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RespectAbility

2018 National Jewish Disability Inclusion Survey

October 16, 2018

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>> Hello. This is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, president of RespectAbility. I'm so delighted to have you all join us today for our webinar on Faith and Disability Inclusion Survey. This particular focus today is on our Jewish data, which was made possible from some fabulous funders. It's great to take a look at our first slide deck and see the name of our brand‑new chairman Steve Bartlett, who just was sworn into office for our organization ‑‑ we call it sworn into office. It's not quite that fancy, but we are so thrilled to have him. He's an original coauthor of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and we are so thrilled to have him as our chairman, and it's the first time that I have done a webinar since Linda Berger has taken over as treasurer of RespectAbility. She's a major leader on disability issues and Jewish leaders from Houston, Texas. So we are very proud of our leadership changes and our previous and current board members.

Again, my name is Jennifer Mizrahi. I myself am a person with a disability. I know what it's like to parent a child with multiple disabilities, and I have a background in strategic communications, including polling, and so having data like this is very important to our organization, because it really means that the decisions that we are making are based on science and data and based on the information that we hear from actual stakeholders, because it's important that our work is exactly in synch with that of what is needed out in the community. But I'm especially pleased to turn this over to Meagan Buren. Meagan Buren is the pollster who did this survey for us, and she has a very deep background in Jewish issues, in disability issues, and as a pollster. This is a large sample, but I will also say that I want to appreciate the Jewish Funders Network, the ORLO found, the Beverly Foundation, for the funding that made this possible, along with all of the Jewish Federations that helped us in our data collection.

Turning it over now to Meagan Buren, who is going to talk about the data, but before she does, I want to make sure that everyone on the call understands a couple of things. First of all, there's actually 170 slides in this slide deck. We are not going to go through 170 slides. They are there so that if you have questions, you can go through and see more information and also if there's a particular question, we'll be able to scroll to it. We are only going to go through about a fourth of the slides that are in this slide deck, so don't get scared. We are not going to keep you here all afternoon. We want to give you the very big highlights in the stuff that's going to be useful to you. So, turning it over to Meagan. Thank you so much for joining us.

>> Thank you, Jennifer, for that introduction, and to everyone that is joining. I will echo, actually, a couple of things that Jennifer said just to start. This is one of the only organizations that puts a value so highly on this type of research, and not in a self‑serving way as a researcher, I'll just say, also as a professional and someone that cares about this organization and these issues, that it is critical that work be done in this way, in order to really get a sense of what the stakeholders think and feel, and especially on topics that we care so deeply about. We may have ways that we think are the best way to proceed or the best way to speak about these issues and gain support and traction, but it isn't until we collect this number of views that we really can get a sense of what the best direction truly is.

And I'll share that in this case, this really is a very large sample, in part because we were able to partner with media organizations in order to share this more widely, but 1,778 in the Jewish disability community, and that means people who either have a disability themselves ‑‑ that's 556 Jews with a disability that's included in that number, and also people who have a family member or a close friend, work in the disability community, volunteer in the disability community, that includes those stakeholders in that number, which is a large number, especially, you know, 556 Jews with disabilities themselves that self‑identify. And then in addition to that, another 798 Jews with no disability connection that are included in the data that you are looking at. There are another roughly 1,000, 1500 responses that we get that are not filtered just to take a look at the Jewish community and disability and inclusion. And Jennifer mentioned the funders who helped to make this important work possible. I'll echo what Jennifer said. We are not going to go through all of the data, and I'll also say that the way in which the PowerPoint is created is not necessarily always the easiest way to use it, and so I am sure that there is a link available on the RespectAbility website as well that gives the data in a PDF that may be more easy to process and works differently with an accessibility screen reader as well, so bear with me as we go through some of this, and I will ‑‑ I'll share the highlights rather than you needing to process everything that is on the screen.

