nTIDE Season 8 - Episode 11 - 11/3/2023

**Andrew Houtenville:** Here we go.

**Recorded Introduction:** Hello, and welcome everybody to the National Trends in Disability Employment or nTIDE Lunch and Learn Series. Just a few housekeeping items Before we begin. This webinar is being recorded. We will post an archive of each webinar each month on our website at www.researchondisability.org/ntide. This site will also provide copies of the presentations, the speaker's bios, full transcripts, and other valuable resources. As an attendee of this webinar, you are a viewer. To ask questions of the speakers, click on the Q&A box on your webinar screen and type your questions into the box. Speakers will review these questions and provide answers during the last section of the webinar. Some questions may be answered directly in the Q&A box.

If you have any questions following this recording, please contact us at disability.statistics@unh.edu or toll free at 866-538-9521 for more information. Thanks for joining us. Enjoy today's webinar.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Hi everybody, this is Andrew Houtenville from the University of New Hampshire. There are some, make sure- Okay. Never mind. Sorry. Someone chatted and I wanted to make sure it was something I didn't need to address. Welcome to nTIDE. Today will be- I'm sorry. Just some zoom tips before we start. Or sound, if you're having difficulty with your sound system, you can go to audio settings and choose different speakers or headsets. Also, close captioning may be found by clicking on the closed captioning button and selecting either subtitles or you can have a running transcript down the side.

All right. Let's see. A little bit about nTIDE. It occurs at noon eastern on the first Friday of each month with the release of the nTIDE Report. It is a joint effort between the University of New Hampshire Kessler Foundation and the Association of University Centers on Disability [AUCD]. We also have the mid-month nTIDE, which digs into different topics. It's typically on the third Friday of the month.

All right, so the first part of nTIDE is "The Numbers" with John O'Neill at Kessler Foundation and me at the University of Hampshire. Part two is nTIDE News with Denise Rozell from AUCD. And we have our guest speaker, Kim Churches, from the Washington Center down in Washington, DC, I believe. And then we have part four is Q&A. So, let's get started. John Take it away for the beginning of the nTIDE Report.

**John O'Neill:** Thank you, Andrew. The monthly nTIDE Report, it's made up of a press release with infographics, where we're looking at the most recent employment statistics. It uses data from the BLS Jobs Report, which is released on the first Friday of each month.

Next slide. Thank you. The data source is from the Current Population Survey, which is put out by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. It's the source of the official unemployment rate that the media and others make so much of the primary statistics, we don't look at the unemployment rate because that can go up and down for different reasons. We look at employment to population ratio and the actual employment rate. It's data on civilians, 16 to 64, who are not living in institutions.

The data containing the six disability questions has been available since September 2008 onward. That's when the Census Bureau included the six disability questions. The data is not seasonally adjusted, which is why we typically compare or at least before COVID, we compared the current month to the same month last year. However, since COVID, we've been looking at the month-to-month changes because we wanted a more sensitive look at trends as the pandemic was emerging. On to you, Andrew.

**Andrew Houtenville:** All right, thanks John. One thing to mention with regard to the data store, before I look at the numbers, for those who are interested. The Current Population Survey, which is the source of the data, uses six questions to identify the population with disabilities. And as with anything, disability is a really complex issue with a lot of variation by say disability type, onset, severity. And so, six questions is never going to do it justice, the population justice. The Census Bureau is in the process of looking at a revision of the six questions, adding a seventh question with regard to communication. So that's good. I'd like to see them add questions with regard to mental health, but that may be for the future.

But the big thing that they're going to be doing is instead of a yes no response, is that they will be having four options. So, cannot do at all, a lot of difficulty, some difficulty, and no difficulty at all. That will provide a lot of information. However, it may change the way disability is defined- well, it will change the way disability is defined. If those questions are being considered, if they're adopted by the current population survey, we're going to have a big gap, which we'll have to on the trend lines mark where that change occurred and understand that they're not going to be comparable before and after that change. But, I'd like to have severity information. That's always been something I think we've needed.

One big issue is if the Census Bureau comes out and says disability is defined by a lot of difficulty or some difficulty. I'm sorry, no difficulty and a lot of difficulty, it may lead to the population declining by nearly a half. Because it would be a more severe measure of disability. So, that would be pretty hard to take. They could add the "some difficulty" responses in to get about a 30% prevalence rate, but that's not what other people do, other agencies do when they use these questions. So, in any event, so there's lots of discussion on that going around. If people are interested, give me a call or send me an E mail.

