- Hi, this is Brenna Schaefer. I'm going to be talking about serving job seekers with cognitive limitations.

So first, we're going to start by talking about what motivates us to work. Some of the things that motivate us to work are to support ourselves and are families financially, to be able to contribute to society, work gives us meaning. A lot of us identify ourselves by our job title. Jobs and work gives us social interaction, and it also provides a sense of worth and accomplishment. Why do people with disabilities want to work? Well, not surprisingly, it's for the same reasons. Because of work playing such a major role in our lives and providing that accomplishment, making us independent, and giving us meaning.

People with disabilities have the same desires and motivations to work. However, if you have a disability, specifically a cognitive disability, beginning to work can be frustrating and difficult. Your ability and willingness to adjust to their barriers and accommodate a job seeker will help to create a positive environment, which will result in a more effective and productive community. Some examples that I've listed of cognitive impairments or diagnoseses are brain injuries, which can be caused by a traumatic incident, such as a car accident or a fall. They can also be caused by something like a stroke or a heart attack. Intellectual disabilities are usually present at birth and symptoms are evident early on in life. Learning disabilities are usually detected when a child is school-aged, but often signs of a learning disability will go missed and individuals are not diagnosed or provided with a treatment early on in life like they need. It's not important to know what type of disability somebody has. What is important is to be able to recognize the barrier and know how to help the person.

Some symptoms of cognitive limitations are often misinterpreted as a person being irresponsible, inattentive, or lazy. Taking the time to get to know someone can reveal that there's much more going on under the surface. Some examples that I've listed of what might indicate a cognitive limitation would be memory problems. The individual might forget appointments or information you've told them. A lot of times, longterm memory is intact but is more difficult for people with cognitive limitations to access short-term memory information. So this could be something that you told them last week or even the same day. Lack of problem-solving skills is another symptom that you might see. This might be demonstrated by the person making inappropriate or questionable decisions. Next is trouble with decision making. And this could look like procrastination. Having a poor attention span may come across as the person being rude or not listening to you. Sometimes, people have limited verbal comprehension skills, so it's good to make sure that the receiver heard and understood your message. Math and reading is self-explanatory, and obviously, that's going to be seen when you ask them to demonstrate those skills.

The most important thing is knowing how you can help someone. Here, I have a list of some of the things that you can do to help. Usually, the individual who you're helping is the best source of information and knows what works for them and what doesn't. So don't be afraid to ask. Try to stay calm. If you become verbally frustrated, it will likely escalate the person you're trying to help, and less progress is going to be made toward their goals. Depending on the information presented, the individual may need some additional time to respond or consider the information, so it's helpful to give them a few extra minutes to process this information. A quiet area such as, or earplugs or headphones may be helpful to someone who's easily distracted. When providing information, consider communicating it in more than one way. For example, provide a flyer or directions or a list in addition to verbal explanations. You may want to check to make sure your message was understood by the individual by asking them to paraphrase or repeat the information back to you. Following up with someone phone, text, email will provide a secondary opportunity for the message to be received and is more likely to be processed and remembered by the person.

Continuing on with ways that we can help the individuals we serve is assistive technology. It's very important that you know what assistive technology and accommodations are available, as well as how to use them. Some types of assistive tech and accommodations can be very simple, such as Post-it Notes, helping someone make a checklist or using a calendar. Use natural resources, such as alarms and reminders on smartphones. See if your office would be willing to provide yearly planners or agendas to help the individual stay organized. iPad apps, Google, and Askjan.org are some really great tools as well.

Don't be afraid to reach out to other agencies and encourage your customer to advocate for themselves by doing so. It's important for you to know what resources are in your area. Thank you for participating in this webinar. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me, thank you.