>> Jonathan: Hi, everybody. I'm Jonathan Murray, the founder of Bunim-Murray Productions, and we make both reality shows and documentaries. Today's webinar focuses on the challenges and rewards of creating documentary and unscripted programming that is inclusive of people with disabilities. Specifically, we'll focus on HBO's "Autism: the Sequel," a short documentary that is premiering tonight on HBO that is a follow up to 2007's "Autism: the Musical" and the unscripted series "Born This Way" about seven young adults with Down syndrome and their families. I was lucky enough to be involved with both projects. In both, we take viewers into worlds that have often been misunderstood and often ignored by the media. How do you tell these stories so that they are honest and authentic and so that they change attitudes and promote positive social change? That's what we will primarily be exploring today. Joining us from "Autism: the Sequel," which premieres tonight, is producer Sasha Alpert, and two of the subjects of the documentary, Adam and his mom Roseann. And for "Born This Way" we have executive producer and show-runner Laura Kirk Orion and Rachel and her mom Laurie. We also have Gail Williamson from KMR Talent, who has been a pioneer in representing talent with disabilities and who represented many of the cast for "Born This Way." Finally, we have Lauren Applebaum RespectAbility's vice-president of communication who advises media companies on scripts and programming to make sure it's accurate in its portrayal of people with disabilities. If people have questions as you go along, we'll take them at the end of each segment, and you can type them into the Q&A and then I'll take a look at it when we get to the question area. So we're gonna start with "Autism: the Sequel." Sasha - what was the hope with the original documentary "Autism: the Musical" back in 2007?

>> Sasha: In 2007 when we were first making this film, there was a tsunami of diagnoses of autism, and it seemed like it was more than we'd ever seen before, and in fact it was- there was a way more people being diagnosed with autism than there had been previously. And our desire with this film was to make a film that showed the ability within the disability - that people that were on the spectrum had certain skills and talents that other people didn't have, and we wanted to shine a light on that, so we wanted to show that people had decided that people with autism would be put in a box and this is what they could do and what they couldn't do, and we wanted to show in a film that there were myriad things that people could do and that in fact, people with autism were all different, just like people that don't have autism - we're all very different people. So that our desire.

>> Jonathan: Did you have to educate yourself about autism before you took on the film?

>> Sasha: I did. I had known a lot of autistic children, but I think the key thing that I learned was what a spectrum it is, so that you meet one person with autism, that means you've met one person with autism. So everyone has different skills, everyone has different abilities, everyone has different challenges and just like anybody else, it's a big spectrum and a big myriad of people.

>> Jonathan: And how did you - what was your way into the film? Like, when you had to figure out, "well, how am I gonna tell this story that I want to tell?" what was the way into it?

>> Sasha: The way in was a amazing teacher - Elaine Hall 'Coach E' - who was taking on - she had just started this program that she - I think was her second or third year - called the Miracle Project, which basically taught students with autism how to act, how to perform, but mixed in with all this acting and performance were social skills and socialization and things that might be more challenging for people with autism, people on the spectrum. But she was our way in because she wanted to mount a full-on musical - everyone was so busy talking about what these kids couldn't, couldn't do - she was like, "I'm gonna mount a huge musical with them, and it's gonna be original music and this is just what I'm doing." So the way in was to follow her, but in following what she was doing, we went into each family's life and the successes and failures around raising children that we all have and what having children on the spectrum did to their marriages, their friendships and their entire life.

>> Jonathan: Wow Roseann and Adam - you had been part of the Miracle Project, and what did you think when the filmmakers came to you and said we want to tell this story of all of you and your families and what you're doing. What did you think?

>> Roseann: Well, this was early on in this new sort of explosion of autism diagnoses, and there was really not a lot out there except for the 'refrigerator mother' myths of the past, and I knew that it might be a way for me to understand Adam a lot easier because I would be focused specifically on his autism and I thought that was great. The other thing is that, one of my favorite books - like everyone says - "To Kill a Mockingbird," and Boo Radley from "To Kill a Mockingbird" is a typical autistic person and in those days he was locked in a room, looking out of the window, which is a kind of thing that Adam used to like to do when he was little. And so I thought it would be really important for people to learn how to be more comfortable around what autistic people look like.

>> Jonathan: And - Adam did you enjoy the Miracle Project? Did you enjoy performing and being onstage?

