>> Debbie Fink: Welcome to our timely webinar in honor of Jewish disability awareness acceptance and inclusion month, commonly known as JDAIM. My name is Debbie Fink. I am a white woman with long brown hair and glasses. My pronouns are she her and hers. Behind me is a backdrop that reads "Intelligent Lives opening doors." It also includes the three logos for the partners for this evening which is the Edlavitch DCJCC, the Poses JCC of Northern Virginia, and RespectAbility. I am the director of Community Outreach and Impact at RespectAbility. RespectAbility is a national non-profit that fights stigmas and advances opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. I want to say how pleased we are to partner this eve with the two JCCs that we mentioned to bring you this powerful film and our panelists -- and the film is Intelligent Lives by Dan Habib. I hope you brought your popcorn. Joy Stein, director of inclusion and disability programming at the Edlavitch DCJCC will be our moderator. And we have with us Jessica Tishler who is the Poses JCC of Northern Virginia's Director of Special Needs and Inclusion. We're so glad that we're all here together. Before I turn the mic over to Joy for this awesome panel, I will cover some accessibility tips. We will add these tips to the chat box now and periodically for those who arrived later. First, today we have live captioning and ASL interpreters to maximize the experience for everyone. To view the ASL interpreter go to the gallery view, click on the grid icon in the upper right corner of your zoom window. For captions, click at the bottom of your computer where the on the screen that says CC. Okay. With that said I'm pleased to turn the Zoom room over to Joy Stein, who is the vision behind this event. Joy, take it away!

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Okay. Yes, thank you for that introduction. I am Joy. I am a white woman with long brown hair and I also wear glasses. On behalf of the Edlavitch DCJCC, I am honored to welcome you here tonight. I'm pleased to introduce our three dynamic panelists, all of whom are speakers in RespectAbility's new and growing National Disability Speaker Bureau's Jewish Division. Check out this amazing resource for the Jewish community and to the community at large, and you will be able to find more information about them in the chat box. The first panelist that I would like to introduce is Carly Okyle, whose full bio can also be found in the chat box. Carly's background is as a journalist, for which she has a Master's degree from New York University. Carly, would you like to briefly introduce yourself to the audience?

>> Carly Okyle: Hi everyone. I'm Carly. I am a white woman with I guess medium length brown curly hair and glasses -- seems to be a popular description tonight -- and I'm very happy to be here. I also use the pronouns she her and hers, and I have cerebral palsy. So I'm excited to speak tonight and I think it's going to be a lot of fun.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you Carly, and welcome. Next I would like to introduce Yonatan Koch. Yonatan's bio is also in the chat box. Yonatan is a teacher and an author whose book "so what, I learn differently" is soon to be published. Yonatan has a B.A. in special education and a Master's in education and technology. His bio and links to his book can be found in the chat box. Yonatan will you please briefly introduce yourself?

>> Yonatan Koch: Hi, my name is Yonatan Koch. I am five nine with black hair brown eyes and glasses, and my pronouns are he his and him.

>> Joy Stein: Thanks Yonatan. Our third panelist is Jordyn Zimmerman, who speaks on the national circuit. She is currently a graduate student at Boston College studying curriculum and instruction. Jordyn's bio is in the chat box. Jordyn, welcome. Will you please briefly introduce yourself for us as well?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Thank you Joy. I'm Jordyn, a white woman with brown hair. I am wearing a light blue sweater. My pronouns are she her hers. I am really excited for the discussion this evening.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you and welcome to all of you. Now we can get going with our questions about Intelligent Lives. For those who are watching from home, please feel free to ask your questions via the chat box or the Q&A at the bottom of your computer screen. My first question tonight will be for Jordyn. Jordyn, my first question for you is think about your own life experiences. Have results from IQ testing or other standardized tests impacted positively or negatively your educational college career or relationship outcomes?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Most certainly. I did not have an effective way to communicate until I was 18 years old, so I felt very underestimated by the educational systems. When I was tested in middle school, professionals told my parents that my IQ was somewhere in the 60s. That arbitrary number dictated my education and segregated curriculum involvement. However I was always very aware of my surroundings and in tune with what adults were saying. Similar to Micah in the film, I ultimately googled that number when I was older and was pretty broken when I came to understand what people perceived my worth to be. As a non-speaking autistic student, intelligence testing did not allow me to show the creative ways in which I learn. In general there are so many components that are not factored into the idea of standardized testing, from whether the individual feels safe with the evaluator, to whether or not the test allows for prompting or considers motor movements. For example my reading skills were not able to be assessed in the way one would do, but I was able to read, so it was very problematic for my learning. As a society we unjustly let an IQ score make decisions about a person that forever affects the trajectory of that individual's life.

