>> Ollie Cantos: Hello everyone! My name is Ollie Cantos and I'm chairman of the board of directors here at RespectAbility. We are so excited to have the presence of all of you today, whether you are here with us live or you are watching the recording later on. We, today, get to share with you our vision for the future, not only within the context of the organization, but also how we get to strive together to build support for enhanced opportunities in the lives of people with disabilities all across this country. We are so grateful to have you here, especially from a partnership context. As we talk today I would like to invite all of you to think about how you may partner with us, whatever way that may show itself, because we here at RespectAbility are a team that dedicates ourselves to building strong partnerships. By way of background and for visual reference, I am a filipino man, middle aged wearing a black cap and also a black dress shirt, and my preferred -- and my pronouns are he him and his. And so when we think about the future and as we dedicate ourselves to this discussion, we are going to be going through our strategic plan that sets our collective vision for the future. And that vision necessarily involves all of you, as we think proactively about how we can work in common cause and in closer partnership with one another by combining our resources and energy and knowledge and know-how in order to build support for people with disabilities and alongside fellow people with disabilities. I am so grateful today to have with us our three vice chairs here at RespectAbility. Delbert Whetter is a man who I really respect and he is someone who has been active in the entertainment industry for a number of years. He is deaf and he also has been a wonderful example of promoting positive effective practices with regard to inclusion of people with disabilities behind the camera. And so he later on will be talking about public attitudes and and our efforts as an organization to shape public attitudes that impact the entire community, based on how we as people with disabilities are portrayed. Next -- we're going to to be having Randall Duchesneau, who is a vice chair of ours as well. And he is a man who is respected throughout government, who is a member of -- the staff of the United States access board, and he also is a founding member of the Philadelphia chapter of United Spinal association. And he is a magnificent leader and he will be talking to us later about our leadership work and our work in public policy. And next we have our third person who serves as vice chair, Vivian Bass, who has been here with RespectAbility since the very founding of our organization. And she has been absolutely magnificent. She is a leader who is known throughout the country. In fact, she is concluding time as chair of one national nonprofit and she's getting ready to move into the chairship of another national nonprofit. And she will be talking about faith inclusion, as well as the broader future with regard to our budget, our expansion and where we see things heading. And so to set the tone, and to provide further background for those of you who may not have known more about the work of RespectAbility in the past, I'm going to ask in a moment that a 90-second video be cued up that will provide an overview of the work here at RespectAbility. And the narrator of of this video is Zazel O'Garrah, who is a member of our Speakers Bureau. And she will verbally set out our vision. And by way of description, the pictures that will be shown in that video will be different team members who constitute RespectAbility, and it is absolutely magnificent, when getting ready to see all of that. So with that I'd like now to -- actually before that, I actually wanted to bring up one other thing. With regard to the strategic planning process, this was the result of a year's work involving every member of our board of directors --there are 30 of us -- and board of advisors, as well as input from a number of stakeholders including non-profit organizations and foundations, and other supporters. And we have worked really hard to craft a united vision for the future. It took an entire year to get that done. And the reason why we wanted to be so deliberative is because we firmly believe that by aspirationally striving high that we truly can bring the entire disability community to an entirely new level because of partnership with all of you. So with that, I'd like to ask for Eric to play the video.

VIDEO PLAYS

>> Ollie Cantos: Now I'd like to turn over the time to Del. Del?

