>> Shelly Christensen: Hello everyone! Welcome to the first of the four webinars in the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network for the 2023 series, "Pathways to Belonging: Supporting the Spiritual and Faith Community Interests of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities." My name is Shelly Christensen. I am the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility, and a member of the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network. My visual description follows. I am a white woman with curly shoulder-length brown hair and hazel eyes. I'm wearing blue -- blue framed glasses, and a dark blue and coral sweater. This webinar is being recorded. And I want to share with you information about ASL interpretation, and our transcription as well. You can turn on captions with the CC button in Zoom, and then you can pin the interpreter to ensure they are visible throughout the presentation. You can also view a live transcript in a separate window, and the link will be in the chat box. Please put questions for our speakers in the Q&A box. That is very important that they go there, and you can put questions in there throughout the presentation. We will -- we will bring those questions to our presenters in the second part of this webinar. The webinar is being recorded, and after open captions are added, you will find it at RespectAbility.org/AAIDD-2023-series/. And again, that link will be in the chat box as well. This webinar series is a collaboration between the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network of AAIDD and RespectAbility. RespectAbility is a diverse, disability-led nonprofit that works to create systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. Our mission is to fight stigmas and advance opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community life, as they choose. The AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network advances recognition of the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In addition to offering this annual webinar series, we collaborate with other AAIDD interest networks, disability organizations, and faith-based organizations to elevate the voices of people with disabilities. The Network also supports the Reimagining Spirituality Leadership Award, which recognizes individual contribution to the growing field of faith and disability. We host a forum at the AAIDD annual conference that addresses current issues, such as the one presented in this webinar series. Again, I invite you to submit questions for our esteemed presenters in the Q&A box. And I'm -- love to introduce you to our presenters. First, Bill Gaventa is an author, speaker, trainer, and consultant in the field of faith and disability. He is the Founder and Director Emeritus of The Institute of Theology and Disability, and directs the National Collaborative on Faith and Disability. Bill is a past president of AAIDD. He is a member of RespectAbility's Board of Directors, and is the author of many excellent books, including his most recent: "Disability and Spirituality Recovering Wholeness: Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability." Next, Keith Dow serves as the Manager of Organizational and Spiritual Life with Christian Horizons. Keith coaches supervisors and direct support professionals in the areas of grief and loss, compassion fatigue, and conflict resolution. And he is the author of another excellent book, "Formed Together: Mystery, Narrative, and Virtue in Christian Caregiving." Jasmine Duckworth has been serving with Christian Horizons since 2004, and has been disabled herself since 2015. As part of her role as Community Development Manager, she often speaks with churches and community groups about disability, accessibility, and ableism. She works closely with self-advocates as they work to improve Christian Horizons and the broader community. One more reminder to post your questions in the Q&A box. And now, it's my pleasure to turn this over to my friend and mentor, Bill Gaventa.

>> Bill Gaventa: Hello everyone. I'm a short bearded wearing glasses semi-elderly guy who's been around in this field for a long time, wearing a blue blazer and a red and white shirt. And behind me are pictures of our son when he was about 40 years ago when he was -- was young, so that tells you about something about me. Now we are just -- we talked about churches, but I want -- and Christian Horizons is on today, but I want to stress that all of us here have worked with multiple faith groups. So it's not simply -- and you'll see that later on in the -- in the webinar. But it also brings up the question of what's the difference between religion and spirituality. Because spirituality is -- religion is often a way in which people have experienced and learned and expressed their spirituality, but spirituality is broader than that. It's not necessarily -- experienced or -- or learned through particular faith communities. Dr. Christina Puchalski, who's head of the George Washington Institute on Spirituality and Health has a really neat definition that says it's the dimension of a person that seeks to find meaning in his or her life, and also a quality that supports connection and relationship with the sacred as well as each other. So it can -- it can be -- include and be part of involvement in faith communities, and that's what it is for lots of people. But for others it may be involvement in other kinds of community. But what we know increasingly from the research -- there's a huge amount of research now these days in the role of spirituality in health care and health and wholeness and flourishing -- we know that it has a huge powerful role in building resilience, in combating loneliness, and positive health outcomes, and in quality of life. Next slide please. So -- but often in the services systems with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, it's not been an easy topic to address. And sometimes -- seems to us some of us avoid it, but it's not been an easy topic to address. And