When we look at the highlights, one of the things that sticks out when we ask people what type of disability they have, and we use the same type of breakdown of this information as other standardized polls, is that there is a very large number that notes, 21%, that have a mental health disability, and this is clearly a rising issue and one that is getting far more and needed attention in the community, so we wanted to note that in the survey as well, and I am sure Jennifer will speak more about that. And the way that these slides are broken up is that you will see the results from within the disability community and then the corresponding results from people with no disability connection.

Within the disability community, one of the things that we noted is that people do not feel ‑‑ people with disabilities do not feel encouraged to serve in the community in large numbers. Right? And so when you look at that, there is a sense that if you can see it, you can be it, and there are many in the disability community who are not seeing people with disabilities in leadership roles in our community. And you can see that true for people in the disability community and outside the community. And they don't know of anyone else. Not only are they not encouraged or feeling personally encouraged to serve, they don't know of clergy or staff with disabilities in their community, so you can see low numbers for within the disability community, and then also slightly higher when it comes to how people outside of the disability community feel, but they know even less people that actually have a job in the community that are a person with a disability, and those are very low when you look at that, right, so less than 10%.

One of the things that we note, even though that we are speaking about a poll that is about inclusion in the faith based institutions, even for people within the disability community, there are other issues when stacked up against that that are very pressing in their daily lives, and we would ‑‑ we would not be being truthful if we didn't note that, that things like health care, Medicaid, SSDI, and jobs and education are very, very pressing concerns for people with disabilities, even though they also still place a value on being included in the disability community. But when asked to rank it, there are daily concerns that are extremely important.

And the same holds true for people outside of the disability community. But they are concerned about this in terms of a standalone issue. They are concerned and extremely concerned about increasing inclusion of people with disabilities in the faith community, and you can see high numbers. Also, this is of people outside of the disability community with no connection, still high numbers in terms of somewhat concerned, but you see the intensity level drop slightly. The extremely concerned is a little bit lower, but still this is overall an issue that people do care about, and we see that concern across the board.

This is interesting. I know it is almost impossible to read what you see on this slide here, but it is intentional that these are all placed up against each other, because when we ask how important it is for Jewish people with disabilities to be able to attend and fully participate in each of the following, what's actually most important to note in this is that there is slight variation among any of them, right? So, it's not like the community is saying, yes, it's important for us to be able to go to synagogue services, but it's less important to be involved in social activities, or it's less important to be in the Jewish day school. There is not a sense in the community that there is one area in which we should focus or that there's one area that really stands out as the area in which people should or should not be working on inclusion. It is in all of the areas of Jewish life that people with disabilities want to be able to attend and fully participate, just as anyone else would.

And you can see also very slight variation when we look at it from the perspective of people without a disability connection.

And overall, people think that the community is doing somewhat well at including people with disabilities in these activities, so somewhat well, certainly still very much room for improvement. We have a long way to go, but what you will see following is that there are a lot of people in the community that is not connected to disability that truly doesn't know, and this points to an area of opportunity for increased awareness, right? If we don't know whether or not there are people with disabilities included and it's not our friend or our family member, then chances are that they are not seeing people with disabilities included in their Jewish community to the levels that we would like to see.

And even within the Jewish ‑‑ even within the disability community, there are a lot of people who think that we are doing a little bit better or even much better, and I know that is without question to the credit of many of the people who are on the phone today, who have been working on inclusion for far longer than the past five years, but I think that, you know, while we all know that there is still more room for growth and a high hill to climb, it's an opportunity to also look back and think that there ‑‑ the needle is moving, and that's important, that the community has a sense that all of the effort that you have been putting in and the work that you have been doing for much longer than five years is making a meaningful difference in people's lives.

And again, you can see that in the community without a disability connection, the I don't know numbers stay very significant.

Of note is that people are looking to synagogues and Jewish Federations overwhelmingly in terms of who they think is most responsible for this work. Those are the institutions that they look to in order to make a difference. And we asked to make sure that it was outside of an individual family or friends, and the same for people without a disability connection, although social organizations ticks up and Jewish Federation ticks up as well.

