>> Tatiana Lee: Hello! My name is Tatiana Lee, and I'm the Senior Associate of Entertainment and Media here at RespectAbility. I am a brown skinned disabled black woman with kinky curly hair in a puff wearing a black top and a red jacket and wearing glasses. My pronouns are she and her. As an individual born with spina bifida and who uses a wheelchair, I've had the privilege of consulting on a variety of projects to help ensure accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities on screen and behind the camera to ensure authentic representation of the disability experience, including on this project. This conversation will include a chance for participants Q&A at the end. And if you would like to view the ASL interpreter in a larger screen, we invite you to pin their video which will spotlight the video throughout the entire panel. In addition, we have live captioning that is available in the Zoom app by clicking on the CC button or via web. We have posted the link in the chat box. We will be taking questions from you during the second half of the panel. Please add your questions in the Q&A box to do so. I recently had the opportunity of consulting on the show "Team Zenko Go!" a new preschool series from Dreamworks Animation and Mainframe Studios that will be available for streaming on Netflix starting tomorrow. The show follows a group of stealthy do-gooder kids who harness the art of distraction to perform an anonymous act of kindness for the residents of their -- of their town, Harmony Harbor. One of the show's main character is a boy named Ari, who also happens to be a wheelchair user. Ari is voiced by Hartley Bernier, an actor who is -- who lives with intestinal failure due to Total Hirschsprung’s Disease since birth, and also occasionally uses a wheelchair due to his chronic pain himself. Some of you have received a screener to see the first two episodes, and if you haven't received it yet, please contact watch@screeners.netflix.com. And you have until 11:30 PM pacific standard time to watch it. If not, all good. You can start watching it tomorrow streaming on Netflix. Today we have several members of the creative production team with us including Hartley, the actor who voices Ari, Jack Thomas, Executive Producer and Showrunner, Karen Lloyd, series director, and Kirsten Sharp, disability consultant. Thank you all for being here with us today and discussing the importance of authentic casting and disability representation in children's media and more. I'm so happy to have you all here. Thank you so much for joining us. So my first question is for Karen. You said earlier on the production team wanted a character in a wheelchair. Can you talk a little bit about the early decision that went into creating such an inclusive show, and what was the decision process like in including a wheelchair user in particular?

>> Karen Lloyd: Yes, would you like my description as well?

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes please.

>> Karen Lloyd: I am Karen. I'm a caucasian -- we'll say middle-aged -- woman with -- wearing a black t-shirt. I have shoulder length purple and red hair, and I go by the pronoun she/her. Yes, I had to do some digging on this question because when I came on to the production -- because the life of an animated cartoon can be very very long, so things go into development -- it could be years before it actually goes into production. So when I came along, we already had a character in the wheelchair. It was one of the different characters, which I can get to. So I did a little digging, and it seems in the early stages of development and writing with our development executive and the Dreamworks executives at the time -- and they were working with some early writers, and they really were keen on having a very diverse cast among the four children. And I think it just came up in a meeting that, hey, this -- this would be awesome to have this representation. And I think it just snowballed from there, and it just became, okay, this is what we're doing. So it's probably not the most exciting story, but when I came along it was already there. When Jack came along, he already existed. So Ari was already there for me, so it's like, okay, let's -- and then -- the change in the character happened along with casting, which I can get to later, or whatever you like but --

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice.

>> Karen Lloyd: I think that was the story -- it was just it came earlier -- I think it was in even 2017 that it came up that this is one of the characters that they wanted to have in the show, to have that representation.

>> Tatiana Lee: Wow, that shows you how long an animation project can often take. Kristin, Jack, do you have anything to add towards that question or anything from your perspective?

>> Kirsten Sharp: Hi, my name is Kirsten Sharp. I am a white woman wearing a white sweater with brown glasses and long strawberry blonde hair. And my pronouns are she/her. I was brought in about 2019, and at that time, I actually used to work at Mainframe Studios, so know a lot of the team which was a good in. I've worked in production most of my life, and I also use a wheelchair full-time, I have for 31 years. So I have some experience on that side of the world as well. And I just want to say how thoughtful the showrunners were, and Dreamworks, and everyone in terms of developing Ari's character, and how much research they did into the -- wheelchair what his disability would be, because as we know, everybody's disability is different. And yeah, it was fun working with the team to come up with what his exact disability would be, how they would present it, if they would talk about it, if they wouldn't. It was great.