>> Joy Stein: I'm sorry -- that was quite a response. I'm gonna ask the same question of Carly. Carly, when you think about your life experiences, did results from IQ testing or other standardized tests positively or negatively impact the outcomes -- your educational, employment or relationship outcomes?

>> Carly Okyle: The one that comes to mind for me is the SATs. It's a standardized test and it helped me get into college, it was part of that package. But even then, I was aware that the SATs are problematic in that they are somewhat subjective in the questions that they ask people. And it matters if you have a background that understands certain terminology that's used, if you're from a certain environment where you're comfortable with that language that's on the test. And I was aware in school we would take these California aptitude tests -- they were called CAT tests, and we had to do them as far back as Elementary school. I'm happy to say I have no idea what my results of those tests were, I can't remember. But I just remember being super anxious and stressed out about it. If you can imagine like a little ten-year-old Carly sitting in this class having to take this exam being like "oh my god" and "what if I get it wrong" and what happens and what does that mean -- and I'm so glad that I had no idea what that meant. Because had I watched this movie and had I been aware of how these tests could be used to determine certain things, it would have made it that much more stressful and uncomfortable. So I just think that even if you get lucky, even if those tests work out for you, if you're able to take those classes where they tell you how to pass the standardized tests and you take those lessons, it's still not as effective as a method of measurement of intelligence, which I think we've all learned from the film. But even thinking back, I think that even in terms of college acceptances, there's a lot of work that can be done to make it more accurate.

>> Joy Stein: Do you have ideas about what would be a better test of intelligence than IQ testing?

>> Carly Okyle: I wish I did. That would be a million dollar idea, wouldn't it? No, I can't say that. But I think part of that is getting to know the person. I --kind of -- actually -- I was nervous but I enjoyed my college interview because I liked talking to the person, having them get to know me, and so maybe I wouldn't answer a question on a test correctly, but if I was given the opportunity to express myself through a conversation and they could see what I was interested in or the kind of person I was, the kind of humor I had, if that happened to pull through at the time, that could have been useful. And I think that part of what we learned from the film is that everyone learns differently. People have many different kinds of intelligence and so the only way to really judge a person is to get to know that person.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Well, while we're on the topic of IQ, let me turn to Yonatan, who can talk about personal experiences and he's also a teacher. Yonatan, do you feel that IQ determines potential?

>> Yonatan Koch: No. I feel that potential can be determined by what a student is willing to and able to do on a daily basis. I mean, I don't blame but I think due to my learning disabilities there are learning differences -- well, I don't test well, and an IQ is only there to show how you test. I am able to do a lot more than I was able to do at five when I couldn't read write talk or walk properly, and as a show of that I'm now having graduated college and I'm writing a book. And I just think that an IQ is a number and if you can't do something because of a number or if you're believed that you can't do something because of a number, then who are you gonna prove to, besides the tester, that you can do something? When people see me on a daily basis they say, oh, you can do this. And through interviews that I've had, people say you can do this. And I couldn't imagine you having done this based on an IQ, and these are usually people who do testing. And I just feel that an IQ is a number and potential is so much more than a number.

>> Joy Stein: Well, and clearly you have been able to demonstrate your abilities by all that you have achieved. In your life, do you feel like that you were judged based on your IQ, or maybe treated differently or perhaps unfairly because of your IQ?

>> Yonatan Koch: I mean thankfully the teachers that I worked with on a daily basis didn't have a clear knowledge of my IQ, because that wasn't shared between the psychologists and the teachers. And we as teachers don't necessarily know our students' IQ, we just know what they're capable of. And I don't feel that I was judged based on an IQ, thank goodness. I feel that I was judged on my abilities on a daily basis.

>> Joy Stein: Wonderful, thank you. You know what -- we just had a question from the audience so I can throw it out to whichever panelist would like to answer. The question was "what therapy that you may have participated in do you feel helped you the most to reach your potential?"