there are reasons for that. One: sometimes spirituality is seen as a private matter and not something that the public or professionals should be concerned about. I think secondly, sometimes with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, people assume that faith doesn't really apply because they have questions about their capacity for reason or for understanding. And yet -- the falsity of that kind of equation can easily be seen by if you've got children and you've been part of a faith community, that people of all kinds of ages and intellectual abilities have been involved in faith communities for centuries. Third: some -- most of our service -- support services are funded by state systems, and people think, well, we can't talk about spirituality because the separation of church and state. That's false. You can talk about it. You can't proselytize. You cannot leverage anything you do on saying somebody should believe something or should go to a particular faith tradition or be part of that. If you've talked with people with disabilities and their families about their own experiences with faith communities, with religion, their own spirituality, you may have also heard experiences that have not been easy for them, experiences that have wounded people, because of either people not paying attention, or saying something that was wounding or hurtful or sometimes even being asked to leave a particular faith community. There's also the barrier of science versus religion. We -- some think that human services are based on the human sciences, and religion is different relationship to that, but I think I'd go back and say to point to the research that's being done on the importance of spirituality by lots of different human services and sciences. And finally -- a lot of us -- a lot of people who are not been clergy or parts of faith communities or whose job has been this have a lack of training in how to address this. They haven't learned as part of their professional training. And when we ask direct support professionals or people in support agencies to think about working with all the faith communities in their area, there's just a huge diversity in those faith communities. There all have different -- they have very different cultures and ways of doing things, so it can be kind of a bewildering array, just as -- human services for people with disabilities can be a bewildering array for people who are not in that world. Next slide please. So I like to think of it -- spirituality -- as kind of a threefold definition, that it's what's core to your identity, first of all -- how do you -- what would you consider to be sacred or holy, or what's most important to you? What are the qualities of your life that are characteristics that are most important to you? Secondly, to think about it as connections: connections to yourself -- we say know thyself -- and be true to yourself, connections with others, connections with that sense of holy and sacred, wherever that's found. It could be in faith buildings and sanctuaries, but it can also be in nature, it can be in time, it can be in other kind -- it can be in a variety of ways there where people feel connected to what undergirds them and grounds them. And then third, spirituality is about purpose, and what's your sense of -- how do I make a difference in the world? Where -- what am I called to do? What's my contribution to others? And in terms of our system, those values line up with Independence, at the beginning of -- we think about people being independent and having an identity. Second, connections with inclusion, and being connected. And purpose, third, with employment, volunteering, and other ways that everybody needs a chance to contribute to their communities. Next slide. Now there are lots of different ways to assess spirituality, and what I'm not -- purpose here today is not to get you confused about the ways to do it, but there's a fairly simple one that, again, comes out of Dr. Christina Pulchowski's Institute that she talks about. In the states, everybody knows this acronym, FICO, because it's your Social Security taxes taken out of your paycheck. But the questions are -- and think about this if you're asking this about people you work with -- is faith important to someone or their family? Was it important to them before you started serving them in your agency? What else is important to that person and to their Identity, or to their family? Second, how does it influence their daily life? What's been their history? Was it -- how is somebody already involved, or if they are involved in a faith community like a synagogue, is there something more that they would like to do to express their being -- being part of a Jewish Community, for instance. Third, what kind of community, what kind of communal expression does it take, or could it take, in a variety of ways. And if it's some other passion other than a faith community, think about organizations where other people gather with those same passions. And fifth, how can staff in an agency support people's choices and preferences? That's basic person-centered planning. How do we support their choices and their preferences in trying to live out that part of their life? Next slide please. And what this does is to help turn all of us into deep listeners. To direct support staff, you already do that in your jobs, as well as clinical staff. It may turn you into explorers with the people you work with trying out different faith communities, or sometimes people say church shopping or synagogue shopping. It may turn you into a teacher of helping people in those faith communities feel more comfortable about relating to people with disabilities, and it may also help you to be a coach, where you're coaching not just the person you may be accompanying and taking to a faith community, but you're coaching other people who are learning to relate to the -- man or the woman, your friend who you serve and with whom you walk on their spiritual journey. And now, we'll turn this over to Jasmine.