>> Jack Thomas: Hi, I'm Jack Thomas. I'm the Executive Producer. I'm a white guy with gray hair, grey glasses, gray shirt, and absolutely no fashion sense, now that I realize how much gray I'm wearing. I'm in front of one of our animated backgrounds from the show, it's the control room. When I came on the show, Ari already existed as a character and was in the wheelchair, and really, I came from the How to Train Your Dragon franchise, where of course Hiccup is missing a leg and a lot of the characters are amputees. So it didn't even occur to me that there was anything different about having a differently abled character on the show. We made a decision early on when I came on board in the writing that we really weren't going to mention that he was in a wheelchair unless it was somehow really specifically necessary for a plot point. And as it turns out, it never was. So we just, you know, he was just another kid on the show.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I -- as a wheelchair user myself, I really appreciated how authentic he was created as a wheelchair user, and just, you know, getting some of the early phases of it was really really great. I was like, you know, you could really tell the intentionality of how this project was coming along. And this next question is open up to anyone that wants to answer, and exactly to my point -- I've really liked how Ari felt -- as a wheelchair user in particular, he felt very authentic. What was the animation project like in terms of creating an authentic look and feel of the wheelchair and the way he moves within it?

>> Karen Lloyd: I can touch on that. I -- again, the wheelchair design already existed when I came along too, but there was definitely -- because of the action sense of the show and the kids being very active and stealthy and zipping around, that they wanted that -- the wheelchair that, like, we've seen, like, basketball, like, sports -- the sports style wheelchair and very fast. And so we wanted Ari to be cool and fast and very mobile. And the team -- I think the design team did a lot of research, again, before I came along. And that was the design they came up with. So I believe it's fairly authentic to what the real design is. We gave him a little pack on the back, that animation pocket you can pull out kind of magic things -- [laughs] not magic but pull out things that would never fit in that little pack, but that's what we call it. We call our animation pocket, someone pulls it up from behind their back, or Ari pulls it out. But we put a little -- little pack on the back of his chair to say, "well that's where -- where it came from." And the animators took a lot of influence from a YouTuber, Aaron Wheels, who does a lot of stunts. So that's -- hence the skate park became a big part of our thing with Ari and doing stunts like that. So there was some research there. So we use influence and animation reference, because, okay, how do you balance on your hand when you do these things, you know, this kind of thing -- and I think our animation directors, I think they did a lot of research just for, you know, how do -- because we've got YouTube, it's great, we can find so much reference, right? So the animators -- I go -- just make sure it's authentic, the way you turn and the way you, you know, the wheel, the hand position, and all that kind of stuff. We tried to be very conscious to make it look as authentic as possible, riding that line between authenticity, but it's still a cartoon, so sometimes we can go a little more fun and cartoony with things, like we do with our our able-bodied kids as well, right?

>> Jack Thomas: That's exactly right. We didn't want it to be the magic wheelchair that could do things that real wheelchairs couldn't. At the same time, as Karen said, you know, if the animation pocket is something every character has, that reach behind the back and come up with something that really couldn't fit in your back pocket, so we wanted -- to give him the same capability. And when he was in costume, you know, the kids in costume jump higher than they really could in real life. So we felt we had some creative license there -- with how he did things. And -- but it was -- authenticity was really important to us -- that -- it looked like all things that could probably be done in the real world.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Kristen, as a fellow wheelchair user, I would love to hear your thoughts on -- that process.

>> Kirsten Sharp: Yeah. I actually was the person who helped them design the wheelchair, so that was kind of fun. And they really wanted it to be fantastical, yet also real world. So I don't know if there's any real wheelchair users out there, but there is --there's a wheelchair called carbon black, and there's a new wheelchair coming out by Küschall, I don't know if it's been released yet, but it's -- very futuristic looking but exists in the real world. So we really took an everyday wheelchair user, mixed it with some sport wheelchair aspects, and then talked about what he would and wouldn't be able to do, and designed his injury level around that too. So he's a lower level paraplegic. So he has the use of his stomach muscles, unlike other people, so he would be able to get away with doing those fantastical elements. And we went back and forth on the design, making sure that it would fit that -- cartoony feel, but would also fit that authenticity, because I'm sure as -- also you, a wheelchair user, you watch all these TV shows and you're like, they would never wheel around in that. And the importance of that for me is teaching the world what someone who uses a wheelchair is capable of. Otherwise, you get questions when you're out on the street that are just like, oh, you can push yourself, or you can do this? And yeah, you know how it feels. It's just that feeling of well, I wish there was something representing it in media that was accurate. And I think that teams and cogo did such a great job of it, I'm -- and the animations -- I got to look at all of what the script that came through, and then all of the animatics, which are before they start animating, and what he would be able to do, and which way the wheels would go, and turn, and flip, and yeah, super fun.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that.

>> Jack Thomas: I've actually seen where he -- we have him climbing the rock wall, and we looked to make sure that that was something that could be done--

>> Kirsten Sharp: Yeah.

>> Jack Thomas: And I think we didn't even design the rock wall with an overhang?

>> Kirsten Sharp: Yeah --

>> Jack Thomas: And we changed the design of the rock wall so that it would be more realistic. We -- look. Your design of the wheelchair was great, and Karen's team was so careful in trying to make it seem realistic, but also fun and fantastical, right? You know, because it's an aspirational show. So I was very proud of that -- all the people who did that work.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, you should be. I think it all came out really really great. And I was like -- Kirsten, you and I can probably compare and have all kinds of conversations with [laughs] different ways people assume people move in a wheelchair and how it maneuvers and how it looks and stuff, so definitely experienced that. So our next question is for Hartley. Hartley, was Ari a fun character to voice, and what was your favorite part about it?

