>> Lauren Appelbaum: Hi, everyone. My name is Lauren Appelbaum and I'm the Vice President of Communications of RespectAbility, a nonprofit fighting stigma and advancing opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. As an individual with an acquired, non-visible disability, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, I have had the privilege of conducting trainings on the why and how to be more inclusive and accessible. Thank you for taking your time today to join us for this panel discussion. If you would like to view the ASL interpreter in a larger screen, we invite you to pin her video, which will spotlight her video throughout the entire panel. In addition, we have live captioning that is available in this Zoom app by clicking on the cc button or via web. We will post that link in the chat box. We will be taking questions from you during the second half of the panel. Please add your questions to the Q&A box to do so. For our friends watching on Facebook, we will be monitoring questions submitted there and bringing them over to Zoom. With 1 in 5 people having a disability in the U.S. today, the lack of representation, just 3.1% on screen and even less in children's television, under 1%, means that millions of people are unable to see themselves in media today. In this second part of our two-part series, examining representation in children's media, we'll take a look at some older children and family content. I want to share a recent study that was conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media with the USC Viterbi School of Engineering where they examined characters in the top 25 most watched shows according to Nielsen rankings, both with younger kids, ages 2 to 6 and older kids, 7 to 13, 25 of each, both live action and animated shows were examined. And this study found people with disabilities, while we make up 20% of the U.S. population, fewer than 1% - just 0.8% of characters in children's television shows- are depicted with a physical, communication or cognitive disability in 2019. I know some of the things that we're going to be mentioning today have come out in 2020, and I view that as a wave of change that we are observing in children's content today. A few other quick stats to kind of frame our webinar today: despite the fact that disability cuts across all other demographics, none of the 39 characters with a disability were also LGBTQ+. However, in better news, 47% were female and 54% were characters of color. This is significant as historically, characters with disabilities were most likely to be shown as white and male. Characters with disabilities, however, weren't necessarily portrayed as well as they should have been in 2019 in children's TV, were three times less likely to be shown as smart and they were much less likely to be shown as having a job or having a management position if they were employed. So with all that kind of as the background of different information, I'd like to pass this off to our moderator today, my colleague at RespectAbility, Debbie Fink.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you, Lauren. Hi, everyone. I'm Debbie Fink, Director of RespectAbility's Community Outreach and Impact. I'm thrilled to be your moderator today for this critical webinar on inclusion in children and family content, representation of women and girls with disabilities. If you would like to learn more about coverage on this topic, you can also check out our website under 'Past Events' and we have a webinar that focused on children with disabilities and their representation in preschool content. RespectAbility extends a thank you to the foundation that made this program possible - New York Women's Foundation and the Coca Cola Foundation. I want to welcome everyone here with us today. That said, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to each of our panelists, whom I will very briefly introduce - I will introduce them to you now. First, I'd like to introduce Erica Spates, who is the executive producer and writer of the Netflix original - drum roll - "The Healing Powers of Dude." Next, a warm welcome to Sophie Kim - Sophie... yup, there she is - who is a 14-year-old actor and singer, performing in same network series, "The Healing Powers of Dude" Third, welcome to Lachi, a musical welcome, who among countless accomplishments is an award-nominated recording artist and voiceover actor and a newly minted speaker with RespectAbility's Women's Speakers Bureau in NYC, and I'll make a plug for the Women's Speakers Bureau a little later, if we have time. I want to wish Bethany Dodson, who was supposed to be with us today, the best of wishes. She isn't able to join us because she's under the weather. And last but not least, we welcome Shaylee Mansfield, a YouTuber and 11-year-old actor who is seen on the screen in shows and films created by Disney, Netflix, A&E and others and more to come. Okay. so welcome once again, to all. We look forward to discussing your thoughts and experiences about the importance of inclusion and representation of women and girls with disabilities in children and family media content As such, I'm delighted that we have a mix of women and girls on the panel. Two generations of talent in one virtual room, so that's pretty powerful and a statement right there about how things are changing on this front So, let's get started. Erica, let's begin with you! [ Laughter ] Are you ready? Thank you for your readiness to share your time and talent with us today.

>> Erica Spates: I'm happy to be here.

>> Debbie Fink: Happy to have you. Among your roster of multiple shows, you and your writing partner and husband, Sam Littenberg-Weisberg, have created a groundbreaking show named "The Healing Powers of Dude." It's been called the talking dog family comedy, incorporating humor, your script raises very real, very profound representations of children with both visible and non-visible disabilities. You made a powerful cultural statement when you scripted Amara as a dynamo girl who uses a wheelchair, and then you cast Sophie, a girl of color, with an authentic disability in that role. It simultaneously promotes authentic representation of girls in children's media, of girls with disabilities and girls who are from marginalized populations. I'm confident that every girl who fits any or all of those identities and their moms and caregivers are so appreciative. So kudos to you. So can you start out, please, Erica, by sharing the plot line of the story - of the show?

