Zoom. We do Zoom mentoring. It's worked out extremely well for a lot of young people who feel they can be themselves without having to stare at people. Because nowadays, kids don't really communicate verbally anymore. So, this is the next best thing is the wave of the future

The next thing we do is face-to-face; having that tangible interaction. We use a small group setting, individual. Of course, we mentioned before we do student seminars, as well. And so basically, when it comes to doing the face-to-face. Also, with the Zoom platform, we're also able to do the group mentoring, as well. When it comes just dealing with these particular arenas, or should I say, these particular vehicles of mentoring, what we find out if you give people access to

what you have, they're more open and willing to enter in into this particular set as far as trying to get to the young people that need the mentoring the most.

For the most part, we tend to go with those young people that, of course, they have some form of disability. They have an IEP, in some cases, a 504 plan. We are dealing with students as far as the career and transitional component dealing with those part of Project Ten Early Warning System. So, they are not on course to graduate with the cohorts. They have a behavior issue. Their academics are not up to par. Absences are too much. And so, these are the -- what we call red alert. These are the ones we try to target as particularly those that are upper grades to salvage any form of that young person.

Also, just going back, I want to tell you some of the advantages of individual -- when it comes to groups, you're able to get a large portion of and realize a lot of these kids deal with the same issue, but they are afraid to say it, or they don't know how to say it. When you bring up a topic, they are able to relate.

When it comes to individual, you get to the core of the issue. You get to talk to that person directly where, again, we're not therapists. We're not counselors. I like to say that I'm an ear. I want you to be able to vent to me or explain to me in any form or fashion that you feel that you need to. Once you do that, you know, it's a no judgment zone. We're here to make sure that the kids -- it's okay for them to be vulnerable. It's okay for them to not be okay. You know, again, we're not there to counsel them or to be a therapist. We just want to help.

Christine, you want to add to that?

>> One of the things with the group mentoring, because we're covering such a large area in terms of work issues, sometimes it's just they might contact me and

say, "Can we run a quick group on some of the work issues going on?" So, there might be five students in the group, and we can do it through Zoom. So, they can see me, and I can see them. We can be discussing different issues people have. With a group, if you're dealing with hygiene issues, which always seems to unfortunately come up, it's a little less embarrassing if we have a whole group brainstorming it instead of standing in front of one person saying, "I'm sorry. You smell when you come to work every day." We can brainstorm different hygiene things and come up with ideas from everyone so it's not just some adult saying, "You're doing this wrong" and trying to say it as nicely as you can. But hygiene is an issue. Also, it gives kids a chance to hear the other issues that people have at work. So, maybe hygiene is not Johnny's issue, but he's got issues with authority. He's got issues with punctuality, or he has to keep using the cell phone limited. He can hear suggestions from other people instead of "You're doing the wrong thing." Even if it's one-on-one in a mentoring situation, he's still discussing something that's a problem for him. In a group, you can kind of move things around. Because we can do it on Zoom -- and I'm hoping everybody understands Zoom; it's kind of similar to this except we can see everybody. We could, if we wanted to anyways, we set it up as a group, and everybody can see everybody else. We can write stuff on a clipboard and have all the information sitting there. And they can call me in the morning and say, "Can we set up a meeting this afternoon?" I don't have to drive to meet with people. Each of these has a different use that we're discovering as we go along, and using the computer is wonderful.

How many people did you see this morning, Damien?

>> Seven.

>> You had seven mentoring sessions this morning on the computer. That's pretty amazing.