>> Hartley Bernier: I'll start off with my description really quick. My name is Hartley Bernier. My pronouns are he/him. I am a white young male with dark blonde hair. I'm wearing sort of a khaki colored shirt, and I am sitting on a couch in my living room. Ari was a -- he was a really fun character for me to voice. This being my first professional acting job, you know, this was really a dream come true for me. And I think that Ari was really the perfect -- the perfect character, the -- he's everything that I would want to play, you know? He's -- we have so much in common. We both like comic books and superhero movies. We're both medically complex, me being -- me having to use a wheelchair for my chronic pain, me having an IV pump and an ostomy bag, and him needing to be in a wheelchair. And I think that we also -- we don't let those things get in the way of our goals. And so I think, you know, playing Ari was so much fun because he's somebody who I -- aspire to be in my daily life.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I was like, yeah, every person wants to be able to, like, play their own, like, very close, similar type superhero. So that is so cool to hear. I actually recently worked on my first voiceover project in last year too, so it's -- it's really really fun, especially when you get to be as animated as you want, and it's like, you can just lay it all out and be fun, and you know, it's -- a lot more malleable -- than live action. So it's quite fun, so I'm glad you enjoyed it. Kirsten, can you talk a little bit about your experience working as a disability consultant on the show? You talked about it a little bit, but I would love to know what process you were brought in on, and how was that process for you going forward? I know you touched on it a little bit, but would love to hear more.

>> Kirsten Sharp: I was just really excited that Dreamworks, Mainframe, everyone was taking the time to take a step back and say "let's not do this as tokenism. let's do this properly." And to reach out and say "how can we do this properly?" And watching -- Ari's character evolve was just so much fun, and seeing how everyone learned -- I truly believe that if you've never met someone in a wheelchair or if you've never met someone who is blind or has something that is not what you have -- I mean, I even recently started wearing glasses and I was like, whoa, man these things get dirty all the time. It's just something different that you don't have that experience with, and it's really a great opportunity to take that and teach someone, and then them learn how to do it themselves and watch Karen's team just, you know, use the reference videos, ask the questions, and be thoughtful about that process. And animators are also actors, and they're -- they're giving that -- character movement and then you hear Hartley's voice with it, and it's just like, wow, this is so cool. And so great to see such a cool character, and watch the team learn.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, thank you. I love hearing how intentional this project was and just the buzz that's starting to create around it and, you know, I have high hopes for this and, you know, I think the proof is in the fact that you took the intention to, you know, create this character and be really as authentic as you possibly can. And I think this is definitely an example of a best practice, and so it's -- really been great. And yes, if anyone has any questions that they have -- for people in the audience, I mean anyone listening in have any questions for our panelists, please get them in in the Q&A. And yeah, so we're going to next question, which is for Jack and Karen. I really enjoyed how the entire group of kids in Team Zenko Go, at its core, is just a group of diverse kids problem solving together, helping each other, and having fun. Why was it important for you to show this type of inclusion in a preschool-age show?

>> Jack Thomas: Well I'll just say from my own life experience, when I was a kid, I went to a pretty much all-white school -- and then when I went to college and I was around a much more diverse people -- group of people, I realized oh my gosh, these people, we have so much in common. And I think if we would get that diversity in at a younger age, right, if you start when they're five and six years old, and show diversity and show that people can work together, and that's one of the big elements of the show is that it's about teamwork, right, it's about working together, and it's about the idea that you can even -- when you work together -- disagree with each other. But at the end of the day, you're still all friends. You're still on the same team. You figure out how to solve things. And my life experience has been -- I just wish I'd had a more diverse childhood. I would have -- I would have been a broader horizon person earlier in my life.

>> Karen Lloyd: Yeah, I agree just having that -- like, normalizing it for kids watching it that, you know, even -- like, our pilot episode is Ari coming to town, but none of the kids blink an eye about the chair or ask him any questions or -- it's just, oh hey, cool, okay, you're new in town, you know, then it came all about, you know, the team and the mission. Like it wasn't about -- like, we don't even really delve into too much of the personal lives of all the kids. It's just -- they're there for the team, for the mission, and we deal with the here and now. And I think that was cool. Like, I forget that Ari's in a wheelchair, and I think it's -- I hope people watching almost forget. Like it is, but you know, it's he's just Ari to me. But -- and we focus so much on personality that he's -- he's always cool and he loves inventing things and, you know, so all the kids have their little quirks. Like, one of the girls is a little mini encyclopedia. And you know, these kind of things, like, they all had their little strengths to give. And I just think -- just normalizing it that hey, we're all just trying to do one thing that all the kids were just trying to -- had one main goal was to, you know, bring some kindness and, you know, to the tow. And I think hopefully it's a nice message. And then just to normalize -- a very diverse group of children as well that, hey, we're just all people and [laughs] doing our thing and let's do some good in the world kind of thing, so.

