>> Josh Welsh: Hello everybody. I'm Josh Welsh, President of Film Independent and it is a pleasure and an honor to be here with you today in partnership with Respectability at the Sundance Film Festival of 2021. I love experiencing the festival this way much as I miss being up on the mountain, but this is fantastic. Today we're here for a panel on the accessibility of filmmaking brought to you by the amazing organization, Respectability. Before we start, let me just say a couple of brief things. First of all, as I said, my name is Josh Welsh with Film Independent. I am, for anyone who can't see me, I am a, I'd say a middle-aged white man with short, mainly brown hair, blue eyes, a black and white check shirt. And I'm sitting in my home office at my computer. So Film Independent as an organization, we're a nonprofit arts organization based in Los Angeles. From the beginning, a key part of our mission has been to make the film industry, to work to make the film industry look like the world that we actually live in, which means the commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion has been there from the beginning. For many years the focus of that was on race and gender but starting a few years ago, we really moved to include people with disabilities in that conversation. And I have to say that came about in large part or through getting to know the people at Respectability starting with Lauren Applebaum. It is a fantastic organization that I think more than anybody has really moved this to the forefront of the conversation about diversity, equity, inclusion which is absolutely where it belongs. And at Film Independent, this is now something that we look at across the board when we're measuring our staff, our board, the filmmakers that we support and the filmmakers whose work that we screen as part of our Film Independent Presents Screening Program. So with all of that in mind, I just again want to say we're so thrilled and honored to be part of the conversation here today. I think we have, it's an incredible panel. You're about to meet everyone on it, but I am honored to introduce our moderator for today. She is an award-winning actress, an international model and a key part of the Respectability team. She's a Hollywood inclusion associate of Respectability. If you've met her, you know that she is a force of nature. She is a fierce advocate in the diversity space. I will stop talking at this point. Please join me in welcoming our moderator, Tatiana Lee. Tatiana, take it away.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much Josh for that beautiful introduction, thank you so much. I'm so honored. We value our relationship with Film Independent and collaborating with you for these important conversations. You are really making a difference for independent filmmakers. So thank you for everything that Film Independent does. Like Josh said, my name is Tatiana Lee and I'm the Hollywood inclusion associate at Respectability a nonprofit fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities so that people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. As an individual with both visible and non-visible disabilities, I have had the privilege of conducting trainings and consulting on the why and how to be more inclusive and accessible in the media and entertainment space. Thank you for taking the time today to join us for this panel discussion, we have live captioning done by a real live person. This is available in this Zoom app by clicking on the CC button as well as via your web browser. We have posted that link in the chat box. This panel is live which I'm so excited. We are live and in living color. We will be taking questions from you during the second half of this panel. Please add your questions to the Q and A box to do so. If you are watching us on Facebook during the live airing, we will be monitoring for those questions there too. So if you have questions and you're watching via Facebook, put your questions there, we will make sure they get answered. This panel is being recorded and will be available on Respectability's Facebook page and website after this event concludes. This panel will cover accessibility touchpoints throughout the entire filmmaking process. From hiring and casting disabled talent, making film accessible and ensuring that the film itself is accessible. Attendees will hear firsthand from other filmmakers on the festival circuit on how they were able to implement best practices. And with that said, I would love to introduce all of our panelists, if you can please join me. Thank you so much. I'm so excited to have you guys here. So, let's just dive right into the conversation. First, we're going to Jevon Whetter. Jevon, after earning your MFA and producing for the American film Institute Conservatory, you have produced and directed numerous projects. Currently working on the feature film, Flash Before The Bang, you're also an educator. So care to educate us about why film accessibility is important.

>> Jevon Whetter: So before I explain, I'm gonna let you know what I look like. I am a white male with short hair and glasses and I'm deaf. Okay. So first, I would like to say thank you that I am here and so for the Sundance Festival, for Respectability and also with Film Independent, so thank you all for the opportunity for me to be on this panel. It's really important to be able to have this conversation about accessibility. So our film project, it's through Film Independent so we went through their producers' program. And so it was really a fast paced program and it was amazing and it really helped us and it was super important to provide that accessibility. So one thing that we do want is authentic, we want authenticity. So normally, you know, when there's like a Rolex watch for example, when there's a Rolex watch, you know, do you want a real Rolex watch or do you want a fake Rolex watch? Which one are you more into? So it's an organic thing. So deaf representation within the deaf community, we want real deaf characters. When a real deaf character shows up, we want to be able to have that access. So in supporting that, we have support, you know, within the filmmaking community. For example, we need to build a bridge. We need to open it up to have deaf medication and take down those barriers. We need captions, we need our culture to be included. So it's not about the outside world assuming about deaf people, you know, that we're suffering, poor us, that we need a savior, no, that's not what we're looking for. We have our own culture, we have our own language. It's about building that bridge to show the world. So it's really important that we have the opportunity to tell our own stories, to share our culture. Many people, you know, they study at college or at high school or from another country and they're fascinated with our culture. They see our stories and we have many stories. You know, we have untapped potential there. So people usually don't understand, you know, and they reject, they don't understand the communication but it's important to educate and allow us to have that access and break through the door. So we deaf people, we need to be able to expand and network and for us to be able to be provided those opportunities. The Producers Guild of America, they have a powerful outreach. They have their producers lab, Respectability. Also, they have a wonderful lab that's inclusive. And then San Francisco Film Industry as well, we've developed our, making sure that we have our stories in the film. So with Flash Before The Bang, you know, it set up really a personal story, it's my own personal life story that's been brought in. So I'm three generations of deaf people. So my parents were deaf and it was about having equal access. So everyone should have access to be able to enjoy the entertainment.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes.

>> Jevon Whetter: So behind the scenes with Flash Before The Bang, we have deaf actors.

>> Jevon Whetter (second interpreter speaking): Charlie Chaplin.

>> Interpreter: So Justin's going to go ahead and voice for Jevon.