>> Adam: Yes. I just got to be -

>> Roseann: Wait, Adam, did you enjoy the Miracle Project?

>> Adam: Yes.

>> Roseann: What was your favorite part?

>> Adam: Of what?

>> Roseann: Well, ah - no, don't tell us the dialogue from it. What Adam does — really remembers every movie dialogue.

>> Adam: To Kill a Mockingbird.

>> Roseann: Oh, you like that.

>> Adam: "I've just got something to say,"

>> Roseann: Oh, this is - he's acting.

>> Adam: "Cause I ain't gonna be sayin' no more."

>> Roseann: This is from "To Kill a Mockingbird."

>> Adam: "He had taken advantage of me!"

>> Roseann: Okay, alright, enough, enough! Stop!

>> Adam: "And if you were fine fucking fancy gentlemen which is a black, motherfucking, yellow, stinkin' coward -"

>> Roseann: Okay, okay.

>> Adam: "- yellow, stinkin' cowards, the whole batch of ya'!"

>> Roseann: Okay.

>> Adam: "These fancy fucking airs don't come to nothin'! No ma'min or fucking Miss Mayelerin' don't come to nothin' Mr. Finch!"

>> Roseann: Okay, stop. That's the highlight of the court scene from "To Kill a Mockingbird."

>> Jonathan: Alright.

>> Roseann: The highlight of the court scene - huh?

>> Jonathan: Wow, that's amazing. Did you have any qualms about participating? About having Adam seen and having your family seen? Roseann, that question is to you.

>> Roseann: Uh, no. I didn't. My theory about autism is, that if my goal is to have Adam blend in, I'm gonna fail that, because Adam is designed to stick out, okay? And so, I just think that, just people kind of learning that this is what autism can look like and -the other reason why I was really excited about being this is that one of the old myths about autism was that African Americans couldn't have autism, because we weren't intellectually gifted enough.

>> Jonathan: Wow.

>> Roseann: And, so, the good part of that, was that when they were taking children away from their refrigerator mothers, they weren't taking away the black children with autism from the refrigerator mothers because the black children were automatically mentally retarded, they didn't have autism - only white kids could have autism, and that's the way it was in the books and medical books until 1978.

>> Jonathan: Well that's why I think it's important, and that's why I think it's important when we talk about inclusiveness or diversity, that we don't just think of it as someone with autism - that when we look at autism, we have to focus on a diverse group of people, we just can't focus on white people with autism.

>> Roseann: Yeah, and especially since that myth for so many years was that African Americans could not have autism and so I think that was important also. But remember, when we started filming the first film, a lot of this stuff was still being taught in schools and I have friends who were [unintelligible] and when I told them that my son had been diagnosed, the first thing they said was, "but you were always up in his face. Like, you were always like taking care of him." And I was saying, "well, you know that refrigerator mother thing is a myth." I mean, it took many years for that to dissipate.

>> Jonathan: Did the process of being in the Miracle Project, where Adam and the other young people were forced to sort of interact with each other, look each other in the eyes, did you think that that a beneficial impact on Adam? That experience of being in the Miracle Project?

>> Roseann: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I have a theory of the tribe; I think that other people with autism a part of Adam's tribe, and even though he's been fully included and he's always been the only autistic student in all of his classes and in most of the programs that he's been in, I made sure that he was able to have lunch with the special ed class at the school that he was at, that was next door to his school, so that because I said, "he needs to be around his people" and they need to understand that they're a community, and so that was another reason why I was excited about doing the Miracle Project.

>> Jonathan: Sasha, you chose not to have experts in the film - talk to me about that decision, because I know you wanted to shed light, but you didn't want to have the guy in the lab coat or the person sort of explaining it all.

>> Sasha: When we first produced "Autism: the Musical" - the first film - there was starting to be a prevailing feeling that it was vaccinations that was creating autism, but many scientists were debating this, so we didn't want it to be a debate about vaccinations and we didn't want it to be about medical professionals and white coats, we wanted it to be about families and their experience, and not someone else talking about what an experience would be like, but about people that were living through it, having that experience. And just to talk about something Roseann mentioned about refrigerator mothers - just to be sure that everyone knows what that means - it meant that the reason why kids were becoming autistic was not biochemical but because their mother had been cold and not loving enough, and so if you could imagine being a mother with the diagnosis of autism, not only having to figure out the path forward, but also being accused of being the cause of it. So we just decided that this was about people's experiences and we didn't - in our 90 minutes - we didn't want to include doctors. That could be a different documentary - this was going to be the lived experience.

