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Vocational Rehabilitation
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Onsite CART Captioning.

Second General Session
10:00 a.m. - 11:27 a.m

>> Good morning. If everybody could start coming back into the room. I think we're going to get started in about five minutes.

>> Good morning. Welcome back to the general session. First of all, before I introduce myself and others, let me say whoever picked the music for this event, wow, are y'all having fun?

I said hey panel we're starting off with Stevie Ray Vaughn. My name is gin Elizabeth Burdeshaw, I am the director of Alabama services combined agency. I am proud to be here. I am the co-chair for employment committee for CSAVR and the panel next to me includes a wonderful partnership that we've had with business in Alabama over the last several years.

I want to introduce everyone on the panel. She doesn't really need an introduction, but to my left, Kathy West-Evans with outline of our business services with CSAVR.

She's going to introduce the rest. But let me just say, J. Lodge we're thrilled you're here and director of OFCCP here. But J. Lodge you'll hear about them in just a minute. We just gave them another award last week in Alabama in the governor's committee. An employment of persons with disabilities. They have hired 114 individuals through our VR programs so we're thrilled they're here and you'll hear more from them in a minute. Thank you.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: Well thank you, Jane Elizabeth and I'm going to apologize for the voice. I've been on many planes during national disability employment awareness month so I think for those of us out there, we'd like to extend it through the whole year because October is just not enough time to celebrate all the great things that are going on.

I want to start by first recognizing the members of our national employment team. If you could please stand so we could say thank you for all of your great work. Thank you.

It takes a team to do the work with business, and to make the connection between all of our great talent and the business customers. We had a very exciting net summit. I want to thank Scott and the Maryland team for hosting us. We had 85 people in attendance and we're already planning for next year, so stay tuned for that.

We've got a real treat today. I've been in conversation with Craig. We've been on, in many conferences together. Craig is -- he's an advocate. He is -- he's in this line of work, I think for the first time I've seen someone in this role that really has a personal connection to the work we're doing.

He is a former city attorney from Coral Gables and he's going to talk with you a little bit about OFCCP. I think when you hear section 503 of the rehab act, the compliance for that faults under Craig's program. So the coverage for veterans, including veterans with disabilities.

So we're really excited to have him here today, and he and Mark, our commissioner have already connected. So we're going to start working on that federal partnership and get you all engaged. The other team that we have here today, and it is a team as you can see, are our partners from J. Lodge, which is now a Cognosante company, okay. And I'm going to introduce first, Chad ties. He is the senior vice president and general manager for Cognosante and you're based in Florida.

Chad's in D.C. So we're going to figure out where they are at.

Kristen Jones, vice president of field operations for J. Lodge and Kristen, where are you stationed?

>> Atlanta.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: And then Kristin Jones, for J. Lodge. Where are you located?

>> KRISTEN JONES: Florida.

>> KATHY WEST-EVANS: This is cause we've talked for a long time. I knew you were in Florida. And then from our Alabama team, some great partners that have been there, Daniel Spencer, the business relations consultant and Daniel has really been the boots on the ground for the Alabama team and it's always important to hear the work that we're doing at that level.

And then Leslie Dawson, the state administrator for business relations in Alabama, a long time partner. What I want to say about this partnership is it's growing. J. Lodge, with the acquisition by Cognosante is a huge team and focuses on IT solutions, particularly around healthcare information systems.

These are work from home positions. Which really has opened up a lot of opportunities for those that we support, the great talent that we support that happens to live in rural or remote areas or have limited access to transportation. As well as anyone who would like to work from home. People here work with individuals, people with disabilities, people without. I want to make that very clear up front because we've had the discussion about the integrated setting. The individuals are hired, they work like everyone else, train like everyone else and work directly for the company.

So it has offered a lot of flexibility for those who have had limited access, and it's a new way of working that I think you will learn a lot about, so the wave of the future. So thank you for all of your support and we are going to go ahead and start with Craig. I want to give him as much times as possible. We're excited to have him with us as well as the whole J. Lodge team and Alabama, thank you for your great work.

>> CRAIG LEEN: Thank you. Such a pleasure to be here today. Full inclusion of individuals with disabilities is a principle focus of the office of federal contract compliance programs. For those of you who don't know, OCCP IS enforce and compliance, related to executive order 11246 section 503 of the rehabilitation act and FEVR. And through that we protect ten different protected classes in our daily work.

One of my concerns when I joined the agency as its director, actually started as senior add visor and then deputy director and then director, but one of my concerns is that we had no focused enough on section 503 and full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of employment. We had done a pretty good job focusing on the seven percent utilization and of course the regulation that is were adopted several years ago that included that principal focus on hiring and utilization rate.

I did not think we were doing enough in the area of including of people with disabilities in all aspects of employment, including compensation, promotions, full opportunity to participate in the workplace. And I was concerned that there was still employment discrimination occurring every day to individuals with disabilitys in different ways that were not so easily measured as the hiring rate of a company.

I would also note that the 7 percent utilization rate has not been met by most federal contractors. In fact my understanding of the rate it tends to be more around two or 3 percent and that's one of the focus of our reviews.

So when I became director, I asked that our agency take decisive action and do something that would get noticed by practical contractors that they need to be doing more for individuals with disabilities, that that needs to be a primary focus of federal contractors.

So what we've done, we've done a lot of things, but one which I came to talk to you a little bit about today is the direction I gave that 500 corporate headquarters be scheduled for a focused review related only to section 503 of the rehabilitation act and that those reviews happen on site and we interview people and look at policies and interview people with disabilities who would like to speak with us and we determine if they're being fully included in employment.

And this is something that I hope will be a legacy at OFcc P, something we're continuing to do from scheduling this going into the future and many of the things we learn will be incorporated into our general compliance reviews so we are fully including individuals with disabilities in everything we do. My agency is renowned and has made a substantial impact, fighting discrimination based on compensation, against women, and minorities. We're well known for that and in fact it's even caused, I want to say controversy because I think everyone supports lack of discrimination against women or minorities in compensation, but a lot of federal contractors have pushed back because it's led to a substantial amount of liability for those contractors.