>> Jack Thomas: Well I think one of the fun things about the way we introduce Ari is he moves to town and in a day, he figures out something nobody else in the town has figured out, right? In a day he has figured out that there's a secret team doing good deeds. And then in the second day, he catches them. And then we immediately established this kid is at least their equal, right? But then you go on and you realize, oh he doesn't know how to do teamwork. So there are things he needs to learn too. And that's one of the great things I love about the pilot. It just establishes right out of the bat, this kid rocks, you know?

>> Tatiana Lee: He does. It was so cool and I think, Karen, you hit something. It's just, like, normalizing that, I think it's so important, not only for non-disabled kids to see that, oh, that guy's in a wheelchair, he's cool, you know, like, he's fun, and, you know? And think of, you know, oh, I could have someone join my club or, you know, my friend group or something like that, and you know, just because he doesn't have -- has a wheelchair doesn't mean he's not able to participate. And then also on the flip side is seeing that representation of someone else who is a wheelchair user. I think that's so important to be like, oh, I can make friends. I can have other interests, and I can engage with other friends. And I think that's something that's so important that I myself did not have growing up. So to be able to see it now as an adult, like, my inner child just comes out so much. [Laughs]

>> Karen Lloyd: That's so great.

>> Tatiana Lee: Definitely. Anybody else has anything that they wanted to add before we go on to the next question, and we have a slew of questions coming in, so I can't wait to get to those.

>> Kirsten Sharp: I just want to add that not only is it important for -- most of kids, but it's also really important for kids that have disabilities to have that ability to look up to someone that is like them. It's not often that you see that in media, and it's a really cool opportunity to say, like, hey, they're just like me. And as you said, redefining that normal.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, I love that. So next question is -- and this came in from the chat and someone said "were there any particular organizations that helped the most in sculpting the character of the series?"

>> Karen Lloyd: I don't know, Kirsten, was there --

>> Jack Thomas: Oh yeah, that sounds like a Kirsten question.

>> Karen Lloyd: Yeah, I don't know if there was -- we -- I know in casting we reached out to organizations because there wasn't a lot of actors, children in the age group and all that. So it was a very small, you know, it was going to be hard to find authentic casting. So I believe that we reached out to some certain organizations that may have that. And then it was okay, like, who -- because it -- there wasn't a lot of acting agencies that had, you know, what we were looking for. So we -- so I think that was part of it. I don't remember the name of the organizations unfortunately, but I think that's how things led to, yeah, having our pool of actors to choose from, and to see who -- then finding the talent within that pool, so I don't know if there was anything else, Kirsten, to add to that, but --

>> Kirsten Sharp: No, I think just some -- I mean I have connections with local organizations like Spinal Cord Canada and BC wheelchair sports, lots of kids that -- young kids that play sport, I'm not sure how Hartley was found in the end though.

>> Karen Lloyd: Because I think, Hartley, you had done something for an organization, had you not -- like a commercial or something?

>> Hartley Bernier: I had done -- I've done a lot of volunteering for sick kids hospital over the years, so lots of commercials and stuff. So I had -- experience in that field.

>> Tatiana Lee: Okay, awesome. So another question: are there any plans to add any additional disabled characters to the show to show the diversity or intersectionality of disability?

>> Jack Thomas: Gosh that's -- I'm not allowed to talk about the second sea -- any possible seasons other than this one [Tatiana crosstalk] so I would just say that -- I will say -- I can't say anything. I guess we have a very diverse world we live in. That's all I can answer.

>> Karen Lloyd: Because this season is done, right, so if -- yeah, I would say if the pos -- if that opportunity came up, I'm sure we'd be open to that for sure, but we just don't know what the future holds. The season's done, the episodes are finished at this point, but pretty much Hartley was the only one in this season, yeah.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Awesome. Cool. Okay, so we have a question that came in. How are you hoping to expose kids to diversity who may not be seeking it out? It was a question that came in.

>> Jack Thomas: Well, I think you just present it, right? You just -- here's a show that you love, and look, that charact -- you know, the characters -- are diverse. It's sort of, you know, same thing Marvel does, right, it's -- there's diversity in there as well. So I think if you just show kids being kids, and they see the diversity and they -- I just think they soak it in, the kids do. And they -- it just becomes second nature to them that way. So hopefully we win them over with fun and the action, and maybe they learn a little bit about we're all sort of the same along the way.

>> Tatiana Lee: Definitely.

>> Karen Lloyd: Yeah I think the intention of this show wasn't to build it around Ari. He was just -- it was built around, you know, Yuki, and the truck, and the missions, and then Ari just happened to be, you know, so I think it's just, again, normalizing it and just showing it that he's just one of the kids, and this is cool, and they treat him as such, and we treat him as such, like, I think that was the main goal.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah I love that --

>> Karen Lloyd: To make a fun show [laughs] characters just happen to be, right?

>> Tatiana Lee: So it seems like children's media is particularly forward thinking when it comes to inclusion. What about -- what about the genre makes it so effective in telling these stories? And I would love to hear this from all of you, any insight or thoughts you all would have.

