

# Moving Forward: Effective Strategies, Supports and Resources in Supporting Families and Youth in Secondary Transition

May 17, 2023

# Session Presenters

## **Connor Archer**

Founder and Chairman/CEO of the Courageous Steps Project

Co-Chair of Maine's Executive Student Transition Committee

Self-Advocate Advisor for Maine Access to Inclusive Resources (MAIER)

[connor@thecourageousstepsproject.org](mailto:connor@thecourageousstepsproject.org)

## **Rene Averitt-Sanzone**

Executive Director at The Parents' Place of Maryland

[rene@ppmd.org](mailto:rene@ppmd.org)

## **Sherrell Bethel**

RSA POWER Transition Project Director

PEAK Parent Center, Inc.

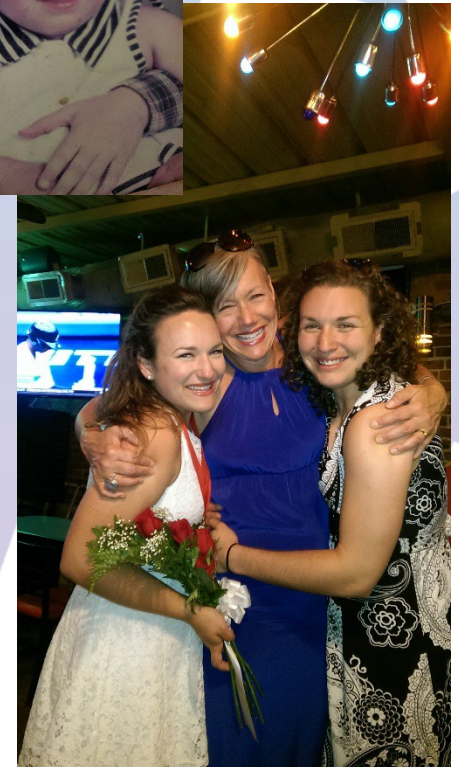
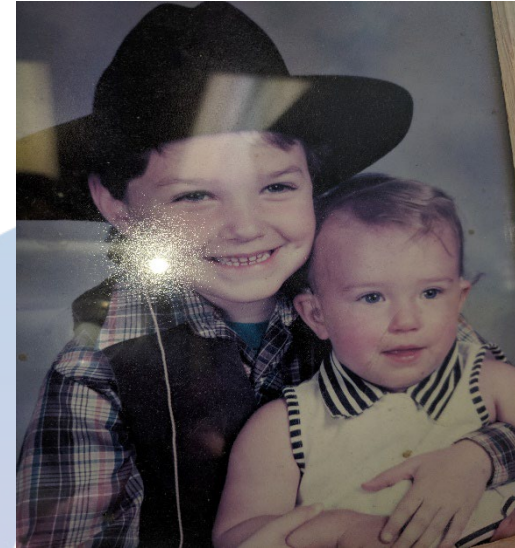
[sbethel@peakparent.org](mailto:sbethel@peakparent.org)

# Key Points Addressed During This Session

- Engaging PTIs and Youth in state and local planning & implementation
- Action steps needed for alignment of consistent & meaningful outreach and participation including with diverse communities
- The importance of Youth voice

# About Rene Averitt-Sanzone

- Mom & Mimi
- 30 + years in the work
- 20 + years in Parent Centers



# Supporting Families to Support Their Youth

- History of the Parent Training Information Center (PTI)
- Shifting role of the PTI
- Tiered System of Supports
  - Universal
  - Targeted
  - Intensive

# Shift Needs to Happen.....

- Paradigm Shift
- Journey Not a Destination
- Practice, practice, practice

# State Snapshot

- Employment First State
- Wait Lists
- State Agency Transition Collaborative

# Challenges

- Authentic Youth Engagement
- Materials & Resources for Diverse Communities
- Limited Resources



# About Sherrell Bethel

- I've worked for PEAK Parent Center for over 3 years
  - Prior to PEAK, I worked for Boys & Girls Club for 10 years
- I have a sister with a Cerebral Palsy
- I have a dad with a Traumatic Brain Injury



# Here's What the Youth Are Saying



## Sentiments Expressed in the Focus Group

### Passions

- Gaining and developing Friendships
- Opportunities after graduation (peer, employment, college)
- Their future
- Independent living

- Whether they are good enough
- Disclosing their disability, fear of new responsibilities, and difficulty in obtaining accommodations in college or workplace.
- Current events
- That there are many barriers in our systems and in our world and that a barrier may stop their progress.
- Mental well-being and our youth's ability to advocate effectively. Our youth with the most significant cognitive and physical impairments require extensive support in order to be as independent as possible. Helping youth and families understand and manage financial literacy and future financial planning.