>> Jasmine Duckworth: All right. So my name is Jasmine, and I am a 40 year old white woman with long brown hair. I'm wearing glasses, I'm sitting in a red chair, and there are plants behind me in my living room. I'm happy to be here today, and I'm going to share a story about supporting a man named Mo as he was trying to reconnect with his faith community. So Keith, can you put my slides up? Oh, I work for Christian Horizons. And our vision statement at Christian Horizons is that people who experience disabilities belong in communities in which their god-given gifts are valued and respected. It's important to recognize that -- I think every DS agency probably has a similar vision statement with similar ideals of wanting people to belong in their community. This is not something that we can accomplish as professionals on our own. This is something that the entire community needs to be engaged in, in order for people to truly belong in their communities. So the -- faith communities are a part of that, and it's important for us as professionals in the developmental services field to reach out and partner with community groups and faith groups and faith communities so that people can belong in their communities wherever they are. Next slide. Okay so this is -- there's a photo of me and Mo on the slide. Mo is a middle-aged Pakistani Canadian man who uses a motorized wheelchair. In this photo you can see he's a little shorter than me, he has a beard, he has black hair, and he has a great smile, and he's wearing glasses. So Mo is going to tell you a story on a video on the next slide. I don't want to give too many spoilers, but I am going to talk about what I learned by supporting Mo, some of the practical tips on how you could help someone connect to their faith community. So Mo needed help reconnecting to a mosque, and I was able to support him to do that. Some of the things that I learned was it's important to get clear information from what -- on what the person wants. Have a conversation with them, maybe look at their personal plan, see what goals they have documented, ask their history, ask other people in their lives. Get a really clear picture of what do they want so that you can help them to try to find that. Ask others who might have experience in that realm. Mo is Muslim. I am not Muslim. I've had very little connection to the Muslim community, and so I needed to reach out to other people who knew more about that to equip me to support Mo. So ask other co-workers, ask people that you might know in your personal life, or turn online to communities that might be able to support you there. Use Google, use Google Street View, phone calls, emails. Don't be afraid to make mistakes and ask for help, and don't be afraid to show your ignorance, to say I don't know, really, what I'm looking for but this is what I've been told to find. Can you help me? I Googled all sorts of mosques, I looked at Google Street View, which helped me see if the buildings might be accessible or have barriers. I called mosques. I sent emails. A lot of those were dead ends, but one of them turned into a really good lead, so just keep trying. Make contact before showing up. The fact that I had done that pre-work of reaching out and finding the place where somebody was eager to connect with us and help be that bridge to help Mo come back into a mosque in his community was really really crucial. We had a meeting with a couple of the Imams before he went to a worship service, so that we could talk about what it would be like and iron out all of those details. And so that was really important for him. Explain what you're looking for, explain your role as a professional and ask for help. Like I said, people are generally happy to explain. And don't be afraid to make mistakes. People are generally not going to judge you for not being familiar with their faith tradition. They're going to be happy to help you navigate it, and they're going to be, usually, enthusiastic about sharing about their own tradition and helping create that bridge for people to come in. And then lastly, before you go, make sure that you're clear on the etiquette and the expectations of what it's like to go into that faith space. Make sure that the person you're supporting has everything they need to participate properly, and make sure that you, as the staff person accompanying, know what's expected of you so that you're not going to be, you know, making a faux pas or doing anything offensive. Again, it's okay to make some mistakes. You don't have to have it perfect. But do some research so that you're walking in a little prepared. Okay, now we're going to switch to the video, and Mo is going to tell you about -- about his faith and about kind of our journey together to helping him reconnect to a mosque.

