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Independent Living Research Utilization

ILRU‑OILP Network Quarterly Connection

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 >> Thank you. And thank you to everyone who is joining the call today. I'm the director of the office of independent living. I am joined on this call by the entire team, some of whom you will hear from later today in the call.

 Thank you for being on the call, and thank you to everyone in the network contributing to the CIL programs, and responding to the COVID19 pandemic.

 We know it's a daunting task. I definitely want to acknowledge that and let everyone in the network know we are fully aware of the extended hours, of the extended work, and just the work that's going above and beyond that's happening in the network.

 At ACL, and especially in OILP, many people are involved in many conversations that we hope will result in getting you the supports and supplies that you need to continue to do your work and ensure people with disabilities remain living healthy in their community of choice.

 So again, thank you for joining the grantee quarterly connection call, and we hope that we will be able to provide you some good information and answer some questions that we know have been out in the network and have come our way.

 I do want to start today's call by making a few announcement s, and the first one is to announce a new team member. Sean Barrett is a new team lead. I will turn the floor over to him to introduce himself and give more background. Sean?

 >> Sean: Hi. I'm excited to be here. I know some of you, many of you. A number of years ago, 15 or so ago, I lived in the Seattle area and was the executive director of center for independent living and all of the duties with the CIL and the coalition with the state, etc. Then I moved over and worked in the independent living unit at RSA. Shifts to the fiscal unit, serving primarily the Voc rehab program. And very recently, I believe a month ago today,

 Corinna recruit ed me back over to the independent living area. As I was saying, people were sad when I left my job, but IL is what got me to DC, and I'm happy to be back in that work.

 Glad I can help.

 >> CORINNA: Thank you. We're very happy to have you on board. This call is being recorded, and there will be an opportunity to listen to the call. Probably a few business days after today's call. Because of the high volume of traffic with these platforms, sometimes it does take a couple of days to turn the recordings around.

 But when those are available, we will provide that information back out to the network so that you can listen to all of this again, or let your colleagues know if they weren't able to join us today where they can listen to the call.

 We are also not taking questions on today's call. Usually we do take some questions on our quarterly connection call, but because we have so much information to cover today, I decided not to have an open platform for Q&A.

 A lot of what we are covering are based on questions from our member organizations, NCIL, APRIL, and the SILCs.

 If we don't answer all of your questions, please feel free to e‑mail your program officers directly. You're welcome to e‑mail me directly. If you do e‑mail me a question that is more appropriate for the program officer, I will likely push it their direction and have you interact with them directly. But either way, we will get you an answer.

 Hopefully you have heard that the revised statement is live. All of that has gone through the necessary holding periods, and is available for use. Later on today's call, Regina is on &, and she will cover that area a little more than I will right now.

 I also want to draw your attention to the CIL annual report, which we are really excited about and is now available on the ACL.gov web page this is an annual report that is required by the independent living administration, which is currently our commissioner, Julie Hocker. That report is required to go to the administrator of ACL, which is Lance Robertson.

 Again, that report did go live yesterday, and you can find that on the ACL.gov web page as well as an e‑mail that I sent out to the network yesterday.

 It might also be helpful to know that all OILP staff are currently teleworking, just as most of the country is. We have made that transition to 100% telework for the time being. That should not provide any disruption to your services at all or your access to your program officers. If you do have any issues along those lines, please feel free to reach out to me and I'm happy to help you work through those.

 So now I'll turn to some COVID‑19 updates. Most of you know that we at ACL and OILP are actively working with other federal agencies and our program partners in ACL to develop all sorts of different guidance and resources. We always recommend that people look at our ACL.gov/COVID‑19 specific link for information as well as the CDC.gov site for related medical information and the ILRU.org site.

 That also currently has a COVID‑19 link that will be easy for you to access that specific information. We have been working quite closely with ILRU to identify good practices and training points. You will hear more from ILRU later in the agenda, and they will highlight for you some of what's available and some of what is to come.

 I think my big message around COVID‑19 and what's happening right now in the network is that we are doing everything we can to make sure that work continues. Will that work look exactly the same as what work looked like 30 days ago or even 15 days ago? Probably not. We have no expectation that that work is looking exactly the same.