And we -- I feel that we've made a very positive impact in that area and we've continued that in this administration, that focus. But then I thought it myself, well, individuals with disabilities have a very low labor force participation rate of about 20 percent. They have a high unemployment rate and a significant wage gap of at least 30 cents on the dollar.

That wage gap is greater than the wage gaps based on race or gender. And it seemed to me if we're doing such a focus ensuring there's not discrimination based on gender and based on race or ethnicity, why aren't we doing the same for people with disabilities when we know that the problem at least in terms of its size, may be even more significant.

I was troubled by that. And that's why I asked our agency to start looking at compensation as well.

When we do these focused reviews and I hope it's something over time that will be incorporated into everything we do at OFCCP. One concern I had is in the area of race and gender we're doing so much that is making an impact, why aren't we doing the same for individuals with disabilities?

That's the question I asked and we've come forward with about five or six different proposals to make an impact in that area to make it more similar to the way we treat race and gender-based discrimination. That's something I'm very proud of.

I'll just take a moment before I continue to tell you we have been fully commit today fighting race and gender discrimination. In fact if you look at OFCCP's statistics, we've had our most successful year ever in fiscal year 2020, by a lot. It's not even close.

We had over 40 million dollars in recoveries in fiscal year 2020. The next closest year, 2017, was 23 million, I believe.

And in fact, the three -- the three years in this administration, FY17 through FY19, was higher than the prior seven years combined in terms of recoveries.

I don't know if a lot of people know that, but we've been extraordinarily successful compensation and fighting discrimination. I'm very proud of that as OFCCP director. I want to continue that in fiscal year 2020.

But I want to do the same for the people with disabilities. And that's really the message I would like to you to take from today, when you talk with federal contractors, we're very serious when it comes to individuals with disabilities and that will be the primary focus of the agency throughout this administration.

In addition to that, I wanted to note, because one thing I have brought to the agency as being a focus of mine is being more collaborative with federal contractors. Even though we've recovered more and we've also provided more compliance assistance, we had a record year last year in terms of help desk inquiries and responses, over 4500 which far exceeded any other year, even though we are doing more compliance assistance and getting more recoveries, I wanted to note that the percentage of discrimination findings is still around 2 to 5 percent. Most federal contractors are doing it right.

That's why I think we're so successful as an agency is we recognize most federal contractors are not discriminating based on race and gender, at least in a systemic way.

That is true across administrations. The Bush administration, Obama administration, we typically run at a rate of between two and 5 percent. So we should never assume that a contractor is discriminating, in fact the evidence is that most contractors are not.

One reason why I think this administration has been successful in getting higher recoveries is because we're focusing our attention on the two to 5 percent that have the problem and trying to resolve those issues quickly and trying to spend less time with the 95 to 98 percent of companies that are complying with the law.

And I think that that has been a very successful formula and we're going to continue doing that.

Having said all that, I'm still concerned, that when we talk about individuals with disabilities, that a lot of companies may be discriminating against individuals with disabilities in compensation or hiring because they're not looking at it the same way as gender or race discrimination.

Right now, if you're a federal contractor, based on regulations you should be doing hiring reviews and analyses of your entire work force to determine whether you're discriminating based on race or gender. I don't see companies doing that in the area of disability. When we know the utilization goal we've set, the good faith utilization goal where companies are supposed to be getting to 7 percent, my focus as OFCCP director is trying to increase persons with disabilities in all aspects of employment and treat them the same way as racism or sexism.

I think that that's necessary. That's what we've worked on for the past two years since I've been here.

And if you have any ideas how we can do that more successfully, please contact me. My e-mail address is [lien, Leen.Craig@dol.gov](mailto:lien,Leen.Craig@dol.gov).

Our relationship with vocational rehabilitation generally, is something that is important to me because I believe that is a clear opportunity to increase hiring individuals with disabilities, for our federal contractors and for the agency. It is a clear partner for us to work with.

Clear partners for us to work with to ensure higher employment of individuals with disabilities. I wanted to tell you a couple things and I wrote them down.

Take a look on our web site, OFCCP's web site. Type in section 503 focused reviews, you -- we have a web page that's dedicated to disability inclusion and I'm hopeful every federal contractor has taken a look at it and I think all the vocational rehabilitation should as well. Go to FAQ number 15 and you'll see how central vocational rehabilitation agencies are to our plan to have successful focus reviews. We want companies partnering with vocational rehabilitation companies. This is a best practice that applies to everybody, but we want federal contractors partnering with vocational rehabilitation agencies their area and using the VRA's as a pipe line to try to hire more people with disabilities it seems obvious to me, but I think not enough federal contractors avail themselves of that opportunity.

We have a list of best practices on our web site as well. Take a look at them and in fact if you have any additional best practices that you think would be helpful for federal contractors to follow, please let me know and we can add them. But right now I wanted to list them to you.

These are what the agency will be looking at when we do our focused reviews and this is what we're asking federal contractors to take a hard look at adopting. Many of these are not required by law, they're best practices, but we believe it will help companies meet the seven percent utilization goal and ensure they are complying with the law, for people with disabilities.

The first best practice is a centralized accommodation system. We are asking federal contractors to take a hard look at centralizing their accommodation system, centralizing their budget and making sure there are experts involved in any decision whether to grant an accommodation. And we are hoping they will typically grant an accommodation when requested.

Most accommodations are free as you all know and the median cost of a accommodation that has a cost is about \$500. Even an expensive accommodation when you a.m. more advertise that across a company

and look at a career and amount of time they could spend at a company, there's really no accommodation that's too costly, in my opinion.

So we do apply the law in this area, though. There is at least the possibility that there could be an undue hardship for a company, but if a company is not going to grant an accommodation because of an undue hardship, they should have a centralized accommodation system so that cost is not just an undue cost to a particular department but a real undue cost to the company and in addition to that they should have experts looking at it.

And it shouldn't just be based on someone's opinion who doesn't know anything about accommodating individuals with disabilities.

That's very important.