>> And just to piggy-back off of Christine, I started at 7:15 this morning. For the most part, it gives the young person -- also, when I can be one of the first things they hear in the morning motivating, pushing them to be the best they can be that day I feel that my job, at that particular moment, I am charged to make sure that they are locked in by the end of our conversation We're not a therapy session. This is a sharing session This is me telling you that you're awesome; you can do this. You're capable of doing this regardless of what your IEP says. Let me say this, too. When it comes to an IEP, it's an Individual Education Plan -- just in case you didn't know -- it is an ever living document. But at the same time, depending upon that young person, and how they're doing that day, it doesn't necessarily tell the whole story of that kid or that young person, or that person, in general. It gives a snapshot. This kid is living a real life movie of a time right now -- a Lifetime movie -- for those that watch Lifetime. People need to understand this is a deliberate thing They need to hear it every day When you turn on the TV, there is so much negativity How can they go all day without hearing something positive? Without hearing that they can conquer the day? It takes one day at a time. As the old adage, how do you eat a whale? One bite at a time I don't know many people eating whales That's not the point. Making sure they understand that they can tackle a marking period, a semester; they can tackle a job It takes one step at a time It is taking care of what you're obligated to take care of. As a

mentor, we drive that for them every time.

>> Why is it special to have a mentor? One of the things we were saying when we came up with this, there's always that student who needs just something a little bit more, and you can't even put your -- I always say I spent my line of working with the people who needed one more thing to succeed. They could succeed. They just needed somebody else to step in and say, "We can make this a little bit better. If you go over here, you can get the help you need to get to another step." And that's kind of what is so special about having a mentor is who can really benefit from that?

Damien, do you have anything to add?

>> Sure. Let's take a few names. How about this? Mark Zuckerberg -- maybe you've heard that before Bill Gates How about Richard Branson? These are multi-billionaires

>> With serious disabilities.

>> Dyslexia. All these billionaires have credited their mentors. Now, I don't know if the next person that I mentor is going to be a billionaire. I hope so. But in the event they do not become a billionaire, I need that person to feel they will be the next billionaire. They have the next best idea. They have the cure for cancer. They are able to do those things So, what's so special about being a mentor? Well, according to Forbes, mentors help you set a measurable goal A good mentor never lets you settle or become complacent A good mentor will share personal experiences that aspire and motivate you Mentoring is deliberate. It is

intentional. Establish relationships. Mentoring brings mentees together with a respected individual who can guide them. It provides a vehicle of care and aspires to build character.

If we want to know what mentoring does, look in the mirror because someone did a great job in mentoring you. Somebody did a phenomenal job in mentoring you. There are some of us who really thought we could probably stop what we're doing and that we were not going to make it to the next moment. Someone pushed one of us. So, I always say, be the person you needed when you were a young person. Because a young person needs you at this particular stage of their life.

Christine?

>> And we learn from the mentee; it's a two-way relationship. There's all sorts of things to learn from kids, from people in different situations making us rethink something. We're supposed to be helping them with one thing, and they're saying, "I'm not going to stop. So, what are you going to do about it?" You need to rethink -- you constantly need to be on your toes and rethinking your approach to helping somebody move on to another situation without shoving the person into, you know, the form that you think they're supposed to be in. We can learn from everybody.

Damien?

>> Absolutely, and I agree with you wholeheartedly. I love the pun, "sofa so good." I would say this -- this is a saying -- I don't know who the author was that actually wrote this, but it says if you only study what you know, you will never learn anything new. These young people, having a disability or not, of course,

we're talking about those that have disabilities -- they can offer things, too. They may be able to tell you to do something that you've been doing for such a long time, and they can simplify that and make your life so heavenly. So, I've learned to make sure to listen to what they're saying -- not just hearing.

I want to also digest what they're saying because they have food for thought.

Mentoring is a relationship. I tell the kids that are part of our mentoring, they don't -- it's not mandatory that they are part of this service -- not one bit. At any given time, they can say, "I don't want to do this anymore." That's fine. But at the same time is, me, as a mentor, I can also say, "I don't want you to be a part of this." A lot of people may say that's cruel. No, because you also have to identify -- and that goes back to what Christine said -- you have to know boundaries and limitations. You have to understand there are people who also use you, too. You have to identify that, because if that person isn't in it to try to change themselves or get something and better themselves, and they are only just being there, and they are only taking, taking; they are not trying to absorb this relationship. Well, then the truth of the matter is then someone else would benefit from who you are. And also, too, it could be that you two aren't a good fit. So, paying attention to the mentees, understanding what they are trying to do, and who you are professionally and personally also helps you by learning from the mentee, as well.