>> Yonatan Koch: I'll be happy to answer that.

>> Joy Stein: Oh thank you!

>> Yonatan Koch: I believe speech therapy, because at the age of five, as I said, I couldn't read write talk or walk properly. And through all my speech therapists, which I had many of and I had for many years, I was -- I am now able to talk properly and write properly and I now know my r's from my l's, and I can pronounce my r's and my l's which I couldn't do even in grade school.

>> Joy Stein: Okay. I'm so glad it was so helpful to you. Jordyn or Carly, do either of you want to answer that question? If not --

>> Carly Okyle: I would say all of them. I had many. I had physical therapy, occupational therapy, I had speech therapy, and as an adult I have psychoanalytic therapy. And all of them are incredibly helpful. When I was young I had plastic braces on my leg that went up to my knees. I was able to use those therapies to get stronger and improve my muscles so that walking and other things like fine motor through occupational therapy became easier. And it was just about living my daily life. And I wouldn't have the life that I have now if not for those early intervention therapies. They have been incredibly helpful. And in fact, I think my family saw the effect of this, because my father changed his job to become an occupational therapy assistant in the middle of his career and my brother became a physical therapist. And I think in part -- I can't take credit for all of those things just by myself, but I think part of their interest in this area may have been that they saw the incredible benefit that I got from participating in those.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Jordyn, did you want to answer that question?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: I'd say a communication device, so not a therapy per se, but access to effective and appropriate supports.

>> Joy Stein: Okay, thank you. You know what, Jordyn, while you're here, I will ask you another question relating to communication. Do you think that if people communicate in non-traditional ways that it affects how they are perceived?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Absolutely. Although speech is just one modality of communication, for some reason our society values spoken communication over everything else. People value phone conversations more than texting, and spoken language in meetings more than written communication in emails. However, there is nothing inherently superior about speech in comparison to other forms of communication. We all have the thoughts in our head, it's just a matter of getting all those words out. So the emphasis should not be the mere type but on making sure everyone has access to the method of communication that works for them. Still, people perceive individuals differently based on how they share information. When I was in undergrad, I got referred to as Siri based on my voice. I was asked if I was really a student on campus and how I could live in a residence hall. People question the validity of my responses when my answers are pre-typed. People who use alternative means of communication are frequently presumed to be less competent.

>> Joy Stein: Well, and you certainly prove to us that that is not the case. Thank you so much for sharing that answer with us. I am going to move on to a question for Carly. Carly, some people say that inclusive school and life experiences are only open to those with strong family support systems. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

>> Carly Okyle: I agree up to a point. I think that you do need a strong support system. In my case it was my family. My parents were strong advocates and they taught me to advocate for myself. Not everybody has that. But it doesn't need to be a family per se. But you need someone in your corner. You need a teacher like Yonatan that bonds with you, that sees the potential and gets to know you in class, and knows all you can do. And maybe if it's not a teacher, it's a guidance counselor, it's a person at the place where you hang out the most. You need some adult that's willing to fight for you, because when you're a little kid you're essentially powerless. You don't know how the system works. You don't know what is expected of you or how these things are going to impact you later. And even if you did know, I'm not sure you would have the language to express what you're trying to say, through no fault of your own, just because you're little. And so you need someone, you need some support, some person that's willing to say "I know this person and they deserve this opportunity. This person can handle these challenges. This person has the ability to do more than you are giving them credit for, and you should open up these opportunities to this person." And if it's not your family, then it has to be somebody else. But expecting a child to navigate that by themselves without having a support system would be unfathomable.

>> Joy Stein: Right. And what about for children who maybe don't have a parent who's a strong advocate for them. Do you think that they kind of get lost in the system and maybe don't get all the services that could benefit them?

>> Carly Okyle: I think that's entirely possible and that's why the role of teachers and other adults in your community -- maybe it's a religious leader, maybe it's a family friend who's not officially your parent but someone who has known you for years and is maybe aware of some resources that are available. In the movie, one of the students, her parents didn't speak english if I recall correctly. And she was in a trade school where they weren't paying her fairly and she worked very hard, and it was just -- it was not a good experience. And the parents basically said in the movie we had no idea. We didn't know. We were told this was a good school and we trusted the people in the system, and we had no way of knowing otherwise. Thankfully it was found out and she was moved out of that situation into a far better and appropriate experience, but it was just because she didn't have someone there that could be aware of that, that could help her, that knew what to look out for. And it's not her parents fault --

>> Joy Stein: Right.