 However, that being said, it is reasonable to expect that there is some work happening at every CIL that's out there.  ‑‑ CIL that's out there. We are a couple of weeks into this transformed work environment, and we as well as everyone else out there really needed a couple of weeks to kind of get our bearings and understand how to use platforms, how to interact with our colleagues in this telework environment.

 But at the end of a couple of weeks, I think it's reasonable to expect that people and agencies and entities start to find their groove and figure out what's possible and what's not possible.

 And whatever is possible, you do that to the best of your ability. And what isn't possible at that point, look at those services and activities and reach out to your peers, reach out to ILRU. Reach out to your program officer. And even look to other community‑based organizations in your community to see what they're doing. What is it that they have figured out? What's innovative about a service delivery model that you may not have considered before?

 So again, I think the big message is making sure that you're doing something versus having a center that has literally closed its doors and everyone is at home and there is no work happening.

 And while I know the majority of you out there are probably thinking to yourselves, wow, is that really a thing? I can tell you that we do know that that is a thing in some places. So again, we strongly encourage people to be reaching out to one another and just figuring out how you can continue to move forward based on what you currently have available to you.

 The kinds of things that we're currently concerned with is if we try to contact a center or a person, and voice mails are full. Have someone assigned on your team to be working through your voice mails and making sure that people in your community who need you have an opportunity to leave you a message and receive contact back from you.

 Your out of office messages, especially those of you that are on the executive directors should not say that your CIL is closed and that no services are being provided. Again, I can tell you that we have seen those kinds of out‑of‑office messages.

 So I would strongly encourage you to rethink that approach and if you need guidance on what is possible, again, reach out to your peers. Reach out to ILRU. Reach out to your program officer. And we can help you move forward in the environment that you're finding yourself in.

 Another area I would like to draw your attention to are your websites. Please update your websites and provide clear service updates or local resources. Many, many, many of the centers out there have done exactly that.

 But there are centers who have not taken the time to update their websites, and that is a pretty light lift that can provide some really good information to people who need you.

 So again, if your CIL isn't currently providing any services at all, please reach out to someone and let them help you through this period and help them help you figure out a way to serve your communities.

 So let's move to the CARES Act, supplement 3, and talk a little bit about funding and the upcoming funding distribution.

 So, for the most part, everyone should know that the CARES Act supplemental number 3 included $85 million to the CIL program. We could not be more excited about that result. In the supplemental funding provided under the families first coronavirus response act, ACL programs receive $250 million.

 That included funding to state units on aging and tribes and tribal organizations. So those were the first two supplements that came out, or the first two stimulus packages that came out.

 Amounts awarded to programs with specific break downs, you can find that information on the ACL website. That will include the break downs for the CIL program funding.

 So, it's really important to note that the CARES Act provided an unprecedented amount of supplemental funding to a wide range of programs administered by ACL. And ACL does appreciate the congressional commitment to older adults and people with disabilities during the coronavirus pandemic.

 When all was said and done, $955 million went to ACL programs across the three supplemental funding acts.

 So ACL staff are working diligently to streamline the process and make awards as quickly as possible. For the CIL funding, ACL received the signed apportionment on March 31, 2020. And with April 1, 2020, being the beginning of the month and the third quarter in the federal fiscal year, the accounting systems for grants was down for several days for end of month procedures.

 So once the accounting system becomes available for staff to use, ACL anticipates it will take two to three weeks to process the over 850 ‑‑

 So at the same time we're processing the supplemental funding, we're working to keep the other grant processes operational. And that covers about an additional 600 awards. So we recognize that there's a high need to quickly issue awards.

 I understand the urgency to receive the funds, but this is a process that still needs humans and we only have so many humans to go around. So we are doing the best that we can. I can tell you that all of the $85 million will go to existing centers for independent living that are funded under part C of the rehab act as amended. ACL is applying the formula that would normally be used for annual CIL continuation funding as described in the act.

 This is consistent with statutory language. The entire CILs funding will be released and available just like continuation funding. The project period will end 9‑29‑2021.

 So I will just pause there and ‑‑ let everybody know that there are FAQs that we expect to launch within one business day of CARES Act funding hitting PMS. So you will be receiving additional guidance on allowable activities under the CARES Act on what that means to carry over funds from one fiscal year to the next.