>> Erica Spates: Yes. The show is about Noah, who has social anxiety disorder, and he's been home schooled for a few years by his father, and he's decided he want to go back to school because he wants to have friends, he wants to have - what he sees on TV, most likely - to be a quote, unquote, normal kid with friends and classes and all of those experiences, and with the support of his family and eventually an emotional support dog, who was voiced by Steve Zahn, he goes back to middle school and sort of through baby steps and the help of his dog, his family and eventually his best friends, Amara and Simon, he's able to slowly get through those hurdles, someone with social anxiety disorder would have returning to school.

>> Debbie Fink: That's just powerful on so many levels. So thank you. As Geena Davis says, "if you can see it, you can be it." So will you please talk us through your motivation to advance authentic representation of girls with disabilities through your script writing?

>> Erica Spates: Of course. I think the idea, "if you can see it, you can be it" is so powerful, also, if you can see it, you can understand it, I think is another way to think about it, which is...

>> Debbie Fink: Yes!

>> Erica Spates: ...important to us, it's giving people an understanding of non-visible disabilities and disabilities that you can maybe see more easily. When we went to write the story and we were thinking about the character of Noah and having social anxiety disorder and we were trying to think of what were the best friends he could have at school to help him get on this journey, because he would really need the support of friends to do something like this, and one of those characters we came up with was Amara. And Amara is a young girl who's incredibly confident, who loves musical theater, who will say whatever she wants to say, whenever she wants to say it and she's just a powerful force, and she also happens to be in a wheelchair. But her confidence was helpful to someone like Noah, who needed that person who was unafraid, who would be there, who could push him and support him, and we were talking about especially for children but also for adults, having a character with a non-visible disability would be interesting to have them with a character who has a visible disability and really discuss what those different disabilities are for the people who have them, how they appear to people on the outside, the assumptions that are made by people when they learn of someone's disability, whether they can see it or not and just have two characters going through very different things but also how they could support each other and be there for each other, which, you know is what you need in middle school.

>> Debbie Fink: Absolutely. That's so profound. This is an offscripted question, but - and feel free, Sophie, to chime in - how much interplay and dialogue have you developed where they discuss their disabilities? Or, is it not - you know?

>> Erica Spates: Well, what we did -

>> Debbie Fink: With each other.

>> Erica Spates: Yes, yeah. Because it was sort of the first season of this show and we were focusing on Noah's journey and his dealing with social anxiety disorder, we did primarily focus on that because there was just a lot to explain and dive into and we were really with that character for most of it, but as Noah got closer to his friends and became a little bit more confident, we were able then to focus on his friends, and he was able to focus on his friends - it was a very organic transition because as he became less anxious around them, he could realize, well, they have things that I need to support them for. So we were able to then have the character of Amara go through something and him be able to be there and support her in that story line. So it was sort of an organic progression.

>> Debbie Fink: Beautiful. And that makes it more authentic, that it's an organic progression, because you're observing, you're listening, you're watching and morphing a story that is an authentic story.

>> Erica Spates: Yeah, yeah.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you. So the creators of the popular film, "The Peanut Butter Falcon" - and I highly recommend it if anybody hasn't seen it, experienced pushback when it came to cast an actor with lived experience in its star role. So my question to you is, did you receive any pushback along the way about either scripting or casting Sophie, an actor with live experience, in Amara's role?

>> Erica Spates: Never any pushback - I would say, honestly, when writing it, there was the question of the Amara character, if we were focusing on someone who had social anxiety disorder, did we need the Amara character? And Sam and I very emphatically said, "yes! We do need it, and here are the reasons why and that she was very important" and they quickly got it, and then the casting, it was never not going to be a young actor who was in a wheelchair - that was always the plan. Netflix and Sam and I, that was always what we wanted and we were really excited to be able to do that, so no pushback there.

>> Debbie Fink: And thank goodness you did it, because we have Sophie, who was discovered as a result. But we'll get to that. We'll get to that. So only good things. So now, second, you addressed a non-visible disability, known as social anxiety. The main character being Noah, played again, as you said, by Jason Chapman, who is, I believe, 11 years old. Is he..?

>> Erica Spates: Twelve or maybe almost thirteen now - you guys are growing up so fast. I don't know.

>> Debbie Fink: You see them and then they grow. [ Laughter ] So, what served as the source of motivation to create a role about a child with this particular non-visible disability?

>> Erica Spates: This is a very personal story for my husband and I. His younger brother has social anxiety disorder that also really manifested right before he was going to start middle school. His name is also Noah, and we wrote this as sort of a love letter to him.

