

- Good morning Virgin Islands. This is Archie Jennings here with Ability Radio, You And Your Health. Brought to you by the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands, I'm one of the co-host of this program, and we're here at the sponsorship of the Lottery Commission. And we appreciate their sponsorship and support. We are in a Cross Disability program and we are broadcasting these programs to promote health awareness and empower healthcare consumers for the entire community. And as a Cross Disability program, we represent an advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities. We have a special guest this morning, from the, he's a state chair of the Vocational Rehabilitation Council and Mr. Julien Henley. Good Morning Julien.

- Good morning Archie and good morning to the listening audience.

- Mr. Henley, do you, wanna try it again they...

- Good morning, good morning Archie and good morning to the listening audience.

- Okay. We'll get this right.

- Yes, we are.

- In a couple minutes. Julien, I would like for you to more or less explain to the community what your role is as a State Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council, and how you came about being in this position?

- All right. Good morning listening audience, again my name is Julien Henley Sr. And it's really a pleasure to be here and to be invited by the Disability Rights Center to share with you, you know, what the State Rehabilitation Council is about and what we do in the territory. The State Rehabilitation Council mission is to give, inform, input, and oversight to the Vocational Rehabilitation Center which is known as VR, with the state plan for the Virgin Islands, in the interest of providing the best possible services to persons with disabilities. So, our effort is really to try and find that we can draw enough people with disabilities to capitalize in VR services in this territory.

- And exactly, what sort of services that's VR Services provide? Vocational Rehabilitation?

- Well, one of the things that they look at is, they wanna make sure that everyone in the Virgin Islands, the United States Virgin Islands with a disability that's preventing them from working in their chosen career is a way of this, of, a way of and has access to VR Services. What they do is for instance if you're an individual that have, a hearing problem or hearing disability. And that's preventing you from your career path that they will do things, not only to get you employed. But, to help you remain employed. And the process is where they have counselors that would sit with you and approve you whether you're approved based on having a disability, one. And two, if you have a career path, that's preventing you because of this disability from moving on.

- And how does medical services or those barriers or removable barriers applied to Vocational Rehabilitation Services?

- Well, it's important for them. Because, one of the things that we find that we have so many barriers, and we have a territory of people that's very sympathetic to individuals with disabilities. But, the empathetic side is really what makes a difference is respecting individuals that have a disability, didn't know that they do have goals also. So, that's where VR steps in and what they try and do is to find one, identify your goal, and once they have identified your goal path, if it is that you need to, sometimes go to college, sometimes, you know, complete your GED, sometimes go to a training school. They will try and identify those things in an interview, and try to find ways to help you pursue your goals.

- And is, what are the age limits, if you know, as far as the eligible for Rehabilitation Services?

- From age 14 and up. They actually start with doing counseling in the high school. So, they go to the high schools and meet with individuals that's in special ed to, you know, to help, guide them towards hopefully at the point of graduation once they get the certificate, to hopefully get them prepared for a life after the bus stop coming. And we said the bus stop coming is after 12th grade, you find that a lot of individuals with disabilities that had, that's in special ed, that they find that that school bus don't come anymore once that you have the certificate. So, what do they do, what is the path for these individuals? So, VR do get involve with their lives. From a young stage, and we encourage the parents to actually play a role as far as trying to identify what the goals could be for these individuals and help them to move on and have fruitful lives after they graduate.

- And I've through the years represented persons who got injured, and or workman's compensation claims, what is [inaudible] have services provide for adults and mid-life?

- Well, you know, if they, if their injury, for instance if a person were employed and they end up where they got injured, and they need a wheelchair or they need to go for medical services. Once they become a client that has a path, to, a path to their career or their goals. Whatever that path or injury would be, they would work with that person throughout that process to try and get them back, engaged, and through

a period of whether it's, they, the counselors making contacts with employers or making contact with physicians or schools, to try and make that pathway open and fruitful for that person again.

- You say pathway, what, are you talking about employment? And...

- Yes.

- Okay.