>> Jonathan: Okay. Now, suddenly it's 10, 11 years later, and now we have "Autism: the Sequel," what was the thought about doing "Autism: the Sequel" focusing on these same families?

>> Sasha: The prevailing question with parents around the time of their children's diagnosis in 2007 was "what's going to become of my child? Will my child ever have any independent life? Will they be able to live on their own? Will they be able to pursue their abilities and their dreams and their fantasies about the future?" and so was such a huge question that every parent had, so coming back and revisiting it, revisiting the life at the same group of five children, now adults, we could see what happened to these children, and now adults, and they are doing fantastic - I mean, we have two of these kids in college, we have - three of these kids in college and one music academy - we have someone living very happily in a group home we have people moving out and living independently, but on their own terms and in the way that it looks like for that individual person. So it is a spectrum, so people are doing things along a spectrum - some kids will go to college, some kids will live independently, some kids will not as adults - but this gives us the ability to see what happened to these kids when they grew up.

>> Jonathan: Roseann, what did you think when you got the call to have these cameras come back and sort of see how Adam and you are doing you? I think, in fact, you originally lived I think in LA and you've moved to a new city.

>> Roseann: Yeah. When Adam got a full scholarship to Berklee College which has merged with Boston Conservatory, it was the opportunity that I just had to make happen - there was no way he was not going to do it, and so we moved out to Boston and we got the first interstate funding of an aid, a communication facilitator, for Adam - in the country. We got we got 35 hours a week, and that person accompanies Adam and helps him with his homework and walks with him to and from school, and I just thought it was really important because we met so many parents that have - who saw the original "Autism: the Musical" - and their children play the cello, because they saw Adam playing the cello. So we have hundreds of Facebook friends of parents whose kids play the cello and when we got back to Berklee, I was stunned at how many kids at Berklee and Boston Conservatory of Music, knew Adam, and it's because they had a sibling or cousin with autism who played the cello because of Adam, and so the autism musical was not only really important for Adam, it's been important for all of these other families and it was another good way to get the administration of the college on board and say, "look, what we're doing is new and it's going to be hard - to have a severely autistic student in classes, but that's our journey and that's Berkeley's journey and we can do it." And there've been bumps in the road, from both sides - I mean there were some teachers that didn't think he should be there, but there were also some people who came up and fought for him, which has been fantastic. And, so now, at Berkeley, we put together the office of - not only the Office of Disability Services, but we put that with the diversity office because it's also a civil rights issue and, because a lot of the accommodations for people with special needs in colleges, none of them applied to autism - they apply to dyslexia and hyperactivity and other conditions, and so there they would say, "well, you can only do what's on this list," and the list did not include the fact that Adam has poor receptive language and what does that mean and how do we facilitate that and does he need to have somebody sitting next to him to help him do it. And so were able to actually show them, do this, while Patricia was in the classroom with us, so while we were telling Trisha, we were also administration.

>> Jonathan: Yeah, and I think people will enjoy seeing the film because it's sort of amazing to have the camera follow Adam around at the school and see how well he's functioning in his classes. It's really exciting and later he's gonna play for us which I think people will really enjoy. Sasha, I guess finally to you, it's always challenging when making a film like this - how do you represent everyone? This was a distinct group of parents in Southern California where there are a lot of good services in this unique program the Miracle Project. So what do you usually say when people say, "well, that's that's not my experience," or that's - whatever.

>> Sasha: Well, I think it is true that every single person with autism will have a different experience, but I think what was unique about the five people that we had in our film is that not only did they have access to great services, but they created a situation where they got these great services, so they're all incredible advocates for their children. So, I think there are services out there, people will always aim to have them cut back, but I think just being a great advocate for your child, you will hopefully get some great services, and I think Elaine Hall, who started the Miracle Project, has been doing it in many many places in the country now - I know it's done in Rhode Island at Brown University, she's done it in all other parts of the world, so I think there are other programs like hers, but I just want Roseann to mention two things: one is that I wanted to mention that Adam got a scholarship - got in and got a scholarship to every single music academy that he applied to, so he's obviously very talented but also that when Roseann showed up at Berkeley, she met someone who said - you want to tell the story about how they were waiting?