>> Jasmine Duckworth: So I gave some practical tips of what to do beforehand. This slide gives some practical tips of what to do on the day of. So keep an open mind. Like you heard in the video, this was very new for me. I do have experience in the Christian faith, and so bringing my understanding of what it is to worship, what it is to be in a faith community, to enter a holy space, I could bring that perspective and just be open to what is this, how is it similar, how is it different, and then following Mo's lead. Be on time. That's like -- it seems so straightforward, but it's so hard, but it's so important to be on time, because if you come in late and you're a distraction and a disruption, that's not going to help the person to connect with the people. And if you've been in a worship service, you know that sometimes the pre-service chatter in the lobby is just as important for connecting with the community as the actual worship service -- is, so be on time. Bring a list of good questions. Come prepared with the things you don't know, and be honest about what you don't know. And take notes constantly on those questions, so that you can communicate it back to the rest of the team. Because if I had gone in that day and I had learned how to support Mo through it but I hadn't been able to transfer that knowledge to the rest of the team supporting him, it wouldn't have ultimately done much good. So take notes, plan to communicate that. And let the person lead as much as possible. So, like you heard in our video I did -- we said to Mo, like, "we don't know what we're doing, please tell us." And he just took over and he let us lead. And it was really great to see him as the expert in his own life and his own faith, and to be able to follow that. It really felt like a partnership, and it -- rather than "I'm the professional." Often we fall into that role, "I'm the professional, I should know what I'm doing," like, I did not know what I was doing, and it was -- it was very freeing and very humbling to be able to say, "I'll help you but you have to tell me what to do." And I think it was a great experience for him, too, to be the one in charge. Plan from the beginning to fade staff support as possible. So right from the very first meeting, the conversation was, "well, when a staff is with you, Mo, this is how you can participate. When a staff is not with you, this is how we can support you to participate." And the Imams were stepping in right away and planning a process of fading staff support, which is really important, because it is about the person connecting to their own community, and hopefully staff can become invisible and maybe not even needed. And then think beyond just the worship service. Right in that first meeting, we talked about Quran study, we talked about community barbecues, and then Mo was saying there's special clothes that they like to wear when they go to pray, and so it sent me back to Google and looking for stores in Ottawa that sell Islamic clothing so that he could get the right kind of clothes so that he could feel like he fully belongs in his community as he goes back. Next slide please, Keith? So my top three takeaways that I kind of learned in this process was number one, I needed to bring my whole self to this experience. I used my professional skills of, you know, questioning and documenting and communicating and emailing and all of that, but I also had to bring my personal self into it. Like I talked about, bringing my understanding of faith and tradition and worship and being open-minded, and using that to connect with Mo. Just watching him wheel into that prayer room and watching him pray after knowing he'd been away for so many years was so meaningful to me, because I know what it is to want to connect with God or the Divine, and I know what it is to feel far from God and then to find that reconnection. And so to witness him in that moment, different from the way I've experienced it, and yet knowing on a deep level we have a similarity of experience there was really meaningful. I also was able to connect with some of my Muslim friends outside of work to ask them, can you teach me how to -- tie headscarf, can you teach me the rules of etiquette and modesty? And so using my personal connections was really important to help me be more professional in the moment. Secondly, this was a great chance to affirm the expertise and follow the leadership of the person, of Mo. It was just -- yeah, it was wonderful to be able to let him lead, and that he was willing to lead me and teach me as we went through that together. And then third, it was about faith. Watching Mo, like he said, rebuild that connection vertically to God, to Allah, but also it was about culture and community, watching him build those connections with the Imams and with the other people that we met when we were at the mosque. I know that losing his parents has meant that he's lost the opportunity to practice speaking his language, and so to see him have a full conversation in Urdu for, you know, 20 minutes, I had to keep interrupting and saying, "Mo, what you guys are talking about, do I need to write any of this down to tell your staff?" And he'd be like, "oh yeah." And then he'd tell me and translate and I was able to take that information. But it was just beautiful to see him connecting with the community on a horizontal connection, as well as the vertical as he connected with -- with God. So that -- that's my story with Mo. Keith, I'll turn it over to you.