 Hopefully we will be hitting most of the questions that many of you were probably thinking about right now. If you have specific questions, please e‑mail me or your program director, and we will work on getting you that information.

 So let's talk a little about priorities and what the CARES Act funding will be directed towards. So the priorities are still developing. But you will, as I mentioned, receive some language in the FAQ.

 You can reasonably expect that anything that was allowable with your regular part C funds will be allowable with your CARES Act funding. Centers for independent living will provide immediate support and services to individuals with disabilities who are experiencing disruptions to their independent community‑based living due to the COVID‑19 pandemic. We know that individuals with disabilities are at risk to losing the support they need for living independently.

 It is reasonable to expect that COVID‑19 funding ‑‑ it is reasonable to expect that there will be some specific guidance and resources provided around technology and the use of technology as a way to support the work that CILs ‑‑ as a way to expand telepresence.

 Again, I just want to remind people that we plan to in how ‑‑ and you will be receiving that, we are hoping, within one business day of your funding hitting.

 I'm going to talk a little bit about reporting. And what the reporting requirements might be under the CARES Act funding. To start that conversation, we're going to take a little trip back in time to the ERA days. Those of us who have been in the federal government and in the system for a while remember ERA and the money that went out under that recovery act program. Specifically to CILs, but that funding also went to many other programs.

 But in 2012, the OIG conducted an audit of CIL compliance and performance under the ERA reporting requirements when the programs were still at RSA. As.

 The second finding was a lack of accurate documentation by the CILs. The third find something that CILs did not comply with all reporting requirements. And the fourth finding was unsupported use of grant funds.

 I can tell you that we will be doing everything within our power to prevent these kinds of findings or other findings from happening in the future if and when OIG conducts an audit of CIL compliance with the use of CARES Act funding.

 Fortunately, we have some history that we can draw from, and we have some lessons learned. And over the course of the last two, three years, on the federal side and in the network, we've been working hard and working together to strengthen the program and to strengthen reporting and to strengthen relationships and to strengthen documentation for all things CIL‑related.

 And so I feel like we're going into this CARE Act funding in a pretty good place. But that being said, we will be paying attention to what we can do to help the network to make sure that when all is said and done, and as we receive requests in the future for information and data around how this funding was spent, we want to be able to show the awesome work that we done. And we want the focus to be on the lives that were changed, not whether or not somebody put the right funding in the right funding stream.

 Funding stream.

 So more on reporting. We're currently trying to figure out a way and identify how the current CIL PPR template can be used to minimize the reporting burden but still provide congressional oversight committees information that they will likely request down the road.

 So we're doing some reviews of the instrument, which isn't great. I know it. That's a whole area of conversation. But for now, that's what we have. And we need to make the best of it, however we can.

 So that will be an additional area of guidance that you can expect you will receive from us to help you as soon as you can receive the information to make sure that funding is being documented and annotated in such a way that there are no questions as to how it was spent.

 So project officers will be working with you. Fiscal staff will be working with you to help you on that path. As I mentioned earlier, I think over.

 Over the years, we have taken good steps to build relationships and processes that put us down the road on this effort. And so we should feel really positive about the direction that all of this will go.

 One of the things that we have been doing over the last couple of years, as we've been reviewing your PPRs, project officers have been calling you and asking you to make additional edits or to provide additional clarifications.

 Believe me, we don't do this to annoy you because we have nothing better to do. We do that because we want to help show your successes and we want you to help us tell the IL Network story. This will be no exception. So, please be prepared to work closely with your program officers so that we can help you tell your story and so that we can show that everything that is about to happen with these CARES Act funds, as well as your regular Part C funds is going to do exactly what people hope that it does.

 That is keeping people in the community with the supports that they need.

 So with all of that, I want to pause and just say stay tuned. We will provide additional updates and guidance on all of those pieces and parts.

 So I'm going to give you a quick break from me and I will turn this over to Regina, and she will give you a few updates around the SPIL and what that will look like. Regina?

 >> Regina: Thank you. And good afternoon everyone, and for some of you, good morning. It's a pleasure to be with you all today. As Corrina mentioned, I will talk about things that are relevant for the ILF program.