**John O'Neill:** Andrew, I had one quick question, are they going to establish onset?

**Andrew Houtenville:** No, no onset is really difficult to do and the only survey that really does it pretty well is the Survey of Income and Program Participation's supplement or module on disability. But that hasn't been done since 2014 for a variety of reasons. But yeah, it's a big deal. We can't get statistics like owner occupied housing. So how many people with disabilities own their home? Actually, they have a very high ownership. That's because not people with early onset, but people with any onset because disability increases with age, a lot of older individuals own homes, and so it's dominated by older individuals who own their homes and acquire a disability late in life.

Same with like, were you employed you know, did you acquire a disability while at work? The forestry, farming industry has a lot of disability, but because it's acquired, not because they hired somebody with a disability. We'd like to know what industries are hiring people with disabilities. Not necessarily the industries that are creating people with disabilities with regard to occupational safety. Anyway, I can ramble forever. 81 people don't want to hear me ramble to you.

Anyway, so September, so this last month before last the employment population ratio. So, we have our trend lines for people with and without disabilities. What's shown in this slide is the decline during The Great Recession in 2009 and 10. For people with disabilities, the decline continued well past 2010 to 2014. And then there's a steady, a slow rise for people with disabilities. And there was a period of time where the employment to population ratio, the gap between people with and without disabilities narrowed. In 2016- where'd my cursor go, 2016, 17 and into 18 a little bit. You can, they're actually narrowed. And that's the area when the economy bumped into full employment. Meaning there's a shortage of workers.

Firms at that point may have looked to other non-traditional labor forces, like people with disabilities when they reach that point. we see the pandemic, the COVID-19 shutdown recession, which was April and into May of 2020. Gosh, is it that far away? Then we see a pretty strong rebound as the economy starts to implement social distancing. We eventually have the vaccines come around, but notably, about the recovery from the pandemic shutdown, is people without disabilities really didn't recover from the pandemic employment wise until very recently in the last few months to fully recover.

People without disabilities recovered in mid-2021, so a year and a half after the lockdown, and shot past historic highs. This line is for 2008, back at the previous peak, and people with disabilities have been hovering around 37%, 37.2% in September, so more than a third of people with disabilities were employed, compared to about three fourths of people without disabilities. So, the employment gap is still pretty substantial. So much so you may not notice, but in this chart, I actually have to break the intercept. Because it would be so high and it would squash down the line, so to fit them on one page I have to break the intercept.

So that's September. People with disabilities have been bouncing around 37, 36% Again, hovering at that all time high. We mentioned it in this month's nTIDE, but Kessler Foundation and UNH Kessler Foundation survey on National Trends. The 2022 Kessler Employment and Disability Survey, the supervisor edition of that survey. We redid the 2017 survey of supervisors, and we redid it in 2022.

For those interested in, kind of, as we try to explain this rise past the historic peaks, one possibility is certainly that there are greater opportunities post pandemic with remote work, more flexible work hours, more flexible work arrangements, better accommodation policy on the part of firms because they had to learn more about accommodation during the pandemic. All of those things may have opened up opportunities for people with disabilities and have set a new level of employment for people at disabilities. You know, I'd rather not see this number stabilize at around 37%. I'd really like to see increase. And so, that's what we'll be looking at over the next couple of years for sure.

But let's snap in October. Here comes October, and both people with and without disabilities have the exact same number. So, we're unable to identify any change in the employment population ratio for people with disabilities and people without disabilities. So not much of a story. The Federal Reserve has been trying to dampen the economy kind of to combat inflation. I'm really excited to see gas prices around here at least go down. Because that would help relieve some of the pressure on the Fed to raise our change interest rates, to slow the economy down.

You may have seen GDP numbers for the last quarter, it was almost up to 5%, it was really quite high. Employment really lags behind GDP. It's much harder to change your workforce that rapidly than it is to sell more product. All right, let's look at the labor force participation rate for September. So, labor force participation rate is those who are employed plus those who are actively looking for work. They are either employed or actively looking for work on furlough. And so, let's take a look at that. So, a similar trend from The Great Recession to the lockdown. One of the stories we kind of followed during nTIDE was during the lockdown, labor force participation didn't really decline much. The story that keeps coming to my mind, it's really hard to tease out causal relationships in this kind of data.

So, one of the thoughts is that people with disabilities, about a third are living in households with incomes below the poverty line. And so, when you're faced with something like the COVID-19 pandemic, you can't leave the labor force if your family is living below the poverty line. And also, people with disabilities may have come back into the labor force as well during the pandemic to help the family. Okay. So again, we see a rise past people with disability reaching past historic highs and kind of leveling off over the summer and into the fall of this year. People without disabilities really haven't recovered until recently.