### Fears

Getting fired  
from a job if I  
mess up or make  
my boss mad

Mental health  
struggles

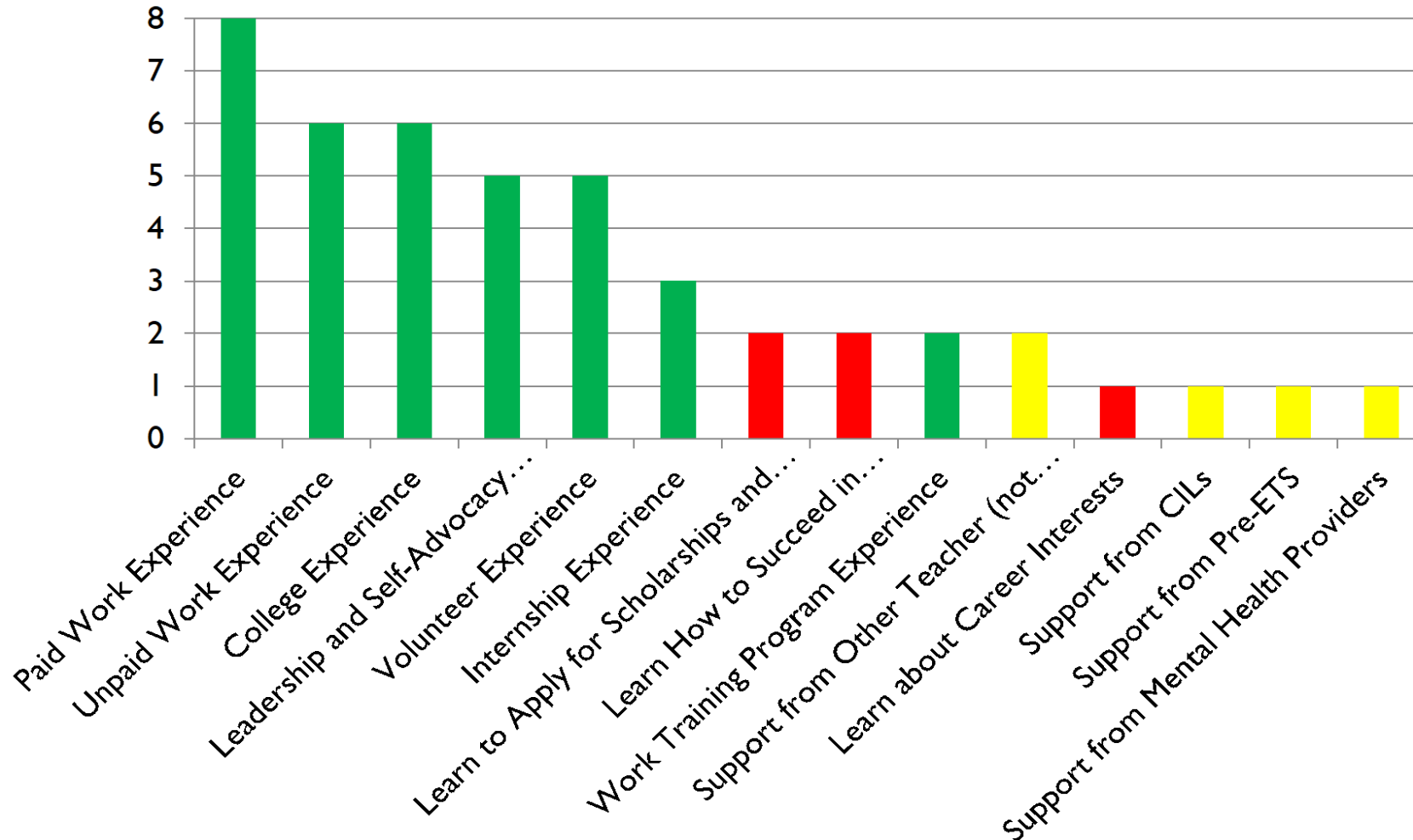
Not achieving  
independence in  
work, housing, or  
relationships

# Youth Say, Experience Matters!

**RAISE**

## Transition Activities and Satisfaction/Outcomes

621 Youth  
(18-26)  
&  
152 Parents



# How PEAK is Engaging Youth

- Paying youth for their expertise and life experiences
- Creating a separate social media account from our PEAK accounts that are youth led and youth focused
- Meet the youth where they are in their communities
  - Independent living centers, libraries, community centers, youth centers on military bases, homeless shelters, respite programs
- We have one goal in mind: **Listen**

# Three Ways Parent Centers are Adapting Topics and Materials

- Less is More
- Social Media: Facebook Live, Stories and Reels
  - Use trending phrases and be relatable
  - Example: “Tell me you’re a parent of a child with disabilities without telling me you’re a parent of a child with disabilities” or “Put a finger down challenge”
- Podcasts

# Expectations When Engaging Families and Youth in State and Local Planning and Implementation

- Know your purpose for engaging
  - What's in it for them?
- No tokens
- Check your ableism and your privilege at the door
- Understanding intersectionality is key



# More About Connor Archer

- 25 year old recent college graduate
- Self Advocate Advisor in Maine
- Founder & Chairman/CEO of The Courageous Steps Project
- 2022 Autism Society of Maine's Professional Providing Service Award Recipient
- Co-Chair of Maine's TransitionME Student Committee
- 2016 National Award Winner for Commitment to Youth Volunteerism



## More About Connor Archer (2)

**I Live With Autism!**



## More About Connor Archer (3)

- Diagnosed with Autism at 3 Years Old
- Non-Verbal until 5 Years Old
- Countless Hours of Early Intervention
- Countless Hours of Support Systems in Place
- Making Gains Along the Way
- Still Continuing to Grow!



# The importance of Youth voice

## In Connor's Words

- They provide new perspectives on key issues/services
  - Streamlining resource delivery & technical support
- They build a connection between youth and families living through the everyday challenges
  - What am I going through? What is my child going through?
- They build our future for the better!
  - New and innovative ideas...with better results!

# The importance of Youth voice

In Connor's Words

# Think Flexible!

# The importance of Youth voice (2)

## In Connor's Words - Think Flexible!

- Find ways to engage with youth
- Provide easy and accessible resources with as few clicks as possible!
- Involve youth in meaningful conversations that are easy to understand at the beginning
- Provide meaningful tasks that engage youth in a positive way
- Expect bumps in the road or unconventional methods

# Group Discussion

What action steps can we take for alignment of consistent & meaningful outreach and participation?

**THANK YOU**  
*for joining us!*

Please take a moment to submit your session  
**Quick Reaction**