 Everyone can use the instrument to include all of the information needed from FY21 through FY23. I have been getting calls and e‑mail s about the submission date. I would like to let you know that the date still remains the same. You have to submit the SPIL to me by June 30, 2020. And that has to be by 11:59 p.m.

 So again, that is June 30, 11:59 p.m.

 So we do not have a federal reporting system. So you have to submit those SPILs to me by e‑mail. My e‑mail address, in case you don't know is Regina.Blye@ACL.hhs.gov.

 You're supposed to submit the SPIL to me as a Word document. Please try not to make any modifications to the SPIL template.

 That means please do not add extra borders or colors.

Keep it the way you received it when you downloaded it from our website or the federal website. And make sure that when you submit it to me as an accessible 508 Word document.

 The signature page needs to be submitted to me separately and it needs to be in a PDF document. If you have several pages, go ahead and combine all of those pages into one document.

 This reporting cycle, I was very nice to some of you and I went on and combined all of the signature pages for you for those that did not have the tools to do so. But for this reporting cycle, I will not do that. You will have to have those pages submitted as a PDF1 document.

 I'm going to repeat this over and over. The submission date is June 30, 11:59 p.m. That's eastern time.

 So I would like to give you a few things about the changes that are [ INDISCERNIBLE ]. I think these changes will help you all when you are trying to what services and funding sources are going to be used in order for people with disabilities to try to maintain in the community.

 So you will see changes to the evaluations section. That will allow you to be able to see how your goals and objectives are progressing.

 You will also be able to report your individuals or organizations that will be receiving the Part B funds, and also the oversight process. These are all new things that were not previously in the SPIL that you're using now. I think these will help you all out when you're trying to figure out how the Part B funds are distributing and who is supposed to be using those funds.

 So I look forward to receiving those SPILs coming up June 30, 11:59 p.m. at the latest. If you send the SPIL and it's not approvable, then it will go back to you and you will be requested to make changes.

 I request that you meet with ILRU and get with them if you need technical assistance about any of the sections that you might have questions about. And just so that you know, you're not alone in this process. We are going to have a training coming up this month. We're still working out the dates. But you can pencil this in your calendar that it could be April 23‑24.

 And that's 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. We will talk about each section of the SPIL so you can go over what you have now and ensure that you are meeting the minimum requirements for each segment. I have already been in contact with ILRU, and they will provide assistance with this training as well as CIL.

 I think we will have a good group.

 I also would like to talk about something else that is coming up, and that is the COVID‑19 SPIL FAQ. We have been receiving questions and comments about what you should be doing during the public hearing and whether or not you're able to have meetings because of COVID‑19. I'm excited to say that that FAQ is forthcoming and that should be able to give you guidance about your SPIL meetings that you will have.

 And also if you are still needing to have public hearings, you will be able to have guidance on what to do so you can meet safely without anyone being harmed. Those are all of the updates I have for you today and I am happy to share that information with you today. I will turn it back over to Corrina.

 >> CORRINA: Thank you, Regina. That was good identification. Something else we have been hearing from the field is around our on‑site reviews and what the status of the on‑site reviews are.

 So just as a reminder, we had gotten back into the swing of on‑site reviews in December. We did complete on‑site reviews in the state of Michigan, and those reports are pending.

 It disrupted our flow a little bit as well, moving our attention to COVID‑19 response activities, but we do still intend to get those reports back out to those centers and on to the ACL.gov web page for public view when they are ready.

 For the time being, we have put a pause on the on‑site compliance reviews. We had actually been mid-way into our next review, and that center was informed that we were pausing that effort, and we were moving that process into a hybrid desktop on‑site review.

 Our plan is to put a pause on desktop reviews as well. At least for the next several weeks to just give everybody an opportunity to figure out where they're going to land in all of this and not have to worry about that piece of oversight that just isn't good timing right now.

 But we will be getting back to it. And when we do, we will put that information out to the centers so that everybody can be ready.

That being said, and this will be a good segue to kick it over to ILRU. This could also be a really good opportunity for centers to take the time to review our compliance and outcomes monitoring protocol materials that you can find on ACL.gov and have a look at the self‑evaluation materials that are included on that website and give yourselves a self‑review and see what you might need to improve to have a good review down the road.

 Those materials are available. And again, might just be an idea for a good project if you have staff that might be available to help you batten down the hatches and put yourselves in a good position moving forward.