>> Jevon Whetter: So Charlie Chaplin was really close friends with another deaf artist. His last name was Redmond and this was during the silent film era, he was a silent film performer. And during that time, the silent film era, deaf people were accessible to watch silent films until the talkies came in and deaf people were rejected from the movie going experience for many, many decades. And now we're back, we have more accessibility. So we are looking for allies and so will you become our bridge? So let's build this bridge together, thank you.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. Yes, we need to build that bridge and tell more authentic stories, which is so important. And I got so excited of jumping into this panel, this conversation that I didn't describe myself so apologies. But to describe myself, I am a black woman. You can't see, but I'm sitting in a wheelchair. I have curly hair and lip gloss and red earrings and a gray backdrop behind me. So next we are going to, speaking of our lab, we have one of our amazing lab alums, Shireen Alihaji. So next question is for Shireen. Shireen, you have co-created meaningful projects with various communities throughout your production company, through your production company, Blue Veil Films. As a Muslim woman of color living with a disability, how important is it for you to create space for yourself and others to pursue your creative endeavors?

>> Shireen Alihaji: Thank you so much for that question. I'm going to just start off by describing myself as well. I am in my thirties, I'm a multiracial woman. I have a brunette hair, I'm wearing thick black glasses and a red shawl and a red headband. My pronouns are she, her and they and I'm on Tongva Land in Los Angeles. So to come back to the question, it is really important to me personally. Historically, spaces have been inaccessible to the communities that I come from so much that space has literally been erased along with the histories that they contain. So then the question for me becomes how do we alleviate this deficit of space so that we're not existing in a constant state of displacement? And one of the answers that I've come up with for myself is that my personal history has survived through the tradition of storytelling. And in doing so, I'm able to reimagine space and transcend my own displacement. If there's something that I would want anybody to remember is that storytelling can be a tool of resistance and that it only requires that one reflects and remembers.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, thank you so much, that was beautifully said. So next, our question is for Nasreen Alkhateeb. You've had experience on working as a cinematographer. Let's take a look at your work. There are no words in this clip, but you're going to describe a little bit of what we're seeing in the clip.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: Okay, so the clip is a series of images, series of moving images of people in places. I'm going to put in the description for anyone who wants to know what it is block by block.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you. Those are some wonderful clips that are just amazing, shows the versatility of your cinematography which is amazing. Thank you so much. So with that, I have a question for you. You just came off the campaign trail as the lead cinema photographer for our first ever female vice president, congrats. As someone with an acquired physical disability, how did you navigate the long strenuous days of being on the campaign trail?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: Thank you Tatiana. First, I'm going to describe myself. I'm a multiracial woman with long, brown curly hair with a gray jacket sitting in a chair in a living room. Being on the campaign trail was very strenuous. It was definitely the hardest work I've ever had to do concurrently. And it was definitely not a space that was set up for someone who acquired their disability in a mobile way. So each day was a new day and some were harder than others, but I would just make sure that I had all the tools necessary to keep up with the momentum because, you know, sometimes we were in three states in one day and 10 locations. And that meant just, you know, getting in and out of cars and into spaces and walking up steep hills. And my leg couldn't always take the strain so I made sure I had, you know, all these tools that would just help me along the way. I made sure that I wrapped my foot each day and I had my cane in case I needed to use it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, awesome, so you knew to differentiate, as a person with a disability, what you needed to accommodate yourself for those long days.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: Correct.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. So, I have a followup question for you. Why was it important? Why do you think that it was important that she chose a woman of color with a disability for this position?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I think that as a woman of color, as someone who's both black and Iraqi, I've been raised in this country with a very specific lens. That lens informs the work that I do. It informs how I see through my camera and through my lenses. So what I choose to focus on wouldn't necessarily be something that someone else chooses to focus on. So I think that really is important to consider when you're looking at any content that's being shared anywhere. Who's behind the camera? What experiences do they bring to the table that informs how they tell that story? And I was honored to be that lens.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you so much. So next is Leah Romond. Leah, you worked on the production team with Andrew Pilkington who we will turn to in a minute for the feature film, Best Summer Ever, which was a fully inclusive film that was an official selection for South by Southwest 2020 and took home the Final Draft Screenwriters Award. Can you tell us some more background of how the film was made and also what was it like working on a production that was fully inclusive of people with and without disabilities in front and behind the camera?

>> Leah Romond: Yes, I would be happy to. And first, I'll describe myself. I am a white woman with dark brown hair that's long. I'm wearing a blue shirt and my background is a colorful rug and a bookshelf. My pronouns are she and her. So, Best Summer Ever was an amazing project to work on. It's a completely integrated film with a cast and crew of people with and without disabilities and we created it from the beginning to the end all together as a team. There were so many people involved in this. Like, if you look at the credits, like hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people involved in this and the background is that we are all members of a community called Zeno mountain farm and Zeno is a community of friends with and without disabilities and we get together multiple times throughout the year and do fun, difficult projects together. Theater camps or we do parades for the 4th of July and build huge floats from scratch and no one has to pay to attend Zeno and no one is paid to work there and everyone is invited back for life. So it creates this amazing community that I am so fortunate to be a part of. And I would also want to mention it was started by four people. Ila, Vanessa, Pete and Will Helby and they bought land for us to, you know, play and create on and we decided that after 12 years of making short films that we wanted to make a feature length film and decided that we would do a musical because that's the easiest first feature film to do. Just kidding. And we had a great time doing it and coming into filming, my disability happened in, I have an acquired disability that happened in 2012. I had a brain injury that led to a cognitive disability as well as physical disability. And I was still trying to figure out how I fit into the world of contributing, being a contributing member of society and where my value was. When the film started, I was not a producer. I was just there present and was very welcomed just to be there and to be a part of that community. And then as we went through the process of the film, my cognitive skills, I learned more about what I can and can't do anymore and I worked with Andrew who is an amazing teammate who you're going to hear from soon and we got to create this dream world. And basically we wanted to show people what's possible and like the fun world that we live in when we're at camp. And I think that it ended up doing that and I'm really proud of it and so happy to be a part of this huge team of friends.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. Yes, I've heard about it everywhere, like everyone is talking about it, it's just been like such a hit project and it's just been doing really, really great which I'm so excited for. So, before we go to our next question which is directed to Andrew, we are going to show a clip from the Best Summer Ever.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. If you have not had a chance to see Best Summer Ever, you have to see it. That is just a clip but it is amazing. So with that, Andrew Pilkington, your film, Best Summer Ever has been getting great recognition including the Final Draft Screenwriters Award prize at South by Southwest. What was it like to be one of the producers on this project? And did you think it would get all of the recognition it's been getting?