>> We just got a question, and we're getting some interesting comments over here volunteering us for other things.

>> Okay.

>> Somebody asked what is something that we could do in a small gifts or kindnesses to offer them when we can't see them on a daily basis? Damien and I did a presentation at a school in Palm Beach, and Damien had the idea that we should have something individual to say to each person who came in. Unfortunately, there were 75 people or something --

>> It was 200 plus.

>> Yeah. They told us 145 people were coming, but the room was packed. I pulled up a whole bunch of adjectives online and made copies of them and cut them up so when people walked in the door, they each grabbed a word like creative or personal, or, you know, different adjectives like that, which is something that we could send to people on their phones, if you wanted to do that. Just send, "You're beautiful" or "you're creative" or "you're smart." Just people came up to me later and said, "Thank you, I needed this today." It was a piece of paper, you know, that we pulled off the web. Somebody else suggested sending gold stars. Everybody loves stars, you know?

>> A handwritten note. I mean, you know, granted now, you see a thousand people; that would be difficult. A handwritten notes goes a long way. People remember that rather than something coming off a computer. Handwritten note -- I still have some of my students that I taught ten years ago, and that's even -- as a mentor, it has me go back and another beautiful word that they use for old -- nostalgia. Sometimes when I feel like I don't know if somebody is listening to me, I don't know if I'm making an impact. I've been doing this a long

time. I've been in the military and coached football. You never know who is listening and taking your word and utilizing those things until they come back and say, "I appreciate you" or you get a note in the mail. I have no idea how they found my address. We're in technology, so everybody has everything. For the most part, you get that and you get those things, it means so much. I would say a handwritten note.

Any time that you see them, embarrass them with love. I'm the type of person if I see one of my mentees across the campus, I'm yelling their name. I'm giving them a high five. Any time, if you can't see them on a daily basis, when you do see them, shower them with love and compassion. Go absolutely bananas on their part. The truth of the matter, on one side, they're going to feel so embarrassed that someone is making this big stink about them. But on the other hand, that worked for me. I have my own cheerleader. No one else in the entire school got that, but me. So, when you do stuff like that, when people know that you have their best interests at hand, it boosts their confidence. Then, on top of that, it boosts your confidence because you played a small part in making this person feel like they're the best person in the world -- even if it's only 30 seconds. A handwritten note. Sending gold stars. Everything doesn't have to cost money. I mean, do something like accepting their friend request on Facebook. It's crazy. Not all the time -- you have limits and stuff like that.

This example that you want to do and how you want to treat that person; let them feel like they just won the Super Bowl

>> Good point. So, you're a wonderful person. Random acts of kindness.

Mentoring. It's all better. You know, mentoring a student, you can only leave

feeling like you did something good. It works, and it's probably -- we didn't put this into our presentation, but it's a good thing to think about somebody you could mentor. Maybe just offering something. Some people mentioning Big Sisters, different agencies that you might be able to be a mentor. A kid who lives down the street, or a kid in your building. A kid you happen to see once in a while who might -- everybody can use a little extra attention

>> Absolutely.

>> So, we have one more poll question, and that's: Do you think that you carry the characteristics of being a mentor? That's kind of where we're closing at this point unless you've got something more to say, Damien?

>> I mean, for the most part -- and I can't wait to see -- one of the things I'm looking at the poll answers -- and I think so, yes. I'm glad to see that there's no no's I'm saying even if it was, that's fine. Absolutely Because you know what? Not everybody is a great fit for everybody. I may not be a great fit for somebody else Christine may be absolutely fabulous for that same person. When it comes to having the characteristics of being a mentor, do you care? Do you want that person to have the best and be the best? Do you feel like that you can, at least, listen? You don't necessarily have to have all the ideas and all the advice. Sometimes just -- I'm sorry to say this because I'm not always politically correct -- sometimes shutting your mouth and listening goes a long way. You don't have to say things. Listening is the number one attribute in the characteristic of a mentor. Can you at least do that? If you can do that, you can be an outstanding mentor.