>> Debbie Fink: Ohhhh.

>> Erica Spates:and the family. He has an incredibly supportive family and parents, who we really also use as a template for our parents and our family in our own show. But it was based on Noah's experiences. He didn't have a talking dog, but he did have to deal with a lot going from elementary school to middle school and we used a lot of that in our story, but yeah, it was from a personal experience, which I think really does help when writing about something like social anxiety disorder.

>> Debbie Fink: Yeah. And you're that much more compelled and motivated to get it right.

>> Erica Spates: Yes.

>> Debbie Fink: So on the topic of getting it right, granted everybody's disability is a variation on the disability, but how have you ensured that your scripted representation was driven by science and research, as well as real life experience?

>> Erica Spates: Well, it's so important when doing a show on something where, for a lot of people, you'll be educating them about it for the first time - they've never experienced it, they don't know about it - you want to get it right. The thing also with social anxiety disorder, is it can be different for different people, which is also why it's so hard for people who think they have it or for people to understand what they're going through. We had a licensed psychologist who had worked with children with social anxiety disorder help us read every script, look at cuts and give us notes during the process, we also worked with RespectAbility. We had wonderful people really helping us tell this story and in a hopefully helpful and accurate way.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you, thank you very much, and that's spot on. So, at this juncture, I have one final question for now, we'll be back: so looking toward the future, is authentic representation of people with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities, an intentional goal or a given that you will aim to achieve in your future scripts?

>> Erica Spates: T he simplest answer is yes. Working with Sophie was a dream, because she's such an amazing actress and she's just so smart and funny. So I hope to work with Sophie again, specifically. But Sam and I write about the world we live in, and the world we live in is not just one thing - it's full of people of all backgrounds, all disabilities - like everything and to be able to write family and children's TV that reflects our world is so important to us. And it's really our responsibility because this is where kids decide what families look like, what friends look like, what role models look like. It helps form their roles, and we hope to just keep doing that in future projects.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you. Especially during COVID-19 when there is a lot more screen watching. Whoa!

>> Erica Spates: Yeah.

>> Debbie Fink: ...than before, so really being able to deliver and provide shows that, as you said, help people understand and really are forming children's minds and mindsets and attitudes during the most impressionable years and at the same time, educating the parents who may be watching the show with the children and/or at least kind of talking about it with them, that you're really able to target two generations. Reaching the adults through the kids. So, keep at it.

>> Erica Spates: Yes.

>> Debbie Fink: And we'll be back. Thank you so much, Erica.

>> Erica Spates: Thank you.

>> Debbie Fink: So, Sophie! You're up! Alright! You are an actor, singer, writer and artist, from what I have read. You personify the intersectionality - these are big words for a younger person - but you personify the intersectionality of a girl with a disability who is also part of another marginalized community. You landed the role of a Amara after an open, worldwide casting call. Pretty darn impressive for someone who had no previous professional acting experience! and one would say that you are definitely a natural. So thank goodness the role was there for you and that you took it on. Growing up, Sophie, my first question to you, is, have you had any authentic role models who you could relate to in the entertainment world? If so, who have your role models been, and if not, how did that impact your drive or motivation to be an actor or singer?

>> Sophie Kim: No, I really haven't. And while I never noticed it consciously as a kid, I did internalize the alienation. I'd look at myself in the mirror and almost wonder, which parts of me are human, which parts of me are normal and to be honest, my dream was never to be famous. I did want to be a pop star when I was really young but that is because I was a big fan of Taylor Swift and Selena Gomez. When I was sent the casting call for "The Healing Powers of Dude," I thought, "do I want this?" I never thought that out of all the artistic careers I could pursue that acting would be the one. But I had always enjoyed it. I remembered all the shows I watched, all the singers I listened to, and I thought, "where are the people that look like me? Where are the Asian Americans, the disabled teen girls?" and that's when it clicked. I wanted to be that for others because I needed to. Does that make sense?

>> Debbie Fink: Oh, yeah. Yes. Well, Sophie, I'm glad you answered the question the way you did and before my my next question, I wanna share - we're going to share a clip from "The Healing Powers of Dude" that showcase you not only as actor right, but a voice, a voice, a voice. So Eric, let's hit it. Let's enjoy Sophie's role.

>> Debbie Fink: Yeah! Wow! Wow! Sophie that was so, so wonderful on so many levels and we see Noah's hesitation and that he's yielding, extracting courage from you to kind of start to word the song in his own. so very subtle scripting and directing, and you were fabulous. And I think that Dude must have been inspired. He must have seen - or she - must have seen Toto in - hello? In "The Wizard of Oz," right? [ Laughter ] So, anyway. Okay, now. My next question to you, Sophie, is what do you find most gratifying about your role in "The Healing Powers of Dude?"