Number two, accessible on line recruiting tools. This is really required which law, if you have on line recruiting tools, they should be accessible. But that's something we are focusing on as a best practice. Number three and this is a big one for me, CEO leadership. We want to see the CEO's of federal contractors sending out messages through a whom company, through video, e-mail, quarterly messages that individuals with disability are welcome in that company if they would like to self ID, that is welcome, as well. And they will be fully included in all aspects of employment. It really needs to come from the top.

That's what I did when I started at OFCCP. As the director I sent a message to all of our employees and posted on the web side in case anyone wants to see it as an example and I spoke with the head of the civil right center who dots internal accommodation requests for the department of labor, and we told our employees that people with disabilities are fully included at OFCCP. We welcome accommodation requests. We welcome self identification, we welcome them.

And I'll tell you since we sent that message, I have a lot of individuals who are not required to do this, but they reach out to me because they have a disability and they're pleased with the actions that are being taken.

And you know, it also leads to more employees sometimes raising issue that is they haven't been fully compensated. One thing we should change is that is a good thing that someone is raising that issue. For too long, companies have looked at that as more of a liability issue. What do we do? This individual with a disability is saying we're not fully accommodating them.

Well what they should do is fully accommodate them and they need experts coming in looking at the accommodations and welcoming people, telling the company you need more inclusion. That's worked at OFCCP. It's been a focus of ours and worked for me so I advise that you consider the same.

Number four, and this is a big one, we're asking companies to coordinate with state and local VRAs. It's a best practice, but also you're going to be seeing that if the company is in violation of section 503 we will be including that in our conciliation agreements as a requirement. And we're hoping to bring more attention to VRAs generally. One thing I've been telling federal contractors is one thing that shows good faith if you're not meeting the search percent goal, is having a partnership with your state or local VRA. That's going to go a long way to showing that you're doing what you can to hiring people with disabilities.

Number five a great self ID program, comprehensive and can inclusive. Welcoming. Not something pro forma. Something you're doing every quarter, nice message saying we welcome people with disabilities, please self ID if you would like.

They can't be required, we're respectful of the individual and respectful of confidentiality, but it's something that can be encouraged of the whole group of employees and make something more comfortable, self ID.

Next is disability inclusion programs, we've included a lot of language on our web site, including in our FAQs that they can favor employment of the hiring of persons with disabilities. That is perfectly appropriate to have disability inclusion programs. Too many times I've had someone from a general

counsel's office for a contractor come to me and say how can you favor employment for persons with disabilities. Isn't that discriminating against individuals without disabilities.

I said absolutely not. Individuals without disabilities are not a protected class and evidence shows people with disability are being discriminated against all the time. Very high unemployment rate and significant wage gap. These inclusion programs are necessary to fully include individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment.

So I was asked, well, can you put that in writing, so that, you know, we as lawyers can cite to that. So I did. It's on our web site. We have a big FAQ about it. We're also going to be publishing more information with the EEOC and office of disability employment policy to be clear that disability hiring policies are positive things.

Let me give you one example. I visited several autism hiring programs. I'm also a parent of a child with autism. Both of my kids actually were diagnosed with autism.

My daughter's autism is profound and affects her in every aspects of her life. So I know a fair amount about autism. I also used to be on the University of Miami Nova center for autism and related disabilities. I was a constituency board member. So I know lot about autism and have been an advocate for autism and individuals with disabilities generally, prior to being in this position.

So I visited these hiring programs and I'll tell you, they're necessary. They may not be required by law but they're necessary. You know they often say that whenever you meet an individual with autism, they're different than every other individual with autism. There are some aspects that can sometimes be similar.

One is a lot of individuals with autism, and I know lot of you know that, have social anxiety or difficulty making eye contact or would be difficulty in an interview even though they would be perfectly good day to day in the workplace, with just a couple accommodations to address their situation.

And yet so many of them are never able to make it in the door because you have people who are not trained in disability inclusion doing the hiring process and immediately excluding them because they're different, because they're diverse.

And that's something that needs to stop. There should be disability hiring programs generally. It's something that needs to be talked about. People with disabilities can add a lot to the work environment, can make a huge impact for our economy, but not if people continue to be trapped by discriminatory views, stereotypes and other aspects relating to individuals with disabilities and that includes individuals with cognitive disabilities as well or who have mental-health issues.

These individuals can add a lot to the economy also and can work in a work environment well, but if there are these old stereotypes and really what in the end is prejudice, against these individuals and they're never given a chance, you will continue to see systemic discrimination against these groups and that's something we need to bring attention to and make a positive impact in that area.

So disability inclusion programs are a positive things and I guess the main point I wanted to make is they are allowed by law and we put it on our web site so please consider them if you're a federal contractor.

In addition to that is ER MS the employee assistance and resource network. Take a look at the web site butt best practice is a ER MS mental health tool kit. All contractors should look at that and make sure they're including people with mental health concerns in the work force that they're giving them access to care, access to tele work if that they what they need to do and not engaging in discrimination against those individuals.

In addition to that, employee resource groups. I think this is a significant one and I want to spend a moment talking about. I feel employee resource groups, maybe except for centralized identification system and also working with state and local VRA, maybe the most important.

It's important for companies in order to show you're welcoming to individuals with disability, it's important to have groups for individuals with disabilities.

You can't require people to do it, but you should allow them to do if and you should support them and support them in employment as being part of employee resource groups. You should give them time to be part of the employee resource groups. It shouldn't be held against them. In fact it should be a positive thing.

An employee resource group for parents of kids with disabilities would be something wonderful for me and if I'm in a private employer one day I would love to have a group like that.

Having a group for employees with disabilities would be helpful. It helps build advocates in your company so maybe individuals who don't want to self ID can go to them and talk to them and have a conversation and then decide to self ID and request any accommodation they need. Big support of employee resource groups.

And lastly, having a chief accessibility officer. Lot of federal contractors are medium to large. Many of the larger companies in this country are federal contractors. They should have a chief accessibility officer, and you should make that person high enough in the corporate ladder that they can make decisions and those decisions will be enacted or will become true.

So those are our recommendations. If you have additional ones, please send them to me.

How am I doing on time?

>> You're right at about five minutes

>> Oh, you have a question, how many federal contractors, there's about 25 hundred, and about 120,000 federal contractor establishments.