So with that, I'm going to turn it over to our colleague, Richard Petty, from ILRU. And he's going to talk to you a little about the great work that's been happening at ILRU.

 >> Richard: Thank you, Corrina, Regina, and Sean, also. I will call on ‑‑ there are some trainings that are ongoing that were planned before we've found ourselves in the middle of the COVID‑19 emergency. And then we are providing a lot of information in a lot of technical assistance around centers' responses to COVID‑19.

 So Brooke, if you would proceed? And then I will come back.

 >> Brooke: Sure. Thanks, Richard. Hi, everyone. Thank you for being on this call today. As Richard mentioned, I'm going to provide an overview of some of the training opportunities that we have.

First, in addition to our regularly scheduled trainings, which I will discuss in a bit, I wanted to talk about some of our upcoming webinars and trainings that we have to support centers and SILCs during the COVID‑19 pandemic.

So many of you probably attended our Q&A session on March 20th that we had. We had a really great turn‑out to that. It seems like it's something that is really needed right now. We have decided to continue providing Q&A sessions.

We're now going to change the format a bit and we will provide the Q&A sessions on specific topics, and we're going to have them biweekly. So our first Q&A session that's coming up is going to be on April 7, and it's going to cover the topic of remote work and consumer connections.

So this will be set up. We will have a few executive directors from centers there to answer questions. So any questions that you might have, and to also discuss how they're working remotely and how they are still connecting with the consumers that they serve.

We also have another Q&A session scheduled for April 21. We're also in the process of developing some fact sheets, particularly that will support the IL SILC on working remotely. We know there are a lot of questions on working remotely. So we're hoping to gather some of that to create facts sheets.

I also want to point out this is a good time to visit the ILRU website for our trainings. And a lot of the trainings you can complete at your own pace. If you have some down time in your day. One of these in particular is going to be our on‑demand trainings. Through the on‑demand trainings, you can view previously recorded webinars and on location trainings.

Something that we've added because we know a lot of individuals have reached out and they would like a way to verify if they've completed on‑demand training. So now we have added a way to send confirmation e‑mails for individuals who complete on‑demand training.

So all you'll have to do on our website is you will need to complete a short survey. Once you complete that short survey, we will follow‑up with that confirmation e‑mail confirming the on‑demand training that you have completed.

We also have our web‑based tutorials. At the end of each of those courses, there's a quiz. If you receive an 80% or higher on the quiz, you will receive a certificate of completion. And of course we also have some online courses that are coming up as well.

In addition to some of the webinars that I mentioned that are really specific for COVID‑19, we are continuing the other webinars that we have planned for this year.

So I hope many of you were able to attend the COMP part 1 and 2 webinars on March 31 and April 1 that Paula conducted. If you were able to make it, those trainings are now available on demand on our website.

So some additional webinars that we have coming up are going to be our administrative requirements and cost principles for grants for SILCs, on May 13. And then we also have a two‑part series on business acumen, the first part on June 10, and the second part will be on June 17.

If you have any questions regarding training, the opportunities, please feel free to reach out to us at ILRU@ilru.org. Richard, I will turn it over to you.

 >> Richard: Thank you, Brooke. We are certainly continuing to provide technical assistance over the range of topics that we typically provide for centers. Although I'm sure as it has for you, that also the COVID‑19 pandemic, the emergency has become a significant focus of our work with centers.

Paula and her team are answering questions about continuing operations to continue work with the center remotely. That involves everything from managing work teams remotely, something that other areas of work have or other businesses and other nonprofits have been able to do in the past, but has not been a fit for centers for independent living and organizations dependent upon having personal contact with the people they serve.

And that's a new way of working. And some of the things that you can continue to do as centers, that centers can continue to do to avoid closing their doors. That's providing core services by telephone meetings, by zoom, by video conference arrangements.

There are privacy issues, and we can help sorting through those with different opportunities of working with folks. And again, those are all technical assistance questions that we've answered.

And there are probably too many to mention in a reasonable period of time. But, for resources, we've been sending out announcements every day with information on some of the good practices that centers for independent living, that you're engaging in to operate without in‑person contact with consumers and others in the community.

How to continue advocacy, how to continue core services and continue other services that are much needed by people with disabilities living in the community.