The places where they find most challenges in inclusion are listed here. Social organizations comes up high as does Jewish based schools and synagogues. Jewish summer camps is lower, and there has been a tremendous amount of work in that area in order to, I think, make those numbers possible, and so these are areas where we should be looking in the future for increased inclusion efforts.

>> This is Jennifer. I want to jump in because what you're seeing on that slide before was that for people without disabilities, who report they don't have any family members, they really report that there is a lack of inclusion or comfort about inclusion in these social organizations, so clearly there's a lot of room for disability etiquette and for helping people without disabilities feel more comfortable in interacting with people with visible disabilities, because this is really showing that they are not ‑‑ because it's not only are the people with disabilities saying that the inclusion is problematic at social activities, so are people without disabilities, and this is an area, frankly, that RespectAbility has not spent much time thinking about, so this is a red flag that says that there is an area of opportunity for people in the Jewish community to focus on this particular issue.

>> Thank you for pointing that out. And when it comes to why they think that there is a barrier to being fully included in the disability community, it echoes what Jennifer was just saying, that there is prejudice and unacknowledged stigma against people with disability, and this stretches far beyond just faith organizations and institutions and also into the work ‑‑ the important work that RespectAbility is doing in Hollywood and in workforce development around decreasing stigma and prejudice in other areas of life as well, because clearly, you know, all of us spend some amount of time in our faith community, but we generally as a society spend a lot more time watching television. So it's important that there are other areas that are impacting this as well. It's not something that alone will be solved in the faith based community. That said, there is also a sense that there is the will to do things differently, but there is a lack of expertise and know‑how and that it can be complicated and expensive, so the types of training and tool kits and information that's being put out in order to change this, I know personally being involved in a synagogue inclusion effort in New York that RespectAbility facilitated, you could see that given the right tools and given the right information, there are people with the right intention on the ground trying to do the right thing, and with those added resources, they are able to move the needle on inclusion.

And you can see similar numbers, slightly different but similar numbers when it comes to people without a disability connection.

All right. Let me slide back for a minute. And there are additional resources that Jennifer will go through. I think those are the main highlights that come out of the poll, and if I could sum them up, it's that much of the will is there, and with the right tools and resources, it is possible to make a difference in this area, and while there is room for growth, in much part because of the people that are on the phone today, you have seen real changes in the past five‑plus years.

>> So, first of all, fabulous presentation, Meagan, and work. Thank you so much. And I see that some super stars are on the phone with us today, including a member of our executive committee, Vivian, who is on expert on Jewish inclusion and disability, and people from Matan and Metro West and Howard and others who are super experts on this are on the phone, and we are going to take questions, but I wanted to just point out a couple of things that are resources. The first is that this seeing that there are not people with disabilities leading Jewish organizations really is a flag, because I know that as somebody who is from a small Jewish community, I grew up in the south where there are very few Jews, and I would go to an event and wonder, is there anybody else Jewish there or am I the only one, and frequently when I was the only one, I felt a little bit more uncomfortable, a little less comfortable, and if there was somebody in the leadership role who was Jewish, I felt even more comfortable, and what we are seeing with this poll data, with less than 10% of people being able to think about who is in leadership, whether it's a rabbi or a cantor or somebody who is at a job with a disability who can't even name a single person, this is a real problem. So there are a couple of exciting things that I saw. I sent around an email that a couple of you probably got saying, hey, send me some good things that you know about. So, in Chicago, some philanthropists there, including the Miller Foundation, have put together a fabulous training seminar for people who want to be board members of Jewish nonprofits and sort of the skills around how to be a successful board member. One of our board members, Shelly Cohen, has signed up to be an inclusion leader in a cohort, and they have another cohort coming up. It actually costs them $18,000 per participant to put this on, but it is so highly, highly subsidized that I think they have gotten it down to a thousand dollars a person, and you wind up with a special degree from the Kellogg School in nonprofit management from this program, and it looks like a really fabulous program, so you can see the link up there to this board member institute.