And then if we stop in October, the most recent month of new data, there's a slight increase, one tenth of a percentage point, for both people with and without disabilities. And so, this is really within the margin of error. Someday, I'll snap error bars around this if people are interested. But, these are really hold steady movements. And this is true when we looked over the reports from the general population and the seasonally adjusted estimates, that's the same story, that the economy is really holding that. So, I'm going to turn it over to Denise and take it away Denise. You can ask questions either in the box or in the Q&A

**Denise Rozell:** Camera keeps going on and off, Okay, I am here. Okay. Let's start with the federal policy update, as we always do. It's an interesting time to do a federal policy update. In terms of disability things, we're kind of on hold. What's going on in Washington? If you've been reading the newspapers, or watching the news, or however you get your news, you know there's a new speaker in town. He is just getting his feet under him, don't quite know what's going to happen next on the house side, so the continuing resolution that exists right now for appropriations goes through November 17.

That is not that far off, and we are waiting to see what exactly happens there. I truly do not have a crystal ball, and I truly wish I did. But we are waiting and watching. Obviously, if the continuing resolution expires and nothing happens, the government shuts down. If another continuing resolution gets passed, the government stays open until that date. At the same as level.

If they pass all of their appropriation bills by then, which I find highly unlikely on both sides of the House, I find highly unlikely. The Senate might get them done, but the House I don't think will. Then we're good. Then we move forward. The speaker said something the other day about some kind of a laddered approach to this. Which truthfully, in the articles and the news I was listening to, even the experts were not quite understanding what he was talking about. So we wait. There are a couple of administrative things going on that I think are really important-

**Andrew Houtenville:** Hey Denise?

**Denise Rozelle:** Yeah, go ahead.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Before you move on from the potential shutdown, what were the effects of the last ones that we've had on people with disabilities? Do you have a sense of kind of the summary of what happened generally?

**Denise Rozelle:** Generally speaking, a couple of things to know. The longest shutdown in recent history has been about, I think it's about 30 days, something like that. I mean checks stop going out. Veterans don't go out.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Social Security benefits?

**Denise Rozelle:** Yeah, exactly. Don't go out because that's part of what your government does for you. So, there are significant impacts on people with disabilities. There are significant impacts on veterans that we also talk about here. There are significant on people living in poverty. And if we start talking intersectionality, that it also includes lots of people with disabilities. Not a good thing, folks. Not a good thing.

**Andrew Houtenvile:** Thank you.

**Denise Rozelle:** Yeah, there are a couple of things that are administrative that I want to make sure you know of. This just, literally, just came out Department of Justice Civil Rights Division came out with a guidance on ADA and employment services for people with disabilities. This was rescinded during the last administration, is now being put back into effect. It's the if Olmstead, if you think of it that way, the Olmstead for people in employment. There's an integration mandate under ADA that applies to public employment and day services. ADA requires state and local governments that people are entitled to the most integrated setting for each person. So, kind of like Olmstead. You can think of it that way. This has now come out and basically outlines what that means. It answers a number of questions, including the most integrated setting under the ADA is the one that lets the most people with disabilities spend time with non-disabled people as much as possible. People with disabilities should receive services and segregated employment or day services should receive accurate information about integrated employment options. There's some good stuff here. This is a big deal. It was a big deal when it was rescinded in the last administration. It's a big deal to have it back. And I'm going to be doing some more looking at this.

This literally just came out next slide, Andrew. I talked about this on the last call, and I want to bring it to your attention again. Department of Labor actually, let's go one slide further. I put these in the wrong order. Department of Labor announced last month that we talked about, that they are doing a comprehensive look and review at Section 14[c] and sub minimum wage to re-examine its use and future viability. That's the language right in front of you. Now go back to the previous slide. They have been doing a series of listening sessions about 14[c]. And we have been encouraging everyone we can think of to please sign up to go to those listening sessions. Talk about why 14[c] is not a good idea. Talk about why people with disabilities should not be able to get sub minimum wage. Talk about what that means individually in your life, in your story.

The next listening session, they were supposed to be done in August and October. They've added two more. One of them happened yesterday maybe, but this one on November 15 is still coming up. Anyone can register to speak, anyone can share, talk about successful experiences transitioning to competitive integrated employment. Successful ideas of how this really can work. What they're getting a lot of pushback on is that what will happen if they do away with 14[c] and do away with sub minimum wage? Well, we have good stories about what will happen. So, we are trying to tell those stories. The importance of competitive integrated employment, all of that is really important to share. So, I give this, and I suggest really lots of you on this call have good information, good data to share.

Next slide, we saw that one, and the next one after that. There you go. I gave you these the last time as well. I just think it's important to give them to you again. These are three resources around minimum wage studies of how it works from the Civil Rights Commission, from NCD, Natural Council on Disability. There's a bunch of stuff here. I again, I just want to give them to you again in the slides if you need those resources to support what you're going to say. Okay. Next slide, Andrew. A few new things now. This one is SSI and SSDI and earnings above SGA levels, significant gainful- That's not right. Substantial gainful activity. Yeah. This is a mathematical study and it's actually through the stats RRTC. Right Andrew? I know.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Yup, yup.