>> Andrew Pilkington: Well thank you Tatiana, and thank you Sundance for having this event. Let me describe myself. I’m a white guy with dark hair and a blue sweater. Everyone knows it takes a lot of people a long time to make a movie. We’ve been making this movie for two years now. And to have it get to the level it has is really rewarding. I remember when it was just me and Leah and other team members writing it in a living room. To get all the way to South By and have it get cancelled was so painful. I had not idea it would ever get to this point that it has. It’s amazing.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you so much. Yes, it's a bummer it got canceled but you still got your recognition and your Final Draft Award, so that is like so awesome. So, next we have the legendary Joey Travolta. Joey, you have seen some awesome, we have seen some awesome projects come out of Inclusion Films like Carol of the Bells and more. The mission of Inclusion Films is to teach filmmaking to individuals with developmental disabilities in six dedicated production studios throughout California. We're going to show a short clip about your work really quick.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. So my question directed to you is, your alumni have gone on to do amazing things in the industry. What inspired you to start Inclusion Films?

>> Joey Travolta: Well first off, I'm a white male, 70 years old. I have a blue shirt on with little buttons there and I have white hair and the lots and lots of it. So much hair that I just, no, I'm not, I'm bald. Anyway, well, before I was an actor. Well, at first, I was a singer, actor, writing, producing and directing for 20 years, before all that I was a special ed teacher. So I always had a special place in my heart. My father, who was the most inclusive man that I've ever known in my life, he was the one that taught me, that was the gift he gave me. Inclusion and making sure that nobody was different than anybody else. Everybody was equal, everybody was the same and it was a great gift. And after going through years of directing and producing, I thought, well, this is a great way to teach more than just technical skills, but life skills and social skills through the art of filmmaking because when you make a film, everything that goes into filmmaking goes into everyday life. So what a great tool to teach those skills. And then if you can teach technical ones on top of that and teach them to be able to work, I mean, it's a win-win situation. That was the behind the scenes that played all over the country on Cox Communications for Carol of the Bells. But it was exciting that, I wanted to prove a point that we took a crew that was 70% native of folks that we trained at the different studios and we were able to make something of value, something of quality. And we weren't hindered in the making of that film. And that's exciting to me and we went on to make a documentary during this last year called Let's Work, we did the Delivering Jobs campaign and every time we're hired as a production company, most of the crew will be made up of folks that are neuro diverse that we trained.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that, I love that. I feel like with your production company, Inclusion Films and the projects you've put out and Zeno Mountain Farms and the projects that they have put out, I feel like you guys are really proving the point that you can have a set that's fully inclusive of people with and without disabilities and it can happen and it can be an award winning project, which is awesome. Thank you so much. So Leah, I've had the honor of getting to know you and call you a friend and I know and everyone that's around you knows that you're a passionate advocate for disability representation in media. What are your hopes for the future of filmmaking?

>> Leah Romond: Yeah, well, I want to add to what Joey was saying before about, you know, sometimes people think that it'll be more expensive to have a film that's inclusive or that it will create issues or problems. And I want to say that, in any of the issues that came up in our film, it was like a truck broken down with rental equipment that needed to be returned or it was delays at Newark airport and having to get, you know, hotels for people at three in the morning. None of the things were difficult about the film had anything to do with people with disabilities or involved disability. So I just wanted to add onto what Joey was saying there. In terms of what I would like for the future of filmmaking, I would like for all steps of the process to be inclusive. From writing to pre-production to production to post, to marketing, acting and inclusive just by default so that sets are created with universal design so that not only is that great for wheelchair access but it's great for camera access and wardrobe access and things like that. Also disability, twenty-five percent of American adults identify as having a disability. That group crosses all communities, all racial communities, gender communities, socioeconomic communities, all communities. So I really would like to see a more intersectional look at what it means to create from a different perspective than what we're used to seeing. I lived 30 some years of my life with one brain and then got a different brain basically put on my head and had to kind of figure out how life looked then. And before that, I don't know if I necessarily realized how different, you know, even just processing information is for every single human. So I really would like to see a lot more diversity in all aspects of filmmaking and I think it's happening and that makes me really happy. And in terms of accessibility, we want not only accessibility in the creation process so not only inclusion and representation in front of the camera and behind the camera but also accessibility for access to see all films and not just films about disability. So in our film, we made the decision to use open captions which means that the entire film has captioning. Closed captioning is something that people can put on as an option. But it was our decision, both from an artistic perspective and from an inclusive perspective to include captions. And then we also did audio description, which is a great tool that I actually didn't know about before we did this film and we're going to show a clip of the beginning of our film with audio description for viewers who are blind or have low vision.