>> Jack Thomas: Oh, that is a good question. I think, you know, kids at an early age are sort of open books, right? You know, they -- so you have a chance to just show them what a kinder, gentler world is. And for them to go oh, this is the world I want to live in. And so, I think that's why it's -- it's easier maybe in younger kids television to try to imprint on them the idea that there's nothing strange about diversities, you know, and people's differences are actually 99 percent of the time their strengths, right? And that's -- we do that very -- in this show, each character has their own strength. And so yeah, I guess that's -- that would be my answer, if that made any sense.

>> Karen Lloyd: And I think just the nature of producing animation as opposed to producing live action, like, live action having a child in a wheelchair hanging off a climbing wall may have a lot more things to take into account, like, you know, with, just things you can do in animation that you can get away with that live action could be a lot more difficult and challenging with legalities, and insurance, and things like that, so yeah, there's that thing of, you know, you're slightly out of -- you can be out of reality, but we -- while we, again, like we say, we walk that line of reality and fantasy cartoons. So I think you can just have a little more fun in animation and go out of that reality. You can go to different worlds and all this kind of thing. So I think it's just probably easier to incorporate, you know, more diverse characters in animation as opposed to live action. There may just be a few more legalities and limitations, and you know, it shouldn't be, but, yeah, hopefully, but -- and I think getting to the young audiences, like Jack said, is a good idea.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah. I feel like with animation, it's just such -- just, a way to dive into all of it and just be as radically inclusive as you want it to be, because you're literally building a world from scratch. So I think that's so awesome. So we have a question in for Hartley. Why do you think it's important for everyone, especially kids, to see a character like Ari on TV, and what are some projects you would love to work on in the future?

>> Hartley Bernier: So I think that it's really important for children to see characters like Ari because, you know, being exposed to, you know, people who are different at a young age can really make it a normal thing. And if, you know, everybody -- if everybody understands that, you know, we are different but we're so -- we're so similar in so many ways, then I think that we can get rid of a lot of the problems in the world. So you know, I think -- I think just people seeing that Ari -- Ari is a kid at his -- at at his heart. He is a kid. Just because he is in a wheelchair doesn't change the fact that he wants to be a superhero, he loves -- he loves superheroes. And yeah, and I would say that I would love to work with -- I'd love to work with Jack and the team again because this was -- a really truly an amazing experience, and I'd love to do it all over again.

>> Tatiana Lee: How about do you see yourself possibly doing any live action anytime soon?

>> Hartley Bernier: I would -- I would be open to it. I'm -- I'm always open to new experiences and that sounds like something that could be super fun.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, all right. I would love to see you in live action someday, so I'm going to be watching out for that. [laughs] I'm definitely keep you in mind, if anybody hits me up looking for somebody that you fit --

>> Hartley Bernier: Thank you, much appreciated. [Tatiana Laughs]

>> Tatiana Lee: So another question that came in, it says they're thrilled that the life and personal authentic experience is being considered in hiring the best talent for the job. And they said thank you. They were wondering what proactive steps are being taken to promote the same ideology regarding roles and characters that have non-visible disabilities? So maybe in regards to something that you may be thinking about in the future, maybe this could go to Jack, any projects you're thinking about of exploring non-visible disabilities? Everybody just wants all kind of disabled characters. [laughs]

>> Jack Thomas: Right so what -- yeah, what's a non-visible disability? Give me an example.

>> Tatiana Lee: So a non-visible disability is a disability that you can't see, so like, ADHD, dyslexia, anxiety, things like that, autism, things that you can't see or know from looking at a person right away.

>> Jack Thomas: Yeah I'm not sure. I think they're -- certainly my wife casts in live action, and I know in live action they're doing a lot of that. I'm not sure in animation. I guess we could -- I don't know why we couldn't put characters in. I just wonder -- how we would get it across, or maybe we don't have to get it across to kids what's going on, they just -- I have to really think. I would really have to think this through. I'll just be really honest, I have not really considered how to do it and how to do it in the correct way. It sounds like I would have to get some education before I included a character, because I don't want to -- I don't -- I don't want to guess at it and get it wrong. So I'm just saying -- I think you could probably do it. Just remember that animation is a very visual medium, so you're going to have to find a way to represent these non-visual disabilities in a way that's respectful, but that also tells the audience what they are, right? So yeah, boy, man --

>> Tatiana Lee: Give us a call, we can help you with that.

>> Jack Thomas: Okay, good. If I do it, I will definitely give you a call.

>> Tatiana Lee: So next question is what would you say to those in the film and TV industry who want to better understand the physical disability experience? So maybe I'll throw this to Kirsten and Hartley.

>> Kirsten Sharp: Hartley, you go ahead.

>> Hartley Bernier: Sorry, could you repeat the question really quick?

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, it says what would you say to those in film and television industry who want to better understand the experience of having a physical disability?