**Denise Rozelle:** So, it's looking at 2018 to 2023 data. Statistics on characteristics, employment experiences of SSI and SSDI beneficiaries who earn more than the SGA for three consecutive months. And how do they differ from other working beneficiaries? They are younger and healthier. They have more education, higher quality jobs, they're more likely to know that they can keep their Medicaid or Medicare coverage,

**Andrew Houtenville:** Right.

**Denise Rozelle:** Yeah. Go on. This is, I mean, you guys- guys

**Andrew Houtenville:** No, no, no.

That last one is great that it's, because there's so much concern when you earn above SGA that you'll lose out. And there are lots of the trial work periods and all these different options, but people spend a lot of time getting into DI and SSI and it's a scary existence.

**Denise Rozelle:** Yeah. Yeah. And there's lots of Medicaid biased stuff too. I mean, there are ways of keeping that and working, and there's lots of options out there, but I don't know that we do a great job of sharing those with a lot of people. So anyway, this was a good one. Next slide Andrew. There are a couple of things that have come up, this one is on anti- racism and anti-ableism in transition, pretty sure Granite and folks at Kansas. This one, it's suggesting as we need to, you know, that we rethink who's the center of transition research. Generally speaking, we are not looking at all folks who are involved. And we have their ableism and racism built into that. And how do we look at that?

And so, it's proposing a new set of equity-oriented indicators to advance DEI. It's giving direction for conducting equity focused research, particularly around transition-age youth. That's why I thought this was good. There are a number of things out there which are really important around anti-racism and anti-ablism. But the fact that this one was specifically targeting transition-age youth, racially and ethnically marginalized youth with disabilities, I thought was really important.

**Andrew Houtenville:** It would be really neat to go back to the youth transition demonstration program that Mathematica helped run for Social Security. And so you go back to that old data that Todd Honeycutt was working on, and look at the social networks and differences between ethnically marginalized youth and other youth.

**Denise Rozelle:** So, there's a project for somebody. Next slide.

**Andrew Houtenville:** There you go.

**Denise Rozelle:** This is another one on including disability in DEI. We've talked about a couple of these over the last few months. This one's from EARN, because it's from EARN, which is the employer assistance side. I thought this was interesting, specifically targeting employers and DEIA professionals. So, how do you integrate disability into this, how does that work, what does it look like? How do you sustain, grow, and measure these policies and practices? Next slide. Yeah.

**Andrew Houtenville:** I should have a right to make a comment after every slide, so the Kessler Foundation does some work on this with the Kessler Foundation surveys and looks at DEI and whether disability is involved in their DEI. But we'll save that for another time.

Denise Roselle: The Future of Work Podcast. This one is around workforce technology again, we're seeing a lot of workforce technology things that the administration just came out with a whole lot on AI, whole lot, which I have not dug through yet, I have to be honest. But this one is an interesting one, if you haven't looked at the future of work podcasts in general, they have a whole series of things. It's from the people at PEAT so it's targeted around technology. This one is why the reliable Internet is critical and how you do that in inclusion, part of your culture, and it specifically is the Georgia Technology Authority that's giving their examples of how to do it. This is from, like I said, PEAT and our friends at ODEP. Next slide.

This next one is also earned. They have a whole page out these days on workplace flexibility. Clearly post Covid we've done a lot more talking about workforce flexibility. This one, again, targeting employers because it's out of earn, that TA center and looks at types of flexibility, how you do it, how you consider it, what employers are thinking about. And then not just what they are thinking about, but how they can think about it with relation to people with disabilities. How to make sure flexibility is implemented equitably? This is a huge issue. How do you make sure that you look across the board in your organization that includes people with disabilities and people without? Then a whole ton of links. I wanted to give you this one, they've reorganized that web page so there's a whole web page, on workforce flexibility.

And then I think my last slide is, we don't talk as much as we should actually about veterans with disabilities. This one's a webinar from deployment to hiring to employment and supporting veterans with disabilities. It's by National Organization on Disability. Luke Visconti is going to be the moderator. And folks from a couple of places, including Northrop Grumman, I thought that was interesting. How to build inclusion programs for veterans with disabilities? I know there are some of you who are specifically interested in this topic. I haven't shared a bunch on this recently, so I wanted to share this one here.

Okay, then speaker. Kim Churches is our speaker today. She has more than three decades of leadership experience in nonprofit and higher education administration, including with AAUW American Association of University Women and the Brookings Institute. She's a dynamic and sought after speaker. Kim has addressed several national conferences and conventions and contributed to national media outlets. Currently, she's the president of the Washington Center, which we'll hear about today. And she has literally just stepped away from a massive boot camp that they're running in order to come talk with us. I am thrilled to see her here and I will shut my camera and hand it to her.