>> Leah Romond: So our open captions were done by the wonderful Michelle Spitz, a woman of her word. Sorry, not open captions, audio description, I apologize. And for anyone that would like to learn more about audio description, Respectability is actually doing a panel with Michelle. It's called Bridging the Gap: Media, Accessibility and Audio Description and it's on this Sunday, January 31st at 11:30 Pacific time, I believe. And if you look in the chat box, there'll be a link to RSVP to that. So yeah, it's not just about accessibility behind the camera, in front of the camera, it's about making content that's accessible for everyone to enjoy.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes and I'd just like to add to that just, you know, including and making your content accessible and including people with disabilities in front and behind the camera is not only the right thing to do in terms of representation. It's also the economically smart thing to do. According to Nielsen, the disability market is worth over a trillion dollars. So it is a win-win where you are tapping into that industry and people want to see their selves reflected, so if they see their selves represented in the content that is being created, they're gonna spend their money to support it. So that is something to keep in mind. Thank you so much Leah. Next we're going to go to Nasreen. Nasreen, what do you want the industry to know when it comes to accommodating someone working below the line that may have a disability?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: You know, I think that in our society, we've done a really good job of like separating disability community from able-bodied community. And for people that work on set who are not used to having someone with a visible disability or even an invisible disability that's out and talking about it, it can seem like a mountain to climb that they'd have to go through so many loopholes or they'd have to jump through so many hoops to accommodate that person or make space for that person and it can feel overwhelming. But the truth of the matter is it's so simple to accommodate people or just to create a design of production in the beginning that's inclusive of everyone on set. And it can be as something as simple as making, you know, the paths of mobility four feet instead of two. It could be something as simple as changing the height of the lighting system or the lighting grid. These things don't cost more money. It just basically takes a conscious intentional design at the very beginning of production. During development, when you're finalizing your script, when you're creating the schedule, it can be really simple things to make it inclusive of everyone on set. Yeah, I'm working on that and I'm seeing more of that and I'm excited for what's to come.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that, simple but intentional, right? Simple and intentional when it comes to being inclusive. I like that, simple but intentional. Andrew, you have a very impressive resume. You've produced for feature length films which you wrote, directed, edited and produced. What do you say to people that assume you could never accomplish all that you have done?

>> Andrew Pilkington: Well I mean, those people see me and hear my voice they think I am very limited as to what I am able to do The challenge is to overcome people’s misconceptions when they put you in a box so I try to prove them wrong. Especially being a producer, because you’re in charge of everything and you have to be in constant communication with everyone [Indistinct] Basically, we were filming in New York once and I was on set And we were on a soundstage. And there was really bad access. The door was open to outside on the street, And so I wanted to get the door closed. So I told the people who were running the set that I want the door closed, and this woman goes over to my PA and asked if it’s okay to close the door. She’s like, “Why are you asking me, he’s in charge!" She’s like “really?” Like, yeah! (laughing) People don’t think someone like me can be in charge of a million dollar film. It’s really important for people to not be judgmental of someone’s capabilities before they talk to them So yeah. I think it's gotten better as we've evolved into a more inclusive society But there's definitely a long way to go. Hopefully someday I’ll be at the Emmys or something and all those people in high school who underestimated me will see what happened.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, we just got to keep proving them wrong, I love it. I love those moments too where people underestimate you and you're like, "No, I got this." And they're like, they're not ready for it but they have no choice but to be ready. (laughing) So, go ahead.

>> Leah Romond: I’ll also add that I was able to participate in this film as a producer because of Andrew and Andrew was the one who encouraged me as I was figuring out cognitively what I can and can't do. So for instance, I no longer am great at computer type stuff or I guess sequencing executive function type of things. And Andrew helped me in every single task that I did. And at one point, I mean, I'm improving, I'm still continuing to heal, but at one point I couldn't save PDFs into a place. So, you know, Andrew's like, "Okay, I'll do it." And he was the one that allowed me to, you know, get this experience and I could bring in my legal background and, you know, issue spot and know what we needed to do and then Andrew could execute what had to be done. So we're, I mean, he's a dream team to me and yeah, it is strange when people underestimate him considering all that he did running this film and is still doing so.

>> Andrew Pilkington: You're great Leah, I love you.

>> Leah Romond: What was that?

>> Andrew Pilkington: You’re great, I love you. You’re fantastic. There's no way I could've done my job without you and a lot of other people.

>> Leah Romond: Thank you. I think that's, like all of us feel about each other. We all love each other and there's no way we could have done our jobs without each other. So, we're really lucky.

>> Joey Travolta: This is off topic but how do you save a PDF? (laughing)

>> Leah Romond: Andrew.

>> Joey Travolta: I’m technically challenged, I'm kidding.

>> Tatiana Lee: Shireen. And Shireen's going to type in her answer. She's having some sound difficulties, but Shireen, what do you hope to work on next and what does your dream collaboration look like? She said, "I love to continue to build and across communities to reclaim space through narrative. Dream collaboration wise, this is my first time meeting some of the panelists so I'm impressed and excited to learn more about their projects and support them as well." So yes, keep the community engaged with each other and the more projects that you can put out together, yes. Awesome, that's what it's about. It's about joining community and supporting one another. Jevon, in addition to working as a writer, director and producer, you also are an acting coach. Why is it important to cast real actors with disabilities? You touched on it a little bit but can you expand on that a little bit?