So an establishment is, for example if you have a company that has a couple factories, five office, maybe a couple distribution centers, each of those places is an establishment. So that would be one federal contractor with eight establishments.

So again there's 25,000 federal contractors, about 120,000 establishments. So around -- between four and five establishments per contractor, on average. Some have one or two. There's some that have over a hundred. So that comprises about 25 percent of the American work force.

So action that OFCCP takes can make a big impact because a lot of those contractors, as I mentioned, are the largest contractors in the United States. Talking about defense contractors, big university contractors, they can have a huge impact on our work force and they are also looked to as thought leaders in this area because they have comprehensive diversity and inclusion programs and typically a whole department dedicated to affirmative action programs and compliance with OFCCP requirements. So these are the companies that can lead the change that will ensure full inclusion with individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment and that is why it is incumbent on OFCCP to bring a focus to that area.

I wanted to conclude by telling you a brief story. It happened to me yesterday, actually. I you know I told you my daughter has intellectual disability and is autistic and is profoundly affected by her autism. And when I say that, I don't view that as a negative.

She's diverse. She's a wonderful child. I'm so lucky to have her. She brings -- so I'm very proud of her. She's doing very well in school. She's an inspiration to many people because she is the light of many people's lives. She's so happy. She's so interested in what she's interested in, but not necessarily interested in what I'm interested in or family.

And sometimes, and I'll tell you why. When I -- yesterday I ran the Marine Corps marathon. I ran it ten years ago in 2009. I almost didn't come today because there was a lot of pain in my legs. I didn't realize how much pain there would be.

I've run ten marathons so you think I would know, but you always forget right? So I ran my first marathon ten years ago in the Marine Corps. It was one of my fastest. I remember running that really fast and being excited about it. And I thought you know, from my -- it's been ten years since I ran that marathon and it was my tenth marathon.

So I thought you know they opened up this duo category where I could run pushing my daughter in a running wheelchair and I thought you know what. I'm going to do that. I think she's going to enjoy it. And it's something that she and I have been doing almost every weekend, we've been going on these long 15, 16 mile runs on a canal path in Washington, D.C.

So I've been training, we're ready, get there yesterday and it's pouring rain. I'm thinking oh, my gosh, will my daughter want to do this. She's mostly nonverbal so I have to pick up on visual cues.

She seemed very eager to go. We get there, get the running wheelchair, I don't know where to go to get to the start, so I sent an e-mail to Ainsley's angels, which is a group helping people with disabilities, often fairly profound disabilities to help individuals in these do you live races, they tell me meet up with us and we'll go down there.

So it's raining, we got up at 3:50, my daughter's in the car ready to go, it's raining, we get to the parking garage at the Marine Corps marathon let us park in. We get the pretty elaborate running wheelchair set up, ready to go.

And it's pouring rain and my daughter is happy. I'm not. You know cause it's wet and she is happy. She's enjoying it. She likes water a lot. And she has a big smile. So we go down to the group and we walk to the start and I must -- I tell you, I was con founded in a positive way.

When I ran the Marine Corps marathon ten years ago, there were a number of individuals with disabilities competing in different ways. Either in wheelchairs or as guided runners, but it wasn't -- maybe I'm wrong. I don't know the statistics, but I don't remember seeing them as prevalent as I did yesterday. There were so many individuals with disabilities competing in this race in different ways. Either through -- in the wheelchair division, which is often the fastest division, being pushed, as guided runners, competing.

And all over the course. Completely included. Being cheered on just like all the other runners and it was very special to be a part of that. And that's the way it should be.

And it's been ten years and I saw a huge difference. And I must admit it was very heart warming and it made me think that the world is going in the right direction, that the country is going in the right direction as it involves inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

This was a running event, 26 miles and you had individuals with disabilities everywhere. And if they can be everywhere in a marathon why can't they be everywhere in a workplace, to the same extent?

So we ran the 26 miles. It was extraordinarily challenging. My daughter laughed the whole time. She loved it. She loved, she loved passing people. It was just very -- it was a wonderful experience to run it with her. I wanted to run -- to push her up the Iwo Jima memorial. That's where the finish line is, I was pushing her and she was making very happy noises, she was excited and laughing. And people were cheering and we finished not toward the front. We finished in about -- it was two hours slower than when I ran it ten years before and that's not -- that's not just because of the running wheelchair I'm not as fast, but the -- but it was a better experience. I have to tell you. It was my best experience run ago marathon, running it with my daughter and the way that people made her feel included and when we got our two medals and the photo together with the marines, it was just very special. And that's something I'll take with me for my whole life.

The point of that, though is if a marathon can fully include people with disabilities, they should be fully included in workplaces, come on. And where he need to recognize that. We need to recognize that. So you're on the front lines, vocational rehabilitation agencies, you're on the front lines. Keep up your great work. We still have a long way to go but we're making progress. We're going to continue to make progress. We're going to continue to do these focus reviews. We're going to continue holding federal contractors to the highest standards when it comes to inclusion and we're happy to partner with you in doing this so thank you very much. It's been a true pleasure being here today.

>> Hello, I'm Kristin Jones from J. Lodge and I would just like to take a minute to introduce countries tee Wilson, the vice president of field operations for J. Lodge. And Chad Teiss, he's a senior vice president for Cognosante.

So who is J. Lodge. I'm sure a of you know me, for those of you who don't, J. Lodge is a quality monitoring company, so if you've ever called somewhere and heard this call may be monitored or recorded for quality assurance, that's J. Lodge.

So we are a recognized leader in the quality monitoring industry. We have the company was founded in 1999 by Colleen and Mike Schrader.

They had a friend that was severely disabled and they founded the company J. Lodge and that is how J. Lodge got the name. The mission of J. Lodge is to provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and most of our employees are quality analysts, the individuals listening to the recorded phone calls and they are able to work from their homes.

J. Lodge provides solutions that improve, for business wise contacts and their operations through monitoring and quality assurance programs. And then we also combine human monitoring with speech analytics, which is an artificial intelligence system. And data science to provide quantifiable insights allowing leadership to make informed business decisions.