>> Delbert Whetter: Hello. I'm going to start explaining my facial features. I'm a middle-aged white man with glasses a blue shirt with a blue curtain behind me and a bookshelf. Hello. So I'm Delbert Whetter. I'm the vice chairman of RespectAbility. One of the first steps in a strategic plan is determine who are you serving. There are 61 million people with disabilities in America. Many people don't realize how common disability is. Disabilities can be temporary or permanent, visible or non-visible, from birth or acquired later, which can happen to anyone at any time. People with disabilities experience barriers in everyday life that is not caused by their disability, but by society’s attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities. It is important to remember that people with disabilities have just as much talent as people without disabilities. People with disabilities want opportunities, just like anyone else. And that really is what we're all about at RespectAbility, unlocking potential and enabling people with disabilities with more opportunities to use their talents. But today only 65% of people with disabilities finish high school, and only 7% of people born with disabilities complete college. And we recognize there is a severe lack of equity in these statistics when it comes to intersectionality among people with disabilities. We see this as a call to action for us to do more to support more equity for persons with disabilities who are BIPOC, and other intersectional, marginalized and underrepresented identities. We recognize the intersection of racism and ableism is a really big challenge and we are committed to confronting this head-on. Only one in three people with disabilities has a job. We're working to ensure success for people with disabilities by creating change and impact. What makes us successful? First and foremost, we are people with disabilities ourselves. Yes, we have fabulous allies, but the majority of our team have disabilities, from myself to our chairman to most of our staff. The second thing is that we serve people with all disabilities. There are many fabulous organizations that may serve people specific disabilities, but there are very few that really combine the connective power, knowledge, and wisdom of all people with disabilities across the spectrum. The third thing that really drives us is our “opportunity agenda” that includes education, employment, entrepreneurship, access, civic engagement for the 7 million students with disabilities, and the 22 million working age adults with disabilities, so that's really our niche. Half of our board and a third of our staff are members of BIPOC communities. We’re also diverse in sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as age, and political, faith and socioeconomic backgrounds. We also focus on systemic change, and we're doing it through authentic talent, who have lived disability experience, and we really valued partnerships in our strategic plan. Our three most important core tenets overall are diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility - so that we are fully including the community that we serve. The second thing is collaboration -- we don't believe that we have the best answers to everything. Working with valuable partners and allies, some of whom are directly impacted by the issues that we're working on, can lead us to the best solutions. And third is commitment to performance metrics. We are change agents, and part of that work requires identifying where we can make impact, and measuring that impact to ensure effective and equitable outcomes. Our mission is threefold- First is changing attitudes: increasing diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. Why? Because we believe that when society values people with disabilities just like anyone else, barriers will begin to fall and our contributions to society will go up. Second is advancing opportunities: We seek & promote best practices in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement so people with disabilities can succeed, just like anyone else. Third is developing diverse leaders in all areas of our work. You will note that these three aspects are in a Venn diagram, because you can’t have one without the others. Another one of our values is transparency. We put on our website and on Guidestar what our demographics are for our organization. We’re always trying to do better on every aspect of diversity, equity and inclusion, because we know this is an ongoing journey that deserves our focus and intentional efforts. We have four main program areas. Those are policy and practices, entertainment and news media, leadership development, and faith inclusion. There have been some major accomplishments in these areas. We worked on the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which supported the dramatic increase in the number of jobs for people with disabilities. We worked on over 200 different productions in Hollywood, including the Emmy winning series Born this Way which led to a shift in audiences’ and the entertainment industry’s perceptions of people with disabilities. We've met one on one with 48 governors and provided testimony in every state and at the federal level. Thousands of people have been to our trainings, in person and online, and 300 plus people have gone through our leadership program – this is important because they are the future. The first program area we want to discuss in more detail is entertainment and news media. Why? Because people have to see people with disabilities for what they can do. Not one time, but over and over again. A single TV show or movie with characters with disabilities, played by authentic actors with disabilities, is always wonderful, but it is not enough by itself. There needs to be message repetition. We must see authentic representations, stories, and performers on screen over and over and over until it becomes normalized, expected, until audiences begin to see us as capable of becoming their friends, loved ones, co-workers, employees, or bosses. In order for this to happen, we must first make an impact on how these stories are created for the screen. That means working behind the scenes to ensure disabled voices and ideas are part of the creative process, using our knowledge of the entertainment and media industry to communicate in a language that they understand, and connecting experienced and trained professionals with disabilities with opportunities. Our award winning Lab for Entertainment Professionals with Disabilities, which just finished its 3rd year, is a big part of that plan. Our strategic plan calls for us to continue to measure people’s attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities. Polling is very clear today that people with disabilities are seen for what they cannot do. So we will keep polling to make sure that we're making an impact. We will keep working in Hollywood, and our plan is to do more with the news media as well. There should be people with disabilities who are reporters and journalists, on the front lines and in the news stations. Next up are policy and practices and Leadership, so I’m going to turn it over to Randall Duchesenau.