**Kim Churches:** Thank you so much Denise. So appreciated and particularly appreciated all of your insights there on what's happening here in my fair city of Washington, DC. Thank you all for being with us today and for including me in this. I'm delighted to be with you. So much of the statistics that Andrew and everybody has shared, I was nodding vociferously around what the covid both exacerbated a lot of the inequities in education and the workforce, but also provided more opportunities as we see with individuals with disabilities, increasing their adaptability into the workforce and into good paying jobs.

But I wanted to share with you just a couple minutes here a little bit about what we're working on here around workforce development and the flexibility around each individual's lived experience at the Washington Center, I joined the Washington Center actually in 2021 because I had been leading a gender equity organization and in thinking about what the needs were for the United States and the globe and ensuring more access and inclusion into the workforce, I really truly saw that there was no one size fits all. We are not all paper dolls as individuals, and we need to ensure that we have levels of different types of modalities and flexibilities. How we think about growing career connected skills and frankly, how we observe. Let me turn on my video. Thank you. How we observe remote work and hybrid work.

So let me go to the next slide. No worries. Here we have Washington Center's new vision and mission. And I was brought on to really do a strategic reimagining of the Washington Center, the Washington Center, While it's based in Washington DC, we actually are working on internships, on career connected skill building, and experiential learning in several different formats, Whether it's semester long, whether it is a boot camp weekend like I'm running right now for first generation, neurodiverse, historically marginalized, and those with disabilities this weekend. And we do that in virtual formats, hybrid formats, and in person formats to be able to meet human beings where they are, and help to ensure that they can gain and practice the skills that are not just going to have them survive in the workforce, but actually thrive in the workforce.

And you can see here, our mission is to create flexible and immersive pathways to enhance the pipeline of diverse talent and build more equitable, inclusive workplaces and communities. When I am speaking with the Biden administration and those in elected or appointed seats of power in red, blue, and purple parts of our country. This is about our ability to continue to be competitive in the American workforce.

In practice, how we do all of this is, we are more than our programs, we are also advocates for breaking systemic barriers and injustice that far too many individuals still face in accessing jobs and careers. So, whether we're working with individuals with a disability, a first-generation college student, someone with a nontraditional educational journey, we really want to make sure that we are dedicated to creating pathways for success through these different modalities. I also want to emphasize our thanks to the Kessler Foundation as well, who has been a key funder and partner at the Washington Center since 2008. I thank you so much and again, for inviting me here to be with you today. Next slide please.

We are really at the intersection of a Venn diagram of serving students and learners. And I'm specific in using the noun learners and not just students because when we say students, we perceive that college students are all 18 to 22. They are not. The data is showing that the majority of students in community colleges, colleges and universities today are non-traditional in age, in background, in all respects. We are at the intersection of serving learners, employers, and higher education. That's important because post-secondary education is what is intended to train and prepare talent.

The learner is the emerging human talent, whether that talent is returning back for additional non degree or degreed skilled programs, or is trying to gain new skills to be able to enter a new career path. And the employer is obviously seeking access to job ready talent. And what we do at the Washington Center is deliver value via experiential learning programs for students, centered on building skills, peer and professional networks, and credentials that can fuel that talent. We also partner with employers in government, and that's small and upper-case G, since I'm right here in Uncle Sam land in Washington, DC. We do this throughout the nation and the world, in government, nonprofit and for-profit sectors as a talent pipeline for engaged, agile, eager and career ready talent. And we collaborate with legislators, educators, and more to expand the pool of diverse talent to fuel that competitiveness and growth and prosperity.

Next slide, please. I don't have to tell you that technology has been driving so much change in the global workforce. And our work really focuses on building access, equity, and opportunity in skills, training, and professional networks. We all recognize that the workplaces today are rapidly changing. We're still changing in a post covid world of whether we are in person, we are remote, or we are hybrid. And what those levels are to ensure return on investment in the for profit, nonprofit, and government worlds. And work more collaboratively towards those ends. So, the tools we use are different today. We're all learning how to work differently. Just go back in time to March of 2020. And I gather many of us were still working in person and had to quickly adapt and learn new tricks to be able to work in remote environments, to keep human beings as safe as we could during the covid pandemic.

The venues we work are also different, right? Hybridity is here to stay, it is not going away. And if we are going to be able to attract and retain diverse talent and serve them in ways that they can thrive, we have to be open to hybridity and working differently in those modes. A couple of the notes that I will say for you on this slide is that technology is transforming more than 1 billion, that's with a capital B, as in boy, jobs, by 2030. That's within the next seven years, folks. And the way that skills are needing to be upskilled and reskilled constantly. Back in the 1980s when I entered college, skills at that time, according to the World Economic Forum, would last you for about 30 years, almost the entirety of your career path. Today, skills have a maximum of about five years. So that means all of us must be lifelong learners to be able to adapt to the workforce of today and tomorrow.