The second thing is that the mayor of Chicago's office, Karen Tamley, has a terrific program, that the Chicago community trust, that Emily Harris has organized, and it's a leadership program particularly for people who have lived with disability experience. It's just for people in Chicago, but I think it's worth it for people to take a look at what that program is and offers.

The next thing is that RespectAbility is trying to lift up sort of case studies, role models, publications, so anytime you have something great about Jewish inclusion, if you send it to us, we will share it in our Jewish Facebook site, which is the RespectAbility for all Facebook, which I hope that you're all following, and also on our Jewish Twitter, which is @JewishInclusion. We have our other faith resources, and the link is there in the resource thing, and then also many people are not aware that we are doing voter guides, and candidates are sending us, particularly for the swing races for senate and governor, but also in Los Angeles and New York City, we are asking candidates their opinions on disability issues, and you can find that those voter questionnaires are now going up at the TheRespectAbilityreport.org, and I encourage you to take a look at what we are getting from some of the candidates. Some of the answers are absolutely superb and extremely exciting. I want to remind you that there are 170 slides in this deck. We only went through a small fraction of them, but maybe Virginia can explain how people can now send in their questions. You can either send them in by texting us through this system, or Virginia will tell you how to use the telephone to ask questions. So turning it over to Virginia for instructions.

>> Ladies and gentlemen, if you have dialed in on the phone and would like to ask a question, press seven‑pound on your telephone now. That's 7 followed by the pound sign on your telephone keypad to indicate that you would like to speak, and we will unmute your line. All participants on the web can type their questions in the bottom of the Q&A box and click on the ask button with your mouse to send it.

>> So, the first question comes from Etta Levinson. Etta is a major leader in Metro West, actually, who is working on suicide issues, in particular, mental health, doing a great job. She asked a question regarding not as much the sample size as characteristics of the respondents. Would you say it is a broad range across the country, including a reflective sample of all walks of Jewish life, disabled and not in all areas of the country, or is it more just those with strong communities already involved in inclusion efforts? Meagan, I turn it to you.

>> Sure, and I can get back to you with some more detailed answers to this, but I would say it's a combination of both, in that we certainly used press in California and New York and their lists in order to recruit corespondents, and Texas did a tremendous job also in sending out information. So on one side, I will say that you will see heavier numbers in those areas, but it really did also go out to all walks of life, and so there are numbers that stretch across, you know, people that consider themselves just culturally Jewish and reconstructionists. There's a decent number that come from just the Chabad community, the modern orthodox community, conservatives. It stretches across all areas in that way and all across the country, although like I said there are more strong numbers in the areas that we specifically recruited, but I would say that it is representative.

>> The other thing is that we did divide the data so that we could take a look at people with disabilities themselves, Jews with disabilities themselves. We can take a look at people who had a family member with a disability and people who had no disability connection, so as we were going through those slides, you will see that we were able to compare people who have lived disability experience to people who don't have lived disability experience and see what the differences are between the groups. I will say that at the end of the day that pretty much everyone thinks that things are getting better in terms of inclusion in the Jewish community, but even after they got better, it's pretty much a rating of meh, like, really, it was not a good rating. So we went from catastrophic, off the cliff terrible, to significant improvement, which brought us to kind of meh, so we have a long way to go.

Operator, what's the next question?

>> We have a question from Howard.

>> Excellent. For some reason I am not seeing it. Can you read it to us?

>> Is there some way to more effectively use the thousands of Jewish children who are attending camps where people with disabilities are being included back in their home communities and synagogues to help these institutions be more inclusive?