>> Randall Duchesneau: Thank you very much Delbert. I'm Randall Duchesneau. I'm an Asian American, I'm a quadriplegic and a power wheelchair user. I'm also vice chairman of RespectAbility's board of directors. I'm joining you today wearing a shirt and tie and glasses. And my pronouns are he him. And it's my pleasure today to really talk about some of the amazing work that RespectAbility is doing in policy. Our goal is to advance opportunities for people with disabilities and this includes removing barriers people with disabilities face in education, employment, entrepreneurship and civic engagement. Next slide. There are approximately 7 million students with disabilities in American public schools today, the majority of whom – 54% – are black indigenous and people of color. Next slide. As we continue to think about the educational opportunities for people with disabilities, we need to look at the graduation rates for students with disabilities, which are highly problematic compared to students without disabilities. This chart shows that across the board, students with disabilities are less likely to graduate high school than students without disabilities. The discrepancy between high school graduation rates is compounded even more for people of color. This chart shows that African Americans with disabilities are much less likely to graduate high school than other students with disabilities, and this is part of a much larger problem of structural racism which has controlled how we fund public schools. Frequently, racial minorities are not getting the early intervention they need to identify disabilities and get provided with the special educators, mental health support, and IEPs that students with disabilities need so they can stay in school and really succeed in the classroom. Next slide. When we look at employment, there's been very little progress for people with disabilities, despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities act in 1990. On average only one in three working age adults with disabilities are employed. That's far less than the employment rate for racial minorities, women and the overall population in general. Just one third. Next slide. And when you look at the employment rate for working age Americans by disability and race, the numbers are just staggering. The employment rate is so much lower, and you can see how it dramatically affects BIPOC communities. Next slide. We've had many major policy achievements and you can find these achievements on our website and with some of the supplemental materials that we can provide you, but overall, we've influenced policy both at the state level – meeting one-on-one with 48 of America's governors – and also at the federal level, including working with executive orders around diversity equity inclusion and accessibility. Next slide. Now as we look to our strategic plan and who we want to serve, what our goals are, we're very specific. We want to achieve parity for people with and without disabilities in education and in the U.S. workforce. We want people with disabilities to get a good education, and to be able to find employment and have successful careers. We want to be sure that the policies governing our public benefit systems no longer penalize people with disabilities for getting a job. Because right now, if you have a physical disability and rely on personal care attendants to help you with everyday tasks like eating, to getting dressed, to using the restroom, and you've gotten good grades in high school, you've gone to college, and you're about to graduate, you find out that if you get a job and you start earning an income, you literally lose the personal care attendants and healthcare coverage you need, that you rely on to get up in the morning. Policies like this just don't make any sense. We've got to expand opportunities for people with disabilities, give them the opportunity to start their own business, because people with disabilities are innovative problem solvers, and the flexibility of being your own boss just might make more sense for people. We can expand opportunities for disability owned businesses, enterprises, to help them ensure they succeed as entrepreneurs. Next slide. Now I'm going to focus on another program area that we have, and that is leadership development. RespectAbility has had a very strong leadership program for several years. Over 200 people have gone through our leadership program, and they've gone off and started having successful careers. With the pandemic we've shifted it to being all virtual, and it's turned into much more of an apprenticeship program now. The first part begins in-house, where participants in the program do some learning and experiential learning working with us. And then many of them go through the program and will end up with an employer where they'll do learning on the job. It's an earn while you learn opportunity, and we have some of the most talented people in the program. So if you want to hire someone amazing, let us know because we probably have somebody for you. We want to be able to expand the national leadership program and create opportunities for the alumni of that program who are now continuing to rise in their careers and are beginning to mentor others. We want to really expand the training bureau that we have, where speakers who have lived disability experience are teaching people how to do inclusion and accessibility. We also want to start a high school program because right now, we don't have a high school program. Our program had mostly focused on junior year of college and beyond, but there's a lot of opportunity in helping high school students as well and getting them the experience that they need. We also want to see people with disabilities run for office, so we want to be able to start candidate recruitment for people with disabilities, no matter what political party it's for, because we're non-partisan and we believe in good public policy across the board. Now I'd like to turn it over to Vivian who is going to begin by talking a little bit about our faith inclusion.