>> Sophie Kim: I think the most gratifying part of playing Amara was working with the writers to make sure the disabled community got accurate and positive representation.

>> Debbie Fink: Okay, great. I, or we, see your role on screen as being much greater than an acting role. Again, in your bio, you say that ,having been born with congenital muscular dystrophy, you hope to be an advocate and role model for increased diversity and inclusion in the entertainment industry and you are doing just that, Sophie. Please share with us how you feel that you are helping to break those stigmas for other children with disabilities, while also educating kids and adult viewers who do not have disabilities because, again you're educating multiple audiences all at once.

>> Sophie Kim: Yeah. Let's see. I have gotten a lot of DMs from disabled kids on Instagram or even adults that are saying, "it's so cool to see the representation" or they're interested in acting, too, and they were inspired by Amara, and as for able-bodied fans, I hope seeing disabled characters normalizes it. I was always seen as the anomaly, the one you stare at, the one you feel uncomfortable around and no one should feel like that.

>> Debbie Fink: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. So we've discussed, Sophie, the past and present state of the inclusion of girls women with disabilities in children's and family media. Looking toward the future, what do you hope to achieve or see change in the next ten years?

>> Sophie Kim: Personally in the next ten years, if I continue to act, all I want is to bring truth to the screen and positivity to viewers and I really hope there are other people like that out there. I'm really looking forward to seeing more representation.

>> Debbie Fink: Great. Okay and to add on a little bit of a lighter note, would you like to tell us about your dog, Kiwi?

>> Sophie Kim: Oh, yeah. [ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Fink: Does Kiwi have healing powers as well?

>> Sophie Kim: Yeah, totally. She is just the sweetest. We got her - let's see, I think 2017. She's three now. She is a Goldendoodle and she's a bit bigger than Dude, but she's really cuddly and if you're not petting her, she'll hit your arm with her nose to get to you pet her. Cute. She's really cuddly.

>> Debbie Fink: She knows what she wants and she goes for it. Alright. Well, Sophie, and we'll be coming back to you with questions at the end. I want to say to you may you go from success to success and embrace the in betweens. There will be in betweens. As you break down stigmas and pave the way for girls and women with disabilities who dream of being on screen.

>> Sophie Kim: Thank you.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you. Alright. Lachi! Hi. Long time no see. Lachi, you are a self-dubbed, "Triple B" - Black, blind, and beautiful woman. And I would add brilliant to that mix as well, by the way, In any event, you talked about being a daughter of immigrants and one who was teased and bullied growing up and how you craved to have role models like you in the media. You touched on this during another webinar that you did with us and I would like to hear and now to hone in on Lachi as child and share or share again. My first question to you is, did you have female role models with disabilities, especially girls and women of color in the media?

>>Lachi: I did not have many role models with disabilities when I was a child. I didn't even think to look for any. I was born with a visual impairment, so I was legally blind, and the very few characters that I saw that had any kind of blindness were either in sort of more beggar roles or roles of being some type of oracle or something that was pretty fantastical, something I didn't see in myself. And role models of color were already few and far between. So to find a role model of color that also had a disability, that was pretty rare. I think i've seen more unicorns than I've seen people of color with disabilities in roles when I was a child. I don't know if that sort of answers your question, but the short answer is sadly, no, I didn't have many role models. I had role models that were people of color without a disability, but when we're honing in on disability, there just weren't any in my time.

>> Debbie Fink: Well, you're on the map to change that. How did these childhood experiences, or lack thereof, spawn your commitment to not only be a role model for today's and tomorrow's girls, but to push for this paradigm shift in our media and our culture?

>> Lachi: Well, one of the things that really drove me to want to push forward the needle of representation in entertainment for people with disabilities, specifically females of color, is specifically because I didn't have any role models growing up. And when I thought it myself as a child, "hey, I'm really great at music. I've got a great speaking voice. I am very creative. I would love to pursue field." I could not see myself - I couldn't visualize my future because I hadn't seen any examples of it, and I don't remember word for word the quote you said earlier, if you can see it, you can be it - I think is what you said.

>> Debbie Fink: Yeah.

>> Lachi: I think that's a powerful statement, because if you can't see it, it makes it so much more difficult to be able to be it. And so I'm on a mission to be that thing that the younger generation can see and say, "well, I can be that."

>> Debbie Fink: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. So, in ten years' time, where do you hope to see children's entertainment and entertainment in general in regard to fighting stigmas?