- Employment. And that's the challenge that we have. It's, you know, there's a lot of success stories that we hear. But, it's one of the biggest challenges that we have. There's so many agencies on this, in the territory or in the community that, you know, that is trying to get people with disabilities to really be, have full, you know, full inclusive lives. But, there are so many barriers, what we're hoping through the efforts that we can find ways to get employers to, if a person has an injury to continue on with their path. I could talk personally for myself. I was an individual that was, you know, high position in a company that I work for. And, I got injured, and became paralyzed from my waist down, from my mid-section down T11, and what was really great for me is that, this happened after I was promoted. And I was over not only centavos, but all the areas that I had to travel. And they never asked if I could still continue with my employment. Would I still be able to continue with this position that I had. They left that decision to me. And, you know, we have those success stories. But, we really need employers to understand that these things could happen to anyone.

- Well, for you, why don't, why don't you explain to the listening audience, some of the barriers you encountered and returning back to work with an injury?

- Well, the biggest challenge is you re-adjust your life. Because one, you end up where, if you love going to certain local restaurants, that you can't do that anymore. If you love, you realize that the sidewalks are not traversable. That, you know, there are limited parking spaces. Because of the amount of individuals that have parking. I'm an individual who drive although I'm paralyzed. And if you really see the challenges that, you know, you can't go downtown at certain times to get parking, or, you know as far as services, you know, a lot of the buildings are not accessible or there's stairs or whatever to be able to get to those services. So, those are, those were some of the biggest challenges, and you find yourself re-adjusting and eliminating yourself from life because these challenges are there.

- All right, we'll take a minute and get right back. And we'll continue this conversation with Mr. Julien Henley on Ability Radio. Welcome back to Ability Radio with Mr. Julien Henley. I was so excited to try to get information about the Voc Rehab Services out. That I forgot to mention this is a call in show. At, and you can call in at 779-1079 or 713-1079. We requested that there'll be no names or personal attacks, no ungrounded allegations, product pitches, no profanity, and we don't give medical advice. So, we won't respond to those questions. Mr. Henley, we were just talking about some of the barriers that you encounter and others encounter in the Virgin Islands that may have a disability. And there was a issue of parking that, although you went right by it, I thought it was something that came up in the legislature even, a couple of years back.

- Well, one, I wanna talk a little bit about transportation and parking all in one. Transportation for us has improved. We have services that, you know, that would be able to pick individuals that have disabilities, like, VITRAN, VITRAN Paratransit, well once it's accessible for them to get to your home, or a place that you need to be picked up. Once they evaluate and find that you are a candidate that they can transport you back and forth, and you're approved. Then you could make arrangements to have a pickup service with VITRAN or now we have another service that was with us for a while and went off--went offline and now they're back.

- Speaking of Dial-a-Ride?

- Dial-a-Ride.

- Okay.

- And Dial-a-Ride it seems like they're back in service. So, these, there are opportunities for people with disabilities, if you're at home and you wanna get out, and you wanna get to different social places, whether you're elderly or a young person that you have services today, and I think on, before these services, how difficult it was. So, you know, if you, if you're not registered with one of those services that you wanna get out, that you could make arrangements that they will pick you up at your door, if accessible for them to do so and take you to your location.

- Well, what about the, those who drive, such as yourself?

- Well.

- What it, what, what's the parking situation, especially in the downtown area?

- It's really difficult. You know, I think when you look at what we have on books. I was reading through what's down at the DMV and what they have is really, like, you know, pick up and drop off. And, you know, so they look at individuals who have disabilities that you either be picked up and drop someplace, or you would have some kind of service that would take you someplace. It really don't expand a lot as far as now people parking, so you could see where, there's a lot, effort needs to be done to update that literature. But, for me, finding parking, it's really a challenge because, you know, our law indicates, which is Federal law, one per twenty-five. And we do the one per twenty-five.

- That'd be one space for twenty-five parking spaces?

- Correct. So if you have a parking lot that has twenty, has fifty-five parking spaces that would only indicate that they would have to provide two disabled parking spots for individuals. And you find it's very difficult because of the regulation at the DMV as far as individuals who have disabilities. And it's not a mobility disability, you can still obtain parking permits here in the territory. And if that's what I feel, if that's the direction that our government wants to take, then we probably need to look at that law and say, "Okay, we could change it to two per twenty-five." Or whatever, I don't wanna deprive anyone or should suggest that anyone who have a parking permit and it's not a mobility issue that they should be prevented from it, obtaining a parking permit. I think that this is up to the government to decide what's best for the territory. And based on that, then they need to make the parking available for those individuals with parking.