>> Roseann: About what? Oh, yes. Boston Conservatory had started a program a couple years earlier for small children to teach them music - autistic children - and when I called, I was calling different music schools to see which music school would be most interested in having Adam, she says, "oh, I've been waiting for you to call. I recognized your voice ,"because she teaches music education and she'd been using "Autism: the Musical" - it's required in her classes, all of her classes, so that's another reason why so many kids knew Adam when we showed up on campus - is because of that, and one of the things that's been wonderful, Adam has been - part of for his scholarship, he has to do a certain amount of volunteer work, and he volunteers with the smaller children that are in the program for autistic musicians, the younger kids, and so that's been wonderful - so he does the same duties that the other scholarship students have to do.

>> Jonathan: That's great. Alright, later we're gonna hear Adam play his cello for us, but now we're gonna turn to "Born This Way," the A&E Network unscripted series that explored the lives of seven young adults in Southern California with Down syndrome and their families. Including "Born This Way" most recent season, a group of digital shorts called "Moving On" is currently available on A&E's website, and I'm happy that "Born This Way" is - you don't have to pay for A&E to see it on the website, it's available to everybody, so check that out, and of course one of the people who stars in that is Rachel, here, and her mom Laurie, and there's a wonderful episode of "Moving On" with Rachel as she explores running for president [ Laughter ] and what her platform would be, but I'm also joined by Laura Kerkorian, the show-runner and executive producer, and Gail Williamson, from KMR Talent, who represented most of the talent. Laura, how much did you know about Down syndrome when you set on this journey of making "Born This Way"?

>> Laura: Absolutely nothing. My world and my life had not introduced me to anyone know born with Down syndrome or the community. I knew a little bit about intellectual disabilities, but I hadn't met anyone who knew anyone with Down syndrome, and unfortunately, through the show I received the best education from the cast and their parents and the community.

>> Jonathan: That's great. And how did you go about casting the series? I know, originally, the plan was to focus on Southern California - there is a pretty tight community here of families that participate in a lot of the same programs and things.

>> Laura: And our casting department was led by the brilliant Sasha Alpert and Megan Sleeper and so really - and their team set out to start with organizations and programs where there may be young adults with disabilities and particularly with Down syndrome, and so we started in those organizations - like John and Ellen I went to a performing arts school, so we were able to tap into that community, then we started looking at other organizations in Southern California and Orange County, and really just had to speak to them about - we have this idea, this is what we'd like to do, this is our goal, this is our aim, we'd love for you to spread the word, and if you had any candidates that you felt would be open to sharing their lives on camera, send them to us. And so they did. We started getting people, and then through the help of Gail Williamson - because without Gail and her connection to the community, who could also speak a little bit about television and what our goals were as much as we had explained to her, not to exploit them in any way but to have them share their personal stories - we started finding that people were more willing to at least check in and see what this is all about, and I think if you asked many of the families, they were like, "this is never gonna happen, so sure, we'll try it," but so we did a short application that they had to fill out and through a series of interviews and we had a nice pool of people to choose from but we could only choose 7, and in the end we chose the brilliant 7 that we did.

>> Jonathan: So, Rachel and Laurie - how did you guys hear about this potential TV series, how did you get contacted?

>> Rachel: How I got contacted? I got contacted through the Down Syndrome Association of Orange County. The woman that works with us - Websites - she went into my drama class and that's how I heard about the TV show they were making.

>> Jonathan: I see, and Laurie - what did you think about potentially having cameras follow Rachel around and potentially cameras come into your home?

>> Laurie: Well, when Rachel told me she wanted to try out for this, I was just skeptical but I sort of, "okay, you know, she'll never get it, let her go for it," [ Laughter ] and before you know it, we applied for it and I think my goal basically was, I wanted the word out there about Down syndrome. I wanted people to be aware of what Down syndrome can do, and I felt the community really didn't know that. So, that's why I was open to do it, and Rachel just really wanted to always do this and it was her dream.

>> Rachel: It is my dream.

>> Jonathan: Gail. Gail Williamson. So, what did you think - when you enter - it's a big responsibility, obviously, to advise client or to, because you had, you've sort of had an outside role in the Down syndrome community - I think you've headed up one of the organizations before you segued into talent, you're sort of the stamp of goodness, like, if you get behind it, hopefully it'll happen - what did you think and was it scary to sort of embrace this?