Having gone through things in life, do you have experiences in dealing with difficult situations?

I remember telling young people that my freshman year in college was so difficult for me. So, I know what it means to be on academic probation and playing football -- doing all these different things. I remember what it was like. My question to you guys answering these poll questions, can you listen? Can you be there for somebody? It doesn't have to be every day. But the moment that they say, "Hey, look. I need to talk to you." Find time. All of us are doing so much. All of us have different hats. All of us are not getting paid what we're worth. We know that. We chose an arena in helping people, and unfortunately, it's not as respected as other careers. But that does not make it any less important. You make a person feel like they can climb Mt. Everest if you tell them. One example that I have --

>> Might not be a good idea. Some people just died doing that.

>> Well, yeah. I mean, you know, we'll say that they climb the hill at the park. I don't know. But one of the examples that I have real briefly, I had a young man by the name of Mark. Mark was a young man who had suicidal tendencies. One time, he attempted suicide. One time, he didn't make his appointment, and I didn't see him. The administration came to me and said "Listen, you know Mark isn't here." I asked why. They said that he said he was going to stab himself to death, but you'll be excited to know he didn't do it because he didn't want to disappoint you. To me, I was in awe. It was something that I felt was almost a burden because I'm like what if the next time I don't have the words to say that's

going to carry him out of that mind state? But I had to quickly stop myself and realize I made an impact for that person. I believe every one of you that hears my voice today, you all carry the traits of being mentors. If you didn't, you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't be listening and speaking to us for 45 minutes to an hour. So, there is something inside of you that wants to do more or, at least, pass on this information to someone else. If you're that person, I say, go grab somebody by the hand. You know, show them compassion. Show them love and listen to them. If there is a possibility of you sharing experience and giving sound advice, not pushing your own agenda so they can be a mini you, but a better them, you are a mentor. By every syllable of the word, you are a mentor.

>> We have a question: Is there any suggested format to make the initial diagnostics and initial data collection review?

>> I don't think I understand the question

>> We typically get a phone call from the school saying that there has been an issue, or if there's a need for a group, or there's something to that effect. We're not really doing the diagnostics; the schools have been doing that. Is that a fair assessment, Damien?

>> Absolutely. They're the team. They're the team at the school that typically gathers the people together as to who needs extra mentoring or assistance. So, that's basically how things work out right now.

>> Does anybody else have any other first assessment? You mean, in terms of -- maybe the first meeting with the student where she can discuss this and see if it's a good idea. Typically, a first meeting is done in person. And, Damien, cut me off We need to get parental permission in order to get mentoring. Typically, we're talking to a group or talking to students who might be interested, and then the students need to get the parental permission. We have forms that have to be filled out. So, you know, kind of an informal assessment is done.

>> This is what it's like for the mentee, taking control of their life. At this stage, I think we're just about done. I see we're over time

>> We're over time.

>> This is about information. If you want to find out more about who we are, that's Christine's E-mail. That's my E-mail. If that doesn't ring a bell, Google KUMDC, M as in Mary, KU -- you'll find us We're so grateful that you allowed us to take part in this event. This was amazing.

Again, I'm Damien Hunte with my colleague, Christine. We thank you. If there is anything we can do, don't hesitate to call, or should I say reach out to us, E-mail. And I guess that's it for us. I don't know if Mark needs to take over.

>> Thank you for listening to us.

>> Thank you. I don't have anything else to add to the presentation. You guys, it was amazing.

Damien, it's interesting; you're the one who made it amazing. Thank your for joining our group. I think we got a lot out of it. We're going to housekeeping

items.

We're going to make sure that, as a reminder, this webinar was recorded. We're going to post it to Employment First Florida on the website. We'll make sure that it's in our follow-up. We'll also post some additional information in the follow-up that goes out after this. Otherwise, thank you, everyone, for all of your time.

Thank you for the good participation this afternoon. We got some good questions, comments. Thanks. And we will see you in January.

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The EmployMe1st project is a joint project of the [Florida Developmental Disabilities Council](#), the [Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston](#), and [National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services](#).

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