- And just for the public notice, if you see a parking space and it has those cross lines, don't park in that area, either. Because persons with disabilities may have to have a lift or to open the door and exit their vehicle. So it's not just to save a space, it, those crash, cross-hatch lines are there for a reason.

- And it's really funny that you say that. You know, you go to certain places and you park. And then someone with a disabled parking sticker would come and park right next to you. And, like Attorney Jennings was saying, one of the challenges for myself because I do travel with my wheelchair inside a car. I have to open my door completely to be able to take the wheelchair from in the car, out of the car. And if someone parks right up to me because they thought that gridded lines on the ground was a parking spot. Then I cannot, if I'm out of the car, I can't get back into my car because this person would be parked so close that the door can't totally adjourn, complete open.

- Okay. And in regard to, back to the state rehabilitation council, what are some of the goals and objectives of the council?

- Well, one of the biggest goals is to ensure that everyone living in a, in the United States Virgin Islands, with a disability that has prevented them from working in their chosen career is a way of, and has access to the VR services. One of the objectives is to promote awareness of services offered through the division of disability, and rehabilitation of services which is VR. In the Virgin Islands, so a lot of people, if you talk to a lot of people in the community, they don't know or never heard of VR. And it's important that we know that there's such a great service that's out there. We also, outside of VR, we also partner with several other agencies in the territory such as Independent Living with Attorney Jennings with Disability Rights Center. The council, VI, you said down at UVI and Department of Labor. So we have a lot of partners as a state rehabilitation council. We touched on a lot of different areas throughout the disabled community.

- And isn't the whole purpose is to make the persons able to participate fully in society?

- Right. And, you know, sometimes we lose sight of that. When you think back in the, back in the day if a person had a disability, they would normally be locked inside or they wouldn't, you know, it's like, okay, you have this and you could go way back into whatever stage in life that really, it's really people, once you aren't completely able to run and jump, then you are actually put aside whether you had a mental or a physical disability. And that's no longer, you know, a lot of laws have proven that individual with disability are people. They're not lack, no different than anyone else. I still have the same goals and feelings that exist before my injury and now since my injury. So it's important for us to really have that level of understanding that people with disabilities are people, too.

- Yeah. Well, I noticed, and I've known you before your injury and obviously after your injury. What motivated you to say, "I'm getting right back into the stream of life?"

- Well, you know, one, you know, I just couldn't see myself giving up. I couldn't see, so even going through my therapy initially when I was in the hospital. You know, I was like, "I'm going back to work." You know, and, you know, I just had this drive because I've always worked, I've been working from the time I was 14 years old. And, you know, I didn't want to be defined by my injury. I didn't want, when a person look at me, they say, "Oh, that person in the wheelchair, such and such." I wanna be identified as a person. So with that, I, you know, got back out, I go wherever I need to go, I get involve with different activities in the territory as much as possible based on, you know, difficulties that I might have. But I try to keep myself as much involved with having a full life.

- And you even picked up a new skill after you were injured, weren't you? Didn't you?

- Oh, definitely. One of my biggest goals was to become a certified diver. And, you know, the, two days before I was injured, we, I went with a crew of people and we went sailing. And they were, you know, we were talking about, you know, diving, and I said that was also my goal. So while I was back employed, the company that I worked for, you know, I was over at the stores in Grand Cayman and when I went to Grand Cayman, it surprised me, and made it possible for me to deal with my certificate of to be a certified diver. And it's one of the greatest feelings because once you're diving, it's the same playing field for everyone. And, for me, being there I wish I could just live there because there was no barriers, there was no stop signs that I couldn't go here where some other person went. You know, you were living as free as the other person next to you.

- And, basically it revived a lot of joy in your life, right?