>> Hartley Bernier: I would say, you know -- it's difficult, but I think that, you know, we need to have more people who do have physical disabilities on TV, and I think, you know, don't count us out. We are -- we can act just as good as other people, and I think -- I think that that's something that would be really important, because you don't see a lot of -- you don't see a lot of people with disabilities who are portrayed correctly. And I think that's because a lot of people are scared to cast people who are actually disabled. So I think that if we can do more of that, then we'll have really really amazing fleshed out roles. So yeah.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Hartley, you are -- you have quite the fan base coming through right here. We have another question for you. Do you have any advice for kids who want to get into acting, or any advice for casting directors, producers, or directors who are working with actors with disabilities?

>> Hartley Bernier: I'll start with kids who want to get into voice acting. I would say, you know, start off by practicing. I think practicing in any little way you can. Maybe you have a friend who's doing a stop-motion animation or something, and you know, just getting into -- getting in front of a microphone and doing voices, I think that, you know, the best thing for any job is to just practice. And if it's something that you genuinely want to do, talk to your parents. Maybe get them to con -- get them to contact a professional and have a conversation with them about what you would want to do, what your limitations are. And I think, you know, this is something that it's -- it's a career, and it is a serious -- it is a serious job, so it can be difficult. But at the end of the day it's -- it's, in my opinion, one of the most rewarding and fun jobs in the world.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome thank you. No, that's great advice, and thank you for sharing that. I myself as also a fellow disabled actor, I would give the same advice. Just, you know, practice, practice, and you know, like you said, find ways to connect and do things, collaborate with other people, and just put yourself out there. Start with, you know, reading, looking at scripts that you can get your hand on -- hands on, reading books, doing poetry, all different type of things that you can find ways to perform, and -- work on -- your voice, and just, you know, developing characters and stuff, I think, is a great thing, so thank you Hartley. We still have a little more time, and so if anyone else has any other questions they would like to throw in the chat box to ask all of our panelists -- let's see -- let me check here. We have some more questions coming through. This one says it's for Hartley and Kirsten. You mentioned it's hard/challenging to cast characters with disabilities. What is so challenging and why do you think it's hard?

>> Kirsten Sharp: Do you wanna go Hartley?

>> Hartley Bernier: I think -- yeah, I'll go first -- I think it's I think it's difficult because a lot of people -- I think that people tend to underestimate what people like us can do, and I think that -- I think that it's -- it's not necessarily -- we're not going to do -- we're going to do an amazing job, and I think that there -- there might be some challenges, but overall -- it's -- I don't -- I think there's lots of people out there who are -- disabled and who are willing to work. So I think if people can just not underestimate us, and realize that we can do just as good a job, if not better than other people, then you know, we'll be able to get past that.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes, I agree. We are all very capable of doing the work. It's -- somebody's just got to give the person that shot, so it's -- yeah, if I would have one thing to the powers that be, it's, like, give disabled performers a shot. Like you said, we're capable of doing it better, you know, the same, if not better. So, yay. Let's see. Another question came in. Okay. It says Shaylee was recently credited as a voice actor on Madagascar: A Little Wild, so there are definitely opportunities for non-speaking folks, or folks who use ASL to work as voice actors. Yeah, so I wanted to say that, because we had a question of someone that asked about being non-verbal and doing voice over acting. So yes, that is an example. Recently Shaylee Mansfield did Madagascar: A Little Wild. And she's the first person being credited by -- as a voiceover credit where she didn't speak. She used -- they actually used her ASL, her signing, and so she got a voiceover credit for that. So that was super super cool. Nope, all good. So that was just an example of doing voiceover without having to use your voice, so, which I think is a great example in how disabled performers are trailblazing a way within animation, which I think is so cool. We have another one come in. This is for Kirsten. Any ways this project was different than others you've consulted on -- oh. In what ways was this project different than projects you had consulted on in the past?

>> Kirsten Sharp: I think depending on what the particular disability is, you have to approach it from that person's point of view, and ensure you're being authentic representing that particular disability. I think one thing that a lot of people don't realize is that every single disability is so different, and there are so so many of them, and we all differ. In particular, though, I think you approach them all the same. You just have to have them shown as a normal person. And Team Zenko did that so well with just integrating Ari. No one needed to know why Ari used that wheelchair. He just did and he just is a person. And I think with the other shows that I've helped with, and in my production work that I do every day, we just have to show people with disabilities as people in roles that they normally have -- wife, sister, mother, brother, father, daughter, grandfather -- and ensure that we are casting those roles for those particular people. Instead of casting the person in the wheelchair, we are casting the friend, we are casting the mom, we are casting the brother, we are casting the kid. And that role can be played by someone with a disability. It doesn't have to be written for someone with a disability. And I think that even though Team Zenko made the conscious decision to include someone with a disability, it simply was just a friend and a member of that group.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that and I think that is so important. Often in the trainings that I do, and the conversations I have with people trying to get them to understand disability representation, one of the things I always say, I'm an aunt, I'm a best friend, I'm a daughter, I love all these different things. I love to shop, I love travel, and you know, I love fashion and beauty. But none of those things have to do with my disability. My disability, you know, is involved in me making all those things happen, but they have nothing to do with my disability. So thinking about it like that. And I think oftentimes, to your point, you know, they don't think of it that way. Oftentimes it is, you know, oh, the wheelchair user here, or the woman in a wheelchair there, and it's like no, it doesn't have to be that way. [laughs] So I'm gonna pose -- oh go ahead.