And based on a lot of data and polling, we see that about 70% of HR professionals know that their organization has a skills gap. That they need more help in ensuring that those skills are ready. So how do we allow for lifelong learning and equitable access to this? The skills gap is real and rising talent does not feel they have the preparation in traditional post-secondary learning places for many jobs, but the potential to limit innovation, growth and competition is there. And we are here at the Washington Center constantly asking how can we do this in a more equitable and accessible way? Next slide, please.

Let me tell you a little bit about what we do to create our living and learning community. And I'll just briefly say we are working on programs in short term, in person, hybrid, and virtual modes, so that we can meet people where they are, whether they have disabilities, whether they have caregiving responsibilities and jobs. Whether they have financial barriers to be able to participate in short term to mid-term opportunities to ensure they are gaining stackable credentials and skills to make them more marketable into the various different industries, sectors, and careers they deliver. But we also have a community right here that has 320 beds, one bedroom studio, and two-bedroom apartments, nine classrooms, and a large-scale auditorium in our facility, in person here.

And I've laid out just some of the things that the Washington Centers, Housing and Community Life offers to embrace individuals with disabilities into our community and preparing them for the workforce of today and tomorrow. So one is that we have a team on site, train disability services team on site here at the Washington Center. All of our classrooms and apartments are ADA accessible, and they're all located at the same site. Which means transitioning between spaces is that much easier.

We collaborate with DC organizations and employers to make sure we have public transportation orientation for any of our visually impaired students. And accommodations for visible and non-visible disabilities like support animal friendly housing, live captioning during all of our presentations, and really critically as we saw the rise of mental health issues in students, in employees and workers, and in workforces, really ensuring that we are upskilling and reskilling our staff and our faculty on mental health resources and making those available much more judiciously and more dramatically.

Our housing accommodations are also listed here of all that we offer within the organization, but those data points are just part of it. It's about really embracing our mission and vision and who we are at the organization. That we are actually going beyond DEI here and we are focused on JEDI here and all that we do internally in the organization and externally towards our mission. So centering justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in all that we're doing. And constantly asking ourselves how, why, and what can we do to better serve individuals to help them as they enter their workforce and beyond. Next slide, please.

**Andrew Houtenville:** I'm sorry.

**Kim Churches:** You're good. Thank you. So, a couple of things that I want to share here. We've been around for 50 years and what we've done, really, we were known for providing academic in person internships over a spring, fall, or summer internship program, where you would go out into the field physically. But the world has changed, you know, the federal government is not back to work. I can tell you that commuting times, whether you're on buses, metros, vehicle, or any other mode of transportation, the commute times on Fridays are incredibly easy here in the District of Columbia and the surrounding metropolitan area because people are embracing hybridity. And so those flexible modalities of how we work have allowed us to change as an organization as well.

So while we still have those internship modes, we really found if we were going to meet people with financial restraints, with disabled individuals and learners and students, and in working with first generation and other historically marginalized communities, we needed to ensure that we had a body of programs that could meet people in lots of different ways. So, we had to adapt and create access points with new short-term programs. So that comes in the form of flexible modalities like virtual micro internships or in person boot camp weekends. We're running just this weekend, hybrid opportunities. We have some participants that had to be on zoom or teams to participate in our program this weekend. And we are centering and bolstering diverse, historically marginalized learners so that we can help them to thrive.

Two examples of new programs we launched just this year, cybersecurity. We did national and international research on this emerging digital technology around cybersecurity and the threats that it's doing. Not just for our nation, but for all of our organizations with ransomware, threats to our nation's infrastructure, and individual concerns about our elders having cyber-attacks and getting into banking accounts and the like. And this is rapidly changing so quickly that we knew that we had massive amounts of talent needing. There are 4 million jobs open in the world right now. In cybersecurity, there are 30,000 jobs open right now in the District of Columbia. That's how dramatic that we cannot fill that with the talent.

And some of the problems with that is that like in any area where there are barriers and biases in the cyber field, it has been largely filled with white males who came from very similar backgrounds. And so the threats as they are changing, there is a real move for more diverse talent, for women, for people of color, for first generation, for those who are neurodiverse, for those with disabilities who entered this rapidly changing field so that we as a potential workforce can ensure that we are addressing those needs. And red teaming and blue teaming the threats provided through cybersecurity.

And a few of the stats there that of the participants we had in our first pilot program, 20% of the participants were neurodiverse, 90% identified as non-white, 60% were first generation students, and a broad age range of 18 to 43 in age. What I would say to you about that is that we also, with that cybersecurity program, knew that it was not enough to just upskill the individuals that were a part of the program. It was also critical. To help to provide best practices and information to employers to be ready to take on this diverse population into internships and to jobs. So, we also created roundtables and learning opportunities for employers in working with diverse, working with neurodiverse and with individuals with disabilities as we try to tackle as a nation and as a globe, these cybersecurity threats.