>> Lachi: In ten years' time, I would love to see more children's stories, cartoons, animated or non-animated shows, feature girls and women, in the first place, of strength. and I would also love, of course, to see people with disabilities featured with strength, with employment, with jobs, with intelligence, particularly women and people of color. There are some shows that I've been seeing this - "Healing Powers of Dude" is one. I actually just recently saw - I don't know if anyone watches the game show "Crystal Maze" on Nickelodeon, they featured a family that had several members that were hard of hearing, it was amazing - another show that I really like is "Steven Universe" - it's a cartoon and it showcases women of strength throughout that cartoon series. I would love for that to become a norm and not just the exception to the rule: if we can inundated with women and girls in power, with people with disabilities having intelligence, it will no longer be something to cringe about, it will no longer be something not seen as normal. Just like we're seeing people of color in more roles, just like we're seeing people of varying sexual preferences in a lot of roles and those two stigmas are very slowly but surely, effectively breaking down. I would love to see that for people with disabilities within ten years - I'd love to see that today, but ten years would be an amazing goal.

>> Debbie Fink: Great. Well, with you pushing the process along, along with a whole cadre of others, hopefully it will happen more sooner than later and it will sustain and will continue to move the direction we need it to move.

>> Lachi: Sustainability is a very good word, because every once in a while, we'll see flare-ups, we'll see people care about something and then we'll see it go away. And so sustainability is something we will need to strive for as well.

>> Debbie Fink: Like, "okay, we did that and now we can move on and move forward." So your music has received millions of streams and you have your creative musical fingers in dozens of pies, as it were, and it doesn't seem like COVID-19 has slowed you down too much So I'd like to hear from you in terms or projects that you are currently involved in that helped move the needle fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for people with disabilities in the entertainment world, in front of the camera, behind the camera, et cetera.

>> Lachi: That is an interesting question because, as a singer in my music career, I tend to sing songs that are very empowering and they're very self-esteem focused, very positivity and stand strong type of lyrics, so in that sense, that's my own creative way of - a lot of the songs are advice to myself, telling myself to push forward, empowering myself to get through hard times and I know that if it can work for me, it can work for other people, and so I tend to infuse a lot of my message of pushing forward into my lyrics. But more importantly, I think one of the things I'm trying to work on is to involve myself in as many different organizations and really anyone who will listen to me scream and shout that we need to be more inclusive in the entertainment industry and to partner with them. I've worked with, or am trying to work with, places like the Foundation Fighting Blindness, Reelabilities and of course, as you guys know, RespectAbility - I'm here on the Women's Speakers Bureau, so shout out to you guys.

>>Debbie Fink: Woo!

>> Lachi: [ Laughter ] But not only am I trying to team up and partner with other agencies that work with disabilities, I'm trying to put my foot forward in other agencies that don't. So I am a Grammy voting member and I'm also a member of Women in Music, which is a large, vast web and net of different women in high places in the music industry, and I do what I can to be on and/or attend panels and bring up this discussion that we're having here now. I mean, every other month, we'll mention, "oh, we need diversity, oh, we need diversity," but every time diversity is mentioned, well, yes, they're speaking about people of color, which we definitely still need to work on, yes, they're speaking about people with varying sexual preferences, with varying gender identities, which we really do need to work on, but there is no mention of disability, and I've noticed that when I do bring it up, there is a bit of a tail between the legs. And I - it's not the easiest topic and sometimes I'm a little avoided. [ Laughter ] but I'm here to continue to champion for it and if I'm the only one in the room that speaks about it and after I'm done speaking, everyone just kinda sits silently and absorbs it, that's fine with me. I am happy to continue to say, remember that "disability is also a diversity." What was the question? [ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Fink: I could listen to you all day. [laughter] I'm this tempted to ask to you break into song. But we won't go there. so tempted.

>> Lachi: Don't do it.

>> Debbie Fink: I won't do it. I won't do it. Well, so, I'm gonna take a little moment here to just kind of showcase our RespectAbility's Women's Speakers Bureau which is actually officially launching next week. Lachi is 1 of 11 speakers and we are so excited t0 - I actually spearheaded the program and it's so I feel very, very invested in what's happening and it's women and our board members and our colleagues, Dr. Donna Walton and my colleague, Tatiana Lee, and it's been an amazing process, and so stay tuned. the women of the Women's Speakers Bureau are about to launch. So Lachi, it's always a thrill to connect with you and share the message.

>> Lachi: A pleasure.

>> Debbie Fink: So now circling back to the comment you made about your songs being about self-esteem and empowering, I'm going to close on our time together for now with a question, so it's so important that as girls and women, as girls and women with disabilities and especially as girls and women with disabilities who are from marginalized populations, that you honor or celebrate or take pride in your accomplishments. In your very busy life, sometimes you don't take time to do that for yourself from what I've heard from you, and one can be humble and still celebrate successes. So with that said, what do you consider your greatest success to date as a phenomenal woman with a disability who is also from a marginalized population, Black, blind, beautiful, and brilliant?