>> So, Howard is one of the great leaders of inclusion in the Jewish community, at an organization where he has been through the system, really including people with disabilities. I think they have a 40‑year history of doing this. They were really the first on the scene, and they have really raised a generation of people through inclusive camps. It is exciting to see how those kids can make a difference, and I'm just going to give you an example. So recently, the Weinberg foundation just gave a $12 million donation to the Foundation For Jewish Camps for there to be more inclusion at the Jewish camps, and what's interesting to see is that the president of the Foundation For Jewish Camps is also currently the president of the Los Angeles Jewish Federation, holding both important lay leader roles, and she has, I believe, something like five kids, and all five kids went through these inclusion programs, where it did have an impact on her kids, one of her kids being the Plat that we all love from Broadway, because he was the star of Evan Hansen, which was a musical that talked about mental health, and we see in this survey that mental health is the number one disability that people in the Jewish community are currently living with, and so I do think that there is a tissue of interconnectiveness within the small Jewish community that we are, and people forget that, you know, there's 7 billion people on earth, but only 14 million Jews, and about, you know, 7 million or so in the states, and that, you know, a lot of us know each other, and that, you know, the kids that come out then grow up and become leaders of other organizations, and they can make a very big impact, whether it's on stage at Broadway or inside the Jewish community. So I think the answer to your question is, yes, a decidedly big yes, but I don't think that we have intentionally as a community done nearly enough to take advantage of the alumni of these inclusion programs, both the kids with disabilities and the kids without disabilities, who have had this experience to help use them to push the barriers in these other places, you know, like the social issue that clearly is quite a question that we are seeing pop up in this data. And I will also say that it was very clear that Jews with disabilities are far more concerned about access to quality health care and access to jobs than they are whether or not they can participate in their synagogues, simply because, you know, if you look at Maslow's hierarchy, for example, the need is so great for access to health care and employment, so those issues are very high. And I think the Jewish community with our commitment to social justice, that we can use the camp experience of inclusion and of respect for the dignity of all people for our social justice work, in addition to also our work to make sure that synagogues and camps and JCCs and social things in the Jewish community are inclusive. So I am not sure if that, you know, answered your question enough, but you can always type in more.

Vivian Bass, could you please further address interfaith families having a member with a disability, and how their community can be especially welcoming and resourceful to them? I know from my professional experiences that far too many interfaith families turn away from Judaism because of their situation. So Vivian, I am not sure if I'm understanding the question, the interfaith families, what they are having, if the family member has a disability. Maybe you can type more about what you think or dial in what it is about the Jewish with disabilities that's turning them away from the Judaism. Maybe what you mean is because they have a family member with a disability, and that family member is not welcome enough, that the whole family feels turned away. So I think that is a problem, though, whether it is an interfaith family or whether it's not an interfaith family. If any family member is not welcomed, respected or included, it makes the entire family, I think, feel less included. So, but you can add more. You know, we are always happy to hear from our treasurer, Vivian.

So are there more questions?

>> Well, I'll add one thing, and Vivian can clarify, but there's one thing of note to add to that, that in some ways just from our own knowledge, although we did not ask explicitly whether or not people were from an inner faith family on this survey that in some ways you're twice excluded from the community if that is the case, because of a person with a disability and because of a lack of inner faith inclusion, and it isn't to say that everything is perfect in other faith communities, but one of the open‑ended comments that really stuck out was from one of the participants who said that, you know, I had two sons enroll in the same Jewish day school. They couldn't accommodate the son that was on the autism spectrum. He is well behaved but otherwise needs a little bit more help. He ended up going to a Catholic school instead. He was disappointed and so was I. We have seen traditionally, or historically, I guess, that there have been issues in terms of inclusion in Jewish day schools and that this is not the ‑‑ you know, the only story where we anecdotally are hearing about people who want to be a part of Jewish day school education and are not able to find a place to do so.

>> And more and more, we are seeing that a lot of this is around the mental health, as the survey showed, with this very large number of people with mental health physicians. We recently did a terrific webinar with Linda Berger and others from Houston around that topic on our website, on suicide, but suicide is one extreme of a spectrum of mental health issues, but this is an issue that is impacting our community at very, very significant levels. 20% of households are impacted by this. 20% is quite a lot, and in many cases, the individual has a second disability at the same time. In other words, sometimes they have a physical or learning disability, and they have felt so marginalized or stigmatized that it is exacerbated anxiety or other issues that are mental health‑related. So Etta has another comment. Let me just say, I want to thank RespectAbility for doing such an amazing endeavor. I know how difficult it is, but it is so important to us. Thank you so much.