- Oh, man. I cried to my stairs, it was, it was really to be down there and to see that gentle life that's, that we have so much of it around the Virgin Islands. You know, you would think that this would be a standard if you became disabled, you have to become certified, and it's law. [laughs]

- All right. All right, here we have to take a little break. Mr. Henley, and we'll get back to the state rehabilitation council and some of the aspects of services and availability here in the Virgin Islands. Stay tuned. Okay, welcome back to Ability Radio. Mr., at this point, I'm with Julien Henley. Again, the call-in numbers, for those who may have questions or concerns, it's 779-1079 and 713-1079. And Julien, you were mentioning your interaction with your employer. I'm trying to get more employers involved in looking at persons with disabilities for employment. What's your take on the subject? What's going on in the Virgin Islands?

- Well, it's, I find that, you know, just by talking to individuals with disabilities or even as with, like, myself, I was an employer before and after my injury. It really opens your eyes and realize that giving individuals with disabilities an opportunity, as most employers, your attrition levels are sometimes very high because people are not loyal to companies. With, when you hire a person with a disability, you find that they're so loyal, you talk to, those who testify about taking a chance and hiring someone with a disability. And I could go through a line of different businesses who've done it, and all they have is total praise for hiring those individual with disabilities. Not sympathy. And let me [inaudible] give this person a [inaudible] no. It's really finding a person with a disability who qualifies to work in your establishment. Sometimes it's making minor alterations, my employer did the entire, because my office to the common area was all carpet and they change it to tiles. I mean, sometimes there's minor things that you can do to really make a change and to really invite individuals with disabilities into your business.

- So, yeah, we sort of gave praise to his tapping into talent.

- Yes.

- And the talent is here, wouldn't you say that?

- Oh, definitely. And that's the thing sometimes we, within that presentation, when we met with several employers, the territories that, we realize that sometimes we don't tap into the talents that's, that some of these individuals who have these talents to come out and be employed. And it's about the ability, it's not about the disability. We gotta go past the disability and realize that these individuals are so talented, I have met so many great people with disabilities who's leaders in our United States. And blind, deaf, in wheelchair. Name it, and they hold major positions in our government in the White House, and different places in the United States.

- Goes back to the old phrase, "You can't tell a book by it's cover." You gotta open it up and read through it, right?

- Definitely. And that's the thing. Sometimes the employers, you look at, because things are a little tight, sometimes you look at a person, "I need to hire a person who multitasks." And who's gonna do all these things and, you know, and with you and I can't, I don't have to look back and make sure that they're okay. And, you know, a person with a disability don't want you to look back and make sure that they're okay. They want you just to give them that opportunity and if there's a need for minor accommodations that you make those minor accommodations. Think on yourself becoming disabled, and thinking what you would want for your life. And knowing that you still have all the abilities that you've had before your disability. And someone say, "No, well, you, unfortunately you became disabled, so we 're gonna have to park you up in the condo and that's it." No, you know, and that's not what we want. We wanna start changing and taking down those barriers and really showing our community that we're a very together community with or without people, with or without disabilities.

- And one of the things we've talked since you travelled and I know you recovered and recouped in Florida, and we're talking about tourism and how the Virgin Islands could be become more accessible and barrier free. What's some of your thoughts on that?

- Well, one of the things, I think this is our biggest opportunity. A couple months ago, my family and I were planning a cruise. And so, in planning a cruise, I called the different Caribbean Islands to see what and how, what I'd be able to, you know, enjoy, you know, events, you know, different things that they had to offer and excursions that they had to offer in their place. And I find that lot of the islands had nothing. They had, they will tell you straight that, you know, they don't have disable vans, they're not, the sidewalks are not in place, you know, they don't, they're not under ADA law which we are and I think we've done a lot as far as what this, still a lot more. So when you look at the opportunity that we have to be labeled as a place that people with disability that can come to. We need to capitalize on that because we have already started the fight, and if we can be labeled at that place, people with disability, you find and they are very loyal to places or stores, or Islands that is accommodating to people with disabilities.

- Okay. You worked in tourism industry, right?

- Yes, I did. I, actually, I was the regional manager for a jewelry company and I also spent a lot of time in Miami with the cruise lines with a different promotional companies.

- And you mentioned the ADA, that's Americans with Disabilities Act for those who don't know about it, it's a Civil Rights Act that covers persons with disabilities. And not only that, we're talking about baby boomers.

- Yes.