>> Jevon Whetter: Sure. So I do have an MFA with producing and I have a masters in theater arts from San Diego University. So I've been teaching high school deaf students and teaching ASL deaf theater as well over at Cal State University in Northridge for many, many years, for about 20 years. So for any person with disability, it's really important to have authentic characters, to cast authentic characters. So before, it would have been nice to start with the story, you know, with the script, start with that first. Encourage the writers to think about including character disabilities in the script. You know, we can create a lot more jobs that way. So I'll give you one example. So when AFI, American Film Institute, there were a student producing program, there was a Spanish speaking film. It was a short film, maybe 15 minutes and they were speaking and I thought that was really cool. The whole movie, I found it fascinating, there were speaking in Spanish. And what ended up happening is that the director was from, he was speaking Spanish and he was nodding his head no because he was from a Spanish speaking country. And I said, "What, is it not a good movie?" And he said, "No, their accent is completely wrong, it's a fake Spanish accent, it's not real." And my entire opinion changed after hearing what he said. So I thought, okay, it's the same thing with deaf actors, people with disabilities. You know, there's an actor who's on screen. We watch them and they're not even a part of our community and it just doesn't feel right, it doesn't sit well with us. So it's important that, you know, it's important that we know with casting, it's important to cast with authenticity to encourage, you know, being able to respect people's abilities, what they can do. And it's important to be inclusive and to keep developing that. So there are different ways of suggestions to be able to do that. So for example, so there's a character disabilities, there's a consultant thing that we're doing, there's a deaf character we're consulting on. So bringing in the culture aspect and bringing on an ASL coach, it's appropriate of course that they sign. So what happened with the director who's hearing? He doesn't know if the line is right or not when they're signing a line. So with the inflection and with the pitch, we have all of these things with ASL. Actors who are voicing, they have inflection, they have pitch, there's different tones and I mean, if they sound flat, you can tell. But how do we know, you know? So as a consultant, we can make sure that it's successful, that process. So there are deaf actors. Sometimes it's a great opportunity for them to get a role, but then there's a challenge. You know, it could become a missed opportunity if they're not even in the script to begin with. So they meet these challenges, you know, with the culture, the language, we have to see an improvement with the script from that point. So honestly, you know, people are dumb you know, but they know, people are not dumb, they know. So if you sit down in a public place, like at a mall or at an airport, I encourage you all to just go ahead and sit down for about an hour and just observe the people who are passing by. You know, what does that world look like? So your movie should be like that, it's what you see. You know, in a perfect world, you know, you try to excuse things, make things not, you know, not to include us, I mean, it doesn't look right.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah and speaking of not looking right, like when you don't authentically cast, someone can mess up the authenticity of the ASL or mess up the authenticity or representation of someone who is a wheelchair user or has CP and so many other things. Those are very nuance things that you just can't learn and portray overnight. They make what, like you said, the authenticity, that much better. So thank you so much for that. Joey, what do you hope the viewers watching take away from this when it comes to hiring crew with disabilities for their projects, big or small?

>> Joey Travolta: To do it. We're proving that content can be made with folks that are neuro diverse. I mean, right before the pandemic, the doors are opening. I mean, I've been doing this for a while. And a lot of the places I used to going in, it was an HR nightmare. There was a problem here, a problem there and all we were asking is give somebody an opportunity. That's all we're asking for, is opportunities. And the Dr. Phil show hired our folks, Special hired our folks. Delivering Jobs hired our folks. There was a lot of jobs happening besides the ones we do through our production company. And, you know, you just got to give us a shot. Give everybody a shot. And I would love to work with everybody on this panel. You know, maybe we'll do a project together, I think that would be cool.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, let's do it, let's do it! And one of the things I want to add to that is that when you're on set and you're working in production, it's all about problem solving. And for people that don't know, people with disabilities are the most amazing problem solvers. So we are really going to be like on it on set and really be able to help problem solve in a way that you never thought of. So really keep that in mind. So you have great problem solving skills, more diverse authentic stories of real life. You have tapping into a market that isn't being tapped into and so much more. So disability inclusion in filmmaking is a win-win.

>> Joey Travolta: Just one more thing. Donna Mills, Donna Pascal, Lee Purcell, they were our, 'cause we did the whole film through SAG and everything and all three of them separately said it was the best set that they had ever worked on.

>> Tatiana Lee: Wow!

>> Joey Travolta: That was the biggest compliment to me that everybody was so nice, wanted to be there, wanted to do the job because so many you know, get complacent and they don't want to be there. Our guys want to be there and they want to do a great job and they do a great job.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. So now we invite you to ask your questions to the panelists. We already have a bunch that I'm getting ready to get to in a minute. Please add your questions in the Q and A box on this platform and for our friends watching on Facebook, the comments are being moderated and questions will be shared with us on Zoom as well. While you're waiting for your question to come in, one more question for all the panelists. What is your favorite independent film? And I'll start with whoever wants to start first. Leah.

>> Leah Romond: I'm totally blanking right now. (laughing) It's part of my neuro diversity of like trivia, picking things up. If I'm talking about something, I can remember it because my brain hits, like it hits along something that relates to it, but just asking something out of the blue, it just goes blank.

>> Tatiana Lee: It's all good. Anybody else has one of their favorite? Go ahead.

>> Joey Travolta: Well, I was going to say Carol of the Bells but that would be, you know, other than that, I loved Peanut Butter Falcon last year, and I got to work with Zach and it just was, it was a sweet story and I really enjoyed that a lot.

>> Leah Romond: When I just said oh, Peanut Butter Falcon is exactly what I was thinking of and Zach is amazing. He is in Best Summer Ever as well. And he met the writers and producers, Tyler Nelson and Mike Schwartz of Peanut Butter Falcon at Zeno Mountain Farm and they wrote that film for Zach.

>> Joey Travolta: Where is that farm?

>> Leah Romond: It's in Vermont. We used to have a place in Venice where we did our film camps, but it's moved to Vermont now but Peanut Butter Falcon for sure.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, we're getting a lot of questions of people are asking where can they view Best Summer Ever?

>> Andrew Pilkington: Well, it's not out yet but it will be out soon at some point but very soon it will be. widely available —

>> Leah Romond: It'll be widely available very, very soon. Yes and if you follow, they posted the website, bestsummerevermovie.com, we'll post on there and on the socials. Yeah, soon. (laughing) We can’t wait enough — but It’ll be soon, I promise.

>> Leah Romond: If Andrew promises, then it'll be soon. (laughing)

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, do you mind if I chime in?

>> Tatiana Lee: Go ahead.

>> Jevon Whetter: So I'd just like to add my new favorite film, which is Coda. I actually saw it last night and I cried, it was so touching. Just wow, that's a movie that everyone needs to watch. And I'm so proud to mention that Troy Kotzur who is one of the actors in that movie, will be the lead of my film, Flash Before The Bang. And so I'm so excited and to let you know, Coda is a movie to watch, it's great. And one thing that really struck me is that it shows a deaf family together and they have one hearing daughter and the rest of them are deaf and so I come from a deaf family myself of three generations. So I could really relate to many things in that film. And so I don't want to spoil it and ruin the rest of the story so I'll keep quiet for now and just let you all see it for yourself.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, thank you. And then you can see Jevon and all of them on a panel that we are having this coming weekend, on Sunday. So you can see Troy and Jevon and hear all about filmmaking as deaf individuals and so that will be a really, really great panel. So make sure you check that out this Sunday. So we have a ton of questions. Someone said, and this was directed to you Jevon. "Jevon spoke about deaf actors' tone during a performance and the necessity of authentic casting. Does he have?" Okay. They said do you have any feedback for or opinions about certain performances of actors who aren't deaf playing those roles?