>> Carly Okyle: It can be -- you know, they don't give -- there's no handbook on this, of how to navigate these challenges, and everyone's just doing the best they can. But if you are someone that doesn't have a strong advocate in your corner, then it's going to be that much harder.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Yonatan, how could parents tell or teach their children how to be supportive of classmates -- I guess classmates that are not neurotypical?

>> Yonatan Koch: I think the easiest way and the best way for students to learn how to understand their classmates is by being in a class with them when they're in an inclusion setting, and they see that one or two of the kids need help, they can actually help them and they can sit next to them or they can take notes for them. For many years I had a note taker which was one of my classmates and they would sign up to take notes and help me with the note-taking process. And one of them said to me one day "you're just like all of us." And that was the nicest thing that anybody has ever said to me. And I said "yes, but I need some extra help." And just by pairing students who are neurotypical with students who have special needs it will help students to understand each other and that's the best way in a classroom for a student to learn is from one another.

>> Joy Stein: Well boy, actually that -- you lead me right into my next question for you Yonatan, what you kind of just answered which is do you support inclusion?

>> Yonatan Koch: Totally 100 percent beyond a doubt. If it weren't for inclusion students would not make so many gains and so much success. I made success because I was in classes with students who didn't have special needs as well as students who had special needs, and you have to put students together. And if you take those special needs students and put them in a room with other special needs students and don't let them experience anything but being with students who have special needs, they won't benefit as much and they won't learn as much and they won't become -- working to their potential of what they could by being included with students who don't and do have special needs.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Jordyn, I have a question about inclusion for you as well. What benefit does inclusive education such as the experiences of Nair and Micah seem to provide to those who are included, both in and out of school?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: When students with disabilities are included, everyone benefits. Every student should be able to tackle education in the same way. We should all face high expectations, be given the chance to reach our potential, and also have that important opportunity to fail. While inclusion can be challenging, as hard as it can be, it is even harder to transition someone into a full life in the community and the workplace if they are not interacting with their peers from the beginning. Inclusion teaches everyone in the classroom to accept students with disabilities and value their contributions, to adapt to various challenges and celebrate strengths. When we learn alongside our peers, it keeps our personal expectations high, and when expectations are high we naturally perform better. If that is happening in the school which is the hub of a community, it is more likely to happen in other environments too, which then opens the door to us living alongside our peers as independently as we may choose. Inclusion is truly about relationships, high expectations and perseverance. When our society fails to include, we limit everyone's potential as humans.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Wow, that was a great answer. Question about the media for Carly. What are some specific portrayals of people with disabilities in the media art or literature that bother you? What are some portrayals that you appreciate?

>> Carly Okyle: I think what always bothered me was when they used a character with a disability as a sort of PSA on the tv show. Like, it had nothing to do with the major overarching plot, you saw them for one episode and then never again. And the whole point of that episode is like "people with disabilities are people! Oh my god, I've never thought of this!" And they learn their lesson at the end and then everyone sort of goes their separate ways. That character is never mentioned, never brought back, and it's really just heavy-handed and ultimately pointless, because the next week, things go back to normal. And that always kind of really bothered me. But I'm happy to say that these days, certainly things are a lot better. You have main characters that have disabilities and sometimes those disabilities are mentioned and talked about. And sometimes that character is just living their life and not every discussion that they have is about the disability that they have. There was -- the son on Breaking Bad, the son of the main character, had cerebral palsy and used crutches to walk. I don't think he ever talked about it with his parents except for when they were trying to teach him how to drive because he had to use his feet a certain way on the pedals and they wanted to make sure he was able to do that. But other than that, it was like "who's taking you to school today?" "Do you have a lot of homework?" And that was it. And honestly, mostly he just ate breakfast. But that felt real to me. I grew up in a house with a parent -- two parents and a brother, and I can count the number of times that we had a serious like "let's talk about how your disability is affecting your life" on one hand. You know? For the most part we were just going about our daily routine. So I thought that felt really real to me and that was really great. Also, just because, I'm a West Wing fan, I loved Joey Lucas, who is Marlee Matlin, on that show. And again, mostly her role on the show was that she was a pollster, she took polls and got people's opinions, and she was valued for her work. She was good at what she did, she was talented and smart and respected and that was her character. And she happened to be deaf, but it wasn't a major point.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Does anybody else want to respond to that question - Yonatan or Jordyn - about how people with disabilities are portrayed positively or negatively in the media?