>> Vivian Bass: Hello, I'm Vivian Bass. I'm a white woman with brown hair wearing glasses and a purple jacket. My pronouns are she her and hers. I too am one of the vice chairs of RespectAbility, and am proud and pleased to have been involved since the very start of our organization. I think it's important for people to know that RespectAbility was started by Jewish disability activists and allies for more inclusion in Jewish faith programs. That was our original DNA, and in fact our co-founders were Jewish, as were most of our Staff. At this point, however, the majority of our team is from a broad range of faith backgrounds, and we're going to work with every kind of faith organization. However this really deep comprehensive program to help on access and inclusion in the Jewish community -- that can be a real model, an effective one for other faith organizations. We've done a lot already to expand access and we're going to continue to do that in the Jewish community. With our new strategic plan we want to reach out to the Christian, the Muslim, Church of Latter-Day Saints, all kinds of faith groups to help ensure full access within the fabric of their communities. It's particularly important because most people may not know that the Americans with Disabilities act does not actually cover faith-based organizations. So as a result, some of the biggest barriers are in faith organizations. And this matters because some of the best human services and organizations are in faith-based communities, or faith-based services. And this also needs to be accessible too and inclusive of people with disabilities. Now you've heard about the four different areas of our work, but as we do that, you'll see on the left hand side our different departments. We also have communications, management and development on our Staff. Right now we have 16 people on our full-time staff. We also have over 30 consultants, mostly working in Hollywood, yet we have 16 full-time Staff. And so what we did as part of the strategic planning process was to specifically go down and figure out for every single thing that we want to do, how many people would it take to do that? What would these job descriptions look like? And how much would we need to pay them? What kind of skills would they need to have? And so we know that we would need 27 more people, which surely is quite a lot. And so the organization also needs to raise a lot of money in order to accomplish that. Our current annual operating budget is about 2.2 million, but to do this right and to really make the difference that we need to make as an organization, we need to be raising 5.8 million a year every year in order to make this difference. I said this was a lot. Of course that sounds like a lot of money, but when you think about an organization serving seven million students with disabilities and 22 million working age adults with disabilities, the per person cost of this impact is really very efficient. Currently almost all of our money comes from foundations, and we're working to diversify our revenue, for example in fee for service, because Hollywood is now paying us to consult on scripts, etc. So we're looking to really diversify our revenue. Our strategic plan is very well detailed, and our full materials online. And so you can go online at any point and download or read on the website the full comprehensive strategic plan, including more details about RespectAbility, about our organizational chart and our budget. However at this point we're ready to have any -- take any questions that you may have. Thank you.

>> Ollie Cantos: Thank you so much Vivian, and now I'd like to turn over the time to Eric Ascher, who will be facilitating our question and answer portion of today's event. Eric?

>> Eric Ascher: Hello everyone. So I'm just going to start by asking some of the questions we have. So how does the strategic plan differ from the original plan back in 2013?

>> Randall Duchesneau: So I guess I can take this question. When we originally did it, it was a much smaller group of people with fewer stakeholders involved, and it was mostly myself and a couple of other people going around and asking people. I think this time there's a lot more emphasis on diversity, because the people who are leading it, including the chair of the strategic planning committee who is an immigrant and bilingual, Vincenzo, so we've made a significant amount of progress just as an organization, how we think about our strategic plan and the professionalism involved in that, and encompassing everything from diversity, to financial planning, et cetera. There's been much more focus on equity, diversity issues, and programs. We really need to work on outreach in mainstream media, Hollywood outreach, the news, the media, and also on civic engagement, and trying to get people with disabilities to run for office. We really see these as some areas where there's a lot of opportunity. And also the new component in leadership development for high school students. I think those are some of the major differences between our current strategic plan and the one prior.

>> Eric Ascher: Okay. So what's your plan to include people with disabilities from all backgrounds in leadership positions in your organization?

>> Ollie Cantos: I think that's a really great question. I'd like to take a stab at this one, especially because it has been in our DNA from the beginning. The way that we do that is by looking at things from an intersectional standpoint. We philosophically recognize that each of us has multiple identities, whether it's political affiliation, racial background, sexual orientation, and so forth. And so what we do actively is we work to build relationships with different organizations within those different segments of the broader population, and we strive to build those partnerships and strengthen those partnerships through finding concrete ways to advance mutual goals. The other thing too that's important for us to talk about here within the context of having people serve at every level is we are already making significant progress in this way. In fact I venture to say that we are among the most diverse and inclusive Staff -- that we have among the most diverse and inclusive Staff within the disability world, because this has just been part of who we are. And when we look at individuals, we also have interwoven throughout -- no matter what people's backgrounds are, we have the philosophy that disability is just a part of who we are. It doesn't necessarily define the whole of who we are, but beyond that, we as people with disabilities need to be afforded the same opportunities to advance, just like every other segment of society. So members of our community are as mean or nice as anyone else, we're just as lazy or ambitious as anyone else, whatever it might happen to be. But what we do here at RespectAbility is that we harness the incredible talent and power and ability of individuals, but geared toward the philosophy of strengthening collective action. So we're not turf oriented here, but we actually strive to --what we strive to do is look at what our lane is in terms of our areas of focus, look at the other areas of focus for others, and then work to support them wherever we can, and in doing that also building into all of that a knowledge of and understanding of people with different backgrounds. Because the more diverse the backgrounds are of the people who are with us, and the more we strive to have that be facilitated at all leadership tables, then the broader the solutions will be, because of reflecting a multitude of perspectives.