>> Jevon Whetter: I also teach American sign language. And so you don't really become fluent in American sign language or ASL quickly. It takes many years and years of practice to become fluid and fluent in the language. If you try and act like a deaf person, it really isn't authentic and the signing wouldn't be authentic either. And so hearing people might say, "Oh, it's really cool that there's a deaf character" but we as deaf people in the deaf community, we can identify quickly a false feeling performance in less than a minute, to just identify that the person is not deaf and it's fake. And so what do you really want for your project? Do you want authenticity? And just to let you all know, there's many things that hearing actors might think that deaf is like deaf people can't function, they're stiff and robotic. So when hearing actors play a deaf character, they tend to have their mouths closed. They just look stiff in general and deaf people aren't like that. You know, it's an exaggeration and they're trying so hard to not show that they're hearing but why deal with that hassle? Just cast an authentic deaf person and it'll just be a lot more interesting to watch. If you see the movie Coda, you'll see what I mean. It just really blooms naturally and if a hearing person who is playing a deaf character, they're worried about getting the signs right and all these other things and the acting itself suffers. And so if you have a disabled or deaf character that's cast authentically who knows how they live everyday and has been through all those lived experiences, then you'll take so much of it out of the way and then the actor can actually focus on their performance and that's my opinion on it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. So we have a question and I have an opinion about this one and then maybe some other people. It says, "With COVID-19 pandemic, safety measures have become much more rigorous in mainstream film sets, sometimes complicating accessibility and communication for some of our community. What advice would you have to filmmakers with disabilities to request accommodations or continue to pursue their craft in spite of the public health crisis?" I personally would say that there shouldn't be any difference. It's just, you still have to take those precautions but nothing is changing. I recently worked on set during the pandemic and it was like, I'm susceptible to catching it just as much as anybody else so there isn't any difference in how that is being navigated. You just have to decide are you willing to take that risk or not? And that's just my 2 cents, I don't know if someone else has something that they would like to add in terms of that?

>> Joey Travolta: I think you're right. I agree with you.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I would just like to add that, just remember that people with disabilities are already survivors. We're already survivors. And so that's enough said, and so we know how to survive. And so the best way is to just ask, don't assume. Don't assume, just ask the person and you'll be surprised what kind of response you're going to get.

>> Tatiana Lee: Anybody else has anything they want to add?

>> Leah Romond: Disabilities are so varied. You know, some of our disabilities affect our immune systems, some don't. I'm not really leaving my apartment because my immune system is not great. And so there's been a lot of creativity, creating content remotely that has really been amazing. I'm one of the senior production advisors for Respectability and worked with this team on the summer lab program. And we switched that from an in-person lab to a remote lab. And not only did it, could we continue with the lab and stay safe, but then we could also include people who don't live in Los Angeles or we could include people who are disabled in a way that they aren't able to leave their homes very easily or very often, because that is a big part of the disability community. So, you know, I'm one of those people that won't probably go anywhere until most people are vaccinated and then I have to figure out what that looks like in my life, but that's not everyone who's disabled. We definitely cover a wide spectrum, but we're creative and so coming up with creative ways to create content is what we're great at. So I really do like, I like the remote aspect of things and I also think that in terms of inclusion in all workspaces, it's been a great change because things that we are asking for for a long time about remote work for people with disabilities that were often denied to people with disabilities, now everyone's doing it. So now companies understand, oh, this can actually happen and I think that that is going to be a great move forward for a lot of us.

>> Tatiana Lee: I agree, thank you. And speaking of our lab, our applications are open for our 2021 lab. Some of our lab alum have gone on to work with amazing studios, including the Walt Disney Company and others and it's a great program. A lot of our panelists here today are alums of our lab. So in the chat box, you can click and apply to join our 2021 lab cohort and we hope to see you there. Another question came in. Someone says, "Is there a space in Hollywood to assertively confront ableism and disability discrimination or should we focus on positivity projects?

>> Joey Travolta: Say that one more time.

>> Tatiana Lee: Someone said, "Is there a space in Hollywood to confront ableism and disability discrimination or should we focus on positive projects? My thing is that there are communities of people with disabilities that are working in Hollywood and they are fighting to, you know, do the work to confront the ableism and discrimination that exists in the overall Hollywood sphere. So there isn't kind of, I mean, there's communities but that's kind of it. And yes, focus on making your own content the way you see it fit to be done. And if someone else has something to add to that. Does anyone have anything? Go ahead, Jevon?

>> Jevon Whetter: Sure, so that's one of the reasons why I decided to get trained as a producer at AFI, American Film Institute, because of discrimination. Because people were really awkward, you know. "Should I hire someone who's disabled?" You know, I'm just my own person. So I have three projects right now, Flash Before The Bang which is based on a true story of eight deaf boys in high school who won the state championship in track and field in 1986 and it's a true story. The second project is, we're developing a documentary called Live at the Deaf Club and that is based on the San Francisco Club for the Deaf in the late seventies and they ended up becoming a venue for punk bands to play. And so many famous punk bands of that era started playing in the San Francisco Deaf Club. And the third project in development, we're developing a trailer for the film and so all of my projects will always include diversity and disabled characters. And unfortunately, I had to have a confrontation, you know, because I don't want to have to wait. You know, deaf actors have been waiting for job opportunities for hundreds of years, it's better to make your own opportunities. And so now more and more people that I see out there are more open-minded and there's amazing places. The Respectability lab, a Sundance lab, Film Independent, San Francisco Reign in Foundation and many more that have opportunities for disabled filmmakers and I think it's just amazing. It's a great time to be involved and I hope that it will continue to evolve over time.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. Actually, we have another question for you Jevon, Jevon, you are very popular. Kathleen says hi and she says, "I wonder what is the best possible suggestion to stop the empathy of the deaf community? We have shared films of deaf related stories for years and not improve the recognition of our abilities and success."