>> Yonatan Koch: Sure. The Good Doctor, I think - you have a great portrayal of kids on the autistic spectrum or adults on the autistic spectrum just which -- the way they treat autism, and they don't make everything about "oh my god, he can't do that, he can't do that, he can't do that." But they treat him like a regular doctor.

>> Joy Stein: So there were -- the expectations of him were the same as they are for anybody else right? Yeah.

>> Yonatan Koch: Yes, 'cause they expected him to come and do the job and they didn't say "oh, you're not going to do the job because of your diagnosis." It's just so nice to watch the show treating him like any other doctor and requiring him to do the tasks of any other doctor.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. You know what, I have another question for you, Yonatan, that came from the audience. How can we as parents best advocate for our kids with regard to higher education and job development and training?

>> Yonatan Koch: I think parents can help their kids in higher education by helping them to write essays and apply to college on their own. And every college has -- that I looked at had programs for students with special needs, and my parents were really helpful and and my special ed teachers were really helpful in looking at the colleges and looking at what the college has to offer. And I believe that going to college was very beneficial. And not to say that I wouldn't be going to college because of my learning disabilities or learning differences, would have been stigmatizing to me and looking at all my peers going to college, but I don't think I answered your question properly. Can you repeat the question?

>> Joy Stein: There's no right or wrong answer. No, your answer was fine. I have another question from the audience for any panelists who would like to answer. What experiences have you had in either feeling that your strengths have been catered to, or the opposite, that your needs weren't met because people didn't look at your strengths? Anybody want to take a shot at that one?

>> Yonatan Koch: Sure.

>> Carly Okyle: Can you repeat the question?

>> Joy Stein: I sure can. What experiences have you had in either feeling that your strengths have been catered to, or the opposite, that your needs weren't met because people didn't look at your strengths? So in other words, if someone looked at your test score, maybe your test score wasn't good but it didn't really reflect your abilities, right? So feeling that people catered to what they thought you were capable of when maybe you were capable of a lot more, because people didn't look at your strengths.

>> Carly Okyle: I think I've been very fortunate in that -- I think that -- not that I've necessarily been catered to, but that I've been given opportunities to prove myself and to show what I can do. I played sports when I was growing up, and I wasn't the best on the team, certainly, but I definitely wasn't the worst one, which was pretty cool. I was given the opportunity to play. They never took a look at at me and my braces and my awkward limping gait and said "oh, there's no space for you here." They allowed me the opportunity to play sports with my friends and it was great. It was a really wonderful time. And I took part in an Americorps program, the National Civilian Community Corps, and I ended up doing a lot of construction, which is so not a strength I have at all. I would not want to live in one of the houses that I had any hand in building, I'll be completely honest, but I was given the opportunity to have that experience with a group of people. And when I discovered that I couldn't nail down a joist to save my life, I found other ways to contribute. I made sure that all the volunteers had water. I kept the children busy and out of the way and entertained, so that the adults could build the houses. I tried to do some light painting and kind of screwed it up, and then went over it and did a better job, you know? I was just -- I was given a shot and that was all I needed. I didn't need to be catered to, I just needed an open door.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. Jordyn, I have a question for the audience for you. Someone wanted to know who helped you find your voice and what were some of the things that you said once you had a way to communicate? I have to imagine you had so much to say.