Question ‑‑ hold on. And it says ‑‑ thank you, we really, really appreciate it. Are there other questions? Operator, do you want to open it up for the phone, in case there's phone ones?

>> Again, participants who would like to ask a question or make a comment over the phone, if you have dialed in, you can press 7 pound on your telephone keypad to indicate you would like to speak. That's 7 followed by the pound sign on your telephone keypad.

No phone questions at this time.

>> So, Meagan, were there any other things that you wanted to comment on before we hop off?

>> No. Thank you for the opportunity to share this important work. I hope that it will benefit the community and inspire people to continue this important work.

>> And I just want to add, this is Jennifer speaking, that we are deeply, deeply grateful to the Jewish Funders Network, to the ORLO fund, which is the Orlofsky family, to the Beverly Foundation, for the financial support to make this possible. We are also very grateful to the federations that helped by forwarding this questionnaire and all of the people who forwarded it to people that they serve out in the communities, but to remind people that we also rented a number of Jewish lists through others to make sure that we were getting a very, very broad sample and not just sort of the usual suspects of the, you know, choir that work with us on disability inclusion already. This was really a very broad sample and a very large sample, so we are very grateful for that. I just want to add that a lot of people, a lot of organizations, Matan and the camps and the JCCs and the federations and others all seem to be rowing in the same direction of trying to expand inclusion. The Ruderman Foundation and also others. At this point, we have made significant progress. We did a similar poll multiple times in the past. We are seeing significant improvements on these issues, but I just want to add that after significant improvement, we are pretty much still at a meh, so we have a long way to go. I did really appreciate Howard's comment about what can we do with the campers alumni to help engage them in solving some of these problems themselves. I think that's a really, really brilliant question, and I hope that others who are on this call will think about that, and I just want to say that you can always email me, and I just put my email back up on the board. It's JenniferM@RespectAbility.org, when you have any questions. And I also just want to remind people on the call that when you see something great going on or you write a column, we are happy to share it in our Twitter and in our Jewish Facebook. Again, the Jewish Facebook is RespectAbility for All. I hope that you'll click like on it and that you'll follow it, so that you'll get that information, and that you'll follow on Twitter @JewishInclusion on Twitter. And you'll send us some stuff. For example, Matan has some webinars and they try to share those with us. If any organizations have something that they are doing, great things, webinars that are coming up, send them our way, because we at RespectAbility really want to be in the business of sharing best practices, things that are going on, you know, some of the writing that Etta has done on mental health, for example, up in Metro West. These are things that we want to be doing, so just send stuff to us so that we can share them more broadly. I think most people on this webinar know that we have a Shabbat Smile that goes out each week where we are trying to share resources and ideas, and we have actually more than 3,000 people who subscribe to that every week. That's a lot of people who care about these issues, but this is a very large sample size in this poll, and it's really wonderful to be able to have such accurate data, significant data sets to work with, so Meagan Buren, I want to thank you for your leadership. I want to thank the board and the staff and the volunteers at RespectAbility for doing this work. I really want to thank all of you who are on this call with us, and I also want to thank Virginia for helping us with the call, and I want to thank our captionist. We are very proud that we have live captions on our webinars. Not very many people do that, and we think that it is very important to make sure that people who are deaf or hard‑of‑hearing can fully participate in all webinars. We will be putting this deck up on our website along with all other former webinars, and I want to remind you also to go to the RespectAbility Report to look for updated voter information. We will be sending out voter guides. So thank you again so very much, and on behalf of RespectAbility, I wish you all a wonderful, wonderful day, and let me also just say that Vivian Bass is playing a major role with us in terms of looking at opportunities in New York and in Los Angeles for leadership, and so, please, if you have any information for her as well in terms of people who want to get involved, please shoot me an email and Vivian from our board will also be in touch with you. Thank you so much. It's delightful to speak with you. And have a wonderful day.

Operator, this concludes our webinar.

>> Thank you all for attending.