Hi, my name is Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan, and I’m program coordinator for the Career and Technical Special Populations Training and Resource Education Center at Texas A&M’s AgriLife Extension Service. Welcome to this webcast on Centers for Independent Living, or CIL’s. When a student with a disability graduates high school, parents, caregivers, guardians, or the student themselves, is concerned with the post-secondary options. In this webcast, we highlight for you Centers for Independent Living, or CIL’s. Centers for Independent Living are community-based, cross-disability, non-profit organizations. They provide:

- Independent living skills training
- Individual and systems advocacy
- Peer support
- Information and referral

Pat Morse: As I said, I work for Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, BVCIL, as we call it for short, is actually under a federal grant. We are on year five of our federal grant. Our federal grant covers Washington County, Burleson, Robertson, and Madison counties. Brazos would be our largest county. The other four counties are significantly underserved based upon how much the need is directly here in Brazos, but we are trying really hard to overcome that with outreach and provide services that we need in the other counties. Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living is one of twenty-seven CIL’s in the state of Texas. Some of the CIL’s have federal monies, and some of them have solely state monies.

In terms of services, all Centers for Independent Livings must have four core services. Independent living skills is major in terms of one of the core services. We also do advocacy on a systems and individual basis. We have peer support, which is not counseling; it is absolutely from one person to another in dealing with that type of disability issue, and also general information and referral for any person with disability resources that are needed. How we handle services at BVCIL is either in small classes or on a one-to-one basis, one facilitator and one individual who desires to have independent living in a particular goal, or vocational training, advocacy, whatever it is that their need is. The most fundamental thing about BVCIL is that we are here to promote independence in any area of community life. That is crucial; that is what our mission is. In order to do that, we have to always be person-centered, and our emphasis here is always on the consumer and what their goal is. It’s nonresidential, so it is a center of services.

And it’s always keeping in mind what the individual community needs are here, we never duplicate what’s there. Our purpose is for individuals to be included in any aspect of the community, so we do not duplicate that service here. My role at BVCIL as a program manager is multifaceted. Primarily, I supervise the independent living facilitator staff that we have. I oversee all volunteers that come and promote the independent living philosophy with our staff, as well as our consumers. One of the rules about a Center for

Independent Living is that being consumer driven and being eligible for services, it’s really important that at least 51% of our staff have a significant disability of some type in order to work
here. Our volunteer board of directors also must be comprised of at least 51% of individuals with significant disabilities. That is because we are consumer based, so that is really crucial here.