>> Keith Dow: Thanks so much Jasmine I'm going to stop sharing here for just a minute. I love how you're able to dive into some of those things Bill was talking about and kind of explore a practical situation where that happened. So I am -- I work with Christian Horizons as well. I am a officially middle-aged brown-haired -- brown and gray-haired now -- man wearing a plaid shirt, which I love to do. I have a lot of books behind me to help me look smart, and a fake tree because I can't keep live trees along for very long inside. So it's wonderful to be with you today. And just a bit of a recap of where we've come from and where we're headed in this -- this last few minutes together. We began with Bill giving us a definition of spirituality and walking us through some of the barriers that we encounter when we support people in their spirituality and our work. So he gave us some helpful insights into this journey. And then Jasmine shared her practical first-hand experience of supporting somebody through this and really gave -- helped to flush that out for us as well. And so as we come to a close, my hope is to bring us back to the heart of why we do what we do. And I'm going to share a slide here with a quote from Robert Hickey. Robert Hickey was Robert Hickey was from Queens University. He's done a lot of research with direct support professionals primarily in Ontario here in Canada. And he has this quote that says "DSPs truly enjoy working with people with developmental disabilities, and appear deeply committed to the nature of direct support work." And I'm sure for many of us it's kind of like, well -- well duh, like -- that's what we do, that's why we're here, that's what's drawn us to the work in the first place. But I do want to dive into this because I think it relates back to the definition of spirituality that Bill started with, that it's a dimension of a person that seeks to find meaning in his or her life. It's also the quality that supports connection to and relationship with the sacred as well as each other. So as you start to think of some of those different components, we see that reflected in the work that we do as we come alongside people. And I know I've had the privilege of walking with teams and people as they process grief, maybe something that they've supported who's passed away, and it's just profound being a part of those experiences and hearing the depth of grief and loss, but also the joy and celebration when they started thinking about the memories that they share with that person. So this is -- profound work that we do, it's significant work, and whether or not you feel a connection to the sacred in this work as well, that's certainly something we can accompany people with. And so, as Jasmine was sharing, there's a beauty in those moments that she shared with Mo as he connected with his faith roots as well. I think one of the big challenges of the pandemic for many of us was that what draws to this work wasn't necessarily what we saw lived out, right? So for understandable reasons, there were all sorts of restrictions put in place, and we couldn't see people embracing their community, getting connected with people in the way that they had before. And so that's really hard and challenging, especially if it's one of the primary things that draws us to our -- to this work, to see people grow and flourish in that way. But now I think we have new opportunities ahead of us as well, because people are kind of reconsidering their relationship with faith or spirituality. Faith communities themselves are thinking about what worked through the pandemic, what didn't work, how can we recalibrate around our values and what's important to us. And so it can be a great time to accompany someone and sit down with them and just say, you know, where are you at in relation to your faith and spirituality? What's helped sustain you? Trying some new experiences for them related to their faith tradition can be important. Or maybe it's somebody who's been invested in a faith community for a long time and is looking to take a break. I don't want to undersell that either, that for some people, maybe it's stepping back, and for maybe -- many people, maybe it's re-engaging there as well. Jasmine did a great job of talking about bringing her whole self to work and what that looked like for her. And so I have a picture on the screen with a woman and a man, both with glasses. The man's in a wheelchair, and so she's supporting him here. And so Jasmine had experiences in Christian faith communities, but not in Muslim faith communities. I'm similar in terms of decades in in churches, but many experiences will be new for me as well. And we bring the richness of that -- of those experiences into the work that we do. If you're coming here today and maybe you don't have that faith tradition connection, you might say, well, how does that -- how does that involve me? But I think there's gifts to bringing our experience with faith communities. There's also a gift in bringing a lack of experience. You bring a curiosity. Maybe you don't have all those preconceptions that some people might have. So wherever you're at, when you bring your whole self to work, you're able to engage those experiences hopefully in a meaningful way as you relate to someone. And as we approach, as we kind of shift from -- it might be very different for us, it might be very new -- we want to kind of shift from a spirit of judgment to a spirit of curiosity, and just ask what does this look like for the person. Why -- what draws them to this community? What draws them to this religion or to this faith or to this service? Maybe they're there for the friendships, maybe that's something that's really important to them. Maybe they're there for the coffee and snacks