The next program, and you heard this from Denise earlier, that I'm truly literally running right now, is a workforce readiness program. And this is based on World Economic Forum data, Gallup surveys, and the like of the top skills that employers are looking for every single sector. And this program this weekend is really serving about 100 learners. It's a hands on hybrid, virtual and in person learning session designed to build the skills and networks for the future in practical ways, moving beyond theory into practice and how we can build some of those and some of the statistics here, 11% of these self-identify as having a disability, 80% are female or non-binary, and 88% identify as part of a historically marginalized racial or ethnic group.

This is important for us because I can tell you, living in this city of Washington, DC. Where far too often unpaid internships and unpaid opportunities for experiential learning meant only those with tremendous amounts of financial resources and networks, we're able to tap into these types of experiences. And at the Washington Center, we are trying to create more access and equity and inclusion here so we can build an American workforce that we can all be proud of. Next slide, please. So, our work continues as well, and so we are constantly piloting and testing, looking at new modalities, looking at new program needs, and individual industries and sectors.

And then more broadly, we are aligning with the Biden administration very frequently. I really appreciated a lot of Denise's remarks around some of the emphasis in AI and digital tech. And I would urge you to take a look at what the Commerce Department just released within the last week or so about tech hubs around the nation and the tremendous amount of opportunities for individuals with disabilities and those from different diverse and lived backgrounds. Huge opportunities here to move forward and help our nation be more competitive.

So, we're thinking at the Washington Center more about the ways in which we teach and what that means. And we are thinking about the accommodations that we provide and how we can ensure greater access and inclusion in all ways. And we're understanding, and that's critical, understanding and championing disability in all its forms. I appreciated the comments earlier about how we define disability and that really is changing. We are all as individuals in this work. Opening up the aperture. I too must be a lifelong learner, right? In learning how we can ensure that we can help individuals to be more mobile and how they are working in remote settings and hybrid settings and continuing to gain new skills.

I would also argue that we all must embrace hybridity. I realize for some of us I've been in the workforce for 35 years. For some of us we were used to going to an office physically and understanding how to embrace hybridity because it helped to break down some of the barriers that far too many people, including those with disabilities, faced in entering the workforce and being able to earn a wage that was competitive and that could help to keep their family to be economically viable. So, we must do that. We must invest in education access.

We truly believe at the Washington Center, this is going to take public private partnerships, P3s are critical to this, to expand the access to skills training and workforce relevant initiatives. And I think really importantly, we have to rethink what higher education can do and what employers can do. And we must rethink credentials and experiences beyond just degrees. The fastest growing programs are non-degreed programs that are offering certificates and credentials that can help you to enter a wide variety of different workforce opportunities. We have to think beyond traditional pathways to jobs and factor nontraditional journeys skills, credentials, and other aspects.

And I think importantly, we also have to celebrate the power of neurodiversity in these adventures, it's a key area where we are investing for learner recruitment and program design as we approach this community of learners. Next slide, please.

So, I would just encourage you once, I just want to thank you for this opportunity to share how we're thinking about preparing learners, individuals, and students to embrace the hybridity of the power of the workforce of today and tomorrow. We are constantly looking at new modalities and ways that we can better serve our students and learners with disabilities and from marginalized communities. To help them as they enter the workforce and well beyond. I really encourage any of you to take a look at our work or get engaged with me in ways that we can pursue partnerships together and help to bolster more individuals to have healthy and meaningful lives in the workforce. And I thank you so much for having me today.

Andrew Houtenville: Thank you, Kim. Thank you. That was really a tour de force. That was awesome presentation. Thank you. We have a couple questions online. Will the slides be available to view on our website? Can we see them at a later date? Yes. I think it takes a few days for us to make everything accessible and put it up on the web so by mid-week next week, we should have the slides and the video and transcripts available for anyone to see. So that's that. Start my video. Can you speak to the emerging opportunities for disability owned businesses? Does any of your work address, you know, kind of self-employment and disability owned businesses?

Yeah, absolutely. I just want to make sure that, yes, I'm off mute. Yes, absolutely. Most of our work currently has been working on those. Either pursuing non degreed certificate programs, community colleges, colleges, and universities. As we are working with employers, we are working with start-ups, with entrepreneurs, as well as with Fortune 100 and Uncle Sam agencies and departments. Where we are expanding our work is actually thinking beyond the college experience and actually looking to expand our work into career connected skills for employers as well as for high school students and for those that are maybe early, mid or later in career, trying to upskill and reskill.

