>> Rosann Corcoran: Welcome to policy advocacy and you 2022! My name is Rosann Corcoran. I'm delighted to introduce our program today. I'm sorry for the trouble in getting us started, but we're going to move this along as quickly as we can to get us to the meat of the conversation. I am a white late middle-aged woman with short brown hair and glasses. I am the manager of the Linkages program here at CJE SeniorLife. Linkages provide support, information, and referrals to seniors who have adult children with disabilities. Before we introduce today's speakers, I would like to acknowledge the planning committee that put this program together. The committee includes several interested community members, disability advocates, and our partner agencies: the ARK, JCFS Chicago, Keshet, and UIC's Department of Disability and Human Development. Most of these agencies have been at the planning table for this program for the last 10 years, as this has been our annual program. This year we actually welcomed a new partner to the planning table and that's RespectAbility. I'd like to introduce you to Jake Stimell of RespectAbility, who's been a tremendous support in planning this program.

>> Jake Stimell: Hey everyone. We are -- so RespectAbility is a national nonprofit that works to fight stigmas and advance opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. RespectAbility had its start in the Jewish funders network, but now does a lot of secular work in addition to our Jewish work. JDAIM is always something that is near and dear to our hearts -- that would be Jewish Disability Awareness Acceptance and Inclusion Month -- and we had a lot of fun participating in this event, and are very excited to see how it goes.

>> Rosann Corcoran: Before we start I want to address a few basic housekeeping issues. I want you to be aware that closed captioning is enabled and that we have an ASL interpreter. They'll be available throughout the program. In order to use closed captioning, you'll need to turn this on manually on your computer. You can use the closed caption icon at the bottom of your screen, and you can either select subtitles or full transcript view. And you can adjust the font size to fit your personal needs. Please do be aware that the program is being recorded, and therefore it will be available later to be shared. Because of this, you will only see the speakers. You won't see other program participants. And this allows us to provide you with the most accessible presentation possible. As well, it protects your privacy during and after the recording of this meeting. Be aware that we're going to have Q&A at the end of the program, so the last 15 minutes. If you want to submit a question for our speakers, use the Q&A icon on the bottom control panel. Jake and I will monitor the questions during the program and will respond to anything that needs immediate attention. Otherwise, we'll get to those questions at the end of the program. We are offering CEUs -- professional CEUs for licensed clinical social workers. You can get those by submitting the program evaluation at the end of the program. And we'll have more information at the end of the program. With all that said, let me get on with introducing our moderator for this important conversation about implicit bias in disability employment. Justin Cooper is a local filmmaker, artist and disability advocate. Justin currently has a photo exhibit at UIC entitled "Through my Lens," in which he chronicles his laundries and engagements with various accessible and inaccessible sites in Chicago's neighborhoods and beaches. A wheelchair user, Justin employs photography as an evidentiary tool that addresses issues of access during the COVID-19 pandemic. His street side exhibition brings attention to the ways disability is defined by societal, environmental, social, and physical barriers that restrict leisure and quality of life for people with mobility impairments. We will provide a link to Justin's exhibition in the Q&A. And with that said, let's move the conversation to Justin and Michelle.

>> Justin Cooper: All right, thank you so much Rosann. Good morning everybody. My name is Justin Cooper. I go by he/him pronouns. A quick introduction of myself -- a description of myself. I am an African-American male with -- wearing glasses. I have a beard, I am wearing a black shirt, and my disability is I have Becker muscular dystrophy. And so I am so thankful to be a part of this conversation -- to be moderating this conversation this morning with you all about implicit bias and disability employment. And also I would like to also introduce my other partner for this event this morning, Michelle Friedman. Good morning Michelle!

>> Michelle Friedman: Good morning Justin, thank you. I'm gonna go ahead and introduce myself. Okay, I have been told by my children I cannot say I'm a middle-aged woman. Children can be obnoxious. So I'm gonna go with I am a white 64 year old woman. I have gray hair, I'm wearing a burgundy shirt, and I am totally blind. And I'm sitting in an office at the moment.