So J. Lodge is a competitive integrated employer who provides meaningful career opportunities for everyone and that does include military veterans and Americans with disabilities. We partner with a nation wide network of vocational rehabilitation counselors and we are committed to maintaining an inclusive environment that encourages and supports a diverse work force.

Our employee model is a testament to that. Most of our employees do work at home, offering their education and business expertise as quality analysts.

So for career advancement, our goal is to provide career advancement opportunities for those who have the skills and capability and desire to grow. Most of our current management team began as quality analysts.

We have promoted quality analysts to many other positions across the organization, including information technology and database rules, client status managers, data science and speech analytics and also managers. And recruiters.

Our employees makes J. Lodge the best. Our unique hiring model is designed to find the best talent in the industry and help them succeed. We empower our team with a flexible schedule and work environment so they do their best work and make a difference for our clients.

Most of our analysts average 3.8 of post-secondary education and our quality analysts have an average of 15 years' business experience.

Our normal attrition rate is usually less than 3 percent.

Through our partnership with vocational rehabilitation counselors, we have been able to place qualified individuals into permanent long-term positions with J. Lodge. J. Lodge communicates with VR counselors frequently to discuss job descriptions, as well as provide feedback on candidates placed. Vocational rehabilitation counselors help J. Lodge prescreen our candidates to ensure they would be able to perform the essential functions of the position through our referral process. How can other employers tap into the J. Lodge strategy?

The partnership with vocational rehabilitation counselors provides access to qualified candidates and also J. Lodge's work from home model removes location limitations and provides productive work environments, to our employees.

This is especially useful for employees who may have limited mobility and may not be able to leave their homes.

Training is our key. We work side by side with vocational rehabilitation counselors in order to provide opportunities for employment for Americans with disabilities. We provide comprehensive training to our employees and this is all completed in a virtual setting.

We provide support to develop each employee's skills that are necessary to be successful in the quality analyst position. We also offer on line module learning courses. At this point it's called linked in learning, we used to use Linda, for employees for additional career growth.

So the linked in learning courses offer our employees the ability, if they want to get, for instance a project management certification or if they're interested in IT certifications we do provide that at no cost to our employees.

Our web site is www.J.Lodge.com and our open positions are on the career page. Thank you.

>> Great morning. Good morning? This is a good mic. I'm going to have to tell my pastor he needs to touch base with your AV person cause I almost started to say let the church say Amen. My name is Daniel Spencer, I'm from Alabama so I am a fighting line fan or I say roll Tide, roll Tide. So let's go ahead and get into I wanted to share with you that the Alabama VR, we have a history with J. Lodge that goes back actually before I started.

I became a part of the agency in 2013. And so we had noticed -- we had a relationship with J. Lodge, so we looked at the numbers and from November 2014 to September 2017, J. Lodge had hired about 11 of our consumers at that time.

And so what we wanted to do, we wanted to discuss the single point of contact because we realized that businesses like to just talk to one person and not talk to 15, 20 different entities.

So in this discussion we decided, hey, let's go ahead and make a single point of contact because there were several business relation consultants on our team who were touching base with J. Lodge. So our state administrator said Daniel we're going to allow you to go ahead and take the J. Lodge account.

So in October of 2017, we implemented the single point of contact which would be myself for the whole State of Alabama. So which meant that all of the referrals to J. Lodge would go through myself.

So in March of 2018, through discussions with Kristin and she'll tell you, we stay on the phone a lot. And we were able to develop and create a referral process which also had the help and assistance of those individuals on our business relations team.

So I know everybody likes numbers so I have to give you numbers. As has been stated earlier, since October 2017 to September 2019, J. Lodge has hired 114 Alabama VR consumers. Y'all clap -- that's a clapping moment.

We have -- so just a breakdown with those numbers there, we've had 84 of our consumers hired on as quality analysts. We've had 26 hired on as technical quality analysts and four hired on as bilingual quality analysts.

And to this day, at this moment, 72 of those consumers still remain employed with J. Lodge. So not only is J. Lodge hiring individuals but our individuals, our consumers, are actually staying with J. Lodge.

So it gives us a retention rate of 63 percent? How many of you would take a 63 percent retention rate?

So we wanted to share with you our process of what we created and developed and implemented as it relates to J. Lodge and Alabama VR.

So our process begins with our VR counselor, who refers the consumer to the business relations consultant. Our local business relation consultant, what they do is explain the job description, the knowledge skills and abilities, the details of the position, the salary, the hours, all of the details to that consumer.

If that consumer says hey I'm interested, we would then refer our consumer for a technology assessment and screening. And this was done -- there is a specific reason why we did this. We found out some consumers and some of of you know, they will tell you no, I'm not interested in a job and then they'll go behind your back and apply for the job.

So what happened was we said you know what we want to do is, because J. Lodge doesn't have a set time that they hire individuals. It's just when they get that contract and they have a need for employees

or quality analysts, they will ask us, they will reach out and say, hey Daniel I need 80 quality analysts. 80? Okay. We'll try.

So it's a very fast process. So what the -- the screening of the technology assessment and screening does, is it allows us to be able to already see what our consumer would need should they get hired on, as far as the technology is concerned.

So after successful completion of the technology assessment, what we do is we then -- and they've been approved, say this person would be a great fit, so what we do is our local VRC, they share the application link with our consumer who then apprise for the job.

They receive the consumer then received the confirmation e-mail from J. Lodge, as it relates to them receiving their application. After we've verified this they've completed that application, there is a referral form that is sent to the single point of contact such as myself and what I do is I call J. Lodge and follow up with them.

I send an e-mail and say I've had John Doe apply for the technical quality analyst position. I want to know if you received his application and what's his application status currently.

So the lead point of contact contacts J. Lodge about -- and I follow up throughout that process. So J. Lodge is not having to deal with none of the counselors in the state. The only person J. Lodge speaks to is myself.

So you can imagine probably about 80 percent of my day is dealing with the referral process and individuals we have in the pipe line.

J. Lodge then informs the consumer and also the point of contact, if they've been hired or not. They do it by e-mail. So if they're hired on, the J. Lodge -- the J. Lodge informs the consumer about the hire date, when they are to start and they also send a reminder making sure your technical equipment is in place to start on that date and J. Lodge has been very patient.