and the greeting as they arrive. I know that's always a highlight for me. Maybe they're there for the spiritual enrichment, for the teaching, to learn more about their faith and their tradition. Maybe they're there for the music or -- for the sights and sounds, kind of the sensory experience. Or they could be there for any combination of these things. So as a human being accompanying human beings, you bring an interest and dedication to this work that helps you to connect with people in a real way, at a deeply human level. And who knows, maybe one day -- I know a lot of things are being done by robots these days -- maybe one day our work will be taken over by robots. And actually this image that I have up here on the screen was done by AI. [laughs] Robots would bring a certain kind of perspective to their work, right? They'd always be on time, they'd have the experience of -- they know all the things about the different religions. They would be perfectly objective, so they'd have some strengths. But I really believe that there's something important we bring to this work as a human being, that we can connect on that level of uncertainty. So you heard both Mo and Jasmine share about some of their questions or concerns heading into that space, and they were able to connect in a real way about that. And just knowing that you bring creativity, insight, experience, dedication, and vision to your work too, I think is so important. This is the kind of thing that robots will never be able to replicate. So let's talk a bit, kind of tongue-in-cheek, about staying ahead of the robots. How do we do that? What does that look like? Well, we hear a lot of talk about being value neutral, and being kind of objective in our -- professionalism, and there's something to that. We certainly want to keep that in mind. But I want to build on some of Bill's work here to talk about being value clear. I don't know that it's possible for us to completely disconnect from our experiences. I've had both very positive experiences in faith communities, and I've had some really hard and negative experiences as well. So rather than presuming that I can enter into a space and just be objective and detached, I need to think about how is that going to impact me? What am I bringing into this space and what should I be leaving behind? We all have values. As Christian Horizons, Jasmine shared our vision statement a little earlier, we have some pretty core values to us, such as valuing people, fostering belonging, serving others, and respecting -- gifts. And I think this is -- these are really important values to me personally as well. But when I think about fostering belonging, for example, that can really help me come alongside someone and encourage them to invest in their friendships, their relationships, their community. But if that -- if those friendships start to break down and that person decides they want to to back away or they want to go connect with new people, maybe the relationships in their -- their church or faith community have broken down and they want to try somewhere new, I need to know also when to to back away from that and say, well, my work is directed by this person, and it looks like they want to head in a different direction. So making sure that my values don't kind of impede with somebody else's values, the values of the person I'm supporting. Secondly -- we are people first, and I think, like I said, Jasmine and Mo helped display this well, that the people-first movement has done a lot of good for empowering advocates. And we are all people first in a way. We all bring that kind of experience, vulnerability, those aspects of what it means to be human. And this can be a really positive thing as we're coming alongside faith communities, because we also know that the Rabbi, the Priest, the Imam, they're bringing their own questions. They have their areas of expertise for sure, but maybe they're looking to learn more about accessibility. Maybe they don't have a lot of experience themselves with people with disabilities. And so kind of joining together towards an accessible and welcoming experience, I think, can be a really powerful thing. Thirdly, knowing our professional responsibilities. So, we don't want to make it all about being professional. I think these stories help show the tension between the personal and the professional in a really important way. But we do need to be professional as well. We talked about the importance of arriving on time, doing the work ahead of time, being courteous, being respectful, all of those types of things that go with being a professional. Knowing what we're talking about as well, and being able to communicate that information. But this is also important when we recognize that we are supporting someone in their community, we are supporting someone in their faith. And this can -- be crucial when we do bring our own values into into our work, right? That if we -- disagree with a particular religious tradition or particular approach to a topic, we know that it's not about us, it's about us accompanying somebody, and taking joy in them connecting with their community, and them finding purpose and meaning in that work as well. And there will be times where we need to step back -- I think a tendency can be to over support, to feel like our own competence is kind of tied up in this work, and so not allow the community to step in and make a difference in the person's life. So knowing when to stop, step back, as well as when to provide that support is really crucial. And then my fourth Point here is to know when to advocate for new and creative solutions. So I want to recognize that we all find ourselves as part of a system of support in some way. If you're a part of a faith community, you're part of a