>> Eric Ascher: Okay, so we have a follow-up question for you Ollie, and I'm reading it word for word. I'm hearing a lot of lip service about inclusion but not a lot of tangible actions being taken to move beyond the leadership structure of primarily white and jewish perspectives. Ollie, as our chairman can you please address this question?

>> Ollie Cantos: Sure, I absolutely would love to. So first of all, we know that we have a long way to go and we've heard that. But let me be very direct. We have worked really hard not only to talk about this, but also to have it reflected in our Staff. We look at our staff and that's why, with the statistics that were talked about earlier with regard to our makeup both at the Staff level, at all levels within Staff as well as among those of us who are part of the board of directors and board of advisors, it's literally reflected in who we are. So in other words, what we're doing is we're not just talking about it, we're actively promoting it, we're finding opportunities to -- to build those relationships. And that includes in everything that we do. That includes within Hollywood, and within the arena of public policy, and communications and leadership development. We see a whole pipeline developing over time of making sure to factor in accessibility and intersectionality. And actually for us, it isn't lip service, it's literally our chosen philosophy as a culture, as an organization. And we love that! The reason why we're so enthusiastic about this is not because of any sort of window dressing, or addressing some sort of number, but actually because of the reality that every single person with different backgrounds has something concrete to offer. And the only way to move forward to that is to talk about that, but beyond that, to really advocate hard for the overlap of intersectionality with everything that we do, in public policy and communications, in leadership development, and in all of the work that we do besides.

>> Eric Ascher: Thank you. So, looking through the questions. So what will RespectAbility's work look like in five years time? How will things be different, better or worse for the disability community?

>> Gabe Gomez: Delbert says I can answer from my Hollywood inclusion group.

>> Delbert Whetter: I think in five years, 10 years time -- I like to think long term. For example in our program, we -- our numbers went up working on different TV shows people in production. And my goal in the long term is to have more disabled people, and it'll be less about access, it'll be more about because people are hiring disabled writers and directors and producers. When we have more of those people, we'll have less of a need to find diversity. It will make better stories. They'll naturally make better entertainment and have better performances because it's authentic. So again, we just really have to make sure we keep making those connections in Hollywood and getting those people and disabled professionals in those right places.

>> Randall Duchesneau: This is Randall, and from speaking from the policy perspective, you know, there's so much I hope we can achieve in the next five years. There's a lot of work we've been doing on that and results are finally starting to be seen. For example, the workforce innovation and opportunity act, which is 17 billion dollars a year in funding that goes to workforce programs -- we've worked so hard on making sure that that funding in those programs are accessible to people with disabilities. In various states, there were a lot of issues where the job portals were not even accessible to people who are visually impaired. So now those changes are being made, job applications are being made more accessible, because we can't have that barrier be there right at the beginning. If you can't even apply for the job because the job application isn't accessible, it's just not right. So we're starting to see a lot of changes there and we're hoping that it will make its way into the employment rates, and improve those employment rates for people with disabilities. And also, you know, the pandemic has dramatically shifted the way our organization operates. You know, going virtual like this. And it's happened not only in our organization but in companies, you know, across the country, across the world. And a reasonable accommodation of telework, which before was pushed back so hard by management and didn't seem reasonable, we know we can do it now! You know? And there's a lot more jobs that people can do if they know that they don't have to strain their body with that hour or two hours wasted commuting, you know, and the physical toll that that takes, or even just going into a work environment that's not as accessible as your own home. So just by the fact that we've been able to show that telework does work, we're hoping that this will dramatically lead to accommodations for employees with disabilities who may need telework as an option to do the best job that they can. I for one am so glad that I get to telework every single day.