So when working with other work from home companies, a lot of them will require you have the equipment up front. J. Lodge actually gives us time get our -- so our consumers, those who may not have all the equipment, to get that equipment in place.

And we have vendors across the state that actually assist us with this, as well. So our consumer, they -- once they get hired on, they complete the on board process, which is then followed up with the point of contact confirming and signing off on that new hire process.

We actually, the point of contact then contacts J. Lodge after three weeks to see if they've passed the certification test and after six weeks upon the completion of on-the-job training.

So I wanted to share with you, there are some disability types when we kind of looked at what the the disability types that are hired, J. Lodge.

We have individuals, consumers who have anxiety depression, autism, traumatic brain injuries, physical disorders which include back disorders, complex pain syndrome, Crohn's disease, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, stroke, hearing impairment, and blindness, which is best correction not more than 20/200.

So the top reasons why our consumers stay with J. Lodge is it's a work from home option. How many of you work from home? Yeah.

And then, so it's the -- it really helps, especially for individuals with disability that is does not allow them -- makes it very difficult for them to get out and move around in a workplace. Also it's the convenience of it, J. Lodge offers full time and part time options for our consumers.

And we have individuals who are on medications, and it's easier for them to be home based on the medications that's been described. It's disability friendly.

J. Lodge thrives on hiring individuals with disabilities. And then again we mentioned the hours. They have a morning shift and afternoon shift and the shifts are in four-hour increments, so it's very flexible for our consumers.

So we also -- I wanted to share with you some top reasons for separation. Let me first say this. J. Lodge, since I've been put over the account, J. Lodge has not terminated any of our employees, any of our consumers.

They have not. So the reasons why our consumers are separated, we have consumers who realize once they start working with J. Lodge, oh, that's work from home. It -- I really have to work. I really have to do some work, I have to get out of bed and for some people it's like I thought it wasn't work.

So with that realization we have to try to find another fit for them. Also the computer skills for the position, we do have those consumers who say yes I know how to do an e-mail, yes I know how to attach a document to an e-mail, yes I know where the volume icon is at and then when they get nit's like no, I don't know how to do that.

That's another reason. There's personal issues that come up. We have individuals who end up becoming caregivers or moving situation, Internet situation, it kind of messes things up for them so they're not able to continue employment with J. Lodge.

Another reason is they don't pass the certification test which is given three weeks after a individual starts employment. And then lastly we have some consumers, and it's not a lot, who end up with their disability, they end up having more complications that cause them to either have to put their employment on pause or they have to end their employment.

And let me share this, J. Lodge is very good at working with our consumers. If our consumer deals with a situation like that, J. Lodge is like okay Daniel what we'll do is put them on hold and allow them to come back. That's a clapping moment, too.

That's good. All right I want to share with you just testimony from one of our consumers who is still employed with J. Lodge, his name is Tyler Spivey. Tyler has cerebral palsy, has been employed with J. Lodge since February 2018 and he found it difficult to find an opportunity -- job opportunities were limited due to his disability. So he was hired as a technical quality analyst and he was really excited when he found out there was an employer that actually hires individuals with disabilities and gives them a chance to prove themselves because a lot of you in the room know that a lot of individuals, consumers we deal with and talk to, they say there's nothing wrong with my mind. I can do the job I just need someone to give me a chance.

So Tyler has definitely excelled and he said this is a very good company for somebody with a disability. He said a lot of people who work there work with VR counselors who are -- they have consumers who are disabled and they have certain issues.

Tile tie letter, last year he won our governor's award and we had several winners across the state and J. Lodge actually gave them a bonus. Oh, y'all don't like bonuses? I like bonuses.

All right. Thank you.

>> I'm Leslie Dawson, for the state of Alabama, and I do want to thanks J. Lodge for your partnership and Daniel for his hard work.

I wanted to talk a little bit about lessons learned and working with J. Lodge and kind of in general about working with businesses.

One of the most important things that we learned is we absolutely have to put in place the lead point of contact, philosophy within the state, especially when working with a business such as J. Lodge.

As Daniel had mentioned, because they allow us to have an opportunity to assess a person's computer equipment before they apply for the job and pretty much say, hey, you know what if the person gets hired then we will assist in purchasing the computer equipment that is needed for them to perform the job.

It made a huge difference in our consumers being able to secure employment. So we had to make sure that they had that assessment completed and that things were lined up for them as soon as the job offer was made, because we didn't want to purchase equipment without having the job in place.

So that lead point of contact was crucial for that as well as following up with any questions or issues that may arise on the job.

Now, these work from home positions are excellent job for consumers who live in rural areas, as long as no Internet usage is available.

I do want to speak to the fact that these are work from home jobs because we have gotten a lot of questions from other states, you know how this competitive integrated employment.

And I want to back up and say last night, as Daniel and I were meeting with countries tee and Kristin, one of the questions was how many people do you employ who do not have disabilities and the answer to that was we don't know. We know how many people with disabilities you hire but what about people without.

And again the question is we don't know because we just hire people to work. And they don't really discriminate between whether somebody has a disability or not. They hire individuals with or without disabilities. The thing they pointed out is the reason we recruit from vocational rehabilitation is because we know you're going to send us qualified candidates who have been prescreened and can perform the job.

But we take applications from anybody from all over the place. So I wanted to point out that it is not just recruiting for individuals for disabilities. It's for any individual with a disability -- I mean with or without a disability.

So some of the other questions that came up were about -- well what about the level of benefits, so J. Lodge offers benefits to every employee, disabled or not.

They offer health insurance, dental insurance, vision insurance, and a retirement program -- plan as well.

They do encourage full-time employment although they will you know offer some part time work as well. The pay range, 8.25 to \$15 per hour depending on the position, and I'll tell you when you're working from home, that's a pretty good wage rate, you're not having to worry about transportation expenses and clothing expenses. Cause this is not video related right? All right wanted to make sure I said that.

Another thing is there is absolutely opportunity for advance: As Kristin alluded to, lot of their upper management started off as a quality analyst and we have several consumers who have been promoted throughout the company.