>> Gail: Well, if you recall, I went through your prototype with you, your first attempt at a show, and so, by the time we came to "Born This Way," I was pretty on board and knew your heart, John, and knew what you were trying to do and what you intended to do at that time. But yeah, in the very beginning, it was kind of - but it was just trying to figure out where you guys were coming from, of what is was you were doing. But no, you guys came on board and loved the community and you've done more for Down syndrome than - I look at moments, "Life Goes On" was a defining moment, when it was on in the late 80s, because it showed us a teenager with Down syndrome and some of the things that they could do, and that could have gone away, and you came about and gave us - and then we also had Glee and - yes, we had episodic television, but getting this reality view, allowing people into the homes, and from my experience as part of the Down syndrome community - as a mother of an adult with Down syndrome and the people I talk to in the conferences I go to - I think almost your parents became as big, if not bigger stars, sometimes, than your youth, because that's who people clamored to meet when we'd be in a convention - people want to talk to the parents, they saw role models for the first time and they saw other people who were going through the things that they were going through and especially if you're from a smaller town - like, in Southern California, us moms are able to kind of form our own little tribes, but there were a lot of people that were really isolated in smaller towns and they could turn on the TV and see this group and feel connected and feel affirmed in their roles as parents.

>> Jonathan: Yeah. Laurie, so it is sort of amazing how charismatic all of the families are - I mean, we actually looked at casting Rachel and Megan and the others first, but then, when we asked the parents to come in to meet them, it was like, "oh my god, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." [ Laughter ] Really great. So, Laura - so you found six young adults, all from the Southern California area, and then how did Megan end up in the series - because she wasn't part of the Southern California community?

>> Laura: Yeah. Originally, we wanted seven - our goal was to have seven young adults from Southern California, and at the end, we did have an applicant who had to drop out, just wasn't the right time for them, so we were just in the beginning of filming, so we went the National Down Syndrome Congress Convention - did I say that right, Gail? - in Florida, we were filming - we were following Sean and Sandra - and there was a young woman who was kind of curious about the cameras and was asking some questions and she had this wonderful line called Megology and so the cameras were just kind of focusing on all the different vendors and booths, and they came back - the team came back from filming - and I said, "did you guys meet anyone there?" and everyone knew we were only looking for families in Southern California, I'm like, "but, no, there's this one young woman and she was kind of interested in television and following us around," I said, "put her mom on the phone, let's call her," and we called Chris and Megan, we interviewed them and Chris said, "it's been Megan's dream to come to California and pursue film and television as a producer," and we're like, "you want to come?" the're like, "our bags are packed," I think they were here within a week.

>> Jonathan: I guess that's why this is reality show and not a documentary, because we essentially recruited someone to sort of join our little world, and it was sort of fun because we got to see it through Megan's eyes who was sort of new to this world. Back to Laurie and Rachel, so Rachel, what was the audition process like?

>> Rachel: I went to just a couple groups of the auditions. Like, the first audition I was in a group of a bunch of friends, and I made the final group and I finally got on the show, so I was in a lot of groups.

>> Jonatan: Yeah, yeah. Well, I think that was to test the chemistry- how do you all sort of bounced off of each other, and also to see whether you get very quiet and you didn't get very quiet.

>> Rachel: No. No, no.

>> Jonathan: So, Laura - what was the story engine for "Born This Way"? Like, this is a docu-series, it's not like there's competitions the cast is gonna be doing, how do you know there's gonna be story, like what was your faith that there would be story?

>> Laura: Well, I think because these seven were in this prime of their lives, in their early 20s and 30s, and so at a time in their life where so many of them have been desiring and craving independence and had goals they wanted to reach and experiences that they wanted to have, and their parents had done an amazing job of giving them all these tools to achieve these goals and now it was time for them to sort of launch, so I think the search for independence is something incredibly relatable, and we knew that the cast was just ready to fly, and so if we just pointed cameras their way and gave them a space to do that, it was going to happen. And we did meet with them and really talk about their goals so that we knew what they wanted to achieve.

>> Jonathan: Right, and one of the things that Rachel did was she and Megan, I think - was it she and Megan? - moved into their own apartment to try out independent living?

>> Rachel: Yes. Yes, yes.

>> Jonathan: Rachel - what did you think when that was sort of pitched to you, the idea of you and Megan living in an apartment together?

>> Rachel: I was nervous and scared living with Megan, I know we'll be okay - ever since that, it was a great experience for me, living with Megan, and now I got the experience, now I've got my own apartment, too.