>> Jevon Whetter: What's really important is to have deaf folks behind the camera as well like producers, directors, writers and so on. And one example is that, deaf people's first language is ASL, right? So not all of us are fluent in English because it's our second language. Some of us are and some of us are not. And so we actually have many amazing storytellers in our community and all of those stories that are out there how can we grab them and put them on paper? You know, we need partnerships and we need ASL consultants that can help develop these stories and not just limit deaf opportunities to acting because there's a lot of untapped talent out there in the deaf community that's just waiting to be discovered. So you'd be shocked by how many amazing deaf filmmakers are out there and I can't wait to help snatch them and bring them in. Many of the disabled actors that I've met are just amazing. And it's very important that we have representation behind the camera as well and that will lead to more opportunities in front of the camera.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. Someone says, "What do you think of audio storytelling as a platform for inclusivity? Is anyone creating this space?" Does anyone wanna take that?

>> Joey Travolta: I don't know, but I find the old radio shows where they had the sound effects and doing all that, I thought that was really cool. I don't know anybody that's doing that kind of thing, that doesn't mean to say it shouldn't be done. I love audio storytelling, I think it's really cool. Then you add all the effects, that's really great too.

>> Tatiana Lee: I mean, well, you have podcasts so I think that's great, but if you do, you have to make sure it's accessible because if it's audio, someone who is deaf is not able to consume it but then you can have if it's, you know, speaking and things like that, you can have a transcript which some podcasts have transcripts of the podcast. So I would say if that's a space you're going to go into, make sure that it's inclusive of not only people that are deaf but you know, inclusive to everyone. So that is something to keep in mind. Cool.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, may I add something?

>> Tatiana Lee: Go ahead.

>> Jevon Whetter: When I was in the AFI producing program, I required my editors to caption all films. And so I first thought that it might be a problem and too much of an ask but so many actors were saying, Oh! Editors were saying, "Oh, I need to practice doing that." And so when I went to film festival, you know, I love movies and at film festivals, I couldn't enjoy them because many of the film festivals had no close captioning or audio description or subtitles and I believe it should be a requirement and I'd really like to applaud Sundance because it's a major film festival that finally has captioning and, you know, for remote viewing and all that and having closed captioning is just amazing. And I really hope that that becomes one of the requirements to submit a film to a film festival that all films should have captioning and audio description. And I'd really like to be involved, you know. I'd like to screen films but often I have to wait and wait and I'm always late to be able to see a film because there's often no closed captioning for movie theaters or screenings and so on and I think at film school level, they should start requiring and teaching everyone to include close captioning or subtitles and then it becomes a habit and no one will think anything of it. I remember, you know, when no one needed seat belts in cars and then they passed a law requiring everyone to have seat belts and then some people are like, "I don't want to wear a seatbelt" and now no one even thinks about it and everyone just naturally puts on their seatbelts. It's the same thing about closed captioning and accessibility in a variety of ways like wheelchair ramps and so on. And so I think that we need to start thinking about that too.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, awesome, thank you. We have a question in here and actually since, I'll probably answer this one since I am the only actor, well no, Jevon is an actor so maybe you can answer this. They said, "How can a non-disabled actor get a chance to work with a disabled actor?" Did you have something to add? I had my 2 cents. Disabled actors most of the time don't get a chance to actually get hired so you as a non-disabled actor have more of a chance for things then a disabled actor does so one of my things is, when you're working on a project, let the production know that you want to hire actors with disabilities to be a part of your project. Those are things that you can ask for and say you also want to hire actors with disabilities to work with you. You have that leverage, that is a privilege you have as a non-disabled actor. So to say, I want to use my privilege to be able to also hire disabled actors, I think that's what you can do. And if anybody else has anything they would want to add.

>> Jevon Whetter: So one of the biggest challenges so far, you know, with many, many years with first moving out into LA in 1993 for myself. You know, so if there are any jobs, if we see any deaf characters, we're excited but then you have to be a SAG member. And we're like, okay, I have to be a SAG member but many of us are not SAG members. So we don't have the opportunity to even audition or be in the film, you know? So that really cut the numbers down really low. And there were a few lucky ones out there who were able to break through into a project, they were able to get into SAG, but then you need an agent. And they say, "Oh, you're not a member of SAG, then you can't get an agent." So when I first moved here, I just started building. So I was writing and I was a member of the WGA, Writers Guild of America. And so I was a member of WGA and I felt like, you know, that there was something I had to face there with that. So they have more flexibility so for example, you know, with filming with a budget of a film.

>> Interpreter: Okay, sorry about that, I'm the interpreter Justin, do you mind coming on to voice for Jevon? I'm so sorry.

>> Jevon Whetter (new interpreter): Sure, incentives I guess, so you have an incentive and if there's a low budget film, you actually get an incentive for diversity and for hiring folks with disabilities and so on. But what about a ten pole films like big budget films that don't have a diversity break for SAG actors? And I think it should actually apply to all film productions. Why is it only limited to low budget productions? So that way they could get that tax cut or that incentive and those tax breaks and I think those should apply to all films, big budget and low budget. So I think that, you know, I'm not complaining, you know, diversity has really improved over the years and now is so much better compared to how it was in the nineties.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, thank you. Go ahead.

>> Andrew Pilkington: It’s not just actors, it’s the same for producers and writers and directors.

>> Tatiana Lee: It's not just actors, it's the same for writers and producers. Correct, yes and that's for all across the board on all aspects of your production, which actually takes us into the next question. Someone said they would love to know if any of you put music in your movies or documentaries that are done by people with disabilities as well. They have worked with people with disabilities and they have a disability their selves. And they're a singer, songwriter and would love to know if this has done as well making your film all inclusive, not just actors. And that will go right back to Andrew's point. It's not just making sure that they are in front but behind. Joey, you had something to add.