So traditionally, the Washington Center has been focused on providing programs directly to college students. And where we are expanding, I think is in that thought leadership mode where we can be a solution provider and help to put together playbooks and best practices for employers to be able to thrive in those ways.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Right. What industries are you talking about when you talk about non degree industries?

**Kim Churches:** You bet. So, you know, you may see some of this in the news, but you are seeing that a lot of state legislatures are voting that for state employees that a lot of positions that always required a two- or four-year degree. They are now eliminating those degrees because there are a lot of other ways to ensure the value prop of what someone can bring to a job beyond just a degree. And this is a growing trend. You're seeing not just in the skills work, like advanced manufacturing, but you're seeing this in areas like I mentioned before like cybersecurity, right? You might be a self-taught hacker and might be able to do a six-month certificate program. It might take place at a community college, or it could take place at Google for goodness’ sake, or here with the Washington Center. But you're not maybe going for a two-year, four year or term degree for that.

So, there's a wide variety of sectors. Social media is another sector where we're seeing a lot of growth, even business consulting and the like. So, I would just urge us, you know, as Americans and those that are trying to think through the future of work here is we have to get out of this idea that only two year or four year or advanced degree is going to be the access to professionalism and to opportunity. And the fastest growing nationwide are in these certificate programs.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Right, right. Universities are moving towards digital badging, where they, rather than a traditional transcript or a traditional program. These badges are designed around specific skills and experiences. UNH is by far not the first to do this. Are there any options in human services for non-degree options? Can someone with a lived experience with disabilities satisfy educational requirements in some jobs? For the digital badge movement at universities and colleges, experiences can be part of that badge, of one of the things that lends to, it's basically a requirement or a qualification. But Kim, do you have anything to say about it?

**Kim Churches:** Yeah, I'd also say there are all of those badging and stackable credentials that you can do that are fully online. You know, I would say if you haven't tapped into LinkedIn, there's LinkedIn learning. There's a ton of opportunities in that regard as well. So not just through traditional higher education. And I would say a lot of employers are developing their own stackable creds and digital badging. Many of whom have essentially the good housekeeping seal of approval. Right? If you get a badge from a Google, a really well recognized brand and you put that on your resume or on you know, on your linked in profile. That's going to carry a lot of weight. And it might carry more weight than a degree, right? Depending on the field you're entering. So, I would really encourage folks to look at those opportunities as well. And human services for sure.

And, you know, I think where we are focused is looking at the big gaps of where the skills gap are and where the industry or sectors where they are crying out for a need for employees. And so right now what we are seeing nationally and in our region is huge needs for finance, accounting, business consulting, cybersecurity, digital and emerging technologies, as well as advocacy and policy work and communications. You know, one of the biggest skills that folks are looking for are problem solving and critical thinking. And, you know, you can do that in any single industry or sector and that's typically not a degree program, but could be digital badging and the like to be able to show that through projects and furthermore.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Do you know if there's somewhere, you know, there are the traditional catalogs of college and university programs, right? Do you know if there's anything similar for non-degree programs? Someone asked where can they find out more about badging or these non-degree credentials. I think LinkedIn would probably be one place to go.

**Kim Churches:** That's one place. I would also encourage you to take a look at jobs for the future. JFF, they've been doing a lot of this work around skills. Also is NACE. That really works with colleges and employers so that you can, we’re an organization, we're not higher education, although Andrew we work with UNH, you're one of our partners, but I would say we're higher ed adjacent. We're really that bridge between education, whether it's traditional education or nontraditional education and employment. But I would say jobs for the future.

NACE is another good resource. You can look at McKenzie, some of the future of work coming out of a McKenzie, the World Economic Forum. Lots of resources there that are going to show around the rise of badging and certificate programs. Then I'm sure Denise is aware of this too. The Department of Labor has been changing registered apprenticeships to include both skilled labor and more professional spaces where you typically did not see apprenticeships before and those are in virtual hybrid and in person opportunities. The world is expanding in this in real time. We're not there yet, but we're getting there and it's just to create more opportunity and get more people into high paying jobs that are going to help their futures.

**Andrew Houtenville:** Yeah, I'll answer this last question. Are we saying that college degrees are becoming obsolete? Think not necessary, there's a lot, speaking as a higher educator, there's a lot that can be learned with regard to the campus experience. There's a lot of softer skills that are learned that aren't necessarily a part of a badge. Although I'd love to see a badge for my students on how to write e mails, and how to interact professionally with other people. I'll stop there. Thank you, Kim. I have 1,000 other questions for you. Perhaps I'll reach out at some point. Thank you for a really great presentation and for the work that you're doing. So, thank you very much, Kim.

**Kim Churches:** Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure. All right. Well, thanks everybody. Have a good weekend. And again, we will be, recordings of this session will be online probably by mid next week. Thanks everybody. Have a great weekend. Bye bye.