>> Jonathan: Yeah, I know that. You got your HUD voucher so you could have your own place - and we'll talk more about that later. Laurie - were you parked out front in the car secretly of the apartment they were in?

>> Laurie: Oh, me and Chris - Meg's mom - we met every day for breakfast and we just let all our feelings out of how we felt and how nervous we were, and whether they were gonna call us or text us and - but it was really hard, but it was the greatest experience 'cause I know it was something Rachel's always wanted to do, so I wanted her to have that experience.

>> Laura: If I can chime in for a minute, what was so great about that, is - that was season 3, and season 1 when I talked to Rachel about, "would you ever move out of your mom and dad's house?" "hmm, no, I don't think so." And so it was Rachel that approached us in season 3 and said, "I would like to try out living on my own, with Megan," - who was ready to also try to move it out on her own - and I think I was more concerned about it than they were, but the initiative and the drive came from Rachel, and you'll later hear how life is different today as a result of that experience.

>> Laurie: Absolutely.

>> Rachel: Yeah.

>> Jonathan: Yeah, so "Born This Way" covered so many interesting issues, from preparing for independence - like getting your own place - to employment: Rachel - you have a job right? You go to work.

>> Rachel: Yes, I do have a job. Yes, I have a job and they're really nice people.

>> Laurie: How long?

>> Jonathan: So we got to see -

>> Rachel: I've been working there from - it's gonna be eight years, it could be nine years this July.

>> Jonathan: Yeah, so when you were making "Born This Way" you almost had two jobs: you had your regular job, and you had your "Born This Way" job.

>> Rachel: Yes. That was pretty a handful. [ Laughter ] I got used to it. I'm used to that.

>> Jonathan: One of the sort of most captivating shows was when you decided to explore sex education. [Laughter]

>> Laurie: Oh, yes.

>> Jonathan: Because a lot of times, when people sort of think of people with disabilities or people with Down syndrome, they sort of tend to think very flatly about it - they don't see these rich, full lives, so Laura - how did that come about, and I bet that was interesting territory as you approached everyone.

>> Laura: It was and it turned out to be a fantastic episode and - so I think it started with like John what you said in terms of again, showing that young adults with Down syndrome are no different than the rest of us and they were all in their 20s and 30s and curious about sex and wanting to talk about it, I actually think that was the one time I remember when we were all together, at leaps and bounds, and everyone was so serious - they brought out their notebooks, they had prepared questions and you're here like, "we're gonna talk about sex," god only knows where this is gonna go. But, so we knew it was a topic we hadn't covered in the previous seasons, and everyone was really interested in talking about it and learning, so I consulted Gail who was then able to direct me to an expert in the field, who runs a lot programs for young adults with Down syndrome on sex education and she was phenomenal, and came in and it just ended up turning out to be a really fantastic episode and experience for all of us.

>> Jonathan: Yeah, it was great. And Laurie, when you saw that episode, did you feel good about Rachel's participation in it?

>> Laurie: I did. I kind of knew where Rachel was at so I was pretty prepared for basically everything but I think the amazing thing about that specific episode is when we've been out in the community and out in this different state, they always bring up that episode, and they always bring up how they use that in their schools, so that's what I found very interesting. So I think it turned out really well.

>> Rachel: And I know the lady who did that.

>> Jonathan: Gail, back to you. I mean you're so plugged in in the disability community - you must have heard from people, so what do you think the impact of "Born This Way" was for families out there.

>> Gail: Well, I kind of touched on that a little earlier, but I think it validated families - it validated indivduals with Down syndrome, it validated their sibling, as they saw other siblings, they saw their interaction, it validated parents, who were living the life, I mean - the interesting thing is, us living with Down syndrome, are pretty much living good lives - it's a different life than we had anticipated, but I don't think many of us would trade it for the world because we're introduced to this beautiful community of creativity and looking at things differently and we parents feel kind of blessed - I mean there are those situations of course, but pretty much we feel pretty blessed - and people think we're crazy, so it's lovely to see a show that shared that and I think some people who don't know anyone with Down syndrome went away thinking they're blessed and probably have even gotten involved with the community, I'm sure Laura may have stories of that, where people who saw the show went, "wait, these are my people now. I need to go and - "

>> Jonathan: And certainly the crew came away from this feeling that "these are my people." Lauren Applebaum, both with documentary and with unscripted shows like "Born This Way," talk to me about the power of storytelling and media representation and its potential to change attitudes or reduce stigmas.