system of faith as well. And sometimes we encounter really significant barriers. And so we also need to recognize that maybe I can't solve this on my own. Maybe I need to propose to my management, to my supervisor, to our service system that we need other scheduling in place, we need other forms of transportation, we need petty cash, whatever it is, that that needs to happen. Maybe we need to think of creative solutions such as the community or friends in the community coming along and providing that transportation or providing that support. Because we don't want to underestimate some of those barriers that you face in the work that you do. I think this is really crucial as well, maybe particularly for leaders. So if you're not in a direct support role today, think about how your role does intersect with the work that's being done here, whether it's in finances, whether it's as a supervisor as you're creating schedules -- as somebody who's championing a kind of vision for an organization as well, where does this -- piece about spiritual supports fit into the priorities of the work that you do? How can -- you support that well? And then -- as I wrap up here, I'm going to share a couple of images from Christian Horizons Family Camp. It would be similar to Johnny and Friends family retreats in the United States as well. And I have a couple of photos here from the camp of people with varied abilities being up on stage, leading in worship. One young person here is holding up a broom. And these are really important experiences for me. It is a faith-based setting, but it's one that's primarily driven by people with intellectual disabilities and their families and other people with disabilities. And so we've been focusing a lot and we've been talking a lot about the service sector side of things. We've been talking a lot about the person-centered planning side of things. And those are crucial, and those are important. I don't want to undermine those at all. But we also want to think about societal change. And so it may seem like a small thing. So that day at the Mosque, those experiences with Mo, you might might seem like you're making incremental steps towards helping one person belong as part of a community. But I really believe that this is part of a much bigger movement, and that is to see our society, our communities, become more accessible and more inclusive. And we're playing a small part in that change, and I think this work helps our communities become better for everyone as well. So I just want to remind us of that larger picture as well that we're a part of here. I hope this webinar has been helpful for you. I'm going to share a couple of resources, and then I think we're going to go back to some Q&A and see what's come in there as well, so if you haven't -- if you have some questions, if you have some ideas or thoughts, stories even, feel free to drop them in the Q&A and we'll come to that in just a moment. So a few of us are part of the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network. And so there's been a lot of great work happening there. I'm thrilled to be part of this webinar series. But we've also been partnering with the National Association of Direct Support Professionals in a couple of ways. So one is the e-badge. If you're a part of their e-learning program, I do encourage you to check that out, there's some neat work happening there. And they also had a really great frontline initiative back in August of 22 that has several stories just related to supporting people in community and getting connected with their faith as well. As a shameless plug, I'll put up Bill and my books here as well. So one is "Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness." It's by Bill. And then "Formed Together: Mystery, Narrative, and Virtue in Christian Caregiving," by me. And then, here's just our email addresses. You will be getting a copy of the slides and a resource sheet as well, so don't feel like you need to scribble those down right now. But do feel free to reach out to any of us with questions as well, especially if we're not able to cover it here today.

>> Shelly Christensen: Thank you Keith and Jasmine and Bill. I'm just so -- so moved, especially, Jasmine, by Mo's story, how important it is to capture -- to capture that. And not just talking about it, but to hear Mo's voice, to hear Mo's story, to hear his history. And to, really, as Bill talked about, deep deep listening before you can -- before even stepping foot into a faith community, there's a lot of things to do ahead of time, and I think you just beautifully illustrated so much of that in this entire presentation. I want to invite our viewers to use the Q&A box to put your questions in. And on that note, I'm gonna -- I'm gonna read Diane Sturmer's comments and questions. "Thank you for this beautiful presentation. It speaks of inclusiveness clearly. Question is what has been the heartbeat of each of you to begin your journey in inclusiveness and accessibility?"

>> Jasmine Duckworth: I can answer that. I don't know exactly what you mean by what has been the heartbeat of each of you, but I can tell you where it started for me. As a small child, my mom was a sign language interpreter at our church, and so I often sat in the deaf section of the church. As a three or four-year-old child, my mom was up front interpreting and I was being cared for by our church friends, who were all deaf people. And so it was just an obvious part of how life is, is that everyone is included, everybody is together in all areas, one of them being faith communities. And so as a child, and a teenager, as an adult, obviously I wanted to continue to live in a space like that, and to work to create more spaces like that.

>> Shelly Christensen: Bill or Keith?