>> Justin Cooper: Awesome. Thank you so much for joining me with this conversation Michelle. And so the goal of this program for this morning is to challenge and change some existing bias that exists in the workplace about people with disabilities. We will provide a call to action that increases the hiring of people with disabilities. And so as we get started, the great question we want to ask is what is implicit bias? And so I offer you a challenge this morning. This is a safe space for all of us, but I want to provide a challenge for you all this morning. So imagine myself, you know as a job -- you know -- as a job advocate who is applying online to your organization. You meet me in person for an interview, and when I arrive, I'm actually in my wheelchair. I did not mention that but early on -- I am a wheelchair user. So what might your immediate reaction, thoughts or impressions be. As this is a safe space, we want you all to be honest, and what actually comes up instinctively when you see me as a wheelchair user come into your office to apply for a job? If you're brave enough, I encourage you all to put your answers in the chat. If not, no worries. This is -- like I said, a safe space. You know, just jot them down in your mind and we will -- we will read them -- through the chat. So that's something that we really wanted to really discuss and really talk about, you know -- during this time. And I see in some of the chat and some of the folks have mentioned in the -- chat -- thank you all so much for sharing -- from some we see "does our office space accommodate your mobility needs?" You know, "what barriers might this individual have doing this role?" Another comment mentioned that you may -- "you may have trouble getting in and out of the building." Another comment said "what resources or assistance will you need to complete this job" is what they would ask. One person wrote down "empathy." and another one says what if accommodations -- that are expensive -- and these are just some of the many many -- comments that are being mentioned in the chat, and I appreciate you all so much. And these are just some of the things that we wanted to -- really highlight, you know, during this conversation. And so Michelle, based off, like, some of the comments that we've seen in the chat, what are your thoughts on -- when it comes to implicit bias?

>> Michelle Friedman: So I think for me, when we talk about accessibility in jobs and accessibility in the world, you know, access -- you know, putting up a ramp or other kinds of access are easy things to do. I think the bigger part and when we talked about this -- webinar in the first place we talked about possibly providing it for people who are disabled people who are looking for jobs. And we all talked about that and suggested that possibly we should start first with employers and organizations who are employing people, because we know that there's implied bias. We know that people have certain stigmas and preconceived notions and assumptions about disabilities. And I think for us, the conversation was how can we -- how can we get through some of those mindsets and change those mindsets, because what we know is that, you know, our actions are a result of our mindsets. So you know, yes, that -- those are good questions and those are good thoughts. I'm going to propose that if I were sitting in an interview and, you know, somebody saw my resume and said oh, I've got all the skills and I'm great and they're excited to interview me, and they come out into the waiting room and see me with a cane, their first response is going to be, oh, heck, I wasn't prepared for this, and why didn't I know what -- I'm sure for some people it brings up a lot of anxiety, and I think we to talk about some of those anxieties are important and some of those mindsets. Because the truth of the matter is there are accommodations required, but most accommodations -- cost less than $500. And if you plan ahead for that, your company has a culture of inclusion for people with disabilities, those will be the kinds of things will be natural responses to budgeting and everything else, so that you can include people with disabilities, and that inclusion is a part of your organization or businesses' culture. Because once we change mindsets and realize that accommodations aren't expensive -- if we've learned nothing else from the pandemic, you know, disabled people have been asking for remote jobs for years so that they could work and they could have the accommodation of that, and suddenly we had a pandemic and the whole world went remote. We found that it works! And that's what disabled people have been asking for for a long time. So if we can change our mindsets and see inclusion as a value to a business -- and an organization, and if we can see hiring people with disabilities as a value to our companies, then our mindsets will change, and we will start to create a culture of inclusion within our companies where it's safe for people to be disabled, and where it's safe for people to express, you know, what their needs are and their accommodation needs. And that's what I hope comes out of this today, to change some of those mindsets. At the end of this hour, you will look at your questions and your thoughts and have a different mindset.

>> Justin Cooper: Exactly, exactly and especially when it comes to, you know, to the process of asking for accommodations and -- [crosstalk]

>> Michelle Friedman: Some of that starts even before -- you know, when I talked about -- didn't mean to interrupt you -- but some of that starts with even just before creating the culture, what does that mean, you know? Does that mean -- you know -- what does that mean -- what does your organization look like if you're creating the culture of inclusion for people with disabilities, so that things like even in the beginning access to the job posting or the job application for somebody like myself who's blind, or being able to get into the building like you said, you know, with your wheelchair -- those things need to be -- you know, those are the things that we as disabled people are looking at before we even apply for a job.

>> Justin Cooper: And it's one of the things that you -- and you make a great point Michelle, and I think it's also important for us to really point out that you know for us -- our disabilities are visible but they're also -- you know, folks who are -- who are have invisible disabilities. And so how does that, like, factor into -- you know, accommodations, into also, like, the job application process. Because it's also something that, you know, many folks don't really pay attention to, because they also -- you know, when it comes to accommodations for disabilities, people just automatically assume it's physical, but it's more -- it's more there's more to that. And it's also that there's a lot of folks with invisible disabilities that often, you know, that often are overlooked when it comes to accommodation. So how do we -- how do we deal with that in that situation Michelle?