>> Lauren: Of course, thanks. So as you all know, people with disabilities really have been erased by films and television, up until much more recently, and you know "Autism: the Musical" and "Autism: the Sequel" as well as "Born This Way" really have helped change that and pave that way. Fully one in five people have a disability and the majority of folks in the US have a loved one with a disability and by simply showing more people with disabilities on screen, we help bring disability - to use a metaphor from the LGBTQ community - out of the closet and into the open. Because, really what people see influences how they feel and act. And so when people with disability to be... excuse me, when people with disabilities are shown to be successful on screen, in having jobs and etc, then employers are more likely to hire their folks with disabilities, parents will be more likely to have higher expectations of their children with disabilities, treating them the same way as their child without a disability, and by promoting success stories of people with disabilities - for example "Born This Way" helped to change the negative perceptions of people with disabilities. And I'd also like to add that, telling disability-related stories is not only like the right thing to do - and I know you didn't do these these films and this show just because you thought it was the right thing to do - but it's also a very smart business model, as the disability market is worth one trillion dollars.

>> Jonathan: Well, I want to bring back Roseann and Adam and Sasha now, because I want to explore how the coronavirus is impacting all of you. Rachel, you were saying you got a HUD voucher and you got your own place, but I see you're at Laurie and Gary's house.

>> Rachel: Yeah, I'm at my parents house. So, when I was at my apartment my brother gave me some advice. My brother Johnathan, he gave me some advice - he talked to my mom and dad because, we both don't feel comfortable being at my apartment by myself.

>> Laurie: That's true.

>> Jonathan: So you guys are isolating together. Laurie, Rachel was gone for what - two, three months?

>> Laurie: Two months.

>> Rachel: Two months, I've been gone.

>> Laurie: Two months, what I have to say is it was an adjustment, but it was because of the show, it was so much easier, and she's been on her own and we decorated the place together and it's been awesome, and it's a shame this happened, but we just did not want her to be stuck in an apartment all by herself for a couple of months, so we asked if she wanted to come home and she chose to - her brother said -

>> Rachel: I think my brother helped me out.

>> Laurie: " I would do the same thing," so she decided to come home.

>> Rachel: I took my brother's advice.

>> Jonathan: Rachel, are you temporarily not going into the office, are you sort of furloughed or - I'm not sure what the right word is.

>> Rachel: I haven't been in the office for like a month. They closed the office, so I haven't been working at all, but, thanks to my great boss, he gave me a bonus, so I get paid for this.

>> Jonathan: Oh, wow. And did you also get a stimulus check?

>> Rachel: Yes, but I haven't gotten it yet. [ Laughter ] I will be getting that soon.

>> Jonathan: Laurie, did you and Gary get a stimulus check?

>> Laurie: No.

>> Jonathan: No?

>> Laurie: No. Well, it'll probably be very little, about $70. But it was a little something.

>> Jonathan: Alright. And Roseann and Adam, the coronavirus - how has it impacted your lives? I assume that Adam can't go into Berklee School of Music right now.

>> Roseanee: Yes. Well, he's been doing classes on Zoom - in fact, at one o'clock today, he had his - one o'clock hour Eastern Time - he had his ensemble final -

>> Laurie: That's nice.

>> Roseann: - they put him on first, and then he was able to come and do this show afterwards. And after this is over, he's got his he's got a piano - he has to take piano, also, at school, and it can be done online, we have a keyboard here that he uses, but although the classes are online, they don't know what's going to happen next fall so -

>> Adam: If there's not a coronavirus.

>> Roseann: If there's not a coronavirus, he'll go back - he'll be back in the classes, but right now nobody knows what's going on.

>> Jonathan: Right, and how have you guys been impacted financially? Did you get - did Adam get a stimulus check, or did you get -

>> Roseann: We're expecting one, we're expecting one. We haven't gotten it yet, it hasn't come yet, because it's supposed to be directly deposited into his account and it hasn't - they asked, it's done through the tax -

>> Jonathan: Right, yeah, well let's go to Lauren Applebaum.

>> Roseann: We sent it all the paperwork but nothing has come through yet, so I don't know if it's just a delay or if it's something we're gonna have to revisit and see what's going on.

>> Jonathan: Lauren, what is the situation for people with disabilities and the stimulus check?