>> Ollie Cantos: And adding to that, the thing that I'd like to invite those who are watching or listening to just think about is in the next five years where would you imagine in terms of where you think this disability community would go, in terms of what will be accomplished within the next five years or by five years from now. How is it that we can work with you to collaborate? Because for us, when we look at the next five years, here's what we ultimately envision. What we envision is a world in which we throughout the disability community have closer direct collaboration with one another. And if I can be direct, sometimes there can be some turfism in different parts of the of the community. But we here are very collaborative. As an example what -- in advancement of our long-term mission for five years from now, what we did within the employment arena is we released what is believed by many to be one of the most comprehensive single source -- single resources on employment of people with disabilities. It was circulated to every member of Congress, every Governor's office, various other elected officials, as well as non-profit organizations. And it literally includes the work that's being done in employment by more than a hundred different other organizations besides ours, as well as different agencies. That is because we believe that synergy is at the heart of making the biggest difference possible. Far too frequently, people may have a lack mentality where somehow the gain of one represents a loss to another. But here at RespectAbility we know that one plus one is not two. One plus one equals eleven. Where we imagine and envision that in every aspect of societal life, that we here at RespectAbility join forces with other organizations of and for people with disabilities to advance changing public attitudes, to work on public policy, to make sure that opportunities are available at a concrete way, and to make sure that those policies are actually implemented in practice.

>> Eric Ascher. Okay, so next, another question. What are some of RespectAbility's civic engagement plans going into the 2022 and 2024 election cycles?

>> Randall Duchesneau: I'll take this one as well. So the first thing that we have done at RespectAbility is, you know, every election cycle, is a non-partisan voter guide. And this is the the sort of thing, you know, that we -- we like to put our flag in on ground issues because the idea is that we want candidates to at least say what they're going to do on issues that matter to people with disabilities. And -- we're not -- in that it's not just a, you know, a systematic campaign candidate questionnaire, but, you know, we've got them going out right now to the Governor's race in Virginia and some of the other races coming up, both to the Republican candidate and to the Democratic candidate, because we want to see what their responses are, and make sure that they're thinking about the issues that people with disabilities face. The second thing is that the campaigns themselves have to be accessible, and this is a really important issue. You know, we're talking millions and millions of dollars that are being spent on special elections for United States senate and, you know, last year, you know, the control of the Senate was, you know, at stake and there's -- there's just so much money being spent in this area, and they're trying to reach out to every single voter that they can, that, you know, people with disabilities vote, but your campaign needs to be accessible. It needs to have information in accessible formats so we can learn more about the candidates. And they should be paying attention to this huge demographic. I mean, we're almost one in four of the population now. You know, if -- people with disabilities, we could be one of the most influential groups when it comes to elections. So campaigns -- we want them to think about the needs that we have as a community and to pay attention to that in their elections, and their campaigns, and their speeches. Are they mentioning people with disabilities when they're talking about all the other groups that they're going to be helping?

>> Eric Ascher: Okay thank you. So will there continue to be more opportunities for virtual community and affinity group activities even when the pandemic is a thing of the past?

>> Ollie Cantos: Absolutely. This is an important way for us to engage with people. And getting to meet together virtually like we're doing today enables all of us to come together wherever we may be across the country or even across the world. And so this is something that is an important part of what we do. And concurrently speaking we also just look forward to being together again in person at some point, because the thing is there is nothing quite like the value of personal connection and being able to be across the table from somebody, or being able to be in someone's physical space where we get to come together in larger numbers. So we are going to strive hard to not only continue these events here online, as we have been doing, but also at some point to be able to to get together in person so that way we can actually just be around one another and to gain from one another's energy and insight through in-person meetings at some future point.

>> Delbert Whetter: I'd like to add that our lab program for entertainment professionals with disabilities - it was a huge positive experience online because of COVID. And there's two big benefits. It allows people with disabilities to jump in a lab program. Most lab workshops in Hollywood require you to be there in person. So online, it just allows people with different disabilities to get access. It's a lot easier from home, from whatever their abilities are. And secondly, it allows people all over the nation to be involved in these Hollywood programs. So in-person you definitely have to be in town for two or three months, which is a huge financial deficit. So we're trying to figure out how we can continue after COVID, because if you can't do it in person. It's really important.

>> Vivian Bass: And likewise, our Speakers Bureau has really had so many -- an abundance of opportunities that they would never have. You know, we've been on sometimes and. one speaker is from one part of the country, someone's from someone else, and it's really been such a respectful and mutually beneficial association, because it's allowed the sponsoring organization to be able to read over the bios and see, you know, which particular speaker they may be interested in hearing from. And it's also given those -- the speakers themselves the opportunity to have visibility, not only in their own communities but from coast to coast as well.

>> Eric Ascher: How will we hold ourselves accountable to our stakeholders, funders and the wider community?