Also, these jobs of found throughout the community. There's work from home jobs everywhere. This is not a company where somebody has to contract or find their own job leads.

They are actually hired and employed and the paycheck comes directly from J. Lodge.

Far as the work unit, the work unit is dependent on the employer's organizational structure and as we know J. Lodge's organizational structure is work from home employment.

So I wanted to cover a few of those topics that have come up in conversation because it is important that we are recognizing that although this is someone who is working from home, they are competitively integrated in terms of how the structure of the company works and they -- the -- the employees have webinars, they have trainings together, they're messaging together, so they still communicate with each other through that on line platform.

The -- one thing I wanted to also point out with the partnership with J. Lodge is the cross state sharing of information. So because we have worked really hard to maintain the relationship with J. Lodge and we've created a specific referral process that has been very beneficial for getting our consumers hired, we share that referral process across states, with other state agencies.

And what I think is very important about having a national employment team is that, one, we have a venue to share that information, but two we're working with a company who works across state lines all over the nation and even internationally.

And so they can receive the same services from one state agency to floor state agency. So it's that consistency of response and that consistency of needing their needs, that is going to be very beneficial for our consumers in the end as far as them being able to secure employment with J. Lodge.

I wanted to ask if Chad, um, had -- would like to maybe tell us a little bit how J. Lodge works in conjunction with Cognosante. Just to give us an idea of how we've got the parent company and then the J. Lodge company

>> absolutely. Is that mic on? Thank you Craig.

So about a year and a half ago, J. Lodge was acquired by Cognosante. Cognosante is a -- perfect -- is a healthcare company that's focused on disrupting healthcare throughout the United States.

We support primarily federal and state governments. But about a year and a half ago we were introduced to J. Lodge and we expanded our mission so instead of just doing services for Medicaid or Medicare or other federal agencies, we realized that we were too limited in looking at what healthcare meant and healthcare has to be about the total well-being of individuals.

So part of the mission of J. Lodge which is to employ people with differing abilities really has rung a bell within Cognosante. So as we integrate, one of the things we're doing is working with the VRs to really understand how that model could apply cross Cognosante but also looking for people who have started working for J. Lodge who are quality analysts who may have promoted and how can we give them other opportunities and expand their presence within Cognosante

>> thank you. Just wanted to add something as I was listening to what Chad was saying and what Kristin said earlier as a director of a program, you know we're also wanting to make sure we are following our guidelines, familiar our regulations.

So I'm like I got to get up here and make sure that everybody understands J. Lodge hires individuals without disabilities so that everybody understands this is competitively integrated employment because when Christian and Chad say our mission is to hire individuals with diverse ability I immediately go to oh, my gosh, but we're following the regulation, but then it just dawned on me.

Wow. If all companies had that as their mission, to hire individuals with diverse abilities and disabilities, as one of our leaders said yesterday, we wouldn't have to be here.

So I think that that is a great mission to have and I want to thank you for having that mission. Kristin would you -- countries tee, would you like to say a few additional things about J. Lodge and kind of what the future hold for J. Lodge?

>> hi, so I think we covered a lot of it, but really what makes J. Lodge special is the people and culture, so although we've been integrating into Cognosante and it's a larger company that J. Lodge has been historically, J. Lodge retains that same culture. Our employees, they're highly educated. They bring just a slew of experience that allows us to help our clients and improve, not only healthcare but customer service and other fields and it really allows you know everyone, despite -- or you know to not dependent on you know certain skills. It's a diverse group of people and they are able to really be productive and provide a great service to our clients.

So my job there is to ensure that we continue the work model that we have and allow it to be successful, so that we can provide as many as opportunities to everyone who has the skill set as possible.

>> thank you. At this time we would like to open up the floor to questions for either Mr. Leen or for J. Lodge.

>> okay. We're going to be running a mic here for questions. Jane Elizabeth is taking charge there. Yeah, that would be great.

I also want to let you know that we will be working with the J. Lodge team, they'll be setting up a call with the net to talk about the new working relationship between J. Lodge and Cognosante. So that's

going to be scheduled. I think we talked about after the holiday, after Thanksgiving, so we have those updates coming for everyone.

Okay. Questions for the J. Lodge team other for director Leen? Okay.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: Hi, this is a question for director Leen. And the question is, you were talking about having businesses allocate a portion of their budget to accommodations. Is there a recommendation of what percentage of all corporate budget should be allocated to accommodation?

>> CRAIG LEEN: You know that's a very good question. We will -- we'll provide feedback on that. I mean what we would ask companies to do is to look over the past few years and estimate how much would be necessary to grant accommodations across their work force, if they amortized it I wouldn't say their work force so a lot of it would depend on that particular company, nevertheless, and it might depend on the industry, but that's a really good question. We should probably have a target goal. I'll probably get a little push back from the attorneys because they worry that companies will view that as, you know that applies to every company, have that amount set aside and if it's still not enough they're still required to grant 9 accommodations that are necessary.

And that's the one point I want to make. You know people with disabilities is a huge group in this country and by group, that's too small a word. It's like 20 percent of the population that really an untapped resource.

When you only have a 20 percent labor force participation rate within that group and higher unemployment rate. It means there's a lot of people available to work right now with disabilities. And we are basically as a country at full employment.

So if there was ever a time to change the labor force participation rate or unemployment rate for people with disabilities, this is the time.

Now the unemployment rate has gone down for people with disabilities. It's the lowest in other or the lowest in recorded history and I assume lowest in history because we're still making progress in this area, but what's important to know is that although individuals with disabilities have a range of disabilities, they sometime will still require an accommodation. The point that needs to be made to people is that's not special treatment. That's equal treatment.

And if you have to grant an accommodation that doesn't make the person unqualified for the job. I think too many people think oh, well they're only qualified if they are granted a reasonable accommodation. They're tiled to reasonable accommodation by law and assuming they can fulfill the job with the accommodation, you should be giving them the job.

