Respectability Webinar

**Tips for Making Your Faith Institution More Inclusive of People with Disabilities**

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Rough Edit

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>> Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today for today's conference call webinar called Starting with "Yes," Tips for Making Your Faith Institution More Inclusive of People with Disabilities. As you may know, RespectAbility is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with the goal of fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities.

we work with a variety of different people from those in the entertainment industry, policy makers, educators, employers, faith based organizations, philanthropists, journalists and others in order to achieve our goals. Today, we have the honor of having Shelley Richman Cohen on for our webinar. She is a founder of RespectAbility as well as the Founder and Director of the Jewish Inclusion Project. She also has served as a coach and advisor to synagogues on increasing inclusivity. She speaks as an advocate for inclusion of children with disabilities in Jewish, communal and re-correctional environments. She serves on the board on Jewish camp and RespectAbility as well as on the executive committee of the American board of-- an innovator of therapies and programming for children with developmental and physical disabilities. She's a former board member of SAR high school in Riverdale, New York, and a member of Lincoln Square Synagogue. So thank you, very much. Can we join Shelley Richman Cohen as she will lead our webinar.

>> Thank you, very much, Lauren. Um, I want to welcome all of you to this webinar. But before we begin, I just must, I would like to dedicate actually this webinar in memory of Rabbi Lynn Lanceberg who passed away last night. For those of who do not know of had he ever she was one of the most eloquent, classy, brilliant and effective champion for social justice in the American Jewish community. After she herself suffered a traumatic brain injury as a result of a car accident, she became one of the religious community's most impactful champion for disability rights. She played a crucial role in starting the institution of the Jewish network for reformed Judaism. She was a wonderful, human being and will be sorely missed by all those people who worked to further the rights of people with disabilities.

And now, I'd like to begin. I also want to say thank you to Lauren and especially to the head of RespectAbility, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi who has started RespectAbility and has really single-handedly done more, I think, for moving the needle forward for the rights of people with disabilities to be included in our society at large. And just a big hats off to Jennifer and let's begin talking about inclusion in our religious institutions.

I'm going to speak specifically about synagogue. But really this is an acumen Cal webinar that the best practices and tips involved in trying to create more inclusive religious institutions can be used for churches and mosques and even specifically about synagogues inclusion, I do think this really can, has a broader appeal.

The first and foremost, we have to realize what we're dealing with here. And we all know that in a country where we have 323 million people, according to the U.S. census bureau, 56.7 million have should sort of physical or learning disability. This same statistic says that 18.6% of the population has some form of disability. And this certainly goes for the Jewish community.

When one looks at this number, you have to think about it. One in five people have some form of disability. And if one thinks of one's own synagogue or place of worship, you have to think about it. Do you really see that, if you count it off by five, you have that population within your community.

Most people, if they answered honestly, chances are they say no. and you have to ask yourself, why not, and you have to ask yourself what can we be doing better to make this happen?

The inclusion of people with disabilities has to be viewed not as an act of kindness. But really as a religious obligation. In Judaism, say-- there is a saying that the world stands on three things. Torah-- and Torah, the Bible. Avoda worship of God and-- act of kindness.

In Judaism, people often put the inclusion of people with disabilities under the Rubric of an act of kindness. And I say that it's really not. This is really an obligatory act from the Torah, object lick Tory-- love thy neighbors as one's self. We have to view creating inclusive community as just that, an obligation for us all to create the right Jewish communal setting that we want to have in our synagogue.

In order to have real inclusion, it is a proactive process. It is not something that one can just say, oh, of course, we're inclusive of people with disabilities. The sentiment may very well be there. Unless certain things are put into place, there's not a way that you can be inclusive. If you have a lot of stairs leading to get into your house of worship, if there isn't a ramp there, a person who is a wheelchair user will not be able to get inside the synagogue or church or mosque.

certain things have to be put into place. If you have a visual impairment, and you want to pray and you need large print, if the prayer book is not in large print, it's hard for a person to say, oh, I'm going to come to this and pray in this synagogue. If they can't use the prayer book, how are they going to pray? So it has to be a proactive process where you get the staff and the people both lay people and administrative staff of your house of worship to start thinking about what to do.

Often times when people start thinking about inclusion, they think, ugh, well, our building is, it's an-- it was from the 1950s. It's mid century, so many stairs, it's to inaccessible. It requests so much money to become inclusive that, you know, it's just not something that we can really do realistically.