>> Lachi: [ Laughter ] Well, this is an interesting question because it's - I really spend so much time working on everything I do that I don't healthfully take the time out to say, "hey, wow, good job, girl," and I believe that everyone should, and I - [ Scoffs ] ask anyone, I love when people brag. I really dislike when people get offended by other people celebrating their accomplishments and going, "oh, they're so snobby or stuck up" or "they're bragging too much," - let them, let them be happy! We only live once. They did something cool. I believe that one of my greatest accomplishments was coming out as a person with a disability; because I'm legally blind, growing up, I did what I could to try to hide it. I need to use a cane at night, so during the day, I just won't use it, I won't tell anyone and I'll do things like hold things very close and people would notice that there was something off about me, not know what it was and make an assumption, and that assumption was always extraordinarily wrong, for sure, but most likely negative. And I came out and I said, "you know what, world? I'm visually impaired! Everybody that I've worked with, other celebrities that I have been around, organizations that I have worked with, I'm legally blind, and I really hope that you'll still work with me," and when I did that, I was generally greeted with open arms and a lot of "ohs!" And I think that's my biggest accomplishment because I've now been able to be very comfortable in my skin, very happy with myself and able to very publicly do the things that I've been so afraid of doing, like, instead of falling into a crack on the sidewalk, I have my cane now at night. Instead, being afraid to hold stuff really close, I just do it and if anybody asks me what's wrong, I tell them. I was once afraid to go into networking events and talk to anybody because I didn't know what anyone looked like. Now I just walk up to people and say "hi, I'm blind. But I assume you're good looking. Let's talk."

>> Debbie Fink: [ Laughter ]

>> Lachi: And I love it. I think that's my greatest accomplishment and I can't even help but smile when I talk about it.

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you.

>> Lachi: And that's how I know. [ Laughter]

>> Debbie Fink: Thank you, Lachi. Folks, to learn more about Lachi's work online and Erica, Sophie, and Shaylee, everyone, as Lachi said, don't be shy to brag, if you have any links that you want to put into the chat box, do it. Shaylee, I'm turning now to you. Last but surely not least, you are making such an impact as a young actor. Your parents and family are really so supportive of you and your passion for acting. Growing up, has anyone served as role model for you in the entertainment industry?

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Yes! I had a lot of role models, but I'm only going to share three of those with you today. The first is Daisy Ridley. She was in "Star Wars" as you all might know. My second is Gal Gadot from "Wonder Woman" and then my third role model is Lauren Ridloff, who is from the new Marvel movie as a superhero, I don't know if you heard about her, but I really look up to both of them. I do want to talk about the first two, Rey and Wonder Woman. I remember watching "Superman" and all sorts of movies, different Marvel movies with superheroes, but what was so frustrating for me was most of those characters were white men. Nobody with disabilities. The lead role in the character was always a typical white male which became frustrating. Until, then there was Rey in "Star Wars" and this was really exciting to me as a young girl and even in "Wonder Woman" to see a lead female superhero. And these were exciting occurrences for me to see. Now, in terms of Lauren Ridloff, that third person, we have female superheroes in "Wonder Woman" but there was not //the// female superhero until Lauren Ridloff came on the scene, So I am determined to be the next one myself after her, because after seeing all those men, I thought that's what I want to do, but then a deaf actor, Lauren, came in and got that role, and I'm so excited for her! I'm hoping I'm next!

>> Debbie Fink: Awesome! Awesome! I'm hoping you're next. We're all rooting for you. So ready or not, you are serving as a role model for other kids who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have other disabilities. You've been featured in scripted shows like Disney Channel's "Bunk 'd" and unscripted shows like A&E's "Deaf Out Loud." Can you talk about the importance of scripted and unscripted shows?

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Okay, sure. Well, in terms of "Deaf Out Loud," why it's important to have those types of unscripted shows is because most audiences are hearing and they have one view of what deaf people are, and "Deaf Out Loud" showed that there is not one way to be deaf. So the producers and writers and everybody selected three different families from three different backgrounds, and that's why that was important. Now in terms of my experience on "Bunk'd," that was exceptional because growing up as a young girl, I watched a lot of Disney programming, basically my whole life, [ Laughter ] and I would say I had never seen a deaf camper on "Bunk'd" and really, I never thought I could be part of the show, but then it came to, I got to be on "Bunk'd" and I played a wonderful character named Willow - I couldn't believe this was happening to me but I was the first deaf camper on "Bunk'd," and you don't see campers who are deaf, so I was the first.

>> Debbie Fink: Awesome. Awesome. And hopefully not the last. So what has been the most gratifying role you have played to date -

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Me, too. [ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Fink: - and why?