>> Michelle Friedman: I think the first -- step is creating that culture. If I know that -- I'm the board chair of Keshet -- and I'm not an employee of Keshet, but I'm the board chair -- but when I come into Keshet -- and we are an organization that deals with people with disabilities and provides programming and services for people with disabilities, so I expect that here -- but I know when I come in here and I have an accessibility issue -- it's not going to be an issue, that there's a culture here of welcoming me and including me. And if we can create within -- you know -- you want to engage disabled people and you know, we know that disabled people are -- that they want to work. They want to be in the employment field, they want to be gainfully employed, they want to contribute, and they're good employees! They have a different perspective that -- you know, just like we talk about diversity in other -- with other groups, disability should be a group of people who we talk about when we talk about DEI. When I go to an organization or a business if I were looking for a job, I'd be looking at the culture. I'd be looking -- does their website have accessibility for me as a blind person? Is their -- you know, is their building accessible? Are their bathrooms accessible? Does the job application even allow for accessibility for me or someone else? Does -- you know -- those kinds of things. Is there a culture? Do you work hard to try and include people with disabilities, because we know there's value. If I feel that sense of, you know, cultural welcoming and cultural inclusion, I know that that's a place that I want to work, I want to apply to a job, and I want to -- I want to stay on that job. And I think it adds to the retention of both the disabled person and the non-disabled person. But if I'm in a space where I -- there isn't a culture of inclusion, and it's difficult for me, and accessibility is always an issue, or my co-workers are, you know, not so sure they want a disabled person working with them, or kind of they give the "I wasn't informed" or "what am I going to have to do differently?" And there isn't a culture where, you know, inclusion is part of the diversity plan -- diversity equity and inclusion plan, then people aren't going to feel safe disclosing that they even have a hidden disability, and they're not going to feel safe for sure when they have an -- oh, you know, I can't hide my disability, Justin, you can't hide your disability, but I -- you know, that's not a place that I'm gonna feel safe and it's certainly not a place that someone who may have a hidden disability, who may need a little accommodation or something on a particular day -- they're not going to feel safe disclosing that to their manager, because they're going to be worried about retribution. Are they going to -- you know, are they going to be looked at differently? And those are the sort of biases that we have in -- people have innately in businesses and organizations, that if we can change, will be a much more inclusive environment for people and more welcoming for people with disabilities.

>> Justin Cooper: Yes, yes Michelle. You make a very good point about the, you know -- that disclosure, you know, that there's a -- fear like of disclosure, because we don't know whether the employer is going to be like, well this -- how are we going to deal with this issue? How are we going to deal with this? And you know, how you're going to deal with it in terms of accommodations. And you know, for us, like you said like it is -- you know -- we can't hide. Like, we really can't hide like -- our disabilities. It's out there in the open but, you know, we do have to, you know, be aware that yes, you know, there is that fear of disclosure when it comes to our disabilities, because that's a vulnerable spot for us. And so you know, during this process and now -- like, now that we're, like, you know, in this world of, you know, doing more interviews online, you know, that's something that you know is going to -- it's something that -- we need to really bring up when it comes to that, because now that we're, you know, here, you know, for example like, you know, if I was doing an interview -- with -- someone and -- they only see the top half of my body, they don't know, like, they don't know if I have a disability or not until they actually see me. And so you know, these are things that we have to look at, especially when it comes to, you know, when it comes to this. And so you do make a great point about that Michelle.

>> Michelle Friedman: Yeah and I think, you know, that's the reason I think these seminars are so important, because I think if we can change people's assumptions, and we can make it -- look. There are -- I would need an accommodation. You know, I remember seeing a job description recently for a fundraiser position in the -- in an organization, and I am a fundraiser. I've been fundraising for organizations for 30 years. I could, if I were looking to work, which I'm not, I could take a development -- you know, I could apply for a development position. But I happened to -- I don't know what made me go to the job description -- and at the bottom of it I saw "must be able to sit for so long. Must be able to read this. Must be able to lift this." And I'm thinking to myself, oh, that does not sound like an organization that is willing to -- even just that I want to even apply to, because it sounds a little to me like they don't have a culture of inclusion. Because if, you know, I may not be able to see, but I have software that allows me to do everything on my computer, you know, mostly everything. And I'm -- you know, all I need to do a job is that software, which I already have on my computer, and even for an organization -- or business to have that already available, it's not that expensive, it's really not. It's a one-time thing. But if I see that kind of a thing on a -- job description or the website to get onto the organization, I'm not likely to apply for that job, because it doesn't feel welcoming. It doesn't -- feels like I'm going to have an uphill battle from day one, which is why I think the cultural issue is so important, because without the change of mindset, without, you know, breaking down some of those negative assumptions, people like me and you, Justin, are not going to want to apply for jobs in organizations where we could add value. And there are a lot of -- businesses and organizations, I know Accenture and Ernst and Young, for a couple -- like, there's more -- you know, have really created a diversity -- a culture of inclusion and included disability in their diversity plans. And that's a first step. I know there are a lot of organizations, a lot of foundations, a lot of businesses, when they talk about DEI, disability isn't part of that equation. They don't consider disability as part of diversity equity and inclusion, and in fact, disabled people are the largest minority in this country. And in fact, disability crosses every other sector. There's you know -- you can be an African-American person with a disability. You can be a gay and lesbian person with a disability. You can be a white person with a disability. You can be a child and adult. You -- it impacts every sector of our community, and it's often one that, you know, you can't opt out of. You know it's not -- I can't become an African-American man, but you know -- well I can't become a disabled person because I already am, but you know, a non-African-American woman can become a disabled person. So my -- any one of us can become disabled at any point, including in the middle of an employment. But when there's a culture, those are the kinds of things that are part of the culture of inclusion. I don't know if that answers your question.