>> Karen Lloyd: To that point, I would say we made this whole show during COVID and we all -- we made the whole show working from home. And I think that also has opened up that, hey, yeah, we can do this [laughs] and Hartley, he recorded in Toronto. Like if, if we -- if it wasn't COVID we probably would have flown him out for a couple of times, but he still would have had to work remotely. And now with all the remote work, I think there's even more possibilities for everyone to get -- even artists in the animation industry, disabled -- if more studios are open to working from home, if that's easier for you, you know what I mean, like, so I think this could also show that, hey, we can do this, you know, from home. And, you know, more opportunity for voice actors. And I think for that representation is like, if you want to act -- learn to act, like, it won't matter if you're in a wheelchair, if you have a -- if you're a good actor, you know, so you don't want to just be cast because -- there is very authentic casting going on, so be in the pool then, like, for those casting directors, like, oh yes, we've got quite a few people that happen to be in wheelchairs, or happen to have this disability, but they're really good actors. So it's like, that's what we really want in the voice casting. So when it's not there, then we have to go searching, right, and then give training. So if you want to do it, find a way to, yeah, like, now there's more online courses, there's a lot, so take an online voiceover -- you know, like, and then you -- then you're in the pool to be chosen from. And then yeah, then someone that -- if we don't see them and they happen to fit the bill, they can play the mom, and they happen to have a disability. It won't matter because they were the best choice for the role, because it's the voice and, you know, this kind of thing. So it's, yeah, getting that -- because we still want the best performance -- because it, as Hartley said, it's a job. It's not just fun and games. Like, it's -- you have time limitation -- like there's all these things -- and techniques and things that Hartley picked up on and did fabulous with. And so yeah, it's -- but more opportunities I think have opened because of COVID and -- but if that's what you want, I think more opportunities will, because you can get the training and you can do a lot more from home or from more possibilities than having to travel. All of us, we don't want to travel. [laughs]

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, I agree that [crosstalk]

>> Karen Lloyd: Hopefully it turns out to be a good thing.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yeah, no I agree. I was just gonna say, yeah, to your point, training and auditioning has become a lot easier with COVID, because you can do it on Zoom, or attend classes, and it's been so much more accessible. So yeah, Jack, go ahead. What were you going to add?

>> Jack Thomas: I'm just going to talk about how great Hartley was, and how he basically recorded the show from a closet in his house, and how that didn't stop him. And his parents should get a medal, because they -- his dad would be the sound engineer, would reach in, you'd see his dad's hand go in and adjust a setting, and it -- really, it was very inspiring. He really did sort of embody the positive spirit of the show, of -- if you try hard you can do anything, because he was not an experienced voice actor, and voice acting is tough. It's not like being on camera. I know there are a ton of -- I'm sure, Karen, you've been your experience too -- a ton of really good on-camera actors who cannot voice act to save their life, because it's a different skill set. You had to be so expressive. And Hartley really started from scratch and learned to do it. And I mean, it's -- sort of -- to me, like, it was always fun to work with Hartley, because he was always just so energetic and upbeat. And he really does embody the spirit of the show. And I just can't rave enough about this young man and the great work that he did. Maybe that's a little off topic, but I just want to say. [crosstalk]

>> Karen Lloyd: And give a little kudos, our voice director Nicole Oliver worked with Hartley, and I think -- I think he had a blast doing it, if I may speak, because she's a lot of fun. And she really helped him find his authentic actor, and I think you guys did really great together.

>> Hartley Bernier: I appreciate those compliments very much. That means -- it means a lot to me.

>> Tatiana Lee: And shout out to makeshift sound booths within the house [laughs] That has become a thing within, like, with COVID, I did the same thing. And it's like, just finding a space, and it's like, you know what, we're gonna make this work. And that's where you get creative -- and innovative. And I'm just one of those people that I love getting innovative to be creative, and so, it's so fun. So yeah, if you want to do voice acting, try to make your makeshift soundproof room. I did my closet where my closet had, like, clothes. And so it like helps with the sound and, yeah, easy, just grab you a mic, different type of mics, and just make it happen. So you had a lot of fun doing that, Hartley?

>> Hartley Bernier: Yes, it was -- it was an interesting experience, but it was a lot of fun.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Do you have any other tips and tricks that you found discovering trying to record at home?

>> Hartley Bernier: Lots of -- lots of comforters lined up on the walls of a closet make for a very good makeshift booth, so that is one thing that I definitely learned. [chuckles]

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, awesome. So I have a question and I think maybe this question will be thrown at Jack, and you can say as much as you want or not, but folks want to know, are there any other shows at Dreamworks or anywhere else that you would be working on that may have some other disabled characters? Are you thinking about it? Are you, like, still toying around with it? Or you just in the early stages? Folks want to know.