And I always say to people who have said these sorts of things to me, that don't make perfect the enemy of good. And by that, I mean, you can't always use money as an excuse. You have to say to yourself, okay, let's just think. How can we create programming that can maybe be accessible to those who might not have a mobility impairment? How are we going to change our programming? What are we going to do in the context of the synagogue that will create still an an inclusive sort of environment. And is it possible to buy temporary ramps versus making this multi--dollar investment of architecturally changing the house of worship and instead is there a way to ramp into a different room, maybe hold the service in that room or maybe hold the programming that you want to do in a room that has a potential for being more accessible?

When there is a will to try and create an inclusive environment, it is often, you have to think out of the box. And you can't always make dollars an excuse as to why you are not trying and working harder towards being accessible.

To really have an inclusive environment, one needs to have essentially three things working within your institution. There has to be a level of empathy. There has to be a thought of a course to create action. And there has to be accountability for how you are going to fulfill that action.

The empathy really means that you have to start thinking back on that 18.6%, the fifth of the community that have some form of disability. And we have to, instead of saying, listen, we can't have our Sabbath morning group catering to these couple of kids who have all these sensory issues. And they know, you know, we have to think of the whole, and we have to do what is greater for the greater whole. You have a sense of empathy and Seyfarth Shawing, how are the parents of these children with disabilities, how are they feeling? Do they feel included in this religious community? Have a sense of really what are these other people going through, a sense of the other of how you want to create a faith based community that has values that are empathetic. When you think of the reaction, you have to think of the terms of what are we going to do and how are we going to approach these people and think about what they would like to have happen. Then the concepts of accountability comes into play and you say, what type of infrastructure are we going to put into our synagogue to really enable inclusion to take place and have a proactive process set up in our synagogue, house of worship that will be able to address the needs of those who come that have disabilities.

The other, the barriers to inclusion are often architectural, attitudinal and and communicative. Architectural is the fact that often times there are steps, often times there are not wheelchair accessible bathrooms. And that is very crucial. And people need to be able to go to the bathroom. And if they cannot go to the bathroom, I think there needs to be some sort of letting people know that you want them to come but yet this is an obstacle. Maybe that is the first thing that has to be on the to-do list within creating a synagogue is to allow that aspect of taking care of the physical needs.

attitudinal, that's often a barrier. People, although we live age and time that the word inclusion is probably the go-to word at the time. Inclusion often times when it comes to people with disabilities, there is sometimes a feeling of, I don't like these people around. Sometimes it's the feeling that there is a bit of prejudice, I believe, that goes towards people with disabilities. They don't look quite the same. They might not sound quite the same there's a sense of difference. That can often be a barrier. But I think with education and attitudinal desire to change, this is something that can be changed within the synagogue. It starts on the top with the Rabbi and the executive director of having to be onboard, saying this matters to them. This is something that they want to breakdown these attitudinal barriers. It has to be spoken. But these attitudinal changes can happen. And they happen through-- communication. Through communication, these barriers can be taken down. But communication needs to be had. Often times communication is the most neglected aspect of working in a synagogue.

They will be doing something that is very inclusive and they don't advertise that they don't single it out. They don't say people with disabilities are welcome. Often you hear people in the synagogue, they don't want to single them out. But the reality is, unless it's spelled out in weekly newsletters, unless it's spelled out on websites, unless it's spelled out by all sorts of communications and flyers about programming, people with disabilities don't necessarily know that they really are able, that they are going to be accommodated within your synagogue. So communication is a very, very key component towards making and creating a more inclusive house of worship.

One always needs to ask questions of those community people within the community who you do know of. When I said to think about that 18.6%, that shift of your community that are they present in one synagogue and have a disability? Maybe you went and thought to yourself, well, I can figure three people. The three people that you thought of, have they been spoken to? Have their needs-- are their needs being addressed? I think on a basic level needs to happen within every synagogue, church, or mosque that those people who have disabilities that are known or have children with disabilities that are known, that they are asked how are things working for you?

You know, is there more that we could do to make your child feel more comfortable, to make you feel comfortable? If so, how can we make this happen? And when are the-- and when you will be amazed when you see how the reactions of people so often, it's simple little things that, you know, a person who uses a walker who has trouble, she wishes she could get an aisle seat. Then a synagogue can put up signs on a number of aisle seats that say, just please give this seat to a person who might have a mobility issue.