>> Ollie Cantos: I could take that one. Accountability is really important, which is why we value transparency here at RespectAbility. Whenever we run up against challenges we're transparent with those. Whenever we have triumphs we're transparent with those. But the way that accountability must necessarily happen is by our staying true to the promises that we make. This is really really important, and I really want to hammer this home for everybody who's watching or listening to this. Our word is our bond. It is really important to us that we be of optimal service and support to all of you through our working to find and follow up -- follow up on a mutually beneficial implementation of goals. And so the way that the accountability works is that we communicate with our donors and other supporters all the time, literally weekly. We stay in touch with them, we tell them what we're doing, we invite them to events including, by the way -- that are hosted by organizations other than ours in addition to ours. We find partnership opportunities and then we work to stand with them whenever those things happen. And then we celebrate those successes. And whenever there are additional challenges we do the same thing. So when it comes to accountability, in addition to our efforts to hold ourselves accountable, we also are grateful for the ongoing process that we have here of being accountable to everybody with whom we work. Because when we hold each other mutually accountable, it enables us to move forward like a rocket -- and to enable all of us to have a strike force approach where we dedicate ourselves to doing things and when we make a decision we roll. Like, a big example of that is how we facilitated SNAP benefits to add food security during this pandemic in 46 states. We did that within a matter of weeks. Not a year, not two years, we did it in in a matter of roughly six weeks or so. And the reason why we did that is because of our efforts to move forward decisively. And then what did we do all along? We made sure to tell all of our contacts about what we're doing, and we also called upon folks to join with us in common cause to make these things happen. So everything we do is always in partnership, and we love that about the opportunities that we have on a regular basis to build these partnerships solid and strong and ultimately to ensure that we stay transparent, so that way we can continue moving in the same direction together.

>> Delbert Whetter: And I would like to add that it's very important -- the important part of responsibility is measuring. We need to measure ourselves. It's important way to keep ourselves transparent. We have to continue to measure our success, and keep counting the data and researching, and make sure we're hiring where we need to hire, and making progress where we need to make progress. Because it's important. It's important to keep our intention with our actions.

>> Eric Ascher: Okay we have time for, I think two more questions probably. So what are some of the key new areas of work that RespectAbility is hoping to impact in the future?

>> Ollie Cantos: Well one area, just to jump in, entails our enhanced ability to create and build a whole pipeline of the next generation of leaders. That's why, as we talked about earlier, we imagine and envision and will implement ultimately nurturing and training leaders from high school and even -- of middle school and on. So just imagine this: there are kids with disabilities in middle school and high school. We work to infuse in them a respect for our disability history as a movement, as well as a positive philosophy about disability. And then we we help them and their families to arm themselves with the skills to be competitive. Then they make their way into school, and then, as they grow there, they can become fellows then serve here as Fellows, contribute directly to our work, and then after that they move into their careers and then we support their placement there as well as their ultimate advancement. And then we have alumni all over the place that will be able to continue to -- that we will be able to continue to work with us. That's just one element of everything. But then the other thing too is we are so appreciative to our partners in Hollywood for working with us and our getting to work with them, because attitudes are key! When the public sees us as people with different types of disabilities portrayed well and positively and accurately, and when we as people with disabilities ourselves are in front of the camera for authentic representation as well as behind the camera, then imagine how perceptions change. And then as those perceptions change, some of those individuals may be employers who may look at us differently and then there we are again. There are people who are also going to see that we are not only an invaluable part of the community, but who will be supportive of us being a part of every aspect of community life. So that will entail then our bringing together even more nonprofit executives and others who we get to partner with, as well as partners from within government agencies at the local state and federal level. And then combine all of that with how we have speakers from our Speakers Bureau who move forward throughout the country to educate people and to provide training in different smaller settings about the truth about our lived disability experience. And all of that is to say nothing of our public policy work, and making sure to advance support for people with disabilities so that way we can thrive in every aspect of community life. As we talked about this -- and earlier with the way that Randall spoke about our efforts with campaigns and such, if you look at everything we've talked about today, everything is interconnected. Everything we do. So what we see in the next five years and well beyond is an interconnected approach in which one series of positive events has a ripple effect on everything else we do, which then creates a positive feedback loop multi-dimensionally for us to move forward together. And just imagine as the broader world sees us as people with disabilities as the sleeping giants politically ready to be awakened, and as we continue to organize on a nonpartisan basis and to strive to ensure that no matter who is elected and no matter what party they're from, that they have a strong philosophy about disability so that we are at every single decision-making table, where nothing happens without their consulting with the disability community, and in a spirit of self-determination we speaking for ourselves, so that we can determine the course of our own lives determine our own choices and ultimately strive to reach whatever potential possible.