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Hmm. [ Light Laughter ] Well I wish I could talk to you about all of them but, hmm, I'm gonna say the role of Willow that I had on "Bunk'd" was the most gratifying. Let me tell you why. Everyone there was so eager to have me a part of the show and I felt very welcomed. But, in other things that I've worked on, hearing people depict or look at deaf people as, well, they can't hear, they can't do this, they can't do that and the character is framed around what they can't do, right? But when I came on to "Bunk'd" and I read that script, I was like, "Wow!" There's no references to me being deaf or I can't hear or I can't talk - there was nothing like that. So that meant to me that this was intentional on the writer's part, that they wanted Willow just to be a regular human camper, and that's what her story was about.

>> Debbie Fink: That's really well articulated.

>> Shaylee Mansfield: I want to add something, okay?

>> Debbie Fink: Sure.

>> Shaylee: One thing I wanted to say is, well, so the episode that I was in and when it was released, I was very excited, also very nervous and you might not know why I'm nervous about releases - often that's because the editor will cut off some of my signs: they don't realize that the sign language portion of the line has not been delivered, so there I am, eager to see, and often my hands are cut off, the last few things that I'm saying is cut off, but not on "Bunk'd." The editing was perfect and all of my signs were there and clear.

>> Debbie Fink: That's really really an important note to people behind the camera, behind the scenes working in this field. So thank you for lifting that up. Speaking of feeling anxious about releases - drum roll - your new film, "Feel the Beat," has just debuted this month on Netflix. So exciting. Let's watch a clip. You can see Shaylee at exactly one minute. Debbie Fink: Okay. Woo woo! Shaylee, I just have to say that we all look forward to seeing the full film, and that we will all be able to say that we met Shaylee, here, on this webinar. So really kudos to you, and as I said to Sophie, may you go from success to success and embrace the in betweens as you break down stigmas and pave the way for girls and women with disabilities who dream of being on screen and behind the screen. Do you have anything you want to say at this juncture? And then we're going to turn it over to questions. Okay. Alright. So Lauren, I'm going to turn it over to you to handle the Q&A. I'll be back to close out but I want to thank all of you amazing panelists at this juncture and let's hear from the audience in terms of what you want to know.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Hi. So I will be glad to ask questions that are from the audience. Debbie, I'm going to turn your video off at this point and keep six videos on screen to make it easier to see the interpreters. So the first question is, "I would be very interested to know whether any of the writers or others involved in creating the series have a disability?" This is specifically for "The Healing Powers of Dude." Of any folks behind the camera?

>> Erica Spates: That's a great question. None of the writers for this season did have a disability - that was something we did think about and I hope to do better honestly next time and have a more inclusive room.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I would like to note that I know that your entire writers' room did meet with individuals with disabilities that influenced what they wrote.

>> Erica Spates: Yes. It's incredibly important, constant feedback from people who had those experiences and could share with us.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: A question for Lachi. How has the music industry at large treated or reacted to you being out about your disability?

>> Lachi: Wow. I think that my fear was largely in my own mind. For the most part, people have been either accepting or just don't really even mention it. I do feel and I see a little - I don't want to say hesitation, but it is a little, sort of "oh, okay"-ness to it. But there has generally been a positive reception as opposed to people just not wanting - I was afraid people wouldn't want to continue working with me, and again, those fears were largely in my mind. But it's been generally positive and I'm very grateful for that. Thank you.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I want to remind folks if you have a question that you can do so by typing into the Q&A box. If you are watching us on Facebook right now, if you put a question in there, my colleague, Eric, is going to share that with us here on Zoom as well. So a question from a journalist named Simon Appelbaum, we do share a last name but not related to my knowledge. So, it was two questions. The first one's for Shaylee, "when you act on a TV series, how do show runners and writers work directly with you on your character?"

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Well, how that works is I have an interpreter with me on set or at my auditions and we just communicate through the interpreter. Is that what you mean?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I believe that would be part of the question. Simon, if you have any more, you can type. I guess, are there ways that you interact with producers and other people on set to make sure that they - that you are fully involved as well as your character in terms of the representation of your character?

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Hmm, okay. In terms of that, the interpreter is there facilitating the communication. I will also text on my phone or write back and forth. I will also end end up maybe teaching some signs to some cast members, helping talk about what some of the lines are and how they can be translated. If other cast members or actors don't know enough sign language, we will bring in or the production company will bring in an ASL coach or ASL master to work with the hearing people on set.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Simon's other question is specifically for RespectAbility. If we are working with producers and writers on series that feature children and other characters with disabilities? And yes, we've been very fortunate to be able to work with folks like Netflix and the Walt Disney Cmpany and others to help ensure that content is authentic as possible. I'm glad to talk more about that with anyone who has specific question on those. I now have a question for - another question for Shaylee. "If a hearing individual is looking to learn sign language, which kind of sign language should they start with? The different types have always confused me. Is there a most commonly used version that you recommend learning?" So I'm not sure if they're talking about ASL or other types of things, but if you want to talk to that.