- There's a lot of motorized accessible personal mobility devices as well as persons coming off the cruise ships here and it's a great opportunity to get a jumpstart on being the most accessible place for baby boomers in the Caribbean.

- And when you look at the baby boomer then you would wanna to look it up and research what baby boomers mean is people who was born from 1946 to 1964. And you will find that those people do more

traveling, they do more investing, they do more, you know, they own, the majority of the major Fortune 500 companies that they, they have a lot of wealth, and when you have those individuals who come through our territory and can say, wow, you know, and be wowed that we have people out front who are disabled, whose inviting people to come to this territory and who, when they go and wanna do different excursions like going to the beach. In the States, you can go, there's mats that you put on the sand that people in wheelchairs could just roll right down to the water, and minor things that we can do to become that staple, recognized place in the Caribbean to be accessible for people to go out and have fun.

- And back to the health issues, I wanted to tie in what, again, what VR works with people concerning health accessibility. What are some of those aspects of, that you see from the council's point of view?

- Well, one of the things with health is that, you know, some people have, need to, whether they go through different type of training, whether, you know, if strength is a challenge and you find that that's the barrier that's preventing you from working, or you have a medical challenge that you find that if this was fixed that I would be able to go back and be employed, and they can sit with you and sit with a position, and sit with whatever the situation would be. Then, once you, you're showing that, through that evaluation by the counselor that there are a different opportunities for you to go through this medical or go through this, you know, rehabilitation process and that would, that being taken care of that you would be a candidate for employment. They would then open up those opportunities for you to have those services done and be able to put you in the path to employment.

- Okay. So essentially, if the health issues keeping you from employment, Voc Rehab will sit down with you and as you develop your individual plan for an employment, help you overcome those health issues by paying for the services.

- Definitely. They finance the services, they would, you know, even, there's a lot of students that we have with disabilities that go into college today, that they are, you know, working on the bachelors, working on, you know, different degrees. And what is great is that they have, you know, with those services that you find a success stories of people who've gone on, and now are great doing so well, you know, you know, territory and outside of our territory because of the educational opportunities that they got, where VR services paid for those needed, you know, school or medical expenses.

- And also, we always forget, there's a technical school over in St. Croix right at the complex. So those who want technical skills don't have to go outside the territory. They just got to get a hold of through the Department of Education and through that technical center, gain skills, and electricity and computer technology. We have to take advantage of what's here in the territory as well.

- Right. And they don't provide housing, so if you live in St. Thomas and you have family, well, there's a way that you can live in St. Croix. Once again, you're looking still within the Caribbean and be able to go and pick up the skills that you find as your career path, and once again, once you said with VR Services those counselors who would be able to make contact and do a lot of the leg work for you and if that's what you would need to pursue your career goals with the person and to qualify, you have to be an individual with a disability first off. So it's not just a person who wants to do these things, you have to have a disability.

- Okay. What else can, well I'm just thinking about you, when you work with somebody, other organizations such as the CenterFor Independent Living, what are some other things that the rehab counsel and the center may do jointly?

- Well, the Independent Living is such a major force that we have in the territory. They actually work with individuals with disabilities to make them independent. Meaning, that they would do what's needed to make sure your [inaudible] that you lost your sight that you would be able to find ways to be able to live, you know, comfortable or be able to live and adjust to becoming blind or whatever challenges that you have. So they provide those services that would be able to come to your home and setup different things in your home which I've seen where, for instance there's dots that they would put on different appliances, they will put on your washer, your dryer, you know, and different things and help you to organize,

differentiate within your home that you would be able to traverse through your home and live a full life although, you know, you've been faced with such a tragic disability that they find ways to make it, that you become independent and be able to live on your own.

- And at that point, do they, what age groups do they cover? I'm not certain if they go help students out-of-school or they, is it just adults?

- I think it, I think, I'm not a hundred percent sure but I know definitely adults, I'm not sure if they do assistance with individuals in school.

- And what about the VI Developmental Disabilities Council, what some of the collaborations you've done with them?