In the same sort of sign you see on the subway or bus to give up the seat. To be put on the back of the aisle seat, you have made that person who every week might feel awkward coming in and put away the walker and have to navigate going to the pew within the synagogue and make it difficult, all of these things make a difference to see. And it's a quick, easy fix if you think about it. There are always next steps. And asking and finding out is the easiest way to really address these needs.

The next aspect of really being an inclusive house of worship is to be really a good listener to validate, to be compassionate. That it seems like I'm saying something so common sense and easy, but you will be amazed how often this is missed by so many.

There's always a solution. I'm a big believer in that. And if you approach things in a way that we're going to solve whatever problem comes before us, they're going to come up with an answer. It might not be the best answer, but it will be some sort of answer. And Scott answers-- as long as you're working with the person with a disability or the family member who has a person with a disability in the family, as long as you're working together to try to find a solution, I think it helps a very long way for that person or that family that has a person with a disability to feel included and to feel validated and to feel like the house of worship is really listening to them. And really what's more, wants them to be there and be part of their community.

It's also important to make sure that you have infrastructure through your programming, that you-- if you're going to have like this-- many synagogues this week, is a holiday forum this Sunday or this Sunday -- many synagogues have carnival for children. What would it take for those carnival to open half hour early for children that cannot take the large crowd. All it takes is a little bit of thought, of proactive thought of saying, you know what? We're going to open this early. We're going to advertise it. And then maybe, what's even better, go the distance and take one classroom and create a calming sensory room where so that maybe one parent who has the child who has autism, will be able to go into the sensory room after the child has been able to be in that preopening time slot of the carnival. Then the one parent can go into that sensory room. And the other children who are not in the spectrum can continue in the carnival when it's all noisy and crazy and be with the other parents.

Just think, if a family, if they have an afternoon activity together in the synagogue or any religious institutional setting that feels, oh, we're a part of this. We as a family are functioning together as part of the general community. I always say, that whenever people, I guess phone calls all the time from different parents, people with disabilities, all about varying things of being like, um, excluded from various infrastructures within the Jewish community. And I always listen, and I always try and be creative.

If I don't know enough, I say, you know what? There's enough information out there. We live in a day and age where there's so much information at our fingertips. We can always learn more, and we can always think to figure out, okay, maybe there's another better way that we can be doing this. Use the internet. Think about it.

If you come and there's a family here and the family is very specific about the child's disability, you can look up and read about what the disability entails, what are various characteristics of the disability. And maybe that can help you further your creative juices to say, ugh, we should be doing this. We could do that. We could fine tune what it is and create a programming infrastructure that will work toward making things far more effective for people with disabilities.

Architectural barriers-- one has to approach architectural barriers in a very long-term and short-term sort of way. Often times if you have an older building That is not wheelchair accessible according to the ADA, the American Disabilities Act, all the institutions were grandfathered in for whatever architectural structures they had. They unlike all public buildings that you go to where you see ramps and wheelchair accessible elevators, those religious institutions were grandfathered in. They could remain in or inaccessible state without any consequences.

And unfortunately, especially in the Jewish community, that began to be a way that, oh, whenever building synagogues, often times the powers that be decided, oh, we're exempt. We don't need to worry about this. You know, we don't have people can disabilities so why worry about it? At the time, of course, there were people with disabilities. But they weren't, they couldn't get in, so of course, people think, oh, they don't have people with disabilities.

I know of a case of a synagogue in particular where a new Rabbi came to the synagogue. And he was-- and his first thought was very mid century modern building that was very inaccessible. He ended up getting a very large donor who came to him with a six-figure sum. And he said, Rabbi I think you're so terrific. I want to give you this gift. And he said, if I give you this gift, what would you do with it? And the Rabbi said to him, I'm going to make the synagogue wheelchair accessible. And I'm going to put this money all towards making it wheelchair accessible.

And the guy looked at the Rabbi and said to him. Why would you do that? Think with all this money, all the programming you can do. The Rabbi said to him, you're not understanding, if I'm not accessible to one Jew, ultimately I'm inaccessible to no Jew. He said, with that he did put the money towards making the synagogue accessible.