>> Justin Cooper: Yes, exactly. I think those are things that really, you know, those are steps that are that really need to be -- you know, really need to be taken in order to change, you know, people's minds on how they view -- how they view disability. And I want to go back to something that you mentioned, and it goes back to the job application. And so one of the things about job applications is that, you know, how are they communicated, you know, to a potential candidate. And I know for you, Michelle, have you had any an experience with a job application where it -- like, it wasn't accessible, or like, if it wasn't accessible, like, how did that make -- how did you feel about -- how did you feel about that when it came to, like, applying for a job?

>> Michelle Friedman: Yeah well, you know, it actually wasn't applying for a job. It was something else I forgot exactly what it was -- I know what you're talking about -- but it makes me -- it frustrates me. It frustrates me that accessibility for websites and accessibility for surveys and even, you know, my doctor's office, that check-in thing is not accessible, even though I've been advocating it for years. It makes me feel, you know, that I don't matter. It makes me feel that I don't have -- I don't have value, and that I'm not respected. You know, I have a lot to offer. You know, without sounding too unhumble, I do have a lot to offer. I -- you know -- I once had a -- I once had a situation where somebody said well, you know, with people with a disability, they come in with an agenda. I don't come in with an agenda. I -- depending on the situation when it's an organization I -- you know, as I'm sitting on a board, my agenda is what is the organization's agenda. My agenda is the mission of the organization. But what I do come in with, and what I know you come in with, Justin, is we come in with a perspective. We come in with a different perspective than other people, and other people come in with a different perspective with us. That's what makes -- that's what makes the world go around, you know, -- and great, because we all come in with different backgrounds and different perspectives. And we as disabled people, we come in with different perspectives as well. We've learned to have to adapt, and we've learned to have to think out of the box in our daily -- in our daily activities. So for me, when I see those kinds of accessibility issues, it says to me I'm not valued and I'm not welcome.

>> Justin Cooper: Yes -- yes exactly. And you know, those are things that I think people really need to -- you know, employers really need to -- look at and really need to focus on when it comes to the application process, because like you said, I mean, like, people with disabilities, like, they want to work. It's not like we don't want to -- it's not like we don't want to work, but it's that in situations like this, you know, there's work that needs to continue to be done in making, you know, making things more accessible for, you know, people with disabilities, and making it more accessible, making it more welcoming -- as you said, culture is -- it is the key, and that's something that I think a lot of people don't particularly understand is that if I come in -- like you said, if I come -- if I come into a culture, you know, and it's like whoa, you don't want -- me here, that really changes my perspective on, like you know, how, you know, how I apply for jobs and you know all the other things -- like future things. And so yeah, the culture is something that is like is very important, and it's something that, you know, that employers continue -- need to work on when it comes to hiring people with disabilities and their thoughts on people with disabilities.

>> Michelle Friedman: Yeah and I think it's actually the first step. I think -- I would challenge everybody on this webinar to just sort of look around their organization or their business and say, you know, what is our culture? Do we even see value in bringing on people with disabilities? Do we see value in creating a culture where people with disabilities feel welcome? Is that even something we want? Is it something we have? Because if it's not something you want, then you know, we're stopped and go -- but if it's something that you find is, you know, you see value in and you understand -- the advantages to having people with disabilities in your organization or business, then looking around and saying "what do we need to be doing?" What do we need to do to change the culture? Look at our websites, look at our -- is our physical building accessible? Is someone who in a wheelchair with a walker -- someone with mobility problems -- do they have the ability to even get in and be comfortable in our facility? And -- you know -- do we have the ability to create accessibility? Do we have accessible bathrooms? You know do we -- and -- but I guess it all starts with "do we actually want that?" Look around your organization and say do we have disabled people? You know, do we have any people with a disability working for us? And if not, why not? And also, you know, there may be people with hidden disabilities? Are they hidden because they don't feel safe, that maybe there are things that they may need from time to time but they don't feel safe acknowledging their disability because they're afraid of what their managers or directors are going to say or feel and it's going to change their attitudes? You know, when I was young -- I've only been totally blind for almost 30 years. Before that I was visually impaired and I could fake it. And when I could until I -- about 40 years ago when I was -- got my first job at access living in the disability field, I was all about faking it and hiding it, because I was afraid that if people knew that I was disabled, I wouldn't get the job or I would be treated differently on the job. And I don't want to be treated differently. You know? And I don't want to get special -- I don't want to get anything special, which is why I'm not a fan of the word special needs. But I want to get what allows me -- the accommodations that allow me to do my job, that allow me to feel comfortable in the business, in the company, but I don't want any special treatment. I just want to feel that I have a place, and I'm included, and I'm welcome, and, you know, but I would have -- it took a lot for me to -- you know, I wanted to hide my disability in those days until I got a job that the job description said disability preferred, and I almost fainted and fell off my chair, and couldn't wait to run to apply for that job. But if we want and value -- if we want people with disabilities in our businesses, if we want -- we see the value in that, then we need to look at our -- you know, our DEI protocols. We need to look at our -- you know, our culture. And we need to look at our building facilities and our websites. Those kinds of things. And that's a start because without that, you know, we're -- I dare say that you or I, Justin, probably wouldn't want to work in that organization.