- Well, they're, oh, and they're, they are really a great force that we have that, you know, territory, they actually work really hard with transportation. They work on, you know, helping parents to be able to work with their children. For instance, some parents don't have the skill set to help a disabled person. So they would work on finding ways to help them develop the skill sets to be able to work with individuals with disability as parents. It's not where you could just pick up a book and say this is how you deal with a child or an adult who became, who become disabled, but they also work as far as doing evaluations with our transit system. You know, whether it's a fixed route buses or the Paratransit, that they work on doing evaluations and mystery shopper or mystery rider I should say, and they get on a bus and do complete analysis of areas that really need help to make sure that the bus is new, to make sure that they make announcements, to make sure that they put up schedules, so many different things that would help individuals with disabilities to be able to use these services because one of the things that we learn in our evaluation, there's so many people every day get on the bus with a disability and they end up going on a bus that's going the opposite way, and because of the announcements, they know if they were blind that this is my stop where I get off. If they had a mental disability, sometimes they're disoriented, and they don't know they supposed to get off at this stop. But when the announcements are made on the buses that they know, "Okay, this is my stop." And although, you know, as individuals without disabilities, sometimes you want to, you should, should be able to see your surroundings. People that have hearing disorder sometimes everything sounds alike. They don't, they can't differentiate with sounds. So, you know, when there's noise in the bus or there's different challenges that's on the bus, they don't know, they can't differentiate. So, you know, through these evaluations would help VITRAN and seeing that, that's our only transportation service, government transportation service I should say that assist people with disabilities whether it's fixed route buses or Paratransit to follow up and to be more aware that not only people without disabilities travel and these fixed route buses but people with disabilities do travel with, on them also.

- And then collaborations with the VI UCEDD, Center For Excellence In Developmental Disabilities with some of the things that State Rehab Council collaborate in that agency.

- Right, and well, they, once again, they are the leaders as far as, you know, providing different things for people in the territory. A lot of, when you become disable, sometimes you need, you needed opportunity to purchase certain things.

- Sort of excessive technology?

- Excessive technologies for your home. It's really amazing to see that, you know, people that's blind, they get on Facebook every day. They are junkies for Facebook, they're junkies for all these things. And because of the technology that's out there, VI UCEDD does a great, great work as far as, you know, whether it's through, they, it's a small loan but it's a very low interest loan and they try to make it available for people who have disabilities to find, if you could develop these skill sets, all you need is technical devices to help you to live a full life that they make them available for you.

- That's with the VI Assistive Technology Foundation Loan Program.

- Correct.

- And I think it's from 500 to \$15,000 that they can borrow money through that program?

- Correct. And once again, sometimes a person might need transportation. Sometimes a person might need, you know, that money to do different things that they feel would make a difference in their life. When I got injured, the first thing that, while I was in the hospital, I was like, "I'm going back to work." And because I'm going back to work, I'm gonna, be able to need, to know how to drive with hand controls. So, you know, once again, they would assist you in getting the hand controls for your vehicle, if it is that you became paralyzed and you need that excessive, you know, device to be able to be installed in your vehicles so you can drive and still be able to get from one point to the other.

- Oh. Wow. As far as we've mentioned that the transportation issues with regard to any other communicative devices, do you know if the Assistive Technology Foundation or their assistance is rendered to the community for other devices?

- There's other devices, some I can't really bring to the forefront, in front of me, but I would say working with VI UCEDD and other partners like Department of Labor which we didn't mention, that's doing so much that partnership with the State Rehab, there's partnership with VR, there's partnership with Independent Living and so on. We've created a coalition down at labor that's working along and looking at the barriers that we have and having Department of Labor on the forefront who's our major employment agency in the territory, they see and can evaluate the benefits or they can see the progress or no progress of people with disabilities in the community. So, we use all these different agencies for different reasons but brings together one voice altogether to say this is what we're being faced with, this is what we need to do to get past this. And hopefully with all these efforts and all these agencies that we could have, we could have employers or government agencies to be a little bit more open to employing people with disabilities in the territory.

- Now, one of the things, we just had a workshop just recently for Social Security disability beneficiaries was mentioned a one stop shop, is that what maybe in the forefront in the future?