That's a legal entitlement. It's in the law, been in the law for several decades now but the point is that I still like to mention 9 actual cost of the accommodations are typically free and the average cost is about 500 simply because I want companies to take another look at that. Why aren't they granting accommodations to basically anyone who requests it. It seems like that makes sense, it's not that expensive, it's legally required, allows you to hire more people, there's only positives attached to that, but included with that sort of approach is you have to have a comprehensive holistic. There needs to be messages object your web site that says we know as an employer that we are not just hiring disability because we have some philanthropic role but that it's good for the economy and good for us.

That needs to really permeate to the entire work force. People need to understand that so they don't view an accommodation as special treatment, but as equal treatment

>> Amen

>> this is Michael from Washington blind I have three comments and one question. First comment, Cathy, thank you for always bringing an amazing panel to this. Thank you for that.

Director Leen thank you for your passion and compliment to people with disabilities. OFCCP has such a broad impact of companies that you can influence and using that to maintain and deepen the commitment to people with disabilities I'm totally impressed with.

Mr. Spencer a single point of contact is important to business, but it's only as good as the sings he will point of contact, and you are obviously an awesome single point of contact, so thank you for that. My question for J. Lodge is I saw your pay range of 8:25 to 15 dollars an hour. I live in Washington State with the local minimum wage starts at \$15 an hour so I'm curious how you work with that in terms of employing people around the country.

>> hi. So we always pay the state's minimum wage or -- 8:25 an hour or the state's minimum wage whichever is higher and then the employee will receive increases from that point.

>> that's just the starting salary, Michael

>> one way of thinking about the quality analyst that is we hire is that is an entry level position where we're hoping to get them in the door and include them in other parts of our business.

So on our data science and data an analysis team, we would have never been able to find them if we hadn't started this way. Get them in the door, find out what they need and how we can develop them and then move them into other positions.

>> and they do hire -- I want to make it clear, they do hire from across the country, including Washington straight Michael. Not just a Alabama, Alabama has just done a fabulous job so we wanted to share that model.

Are there questions?

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: Hi everybody, I'm Christy Ramos and I'm from communication services for the deaf and I want is to thank you for what you're doing and including people with disabilities.

So for J. Lodge the question I have for why you guys, the jobs you're providing for different individuals for the hybrid that you're using, do you have any deaf and hard of hearing employees working for you and if you do, what kind of positions are they in?

>> so we have had positions for hearing impairment, including -- so rather than analyzing a phone call, they may be analyzing a chat or e-mail interaction. So dependent on the type of contract we have, that is is a possibility.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: (Not near microphone)

>> we do, we do.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: Hi I'm Kathy Davis, business relations program manager for Florida VR and director Leen, I wanted to tell you that you are the real deal.

I'm very impressed. Change comes from the top down and since you've taken office, I have seen the most amazing response from your district managers. They have been reaching out to us to include us in virtually everything they are doing. They also recently organized with us an aerospace networking event. And it was amazing. I don't want to steal their thunder, but our area director is here. You can talk with her about it afterwards. Tawanna raise your hand.

We had six aerospace companies come out, Chris came out, I think with his supervisor. And we had 40 job seekers come and learn about the aerospace networking. So it was an amazing turnout. We've done many other things with OFCCP throughout the State of Florida and we really thank you for your leadership.

>> thank you so much. I'll tell you, I did tell every region and district director I wanted them to have a relationship with all 50 state vocational rehabilitation agencies and I know that's who I'm meeting with. So I hope that each of you have been reach out to.

Also I asked them to look -- to contact -- if there was a local vocational rehabilitation agency to reach out to them, too.

So we have 48 districts, district and area offices, so hopefully each of you have been reached out to in some way. If you have not and don't worry, they won't get in trouble for not doing it. I will send them your information.

If you have not been reached out to, please send me an e-mail and I will put you in contact with our district or regional director. That's important to me that we have a relationship with every one because ultimately you are the experts in this area and we should be benefiting from your expertise. Every week I prepare a report -- I think they call it like the White House and their liaison, it basically talks about all the outreach we're doing. Which is good, we should be doing out reach on the executive order, but I never saw section 503. The most recent one I had had section 503 in every single one and there were like ten of them.

So I have told my agency I want them doing out reach specifically on section 503, and Deborah, as well cause we're going to be scheduling this with five different headquarters and that will be focused on Vevra, is it veterans with disabilities and their spouses. My long term goal is to always be looking the section 503 and VEVRA in every list and also include a focus on that. So anyhow you should be being reached out to, if you're not being reached out to, reach out to me and I'll put you in contact with the appropriate person and hopefully you each have a relationship and I would like to hear more about what you were telling me.

So that sounds really exciting so I look forward to talking to you after this.

>> thanks Kathy. And we've been talking about an MOU between CSAVR and OFCCP and I think that's exciting and I think when we first -- when the changes happened with section 503 and VEVRA, we had training and I think so it would be great for you to provide updated training

>> yes, we would like to have an MO Uwith you. Right now we have one with the national group, writes more general and focused. I think we should have a similar one with you and it should basically, in my view commit the agency to providing support for your conferences like this one that we would come and speak and then also a collaboration regarding what you do every day.

And then also the fact that I've mentioned that in our conciliation agreements we're going to start including a requirement that they coordinate with the local vocational rehabilitation agency, state or local.

And then also more general commitment. I would like this to survive my director ship. And I believe it will. I think it's something that makes sense. It really is nonpartisan, apolitical, nonpartisan, so I would like to establish a memorandum of understanding that will stand the test of time.

So we're going to be working on that.

>> so great to have you with us. Other questions?

Okay. All right. Any parting comments from our panel?

Well I just have to say the future is bright when you've got the commitment of people like director Le, nand the whole J. Lodge team that has come here to be with us from around the country and your continued support and growth and Cognosante, what a great opportunity.

And then thank you to Alabama for sharing your model because this is what we're all about. When it works in one area, let's not reinvent the wheel, let's move that model. So thank you so much 6789 it's a great future. Thank you.

>> I believe I think we have a short break and we move into -- move into regional meetings, the room assignment should be in your program. And lunches for those regional meetings, do you know? Are they in the rooms? Okay. All right.

And if you do not have a regional meeting to attend it's lunch on your own. You can return after lunch