And ironically, the very first Shabbat that the ramping system that was put into place to make it more accessible, and they moved-- they did a short-term goal, he put the majority of the money into the long-term goal of making the building accessible. But he did short-term things to make it more accessible. And moved-- he moved the where the prayer services into a different level that was lower, that was able to be accessed through ramping a certain sense. Once he did that, it turned out that he learned that, um, four people with different disabilities showed up on that first Friday night service. And it turned out they were for individuals who were in a group home that was less than four blocks away from their synagogue. And nobody had ever known about it. And it was a good home that was from the foundation, Jewish group home. And no one had known it was there because most people couldn't go to synagogue beforehand.

And now that this Rabbi had made it more accessible, he had new members attending their synagogue. So I think that, architectural barriers, you have to have a short-term and a long-term fund-raising goal in order to address the fact that those things need to change.

Purchasing, you know, you can purchase or build temporary ramps. You can re-purpose your usage, signage is very important so that people know what you have and what you don't have in a way of making your synagogue accessible.

And by that I mean, if you have large-- if you have a rail, all of these things need to be marked and there has to be signage up so that people understand where you have a wheelchair accessible bathroom needs to be marked so that people know this is where there is wheelchair accessible bathroom. You might only have one in the building, that one has to be marked so that people know. It's all part of the educational process for people in general to see that there are people with disabilities out there. And the synagogue is working towards creating a more inclusive environment.

And again, it all gets back down to communication. That by seeing signage, by understanding what's happening. By advertising that we're going to try and create a capital campaign that's going to work long-term on making synagogues accessible, but making it accessible, it means more than just get ramping to enter into the synagogue but the image or places within the synagogue,-- where most times synagogues, will, all of a sudden reaching to the-- or the-- where the central spot where often times they lead the prayer service. Those areas often have steps for them. There has to be a thought and an involvement to say, why shouldn't a person be able-- with physical disability be called to the Torah. And therefore those areas of the synagogue need to be thought about proactively, and be thought of to make sure those are also accessible.

When we talk about the attitudinal and awareness barriers, in order to really break that down, there has to be an amount of education. You have to educate the staff. You have to educate sometimes the Rabbi. You have to educate the board of directors. You have to educate the congregation by first and foremost having being inclusive of people with disabilities written on your mission statement that is on the website of your synagogue. That's the very, very first portal entrée into the synagogue world. If a person with disability is moving into a community, by putting synagogue disability, you see what pops up.

The people that have the heart-- including it in their mission statement, that synagogue is going to come up and that person is going to say, let me look at this synagogue. Let me see if this is a place I really want to bring myself and my family to have a religious home.

I think it's very, very important that it be periodically in a Rabbi's sermon that is, when the Rabbi when the head of your religious home talks about being an openly welcoming, inclusive environment, that is the first-- that is the first stop by saying, there is a trickle down theory I always say in religious life. And it comes from the Rabbi. And it-- and it comes from the Rabbi and from the-- that the cantor that these are the people who really set the tone. And if they talk about this, if they include it in their word, it goes a very long way in really creating this feeling of inclusivity. I think it also very much needs to be posted in weekly newsletters that the house of worship is a place that's welcoming of people with disabilities.

And in that, there also has to be a name if you need special attention or you know, if you're a person with special needs and need special accommodations, please see so-and-so. If there is a number or email address of who to contact in the synagogue that an infrastructure is set into place so somebody in the synagogue office knows. This is what I need to do if somebody calls and talks about a specific thing they need. This needs to be spelled out and should be seen by everybody in the weekly newsletter so that they know what's happening and that they know that there is an important part of the community, to have people with disabilities as part of our community.

And in Social Media, with Social Media being used, it should be posted that events and various services or programming is open to people with disabilities. There are practices and policies that are a mainstay of being proactively inclusive of people with disabilities.

There's a way of -- there's a disability etiquette of how we want to speak and how people with disabilities should be addressed. You know, it's not the Down Syndrome kid. It's the child with Down Syndrome. It is-- there is a way of speaking that of language, people, the verbiage now is people with disabilities. That's preferred verbiage, and it's important to start thinking that way that we don't use the disability as an adjective. That is just a part of what a person is.

It's a person with a disability as oppose to a disabled person. The-- there's -- it's very important for synagogues and for other houses of worship to create inclusion community because there has to be somebody thinking proactively about how we are seeing through it. Whatever's happening in our synagogue or in house of worship is really working and thinking to be inclusive of people with disabilities.