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: My family was a strong advocate for me, especially my mom. My mom was in a disagreement with our school district, and an attorney who is going to help came to our house to meet me. She asked how she could possibly learn more about my experiences in school from my point of view, and if I had an effective way to share my thoughts. My mom explained that I had a device but I did not use it consistently. She got it out and sat on the couch, at which time I sat next to her and began touching pictures and words to make sentences, slowly explaining my frustrations. I shared years of educational pitfalls that I experienced and what I wanted for my future. It was years in the works, I just happened to be ready on the day.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. You know what, maybe Jordyn, I will -- I'll ask you another question since you were on the screen right now. And this question has to do with IQ, which there was certainly a lot about IQ testing in the film. Why do you think that IQ tests remain so prominent in our culture?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Our society puts a whole lot of emphasis on standardized testing, which include IQ tests. It's an extremely powerful way to exclude people from our world. The questions and strategies are also used to justify racism and segregate people based on socioeconomic status and ability. This is easy for people to continue to do because it conforms to harmful biases that still exist today. Although we all know that the IQ is a meaningless number, people still believe that it can be used to estimate someone's success. However, the concept of someone being intelligent can mean many different things, dependent upon the environment a person is in. Everyone has different strengths and areas that they care about. We should not be looking at a number to decide whether a child will have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma or be meaningfully employed.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you, great answer. Let's see. Yonatan, in your experience, do you feel that students with a label of intellectual disability are encouraged and supported to pursue higher education? Well, I don't think they are, I think they should be. There's no reason to say that a student with the low intellectual number or low IQ number should not be given the opportunity to pursue a higher education, and we need to look at people first, opposed to their diagnosis. We need to look at people for what their abilities are, not what a label can say that they can do. Labels are just a word on paper, it's not necessarily what we're able to do, right? And I think Micah in the film helped prove the point that you just made. Right? Like, I think he really exceeded the expectations that people may have had. He was a perfect example of not letting a number stop you or stop what you are able to do, and not letting a label stop from what the world should expect of you.

>> Joy Stein: I agree with you. Carly, I have a question about romance for you. Do you think that intellectual disability plays a role in a person's ability to develop and maintain romantic relationships? Why or why not?

>> Carly Okyle: I think that's a tough question. I first want to say that I understand if there's a general hesitance for people to be unsure about that kind of relationship for people with intellectual disabilities, because in 2018, NPR did a study with statistics from the Justice Department that showed that people with intellectual disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate of seven times higher than people without intellectual disabilities. So there is genuine cause for concern. You want to keep people safe, and you don't want to put them in a situation that they can't -- that they're not ready for, and that they can't advocate for themselves and keep themselves safe. So I understand if people are kind of like, oh, I don't know can people do this? Having said that, I think that it is -- it should be, if it's not already considered a basic need, that everyone has love and connection in their lives. And sometimes, you know, just as intelligence is different on an individual basis and there are different kinds of intelligence for everyone, there's different kinds of romance for everyone. And so for some people, that intimacy is just sharing your life. For some people romance means, you know, getting married. For some people there's a sexual component of their relationship, but not for everyone. It's just a matter of what each person is capable of, and ultimately what it comes down to is do you find a partner that respects you and makes you better, and you enjoy being with and spending time with. And if that's -- if you can find that person then I don't see why you should be limited, why you shouldn't be allowed to look for that person, to find that person, to have those experiences as long as everyone's doing it safely.

>> Joy Stein: So really what you're saying is that all people want to have those same experiences, they want to have those same connections, and those same relationships. And I think what we don't want to happen is that maybe, for someone who has an intellectual disability, for them to be taken advantage of, right?

>> Carly Okyle: Right. But that would just be an unsuitable partner. Right? You wouldn't want to be in a relationship with someone that is taking advantage of you in any way. So yeah, I think -- I don't see any reason why there should be a limit on that.

>> Joy Stein: That's -- a great point and that's a really important topic. I have a question for any of the panelists who would like to answer. Someone in the audience wondered who your -- who role models and mentors have been for you as you have grown into adults?

>> Carly Okyle: If I say my parents, is that cheesy? [laughter] And I kind of know they're watching. So no, but it's true. My parents, my brother have been big mentors and role models for me certainly. Okay was there anyone I don't know throughout your --

>> Carly Okyle: Yonatan started answering and then I think I cut him off.

>> Yonatan Koch: That's okay!

>> Joy Stein: I will come back to you and it's -- okay, go ahead Yonatan.

>> Yonatan Koch: As Carly said, in addition to my parents have been major role models, but the people I really have to give credit to are my special education teachers. My special education teachers never gave up on me, as much as I annoyed them, as much as I asked them rhetorical questions, they never looked down on me and they never gave up on me, and they kept encouraging me. And they worked with my parents and they helped my parents. And these special education teachers are just who I owe all credit to, which is why I wanted to become a special education teacher.

>> Joy Stein: That's great, so they were such a great role model that they encouraged you to pursue that as a career.

>> Yonatan Koch: Definitely.