>> Jack Thomas: Yeah I don't -- I'm not on a show at Dreamworks right now, so -- I know inclusiveness is really important there and, you know, I'm guessing that if I do get another show at Dreamworks, we will probably have differently abled characters. But I'm not on a show, so who knows? Who knows where I'll end up?

>> Tatiana Lee: Okay awesome, awesome. So we have about another 10 more minutes, so if anyone has any last-minute questions they want to get in. In the meantime, I will ask one of you -- each of you just any last words, anything you want to add or say that you didn't get to touch on? This is the time. So I will start out with Karen.

>> Karen Lloyd: I don't know what else. Yeah, I had a few little notes, I don't know. I just probably have already said it, but it was -- it was fun, I think it was probably fun even for the animators to do something that was a little different, that they had to do a little research for, and, you know, find that, you know, it was -- because it's not something you animate every day, so I think it was probably really cool for them as well, because the work we're getting back, hey that looks great! That looks real, they're doing the research. And so it's always nice to up those challenges, and that, and having that research and authenticity, I think was, is really cool. So kudos to my team for rising to the occasion and [laughs] making Ari. Just Ari, he was just -- he was just one of the kids, like again, I just see him as one of the kids And he, again, with his own distinct personality, like all of them did. Like, he was just -- he was funny but, you know, he was smart, but he wasn't like a robot, like, he was just human, right? He just -- you know, all the kids were like that. They have their little, you know, goofs and saying something ridiculous, and that kind of stuff. And so we just treated Ari the same as everybody else, and hopefully it paid off. I just hope we that we did that community -- like, people are happy with it. I just hope we did okay [laughs] that it's represented -- in a positive way, and that was -- our goal, so I hope we -- I hope we achieved it. [chuckles]

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. I enjoyed the first couple of episodes that I saw, so I'm totally a fan. So in my opinion, I thought it was executed great. So, how about you Kirsten, any last thoughts or anything else you want to say before we close out?

>> Kirsten Sharp: I just hope that more and more teams decide to represent characters with disabilities authentically, and take a page from Mainframe and Dreamworks' books, and continue to create real world examples for people to learn and look up to.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, thank you. How about you Jack? Any last words or anything you want to say or add before we close out?

>> Jack Thomas: Well -- you know, I was just thinking about it, you know, when we were writing the scripts, I don't think we ever -- we just treated him like another character, you know, and then trusted the animators to do the work, the artist, and Karen did an amazing job. Her team was so into authenticity and getting things correct, that you know, we -- just wrote him as another kid. I mean, he was -- he evolved over the show to pretty much be the smartest of the kids, and he was, you know, he was the inventor -- and it was almost to the point that we were making him a little too perfect, so we had to ding him up a little bit near the end, give him a couple of foibles, but it was -- it was a fun experience for me too, watching a lot of the videos to sort of prep. That Wheels guy was just amazing, you know, so you started thinking about what the capabilities of the character were, not the limitations, when you see that stuff. It was really a fun experience and Hartley was a great kid to work. Hart, he likes to be called -- you like to be called Hart --

>> Hartley Bernier: Yeah I don't really mind, but Hart is my go-to nickname.

>> Jack Thomas: Hey, I'm sorry Hart.

>> Hartley Bernier: No worries.

>> Tatiana Lee: So --

>> Karen Lloyd: Oh, one last thing having -- sorry -- having Ari as one of the characters made us very conscious for our designing the environments, actually, because we wanted everything to be wheelchair accessible, like, so there's ramps into the community center, there's a ramp at the back of the truck. So it made us more conscious of designing the world. And I think that was really important, whether we had that character or not, it probably should be designed that way, right, like whether you see those characters on screen or not. So I thought that was something that really made us conscious and made us aware. So I thought -- I think that was really good for the team overall, and the design team as well. So that was just a little extra thing.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that, I love that. Yes, very intentional, and I love that you recognized that, which is so great. So with that, last but not least, Hartley, do you have anything you want to say or add before we close out?

>> Hartley Bernier: Yeah I would just like to say, first of all, thank you for having me on here. This was -- this was so amazing. And yeah I would just like to say playing Ari was so much fun, and it was -- it was truly an honor to be able to -- make -- to be able to use my voice and make that be him. But -- and I would -- also say that I hope to see more differently abled people, and people with disabilities on screen and being casted for things. I think that that is really important and it'd be -- it'd be really cool to see more people like me on TV. Yeah.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, thank you so much for that. Thank you so much to Jack, Karen, Kirsten and Hartley. This was such a great conversation. This webinar will be available on our website and social media to watch again, and we're so excited to be seeing the upward trend of authentic representation. And thanks again to the folks at Dreamworks and Mainframe Studios for this wonderful series. Don't miss Team Zenko Go, streaming on Netflix starting March 15th, which is tomorrow. And I hope you have a great rest of your day. Thank you all for joining us!