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Yeah, sure. Let's first talk about American Sign Language. So ASL, or American Sign Language - well, let's contrast this with because people are like, "oh, it's universal. Everyone uses ASL. In Russia, they use that. In China and Japan, they use the same sign language." That is not true. That's why we call it American Sign Language or ASL, okay? Now, to answer your question, the best way for hearing people to learn sign language would be to watch tutorials on the internet, like ASL Nook, which me and my family were featured on, or other web-based teaching materials that are done by deaf people. You can also hire an ASL tutor or a coach who could work with you one on one. Those would be my two suggestions.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you so much. A question for Sophie and Shaylee. What would you like casting directors to know about you prior to you auditioning? What can they do to help you bring your best self to the audition? Sophie, if you could go first, please.

>> Sophie: Hmm. Actually, can I think about that for a second?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Of course, we can come back to you. Shaylee, do you have a response to that?

>> Shaylee Mansfield: Sure. Me? Ah, okay. Really, I would say, in general, hmm - I definitely don't think that I have to be cast as a deaf person for a deaf role. I can be cast in a hearing role as well.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Another question for Sophie was, specifically asking about the sets of how things were kind of set up. The question was, "did you have to pay extra costs for it to be accessible?" So if you want to talk about kind of the accessibility of the set for you, and then Erica, if you want to add onto that afterwards, that would be great.

>> Sophie Kim: Yeah. Actually, it was really easy to make sure it was accessible. Everyone was really accommodating. And there was one time - oh, yeah, so my trailer, we worked on getting accessible, the bathroom and getting a ramp up into it and all that. And then there was like a couple places where - I don't know what you call them, but there's a cord and there's a covering on it and it was hard to roll over, but then they fixed that really quickly, within a matter of minutes, so yeah, it was a really accessible set. I'm really thankful for everybody who was able to make it that way.

>> Erica Spates: We, from the beginning, talked to RespectAbility and other people and have a plan, talk to Sophie and her family, I think the most important thing is communication, not being afraid to ask questions, to have an open dialogue so you can problem solve really fast and just make it a very comfortable, open environment where no one is afraid to ask or say anything, and that's what we strive to do on set.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: What I noticed personally being on set was that Erica and the rest of the production team gave Sophie and all the young actresses agency to speak up, and I think that is vitally important especially as actors with disabilities are less likely to speak up and kind of cause a fuss or are afraid of being seen as a cause of fuss when something isn't going going right and I think that there was someone who asked what can people know, and it's just asking, "how can I be most accessible to you? How can I ensure that it is most accessible for you?" So it helps both the actor and the production and ultimately it makes everyone's life easier and makes the production better.

>> Erica Spates: Yes, exactly.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: We have a few questions on sending script ideas. No one on this panel works for a studio that will be taking scripts. But we're always glad to help connect folks that have suggestions and last question is for LachI. "How are you doing shows now that everything is kind of closed due to COVID-19?"

>> Lachi: Well, it's actually been quite interesting. It's always been quite the ordeal to do a show as a person who is blind - the travel, getting everything set up, being on a crazy stage, and now I can just sort of sit in my apartment and do streams, so in that sense, it's actually been beneficial for me as a person with a disability to be able to just stream from home and I actually have a show coming up - am I allowed to shamelessly plug this show I have coming up? [ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Fink: Absolutely!

>> Lachi: I have a show coming up July 9th for the Disability Pride in Philly. I will be doing a show July 9th, so check it out, Disability Philly Pride, and I will just be streaming from my home - the concert venue that is my living room, and it's been great. Thank you for the question.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Debbie will come back to close out. I think it's great if anyone has things they want to plug, please, here's your option to do so

>> Debbie Fink: Don't be shy. Don't be shy. Thank you, Lauren. Great with the Q&A. So I want to thank all of the panelists and give everyone a round of applause for an awesome, awesome time together. To Erica Spates, Sophie Kim, Lachi, and Shaylee Mansfield, thank you for sharing your time and talent with us and thanks, once again, to the New York Women's Foundation and the Coca Cola Foundation for making this possible. It's been a pleasure to learn with all of you, and thanks again to everyone in the audience and participants for joining us. We leave you with the Geena Davis motto, "if you can see it, you can be it" and, to quote Erica, "if you can see and hear it - or hear it - you can understand it." So thank you, Erica, for adding that layer of depth to everything. So to the two generations of creators and actors out there on the screen, we want to thank you, once again, and everybody, have a great rest of your day.