>> Joy Stein: That's wonderful. Jordyn, do you want to answer that question?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: I have a lot of role models in DC. I interned on the hill in 2019, and met a lot of amazing and dynamic disability advocates who are great friends and mentors.

>> Joy Stein: What are some ways that individuals express their intelligence if they're unable to communicate verbally, and was there any examples you saw of this in the film Intelligent Lives?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Communication is constant. Although I may not express myself through spoken words, I type on an iPad to share my thoughts about different things going on throughout our world. Communication is so much more than speech. People in the film communicated through their breathing patterns, changes in posture, gestures, art and overall body movements. There was never a scene where everyone was not communicating in some form. This is true wherever you are. Although spoken language may be the most widely looked for or accepted method, this does not mean that everyone is not always communicating through other means.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you.

>> Carly Okyle: Isn't there something that says that 90% of all communication is non-verbal? I thought I read that somewhere that -- or if not 90%, then at least the majority of communication between people happens non-verbally, as Jordyn said, with posture, with breathing, with eye contact or lack thereof, or nervous tics or gestures.

>> Yonatan Koch: I remember seeing that somewhere.

>> Joy Stein: Yonatan, I'll ask you another question since you're on the screen. You are a teacher and you have learning disabilities What qualifications does one with intellectual disabilities bring to the position of being a teacher?

>> Yonatan Koch: I'm sorry?

>> Joy Stein: Well, so, do you feel, because you grew up with a learning disability that that gives you some special skills in being a teacher, that you maybe are able to understand your students better or you can relate better to your students?

>> Yonatan Koch: I think so, because I'm able I know what my students are going through or I know what some of them are going through. We don't always know everything that another person is going through, no matter how closely we are relatable to them, but because of what I went through, I think I can relate to some of the things that different students of mine are going through, and I can be more compassionate towards those students. And it makes me a better teacher because I know sometimes how they feel.

>> Joy Stein: Yeah. I think that's probably a good point and you probably do have -- have an empathy that someone who didn't grow up with some of the challenges that you might have had growing up had. And so you -- I'm sure you probably can relate better to your students. I'm sure they love and respect having you as a teacher. This is a question for any of the panelists. What do you -- this is from the audience -- what do you wish that the film covered that it didn't cover? So what subject or topic do you think maybe they skipped over?

>> Yonatan Koch: Wow, it was a very good film. I mean, it covered so much material and it was so intriguing, and I'm at a loss to think about what it didn't cover because it was so inspiring.

>> Joy Stein: Okay, that's a very fair answer.

>> Carly Okyle: I think I just wish that it kept going. Like, it ended, but I wanted to see more. You know, what happened with that art program when they were going to work on that student's art portfolio, you know, how did that go? What happened after Micah graduated? What was his work experience like? What happened to that girl Megan? Are they still going out? I just had questions because I was invested in their stories and I wanted to see more of them but I understand that the film had to end sometime, so --

>> Joy Stein: Great, I kind of thought that too. And I kind of wondered how are they all managing now during the pandemic? They were all very social, and I -- at the end of it that was where my mind went, was how are they all doing now and what are they all doing with their time and their lives right now? So that's kind of where I went. Thank you. Jordyn, I don't know if you are working on an answer for that one.

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: I agree. Like every good film, I want to know more.

>> Joy Stein: Okay, I think we all feel the same way. We'd like a sequel. Maybe we can reach out to Dan Habib, the filmmaker, and let him know we need a sequel. Naieerâ€™s teacher made a comment -- and this question can be for anybody -- whether it's college, trade school or something else, students need something beyond a high school education. Going to college for the sake of going to college isn't important. Going to college for the sake of bettering his life financial success. Do you agree with the teacher's statement, that students need something beyond high school? Do you think that's important?

>> Yonatan Koch: I think it is. I mean, going beyond high school, whether it's a job or a profession or college, is just so important. I know a student who I once had who said "I'm going to play video games when I finish high school." And I said what are you going to do to have a successful life? And he really didn't know, and he had to think about it. And we had a discussion about it, and I wish I knew where he was today. But it's really important to have a career or have a goal in mind and continue life after high school.

>> Joy Stein: Alright. And this question actually is for Carly. So there's a statement in the film that says that our society overvalues college and undervalues the trades. Do you agree with that statement and how do you think this perspective might impact individuals with intellectual disabilities in terms of receiving encouragement to consider higher education?