Often times, it's a wonderful thing if you can have an inclusion coordinator. Some synagogues I've worked with have hired inclusion coordinators. Other synagogues have a designated lay leader as an inclusion coordinator. But it is important that there is somebody who is seen as or committee of people that are seen as the people who are seeing to it that they're keeping this segment of the community involved and included in whatever is going on in the synagogue setting.

Often times synagogues have created essentially an inclusion policy where they think about how they want needs to be met. And you know some advertise it and put it into more of what the mission statement is of the synagogue. But one doesn't necessarily have to do that. It could be a more informal thing of saying, this is how we're going to handle, seeing it to that we are more inclusive of people with disabilities.

Some synagogues have created buddy systems for both people with disabilities and their families where they will either have family be there to help guide the new family that's moved into the neighborhood that has the child with disability. And it's paradox so that they see to it that there's a child mentor who makes sure that a child feels comfortable in the Shabbat groups or Sunday school. And there's kind of a pairing buddy system. Sometimes it's done where you have a buddy system where it's-- where it is two families that each have children with disabilities. It's a partnering of service so parents can have mutual support. Typical siblings can have support with other children-- of a child with a disability.

And then there is the children with the disability. And it's kind of a pairing that goes on, some do it in a formal way, some less formal way. But that, too, can be an opening, welcoming feeling for some families who are coming into the synagogue setting in a relatively cold way. And it really can be a benefit to them, to the family with disability who wants to be included.

also there are such synagogues have created support groups in larger synagogues where parents who have children with disability get together on an informal basis once a month to really just have coffee, to talk, to see. Sometimes they will have-- I've known of a synagogue that created a kind of a Sunday morning coffee clutch where the parents, the kids would be in Sunday school. And it was an inclusive Sunday school setting. And the parents would have coffee and bagels and be able to talk. In one synagogue, I know they had another person within the congregation who was a psychologist. She was the facilitator.

And it got a chance for many of the parents who really-- it was a bit of a struggle with their child with disabilities that could be in an environment where they were able to really discuss and talk about it and for it to be within their spiritual home. It was a very helpful, comforting and empowering sort of setting.

So support groups are also another avenue to create a more inclusive environment for inclusive synagogue settings.

I have here now on the screen an inclusive synagogue infrastructure set up for you to look at. This isn't written in stone. This is kind of, sort of helpful way of thinking of creating-- often times people think of kids with disabilities in synagogue. Everything gets talked about in terms of the youth director or the head of the Hebrew school or Sunday school. And there's no thought given to the aging population that is getting progressively more disabilities whether it be hearing impairments or physical mobility issues.

And also just those people who the congregation fall between the elderly and the young who have disabilities. And often times there's a way of them all falling through the crack. And which creating an infrastructure that really views part of their mission and creating an environment that is completely inclusive of people with disabilities, one has to think in terms of the entire structure of the synagogue and how it works. And then the inclusion community which I mentioned earlier, it's so, so important because essentially those people who are part of the inclusion committee should be serving on every other community that is involved in the synagogue whether it be a one-- just say, the players of the whole, or an ongoing, ritual community or the program committee or the communications committee or membership committee, those ongoing larger programming sorts of committees.

Somebody needs to be there also who is thinking about the segment of the communities that either the person has a disability or a member of their family has a disability. And by having a structure where you have an inclusive community and you have those members on every other committee and including somebody on the board who is part of that inclusion committee so they can always keep that hat of being inclusive on their heads during the board meetings just so that they can make sure that this segment of the population is not being forgotten.

This slide in particular gives you a sense of how it should be. And I always say that, I would hope that one day this won't be necessary. That at some point, within the infrastructure of the synagogue, things become to de riguer being an -- no longer will there be an inclusion committee. But before that time, I think it's really worth investigating and worth thinking about and approaching one's house of worship to really see whether they would be open to thinking about structuring the way things happen. in order to become truly inclusive of people with disabilities.

As we talk about programming-- oh, sorry. As we talk about programming-- there seems to be a lag.

When we talk about inclusion programming there are many ways-- there are many things that have to become part of the infrastructure. I mentioned some before. And um, I think it's worth really digging a little deeper into it.

Shabbat morning groups is often a big thing. It's one-- does not offer some form of inclusionary aspects to Shabbat morning groups. It is like throwing the family away with both hands. And out of the religious room of the a synagogue setting. Shabbat morning groups need to and be ready to take on children with disabilities. If that means you have to hire Shabbat group leaders that have some sort of background in special education, maybe that's exactly what it means. It has to be-- or if it's not, and if you only use high schoolers. I think there has to be training that goes on before the school year begins. where it's discussed how are we going to be inclusive of children with disability?