>> Justin Cooper: Yes exactly. I would definitely not work -- not want to work there especially if, you know, given, you know, how they treat people with disabilities. And so I know we're getting close to -- the end. We want to get to, like, people's questions. So there's a few call to action points I want to get into before we end our conversation. And so one of the points -- and I think we've mentioned it, you know, throughout -- throughout this conversation, one of the points that we want to make is that, you know, it's important to change the narrative, you know, it's important to change the narrative of, like, you know, people with disabilities are good workers. You know, they want to work. They want to do -- they want to work, they want to provide for their families, they want to have their own money. A. d you know these are things that, you know, going forward, these are things that we really have to -- deal with. Another thing we deal with is like, you know, reinforce adaptive and creative thinking. One thing that's important is to go outside the box and look at organizational structures that are blocking the employment of people with disabilities. You know, the job market is always saying that, you know, they need good workers, they need good applicants, they need all of these stuff. Well, we're here! We're -- we're willing to work, and you know, we've often been excluded from a lot of these things. And so -- if you need workers there are people with disabilities that are there for that.

>> Michelle Friedman: And Justin, if I can interrupt you for one second, we also know there's evidence, you know, that disabled people have amazing retention rates when there are accommodations and they're in a culture. And we are in a employment situation where retention of employees is difficult. You know, we know that people with disabilities stay in their jobs longer. They want to stay when there's -- when they feel welcome. And if retention is an issue in your organization, you know, there's value in hiring people with disabilities.

>> Justin Cooper: Exactly, exactly. And so another point that kind of needs to be made is is looking at personal bias and organizational bias. You know -- how are they displayed in the workforce, you know? What can we do to -- change that? What can we do to change you know -- those biases towards people with disabilities? Since this is also the Jewish Disability Awareness Month, it's important to elevate that to more than a month. It's more -- it's important to focus on that every month, make it part of the everyday process and awareness. You know, integrate that into your routines and -- procedures. That's something that's also very important during this, you know -- during this Jewish disability awareness month.

>> Michelle Friedman: Yep.

>> Justin Cooper: And then also -- go ahead Michelle.

>> Michelle Friedman: No I was gonna -- you go ahead with your also, and then I'll see if you caught what I was going to say.

>> Justin Cooper: No, no, you go right ahead. [chuckles]

>> Michelle Friedman: Well I was gonna say that as the -- you know we talk a lot in organizations and businesses about disabil -- I mean diversity equity and inclusion. You know, if your organization includes disability in that, great. You know, that -- that's amazing and a lot of credit to the organization. If it does not, you know, my call to action would be that you, because you're here, you must have, you know, an interest in disability employment. If your organization doesn't include disability in your DEI protocols, I would encourage you to advocate for that, and I would encourage you to step up and say we need to include disability in our DEI conversations, in our DEI protocols, in our DEI trainings. Is that what you were going to say?

>> Justin Cooper: Yes, there you go. We're on the same page there. As a person who's actually on a board that's focused on, you know, DEI, you know, yeah. If you don't have people with disabilities as part of your DEI focus, then what are we doing? What are we doing? What are we really doing? What are we doing here? You know? And it's something that you always have to question, because yes, DEI is the hot thing and it's something that's really important to focus on, but if you're not involving everybody in -- and if you're not bringing everybody to the table, then what are we doing here? And so that's something that's important that, you know, we need to, you know, continue to focus on when it comes to DEI. And also --

>> Michelle Friedman: And if you're not bringing everybody to the table, you're missing out on something. Because we are consumers. We are service providers, and service acceptors. You're missing out on a whole perspective if disability -- disabled people aren't at the table and aren't -- at the conversation.