>> Carly Okyle: I do agree with that statement. And I feel slightly hypocritical because I went to college, I didn't go to trade school, but I do agree that it's -- the importance of it is over inflated. To answer your last question, I was going to say that lifelong learning is important. Learning beyond high school is important. If that happens on a college campus, great. If it happens in a trade school, awesome. If it happens just as you're going through life and you're meeting different people and you're having new experiences, great. As long as you're continuing to learn something. And there's all this emphasis that's placed on, you know, college college college. And maybe at one time it was far more helpful, but now you have a whole bunch of people with these really impressive degrees and nowhere to work, and they're stuck on the intern carousel forever, and it's frustrating. Whereas, there are spots in trade schools that are empty and not thought about as much, but those opportunities are just as valid, and they're important, and they lead to important work that is -- that needs to be done. And there used to be a show by the guy that did Dirty Jobs, I think his name was Mike Rowe, and there used to be a show about the importance of learning those trades and I'm -- now that I'm mentioning it, I'm forgetting what it was called, of course I am. But I do wish that they were talked about more as options. Because if you don't learn the best way in the classroom setting, maybe working with your hands is better for you, and that's the way that you learn better. You shouldn't be made to feel less than because you would rather work as a mechanic than go to college. There's nothing wrong with having that experience instead, and if that is more valuable to you and if that is more helpful to you, then that's what you should be able to do without any sort of stigma.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you. You know what, we are drawing to a close here so I'm going to ask one final question to whichever panelists would like to answer. This is a question from the audience. Do any of the panelists have any ideas of what else can be done to give persons with disabilities like yourselves good opportunities for gainful employment?

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: Everything starts when children are young. We are doing a really bad job at providing services and supports as students move through each tier of their learning. Special education should not mean separate, so inclusion is important for ensuring success and gainful employment. If we are starting somewhere, we need to reframe what that looks like because we haven't mastered it at all. The school is the hub of the community.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you.

>> Carly Okyle: I would say that at the national speakers bureau, we talk about how if you have employees with disabilities, they are more loyal to the company and they come up with solutions to problems. They're very solution oriented and you should be -- companies should be encouraged to expand their hiring bubble specifically to look for people with disabilities, and to reach out to those people because they're valuable to organizations. And I think if that idea sort of picks up steam, if we can again get rid of that stigma of being someone with a disability in the workforce, if we could instead choose to choose to change the narrative and talk to organizations and say, hey look, there's a really wide talent pool here that you haven't tapped into yet, and these are all of the benefits that they can offer you by being on your staff. You're not doing anyone a favor, you're helping yourself, right? And if we can make those organizations understand that and sort of encourage that line of thought, I think that would be a very effective thing to do to sort of change those attitudes, and hopefully doors will start opening.

>> Joy Stein: Thank you, great answer. I want to thank the panelists Carly and Jordyn and Yonatan. You guys did an amazing job putting yourselves out there and answering these questions. A lot of them were surprise questions from the audience, and you did so well. I really want to thank our speakers. Of course, I want to thank our filmmaker Dan Habib for making the film. I would like to thank Sarah and Christine, our ASL interpreter and our closed captioner. And of course we partnered - the Edlavitch DCJCC partnered on this event with RespectAbility and the Poses JCC of Northern Virginia. And again, this event was part of Jewish disability awareness month. So I just want to thank everybody for the panelists again for your time and your preparation in this, and for all the attendees who came, I want to thank you so much for listening to what these amazing young adults had to share with us, and I think we've probably all been very inspired by them. And I think in the chat box there are lots of upcoming events that the different organizations have coming up, so those are in the chat box. Oh I'm sorry Jordyn, it looks like did you have an answer for one more question. Jordyn, it looks like there's a note in the chat box, and if you prepared an answer I don't want to skip over you.

>> Jordyn Zimmerman: I think it's different for everyone. No one's experience is the same.

>> Joy Stein: Okay and that was in relation to how typical was the experiences of the people in the film. Thank you. All right, well thank you so much. So with that, I will close out this meeting, unless anybody else has -- any of the other speakers have any final words they want to add. Otherwise again, I again thank the panel and the organizations that we partnered with, and I'm glad you were all able to join us. Thank you!