And so there is a link on the main ILRU.org web page. It's right next to the search bar, the search field. Click on that link, and that will take you to a new section of the website that includes listings of our daily posts and other highlighted information.

We're posting many of the things that ACL and OILP are posting and other areas of ACL and also HHS and other agencies like the centers for disease control and many other resources.

We have every month our CIL speak call. This month it was on the 2nd. This month on the 13th, there will be a call for new executive directors, and there will be a call for managers. Those are CIL new executive directors and CIL managers.

Those calls, I am almost sure that will be about COVID‑19. There will be questions and questions answered on those calls by Paula and by others. Those are good group discussion and group learning opportunities. And those will occur every month. They will be in May and June and on.

In May, there will be a financial managers call. And those will be posted and announced. And in June, there will be calls for the designated state entities.

And again, it's very likely that we will be discussing COVID‑19 issues in all of those calls. This is a new age for us and a new and different time. And it's ‑‑ it will be consuming for some time. And we all want to address that as best we can. And we at ILRU want to provide the very best of support to you.

What you're doing in your communities and there's still a need to be change agents, and there's still a need to provide the widest array of services that can be provided to the disability community. They're needed. And we know that, and we know the challenges that you face and the burdens that you're experiencing.

And we want to help you just as I know is true of ACL. And we have appreciated being able to work with Corrina and her team. They have been quite supportive. And have been good partners in this process. To Corrina, thank you for the opportunity to give that information. And we're available to answer any questions now or at any point at ILRU@ilru.org e‑mail. Thank you.

 >> Corrina: Thank you, Richard. I'm going to turn the floor over to scene for some wrap‑up comments.

 >> Sean: There we go. I'm seeing questions about not finding the SPIL. We will make sure that is available. Hang tight on that if it's not already there.

I did want to wrap up with general thoughts, listening to what was said and reading different things. Much like ERA, you can pretty much guarantee that at some point in the future, some federal something or other is going to look at how this money was spent and make sure it's documented how it was spent to respond to COVID‑19 issues. And whether it was spent appropriately and effectively.

Although we don't know what that specific mechanism or reporting tool is now, we can all be relatively assured that some tool will exist in the future. You might not know, and you don't know right now where to report that stuff, but you could be thinking about how to track your activities related to the COVID‑19 things.

 Think about that so we all look good in years when somebody comes and reviews how the funds were used. We absolutely understand and our guess ‑‑ well, not really a guess. That you're not able to provide services in the way that you were a month ago. But one of the great parts about the IL program is that the services you can provide are broad and flexible. Our expectation is that you are figuring out a way to meet the requirements of the program in a different way. We understand that might take a little bit of time and it should take time to shift the gears.

 You can shift the gears, but they have to shift. If you have down time while you were shifting, that's okay. It's like moving your office. It's not a reliable expense to continue to not do anything related to meeting the needs. If you're in that boat, please reach out to your program officer as soon as possible.

Last couple of things I would say is this is new for almost everybody responding to a pandemic like this. I would encourage you to have a little bit of your brain ‑‑ not all of it because you're busy with this stuff. But think about the lessons you're learning and jot those down and think when we can pull our heads up, we will address these things like nobody checking voicemails or deleting voice mails.

We get it. But those are lessons that we should all be learning now and planning on how to address in the future. The last thing I want to say to summarize is as you are learning that stuff and getting access to the large chunk of money, be planning. Understand that this isn't long‑term money. This isn't going to be re‑upped. It's not going to be there to pay rent in two years.

But what are some of the things you can do to meet the demands that have some responses to COVID now and planning for the future and not putting yourself in a situation where you're out of money for activities related to this influx of money. And you're thinking of asking where is the new one? There is zero guarantee of additional money and there is immediate need. So plan. Be planful in how to use the money.

With that, I will turn it over to Corrina.

 >> Corrina: Thank you, Sean. So again, I just want to say to everybody, thank you for your work during this very unusual timing. And I want to especially thank NICL and APRIL who make themselves available to me, often on short notice to provide input into decisions that are being made.

On behalf of myself, the ACL leadership, and OILP staff, we continue to wish you health and to continue to make a difference in the world. We are your partners in this. Please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you again very much. I hope everybody has a great day.