>> Joey Travolta: Yeah, I added several songs by a young man with autism that wrote and performed them. So I'm always, anytime I get an opportunity to work. I didn't just do it because he was on the autism spectrum, I did it because it was really good too. So, and it's the same with the folks that we train. When we send somebody out to the job, if we send you, they can do that job. That's why we have the production company to train them. It's not unlike the minor leagues of baseball. It's professional, they're getting paid but if they make a mistake, you know, that's where you can make the mistakes. But when we send somebody out, they're ready to work. And again, the doors are starting to open.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, they are. Go ahead Leah.

>> Leah Romond: Best Summer Ever is a musical and because we were integrated with people with disabilities through the entire process, it wasn't just actors for us as well, we do have disabled musicians on our soundtrack. We have nine original songs on the soundtrack and they're really good and a lot of people put a ton of time into it but like our friend, Jeremy Vest is an amazing drummer and he was drumming on the songs and our friend Connor Dara is an amazing saxophonist and pianist. And we flew them into New York to record the songs. And they're extremely talented and I'm really excited for you guys to see this movie and also hear the soundtrack, it's very fun.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. So we have about five minutes.

>> Interpreter: Jevon was saying, oh, nevermind.

>> Tatiana Lee: Go ahead, go ahead.

>> Jevon Whetter: I just wanted to add that I know that there are people who assume that deaf people do not have music, there's no deaf musicians. They would be shocked that we do have deaf rappers, we have deaf singers, we have deaf musicians who play instruments. And so we have several, I just want to let you guys know that, I just want to throw that out there. - Dancers, all of that. - You know, so everything is possible.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you. So we have a few more minutes before we wrap. I'm going to give you guys all an opportunity to do a shameless plug. What are you working on? Where can people find you? And all of that good stuff or anything you want to promote. So I'll go, Joey first.

>> Joey Travolta: Okay. Yeah, we have what we call inclusion networks and basically it's all the content that's created from the workshops, from the documentaries we do, the work that we do. So there's seven studios that are producing and it's a subscription base but all that money goes towards employment. So if you want to see what we do, it's a great thing. You can come on for a month or two or whatever but it does go back to employment and we're ready to do a documentary where we're getting major businesses to hire somebody with a disability. And we're going to document from the HR meeting to going through their process of getting hired and at the workplace and really diverse in the places that they would be hired. It's not just the film business, it's all businesses but film would be very prominent. That's it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you. Next, Nasreen.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: You can find my work and some of the projects I'm working on IG, content director. One of the projects that I'm kind of excited about which I've never done before is I'm putting together a toolkit for some of the studios in Hollywood on how to build universal design. So if you are a filmmaker with a disability who's used to being on set, I wanna speak to you, I wanna hear about your best experiences and worst experiences so I can include it in the toolkit.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. Next, anybody else, Jevon?

>> Jevon Whetter: Yes. So I am on Cal State Team. So it's Dreamworks. So there's a show called Madagascar and it's called In The Wild and so, you know, I'm involved with, many other projects as well and I'm excited about that with Madagascar and also, you know, we have the animation we have on Hulu, there's signing also in that animated series. And then the second thing is Flash Before The Bang. So we're ready to go on with that process. We're ready to, we're looking for, sharing, financers financing that as well. So with Flash Before the Bang. So you can go to flashbeforethebang.com and we also have a Facebook page as well. So you can see it there, Flash Before The Bang and that's about it.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, and your panel on Sunday. (laughing) Your panel, back to your-

>> Jevon Whetter: Yes, yes, come. So it's all deaf perspectives on that one. You know, we don't bite, come on over, we don't bite.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. Andrew and Leah, if you guys have something you want to plug or anything for Best Summer Ever. Anything else of where they can find you?

>> Leah Romond: Go for it Andrew.

>> Andrew Pilkington: Like I said, the movie will be out very soon so go on Instagram Best Summer Ever Movie Me, I’m developing a couple things right now. Like most of America, I’m looking for jobs, so. You need a producer, you can google me and —

>> Leah Romond: If you need a producer, get in touch with Andrew, he's great. I am so excited to share Best Summer Ever as Andrew said, it's coming out soon. There'll be ways to see it soon. You know, our festival run, we didn't get to do last year. And so it'll look different but I'm really excited to share it. And then also I want to remind everyone that Respectability has like Tatiana already said, we have our summer lab coming up for people with disabilities in positions behind the camera. So writers, directors, producers, animators, a bunch of us on this call who are alumni of the lab. And a lot of us also work on the programmatic side of the lab. So go to the Respectability website and apply for that lab and you can, we'll introduce you to studio executives and producers and, you know, we're just trying to get the word out about authentic, complete inclusion for people with disabilities. So I really encourage people to apply and hopefully see you then.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much and in the chat box, there's a link for you to apply for the lab. Also, you can sign up for our newsletter where we have updates on events and so much more. We do casting notices, all of that good stuff, great articles on really great disability representation so make sure you check it out. And if you are a filmmaker or anyone in the industry and you're looking to be inclusive and need some guidance on being inclusive, please reach out to us. We are always happy to be a resource to make sure that your project is inclusive as it can possibly be. So reach out to us. I would like to say, thank you so much to all of our panelists, you guys are amazing. This was such an awesome conversation. I am honored to have moderated this, and I hope you will join us for the remainder of our panels at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. Tomorrow, join us for a conversation Through The Lens: A 360 view of disability on set. This session is particularly useful for directors and producers. On Sunday, we have two panels. First we offer Bridging The Gap: Media Accessibility and Audio Description and you may have thought about making your set accessible but have you insured your finished project is? Then join us for the nuts and bolts of producing deaf content and working with deaf performers presented in ASL with interpreters. Learn from experts with lived experience about producing authentic deaf content. And finally on Monday, join us for our final panel conversation. Join me back then for that conversation on the importance of mentorships especially for individuals from multiple marginalized backgrounds to succeed. Check out the chat box for all the links and all of these events are free. Thank you so much for joining us and enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you!