- Right. And that's something that's really being worked out. There's a lot of seminars. There's, I think right now we have leaders in the territory who's in Washington D.C. and they're really working on this one stop shop when you get to the Department of Labor or that you'll be able to apply for all the different services, you know. If you go to Labor on certain days there, counselors they'll help you if you're blind. There's certain days that you could go and, you know, meet with someone who could help you if you have a desire to work. There's certain days that VR is gonna be at Labor. So you could go there and make it a one stop shop that you'll be able to, not only deal with some of the things that you might have to go from one agency to the next and be bouncing all over. They bring it altogether in one building to be able to service people or that have disabilities, you know. So it's built for everyone in the territory but it actually gives a better service for people with disabilities that they don't have to go all over to try and get all these different services.

- So, is that actually in place now or is it something for the future?

- It's, it was launched a couple months ago but it's a work in progress because you're bringing all these different agencies that, to come together to create one state plan for the entire territory. So, you know, each one have their own mission statements or their own degree of work. So now, you're bringing all these agencies together and saying together, this is what we're gonna be able to do for the territory over the next three years. So not only that they are, we'll be continuing to do a one year state plan, but now, they're gonna be ended up doing a three-year state plan that's gonna really make a lot of difference, a lot of forecasting, a lot of planning and a lot of working together to make these services a success in the territory.

- And who's the lead agency on that effort?

- Department of Labor is the lead agency with that.

- And can people contact the Department of Labor now about this or, is, like I said, is it something that the, just in the planning stages or is it, someone can tap into it now?

- They could tap into it now. It's not, all the agencies are not fully up and running. I know that VR have certain days that they go there. I know that Independent Living, you know, you have different agencies that go, that gives services throughout the government that you could go there I guess with a snap. You could go in certain days. There's so many things that they have, and, but it's, like I said it's a work in progress. They're still looking at how they can, I know a lot of [inaudible] and you know, there's a lot of challenges with it. But in the long run, it's gonna be one of the best things that happen, you know, in the territory for people with disabilities.

- That's great to hear. That's great to hear. Well, and just as an opportunity, is there any other area you'd like to tap on and touch base on as far as the State Rehabilitation Council?

- Well, one of the things I would like to say is as a community we need to understand that disabilities are possibility for everyone. And, you know, doing sensitivity training and getting out and sometimes you feel, "Oh, yeah, I know it all, like, I know this." But then you go through sensitivity training and you realize that there's so many things that we as individuals who are not disable that you think that you're doing all these things or you don't look at people or treat people a certain way. And once you can get into sensitivity training, you realize that it's a major step forward to success and the questions that we have when we do sensitivity training in territory has been great.

- I think I hear a commercial coming up. So we'll get right back to you, Mr. Henley.

- Okay.

- Thank you again.

- Thank you.

- Yes. Welcome back. This is Ability Radio with Mr. Julien Henley who's the State Chair of the Rehabilitation Council. And Mr. Henley, any final remarks regarding the council and some other thing for the future?

- Well, one of the things I would like to say is that doing sensitivity training, we realize that, you know, there's so much we could learn and so much we can do to encourage our employers to, you know, give opportunities to people, you know, territory to have an opportunity to be, you know, feel that they can still contribute to our territory and our way of life. And to know that always that a disability is not prejudice, they don't look at you based on wealth or anything else, that a disability could happen to anyone, and if we have a culture of, you know, employing, a culture of inclusiveness, you know, territory and it's not a second type that this will be a benefit for not only yourself but your family, children, the territory on a whole. I think that, you know, we'd look at now and we can see so many different opportunities that we could take care of and take advantage of because we have started a lot through Department of Profit and Procurement and so many different agencies would do so much to, reassuring that buildings are accessible and different things when you submit plans. That we're on a path of being good but we can do a lot more. So I hope that our message today or my, you know, conversation with you would make a difference in our territory.

- Again, thank you. You know, it's a lot of information with regard to what's happening with those organizations that are associated with persons with disabilities and I, hopefully the pitch to the employers and not only the employers but tourism. Let's make our whole territory accessible. Let's bring down those barriers like we can say, "Bring down that wall. Right? Bring down those barriers." And so that persons with disabilities could be fully inclusive within the territory. Again, this is Ability Radio and You and Your Health and we appreciate your time and have a great weekend Virgin Islands.

- Thank you. Have a good day.