Chances are the senior community within your synagogue, you know of certain children that have disabilities. It goes back to talking to those families, what we discussed before, ask the parents what you think your child's needs are. What does your child enjoy doing? How does your child learn in general? Try to tailor and see what kind of a group setting you can have that will work and be beneficial to this child and where the family and parents will feel that they can leave their children, be able to pray and that their child will feel safe and comfortable and have a good religious experience in the synagogue or house of worship setting.

Often times and nowadays it's becoming more and more commonplace that Shabbat morning groups offer a sensory calming room in one of the classrooms being used has some sensory-friendly toys, has low lighting instead of the overhead fluorescent lights that they just put in some low lighting so that there's a sense of calm. And that this room, you can have signage up that it is labeled as a essentially calming room. It's really important, if people don't know about it, they don't hear about it, if they don't see it. They won't know it's there. And things need to be labeled. They need to be advertised in your weekly newsletter, in the family newsletter that this is available. It's another way of telling people who have family members and children with disabilities that they're welcome in your synagogue setting.

And so it's a-- sensory calming room costs a few hundred dollars to put together. It's really nothing. You know, you can talk to any special education educator that's in your community an OT or PT and just-- better an OT who is really familiar with various low-key sensory toys, have some books if you know, books on the bookshelf have a nice, quiet room. You can make the room whether you're going to have a person stationed in that room whether you want to have a parent attend in that room. But it should be known that it's a sensory calming room. It is not to be used as another playroom. It's a place where when things get overwhelmed and a child gets overstimulated because they were in services or in groups that were too stimulating that they have a place to calm down.

The adaptive holiday programming, I mentioned about having carnival time earlier. Almost with every holiday there's a way to try and, if you have passover time, that could be-- if you're going to be in a very large group. Again, is there could be a preset time where you have for smaller groups. It's just going that extra mile and being extra sensitive toward those families to make a big difference.

And of course, bar and Bat Mitzvah programming. That there is a person available in had the community and synagogue who is readily happy to work with children who have varying degrees of disabilities that might prevent them from doing what is the normative practice within your synagogue for a bar or Bat Mitzvah. And that person could be found either by seeking out a professional who is a member of your community who might be willing to volunteer time or it will be an investment of finding the right type of person. But there are so many resources that one can find online.

and above all, you can find so much of these things by-- you can look at RespectAbility.org. There's a whole Jewish inclusion section. And there are practical guides that we have in there that have been written that are-- that involve and have so many different ideas and programming, thoughts, for so many of these ideas.

I see-- I just want to say that synagogues, again-- I did this wrong. Synagogues could be a portal for better living for people with disabilities. That goes for all religious institutions. But it is a way to give people with disabilities another avenue for feeling included in the spiritual side of society. And I think that many of these tips can be found through usage of all that is out there and available to us, especially looking at RespectAbility.org is a wonderful way to find lots of things that are available through the Jewish community and through religious communities at large.

And I'm happy to take any questions if there are any questions. And I thank you for listening.

>> Thank you so much, Shelley. Operator, can you let people know how they can ask a question, please.

>> Ladies and gentlemen, if you have dialed in and would like to ask a question, please press 7-pound only your phone now and you will be placed into cue in the order received. That is seven pound on your phone. Listen to your name to be announced and ask your question when prompted. You can also send your questions via the Q&A chat located on the left of the presentation. Type your message and press ask to send it.

>> While we're waiting for people to submit a question via the online system or phone, Shelley you said a lot of great information on how people can do better. Is anyone really doing it well? Do you have a good example to share?

>> Of a particular synagogue that's doing well?

>> Either synagogue or aspect that someone's doing well. I mean, I'm personally on the co-chair of the inclusion committee in my synagogue. I know it's impossible to do everything well at the beginning. But sometimes some people will do one aspect really well. Is there good news of something someone is doing really well?

>> There's a synagogue that comes to mind that did an exceptional thing of programming. It was a synagogue that felt like they were close, you know, like they have it in mind and they were doing lots of things. But yet they felt somehow they were missing the mark. They created a Shabbat home that they set was an inclusive that is to teach congregant to congregant what people are going through and what was not working for them and what was working for them in their synagogue. And it was fascinating because what they did was they had a panel for Friday night speakers. And it was all people in the community. There was a little person. There was a person who had autism. There was a person who was deaf.