>> Justin Cooper: Exactly. And so lastly, you know, this goes back to your organization. You know, like, in your organization, who can take on that challenge to look at accessibility and inclusion issues across your whole organization? That comes to not just accommodations, but comes to website design, job applications, job descriptions, building accessibility. You know, these are questions that are important to ask when, you know, taking on this challenge of including more people with disabilities, hiring more people with disabilities. This is an important question for y'all -- for many of y'all who are here today. And so these are questions that you can take to your organ -- take back to your organization, and these are important questions to, you know, to ask. And so yeah, these are your call to action points. These are things that you could really look at your organization and take back to your organization, and be like, hey, these are things that we need -- we need to do this, and this is something that we need to, you know, really need to challenge, you know, yourselves to look at, you know, what we -- and making -- making change because that's very important.

>> Michelle Friedman: Yep, and including trainings. If you -- you know, there are lots of people and organizations that do training on, you know, accommodations, on disability, on DEI including disability. You know, bring those to your organization. You know, everybody can benefit from them. And I'd say, first step -- I would actually say look at your website and look at your protocols, and does your DEI statement, when it says, you know, we don't -- we include -- I forgot how those statements go -- you know, based on -- we don't discriminate based on gender, based on religion, based on ethnicity -- does it also include ability slash disability? That's a -- that's a big one.

>> Justin Cooper: Okay yes, there you go. Exactly. So Michelle, we are we are actually like close to out of time, we want to kind of get to people's questions, but I do want to thank you, you know, so much for, like, being a speaker and really having this conversation with me about this, because this is -- we've had conversations, you know, leading up to this about this, and so I really appreciate you taking part in this.

>> Michelle Friedman: Well I appreciate the opportunity to do it. This is -- I could -- I could talk forever, as you can tell, on this subject, but I appreciate the opportunity and I appreciate the opportunity to help change mindsets, I hope.

>> Justin Cooper: All right that's -- that was -- our conversation, and so thank you all for participating. I see the chat has just been, you know, showed up and -- really just given us really good feedback, and we really appreciate that. And so we'll go into our Q&A, and I will hand it back off to Rosann.

>> Rosann Corcoran: So I'm actually handing it over to Jake, who's going to run the Q&A.

>> Justin Cooper: Alright. [laughs]

>> Rosann Corcoran: But I do have to say, the chat has been amazing. There's so much going on in there -- it's so much -- Jake, I'm curious to see how you're going to pull all this together, we've got a lot of interesting comments.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, so we've had a lot of good comments in the chat and the Q&A. The first question I'd like to start with is what are some ways that companies can be more understanding of work accommodations, as well as cultural understanding and accommodations of BIPOC disabled employees? I think that -- I think cultural understanding of disability and culturally centered work accommodations is just as important as work accommodations based on disability.

>> Michelle Friedman: Yes -- so that was a long -- that was a big question. So I mean -- I think we sort of talked about that a little bit. I think, you know, creating the space is important which means -- which means, I guess, having that -- having from the get-go that cultural space where -- I know, Justin knows, that this is a place that we are invited to come and apply for a job, that we are welcome to work at, and that accommodations -- you know, accommodations are not a big deal, that if -- you know, a lot of companies, when they see somebody you know me or Jake, they freak out and think it's going to cost them tons of money to accommodate, or you know, the person is going to want to work from home every day. Like I said -- I think I said earlier, you know, we've learned that remote working is not so difficult. It's not so challenging. The whole world's been doing it for pretty much two and a half years. Sometimes that's -- you know, that's the only accommodation a person with a disability needs. But if people -- I think I might not be answering this particular question, because that was a big question, but I think it starts from creating that environment that we know from -- from day one that this is a place that is open to people with disabilities, and I can -- I'm okay applying for a job there. Justin, do you want to add?

>> Justin Cooper: No, I think that you've -- I think you've explained it, I think, pretty well, that yeah -- those are things that we really really need to -- I think it's those are things that we really need to -- really need to focus on, and it's something that, you know, hey, like you said, it's all about really -- it's all about really changing the culture of, you know, of your workplace, and yeah, I definitely agree with you 100 percent.

>> Michelle Friedman: And -- you know, hopefully when you create that culture, you know, other people in the -- in the organization are going to embrace that culture, and are going to embrace -- you know, not say, you know, oh heck, you know, now what am I -- what do I do with this -- what do I do with this co-worker who's, you know, disabled and, you know, they're in a wheelchair or blind, do I have to act differently, or do I have to do something differently? The answer is no, you know.

>> Jake Stimell: Great. We just got a question that says "can. you address psychiatric disabilities?" So I would interpret that as how would you accommodate psychiatric disabilities, which I know is another loaded question, and not one that's particularly easy to answer, but if you each want to give your best shot, and I think I have something in mind as well.