>> Delbert Whetter: And I'd like to add on Ollie's great answer right there, but I'd like to add two little things. I'm pretty excited on our Hollywood inclusion work in the news media especially. It's been going up. We've been working with people in print and reporters and different news media organizations. And that improves their coverage of disabled people. Because many of them know -- you guys know how newspapers often frame disabled stories, and they tend to look down or they're pitiful and we want to change that, if we can change that. And how we can change that is by making the reporters or the writers -- we can give them advice, because they have a big impact on the story. Also with children in the program -- we've been doing a lot of stuff with children's programs, and that's also important work, because children with disabilities need to see themselves on TV. That's important. Also, other children without disabilities need to see children with disabilities on TV. Make it normal, become normal. It's everyday life. Disabled people are part of life. They're everywhere people live. So we can start that young, that positive perception, and it'll continue throughout their life.

>> Vivian Bass: Another really -- sort of an intangible yet a really impactful factor is that of sort of the peer mentorship on a one-to-one basis. You know, over my many years at RespectAbility I have just, you know, seen or learned about so many really, you know, confidential and invaluable one-to-ones that some of the -- whether they've been our Fellows whether they've been Staff, whether they've been even, you know, board members, others -- have developed. And that's really flourished over the years, in -- again, in a really positive manner and it's just something that you don't often think about, that people really -- we learn as much from one another as we do from others. Okay, I think we have time for one more question. So we have one last question. How many of your key Staff members have disabilities themselves? And I'll answer that -- it's 85 percent. And the second part is what concrete steps are being taken to create a safe workplace environment?

>> Ollie Cantos: I can take that. When it comes to the workplace environment, that also necessarily means that it needs to be an environment of inclusion and it needs to be environment that -- ultimately ensures of safety. And that includes making sure to have the right policies and programs in place to ensure that people -- not only within the workplace but anywhere -- are free from harassment and other things that can jeopardize safety. The other thing that's important too is we -- we dedicate ourselves to promoting the mental wellness and mental health of all of us. Because the thing that we also talk about very directly is that when it comes to all of us, we all need to have the kind of lives where in addition to our own physical health, that we also have a sense of a mental well-being and clarity and that we're also supported there as well. And so when it comes to safety, what's also important for us to recognize here is that we join with with the rest of society in making sure that efforts to build and protect safety among all of us is critically important, so that we can be a safe place and a safe space for anyone with whom we work.

>> Randall Duchesneau: I'd also like to add on a little bit to that. And you know, I've worked in many different places and when we talk about inclusion, it really means being able to show up with your full authentic self, all the experiences you bring, all the different hats that you wear, whether it's a disability, or being of a certain race, or certain experiences, growing up in poverty, et cetera, and bringing everything that you've experienced in life to the job, and not being afraid or ashamed to show that part of yourself. And being able to speak out, being able to have dissenting opinions, being able to disagree, and not being afraid to to speak your own voice. And I think that's what we really want to achieve as an organization. And we're hoping to do that through diversity equity inclusion and accessibility training for the organization, for Staff, and also just being an organization that can acknowledge mistakes and work to correct them. You know, just as a person with a disability, you know, I'll often come across somebody that has, you know, ableist tendencies and they don't know how to interact with the person with a disability. But rather than get upset about the interaction, I find it as a teaching moment and a chance to educate somebody in something they may not know about. And there's a lot we need to do as an organization not only for ableism, but also racism and many of the other issues that organizations face as well. So we need to be open-minded. We need to acknowledge our deficiencies and work to be better. And I think as long as we have a culture where we want to be better, where we want to do the right thing, we'll at least be on the right track and hopefully we'll get there someday.

>> Eric Ascher: And with that we have officially run two minutes and 30 seconds over, but I think for a good reason. So I'll hand it back to Ollie to wrap us up.

>> Ollie Cantos: Thank you Eric for facilitating that. So in conclusion, I'd like to thank all of you - either for watching the recording or for being with us here live. It is really the beginning of a next chapter of partnership with us. And I'd like to call upon each of you to consider donating to RespectAbility, to think about ways that we can partner up with you, and in the spirit of what Randy say, to bring to the table your authentic selves. We love and embrace who and what you are, and we're here to celebrate that because it is in that celebration that we each become stronger, not only bound together by what makes us alike but also bound together by embracing what makes us unique and different. So with that, I'd like to close this off for today and to express my appreciation to my co-presenters today. We have a lot of work to do together.