They had really a wide range. And people spoke about their experiences in the synagogue. And it was things came out that people had never, ever thought about. One talked about how-- actually all three persons on the panel complained about kiddish. And the kiddish room and how overwhelming it was for them to walk into this room that was just filled with all these people and it was so loud. And it was so-- people, you know, pushing kind of around the table where the food was. And it was just a really not good feeling for any of them. And it was interesting that they realized that they had like a partitioned off part of the where the kiddish room was. There was an attached room. They decided that they were going to open up part of that and have part of the kiddish also be able to trickle in there and that they with label 2 then-- it was nor a quieter calmer kiddish.

And it was their way-- that was ultimate what came out of that synagogue's need for lowering the decibel of what was going on. They had a speaker who also had a disability. And um, she spoke from the pulpit. And she talked about just the need and the feeling and the desire to feel included in the Jewish community and have sometimes from an institutional standpoint, synagogue standpoint she felt very left out. It was really useful-- you saw there-- the afternoon and evening services of the synagogue, they had a speaker that came in and spoke about employment. And how the Jewish community would really need to do more and make more of an effort for inclusion within a working way.

And the synagogues, they realized that they should be having, and I know they since employed a person with a disability in their office. And it was really a way. It was just a really, sort of wonderful self-created programming that really raised the level of awareness in the synagogue and really intensified the synagogue's desire to be an inclusive place.

>> Thank you. Do we have any questions via phone?

>> There are no questions at this time.

>> All right. I'm going to hand the call over to RespectAbility president, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi for a moment.

>> I want to say, Shelley how fabulous this webinar was and how much I appreciated not only your walking people through in a very intentional, thoughtful way but the fact that you've been a great role model for all of us at RespectAbility. I want to ask you because I think you've been instrumental in terms of children being able to be included in synagogue Hebrew school programs and other children's programming if you would share a favorite story of including a child so that they could be involved in safe education.

>> Um, let me think. Um, there was a child who really was so-- he was on the spectrum. And he really felt that there was just no place for him, you know, anywhere essentially. And it was very nice, I remember this one Rabbi was really intent on seeing to it that this child really had a place.

and what was more-- the father walked-- the first time the father walked into the synagogue on a Friday night. And he had brought his son. He-- the Rabbi at the end of the service, the father says that, you know, some people looked at him very annoyed as the child was acting out. And the Rabbi had gone up to him. And said to him afterwards how happy he was that, um, he came to his synagogue. And he said, if anybody-- if anyone says anything to you about your son, let me know because I'll be happy to ask them to leave. From that point, the Rabbi asked the father where the child was in school. Found out that the child was in a public school. And then started the conversation of, what can we do to have him be a part of our Hebrew Sunday school structure?

And they ended up accommodating him by having him be in part of the more social aspect of the Sunday school program. And then they had a person on staff who worked more one on one in an individual way with this child. And I have to say that that was a really amazing Rabbi. And it really started at the top.

And that was a situation where they-- really they had to differentiate their learning environment. They decided to put the more social aspect of when the kids were doing a play sort of thing that could be a little bit more where the child could be moving around more. That they included the child in. And then they did for the learning part where he was not able to really sit and focus. That part they adapted and had a more one on one sort of setting for the child.

>> That's a wonderful example of people who put a lot of intentionality, a lot of love and thought into the work. Do we have any other calls at this time in

>> Um, we did have one, but they disconnected.

>> Oh, okay. Um -- whoever-- if the person is still on, you know or has the question, you're more than welcome to contact us afterwards. And we will make sure that Shelley gets the question so you can receive your answer.

>> Shelley, do you have any closing comments?

>> No, just thank you very much. I always say, whenever there's a will, there's a way. If a religious institution or house of worship desires to be inclusive, you can be inclusive. There are all sorts of levels to it. And the thing is to just keep trying and keep building upon that desire. And it can happen. And I wish everyone who was listening a lot of luck and, uh, let's all work towards creating more inclusive society.

>> Thank you very much for that message. Um, thank you everyone who has joined us for this webinar. To find out more information, you can find us online at www..RespectAbility.org. And I hope everyone has a good rest of your day. Thank you.

>> Thank you. Bye-bye.