>> Michelle Friedman: So I think psychiatric -- you know, psychiatric disabilities -- are generally one of those hidden disabilities, and I'm -- you know, I think there is a lot -- even more stigma perhaps with psychiatric disabilities, people are -- you can hide a, you know, a psychiatric disability for at least a while. And I think there's probably a lot more stigma around a psychiatric disability, but it's a disability, like any other disability. The accommodation may be, you know, when medicine goes awry, you know, a little -- you know, work from home until we can get our med -- you know, they can get their medicine adjusted. Or knowing that, you know, that there may be a time where, you know, there's -- there is an impact, but I think, again, if it's not a culture where that person feels safe disclosing their disability, they're not going to go to their manager and say I'm having a little bit of a rough time, my medication isn't working right now, could I work from home, or could I have some, you know, paid time off because I have this disability. But you know, depending on the culture of the organization, that is not going to be a safe space.

>> Justin Cooper: Right.

>> Michelle Friedman: Unless it is a safe space. Jake, you want to add to that because it's not my --

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, I was just going to comment that flexibility is generally a very good thing. Flexible schedules, flexible work from home policies, just flexibility in general, flexibility within the actual workday. If a employee needs to take an hour or two off to go walk around in nature, then I think that should be an appropriate acceptable accommodation. So yeah, I think it's just flexibility, and as Michelle was saying, creating an environment that's flexible in all ways and really values their employees and wants to put them in the best position to succeed.

>> Michelle Friedman: And that it's a safe space, that they can disclose that. Otherwise they're not going to get that flexibility because they don't -- can't disclose it, because it's not a safe place and they're going to be afraid of losing their job.

>> Justin Cooper: Mmhmm.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah. Now we also got a question that says can you address medical disabilities, such as heart conditions? I assume that it would be similar as whatever accommodation that employee needs, they could sit down with their supervisor or HR manager, whoever handles accommodations, and just figure out what's -- what accommodation works for both parties. I urge you all to know that accommodations are never just what the employee needs. The interactive process really calls for an employee and an employer to together figure out what works for both parties. Michelle, if you have any other thing, if you have anything else?

>> Michelle Friedman: Well I was just gonna add just, you know, the other part of what you just said, Jake, is don't assume -- I don't, you know, I don't think an employer should assume they know what accommodation I need, or how that's going to impact me. I'm a good self-advocate, most of us with disabilities are. I can, you know, I can advocate for myself, and exactly what you said -- a conversation with me, rather than making assumption about what you think I'm going to need, but in a conversation, what those accommodations are that I might need, how we can negotiate that. You know, I have a voice and I got a pretty good -- you know, I'm losing it at the moment, but I'm a strong voice for myself, and an advocate for myself and other people with disabilities. But include me in that conversation, and we can work it out.

>> Justin Cooper: Yes, this is Justin. And, yeah 100 percent agree. You know -- I hate when, you know, when it comes to accommodations that, you know, people make assumptions -- about me because -- I'm in a wheelchair, and I was just like, you know, that is one thing that will turn me off very quickly. And it's just like, yo, just have a conversation with me, you know? We're -- adults, we're grown people, you know, we are capable of having -- a conversation about this. And like you said, don't just assume. Because yeah -- that's definitely not a good idea.

>> Jake Stimell: Yes, yes. Great comments. So we were talking a lot about attitudes and then also about accommodations, but as Michelle was saying, I think attitudes are the best place to start. And there was one comment in the chat box that actually I want to comment on, and that was when Justin asked the question at the very beginning, one person commented empathy. And first of all, I don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable about how they how they responded to Justin's question or to feel bad about what they said, but I would just like to comment that personally, as a person with a disability, I don't think that anyone should feel bad for people with disabilities. I think that it's a part of my identity and it's it's a part of who I am, and I don't -- I don't feel bad. I think it gives me a new perspective, as Michelle mentioned. I think that perspective is a really important way to look at things. I think that's the whole -- the whole -- the most important thing of the the big diversity concept that has taken over in the last few years, especially since the the the murder of George Floyd has really -- DEI has really taken a big part in all workplaces, and I think this perspective is a really important way to think about it.

>> Michelle Friedman: And Jake, if I could add one thing to what you said just about my -- and then I'll be quiet -- I think what -- part of that -- conversation is when we can see disability as a normal part of the human experience, not something to be pitied, not something to be concerned, not something to, you know, be any more empathetic towards than any other person's situation. We all want to be empathetic to people's situations. But when we see disability as a normal part of the human experience, then I think at that point, we will have a mind -- an attitudinal shift that will create more accessibility.

>> Jake Stimell: Yes. [crosstalk] Justin, do you have any comments?