>> Lauren: Sure. That's actually something that we, at RespectAbility, were really involved with, trying to make a difference. So folks who are SSI recipients for example, there was some back-and-forth, but we're very happy that they should be automatically receiving their stimulus checks, their economic impact payments, directly to their bank accounts, by debit card or by check, without filing a tax return. And furthermore what is really important for folks who are receiving - furthermore for people who are receiving government benefits, this is considered a rebate, so it means it does not affect their ability to continue receiving government benefits, which was a concern for many people with a variety of disabilities.

>> Jonathan: That's great. And I understand that RespectAbility has also been working on the SNAP program, because some people with disabilities receive, what used to be called food stamps, but with social distancing - for instance if you're blind, how do you social distance when you go to the grocery store? How is that all working out?

>> Lauren: So access to food, food security, is a issue very important to all of us at RespectAbility, it's something we've been working on for more than a month now, and as you mentioned it, people with disabilities - especially those living on their own - have limited access to food, and so what we're trying to make happen, and my colleague Philip Kahn- Pauli who is our policy director, is really working to ensure that people who receive SNAP can use them for online grocery deliveries, meaning that they don't have to physically go to the store to use them. A version of this is helping in cities like Los Angeles and New York City, but most of the country has no such options. You mentioned about social distancing - I think that there are several different people with disabilities who, social distancing becomes much more of an issue - some members of our media team have a personal care assistants, people to help them get dressed and eat - however those personal care assistants could bring the disease into their homes without realizing because they could be asymptomatic, and if that happens, there's a whole other issue now of risk of medical rationing, which is happening not only around the world but in some states right now, where it's a very recent fear that people with disabilities might not receive the care that they need should they come down with Covid-19. And then for folks who are blind, as you mentioned, touch is a part of our everyday experience, even more so when you cannot see, and so when when people around them don't take distancing seriously, it can really result in some real consequences - I want to share that one of our board members, Ollie Cantos, his 20 year-old triplet blind sons, currently all of them are battling Covid-19, and despite them self-quarantining for more than a month after returning from college, they all got the virus - most likely from someone who lives in the house with them, bringing it into the house without realizing, because that person was asymptomatic as well. So, it really goes to show that even if the importance of self-isolating and keeping your distance from others because, even if it's not for yourself, it could be for someone else.

>> Jonathan: Well, thank you for that information. It's great the work that you and the others are doing. Alright, we're gonna bring this to an end, but we're gonna do it in a really fun way, because Adam has agreed to play something for us on the cello. Again, you can watch "Autism: the Sequel" on HBO tonight, but it's also going to be available on their YouTube channel for free, for those of you don't have HBO, and "Born This Way: Moving On" some wonderful shorts, including one on Rachel running for president, that will give you a nice break from our own presidential election that will be happening soon. I'm on the Rachel team. And so, lots of great stuff out there. Thank you all for participating in this, I really appreciate it, and let's hear something from Adam. What, Roseann, what's Adam gonna play for us?

>> Adam: Elegy from 9/11.

>> Roseann: Okay, yes. One of the things that's been wonderful about him being at conservatory and why it's important that people with disabilities be able to go to real schools in order to get the education they need to make music, is that he's been taking composition class and this is an original composition that he wrote and he's been writing fugues and all kinds of things. When he got to college, he didn't know how to write music at all, and so in the short time that he's been at college, the last four semesters, he's learned how to write and set in different clefs, he's learn how to write different kinds of music, he's taken music theory, he's taking jazz music theory, he's taken counterpoint in harmony, and so this is a piece that he wrote and it's called what - what is your piece called? Adam, what is your piece called?

>> Adam: Elegy from 9/11.

>> Roseann: Elegy from 9/11. He wrote it about 9/11. Okay. So, here. Ready to play it?

[ Music ]

>> Rachel: Wow. [ Applause ]

>> Adam: Thanks.

>> Jonathan: Wow, that was great. Thank you, Adam. You are very talented, and it's great that you're at Berklee School of Music and really you know continuing to set example for everyone whether, they have a disability or not - very impressive. Well, that's - I think everything, so thank you, again all of you - thank you Rachel and Laurie, thank you Lauren, thank you Gail, Rachel and Adam, Sasha, Laura - this has been a really nice break from the regular day, all great to see your wonderful faces. So thank you.

>> Laurie: Same here.

>> Rachel: Thank you.