>> Justin Cooper: No, no. [chuckles]

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, I think all of this talk about disability pride in the chat box -- is great and it really goes to show that people with disabilities are proud of who they are, as all people should be. You should -- all -- everyone should be proud of who they are and their different aspects of them that make them who they are, right? We probably have time for one more question. Let's see if we can find a good one here. [Michelle chuckles]

>> Michelle Friedman: Actually while you're doing that Jake and looking, can I make one comment?

>> Jake Stimell: Yes, definitely!

>> Michelle Friedman: I would ask people who wrote, you know, when Justin asked a question about what they think -- what's going through their minds when they come out in that interview and see Justin in his wheelchair, I'd ask them to revisit that in an hour or so and see if anything has changed.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, great advice. Justin, this one is actually for you. It says can you talk more about what you want people to learn from your photo exhibit?

>> Justin Cooper: Oh wow. Okay yeah, I could -- I could definitely do that. I think -- so just a little -- just a quick little background about what I was doing is that -- most of the photos that I've been -- that I took for my exhibit have been like taken -- during the pandemic, and it's been been showcasing -- accessible and inaccessible places within -- in the city. And so -- during my travels throughout this pandemic, I have noticed that -- you know, I've seen places where I have, like, this freedom of -- of accessibility and being able to roll around and being able to, like, at certain points when early in this pandemic, when it was like, really, everybody was in lockdown and there was, like, no traffic really outside, and being able to be free to roll around in the street and having that accessibility -- and then during -- and then as we got into parts where everything started opening back up, and I started noticing how, like, a lot of inaccessible -- a lot of places were now, like, inaccessible. Access to sidewalks were becoming more inaccessible, and it kind of forced me to go out in the street and do all of these different things that was very frustrating for me. And so I want people with -- you know -- to see -- through my lens, I really want people to see the experience that I dealt with, you know, during this pandemic and really focusing on the conversation that comes with accessibility. And so that's what I really want people to look at when they see, you know, my exhibit, is really looking at the different -- you know, the different sections of accessibility and inaccessible spaces. And so yeah, I -- really -- that's what I really want people to look at, and that's the main takeaway because I want to have a -- to start a conversation about those issues, because it's constantly -- they're constantly brought up, and now that we're even in -- this pandemic they're like, really out there. And so I really want people to see that work and really talk more -- you know I want to really start a conversation about how we view accessibility.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah. There were a lot of -- of emotions going on at the same time for people with disabilities during the pandemic. Many people were scared for their lives being immunocompromised, or blind people often couldn't see if people -- if someone was six feet away from them. RespectAbility -- had a very large push to make food stamps that you could order them online to make them more accessible for people with disabilities. And then, now with everything opening back up, people with disabilities are scared again sometimes because they don't -- they want to be involved in the community and in social activities, but they don't know how safe it is, or sometimes they just -- they go out and -- they -- they are involved and then, god forbid, they get COVID or something. And there was also a bunch of anxiety that went along with that, so mental health disabilities were, I would think, just exacerbated during that. And then there were a lot of other issues going on, as I mentioned with the murder of George Floyd at the same time. And things were just -- it was a very uneasy time for everyone, especially --

>> Michelle Friedman: And Jake, there was even an issue around disability, like, you know, when there were shortages of ventilators and things like that, whose lives were more -- you know, were disabled people's lives, you know, important -- you know, with the value of life, there was that question and people with disabilities felt very afraid.

>> Jake Stimell: Yeah, definitely. Rosann, I don't know if you would like to close us out in these last two minutes?

>> Rosann Corcoran: I don't even know how to wrap all of this up. There's so much that's -- been unpacked, and we've been exposed to so many really compelling ideas challenges. I so appreciate the challenges to our personal bias, which is what we started with in Justin's presentation. I so appreciate us -- and our need as allies to -- identify what we can do differently ourselves, what we can challenge our organizations to do differently, how we can look at our work spaces in different ways, and work with HR and work with our DEI committees. There's so much that we all can do within our organizations to affect change and to take personal responsibility. I definitely want to say -- to acknowledge, excellent presentation thank you all. I've been delighted with the work we've done together. Thanks to Jake and RespectAbility, and to Michelle and Justin, you've been phenomenal partners in this. I want to be sure that as people are leaving the program, you complete the evaluation that's going to come up as you exit the program, especially if you're requesting CEUs or a certificate of attendance. You have to complete that program evaluation, or we won't know that you were here. We need your name, your license number, we need you to identify what kind of license it is that you need the certificate for. Allow us a couple of days to get those CEU certificates and certificates of participation out. So with that said, thank you! This ends our program for 2022. We'll look forward to seeing everybody next year, and we'll look forward to having more compelling programs in our regular Linkages programs that we offer monthly. Thank you all!

>> Everyone: Thank you.