>> Bill Gaventa: Unmute myself. My beginning was as a trainee in a -- pastoral care program at the University of North Carolina's hospital. And I was assigned as part of my job to one of the early -- what are now called University Centers of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. And I had no idea what to do as a pastor or a chaplain with families who were coming through there with kids for a kind of multi-disciplinary evaluation. But what -- where my call got born was just listening to those families, and saying, kind of like Jasmine said in her thing, I didn't know what to say, so I just sort of bumbled and said "can you tell me your church story" or "tell me what -- whether your faith community has been important to you?" And just out of hearing those stories -- both the good ones and then, far too often, not so good ones, was where my sense of call and passion got born for, you know, this is something we can do to change things. And as I now know much later, it was also about the joy -- to go back to what Keith said and you, Jasmine, of helping people get reconnected or connected to parts of their lives that had so much promise for them. Because what I saw, mainly in the lives of people with disabilities, was a sense of loneliness and disconnection and lack of friendship and sometimes purpose. And to me those -- all those things, when I could do that reconnecting, people could start helping out in a synagogue or could -- develop friendships, or whatever, it just -- it makes all the difference in the world to feel -- that just makes my work meaningful and purposeful, as well as joyful.

>> Keith Dow: I'll just pick up on Bill's answer there, because it was so good, but yeah. For me, coming in this work I had not had a lot of experience with people with disabilities, let alone intellectual and developmental disabilities, but I've been part of Christian faith communities -- for decades. And so joining in the work of supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, I realized what -- churches or mosques, what synagogues, were largely missing out on, and that's the -- leadership and participation -- of people with disabilities. And so like Bill said, the, you know, the opportunities for friendship, for just growth and development that -- that happen, both for the person who I was accompanying or journeying with and for -- the church community or the -- faith community that they were joining, you really started to see people being transformed. And I think a really positive way it broke down a lot of the -- I'm going to say pretensions that sometimes religious communities can form if you don't have to be flexible and if you don't have a diverse community base. Thank you. Marcella, there is -- Eric put the link to NADSP in the chat, so if you want to look further at the e-badge, which is very exciting, please do. And also the front line initiative, just --

>> Bill Gaventa: What was interesting as we worked on the e-badge was that we learned from NADSP that a lot of the DSPs who worked on community building and community inclusion e-badges, that the stories and experiences they sent in were about helping to take people to faith communities. So I think one of the things we would love for the religion and spirituality division and RespectAbility as well is if you are a DSP, and to share your stories and what you've learned, and some of those, kind of aha moments -- that -- where you've learned things that you thought would be really helpful, or you wish you had known beforehand. And that will be helpful to the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network and many of us as we continue to work on this.

>> Shelly Christensen: Yes, that's great, thank you Bill. And also -- to service provider agencies, to let us know how -- you provide training or how you support your direct support professional staff to -- accompany somebody on this -- journey, which I think is so fascinating and so interesting.

>> Bill Gaventa: Yeah, Shelly, I just wanted to add -- I wanted to say earlier and I forgot. This should not just be up to the DSPs --

>> Shelly Christensen: Right! It's the clinical team, it's others, Keith alluded to that. I mean, say somebody was being -- directly supporting a Jewish person and they are not Jewish, and --but there was a Shelly Christensen working somewhere in the agency who was Jewish. Then that, you know, DSP ought to be able to turn to that person for help, you know, within the network -- one, within that -- particular agency. It all goes down to who do you know who knows and can help us out. And Jasmine's thing was really right. If you don't know, ask. And Keith's thing about sometimes no experiences is a -- gift, because if you don't know and ask other people for help, then usually they'll be glad to help you.

>> Shelly Christensen: A hundred percent, absolutely. We have reached the end of our time together. We could listen for such a long time to this conversation, and maybe host a bigger conversation, but I -- I want to invite everyone to join me in thanking Bill, Keith, and Jasmine for sharing their wealth of knowledge, their experiences, and their stories with us. And just to piggyback on that, for all of us to think about how we'll apply something that we heard today in our own work, or in our own lives. So to continue the series, really excited to invite you to join us on March 15th at 2 pm Eastern for the second webinar in our series. It's called "From Assessment to Participation: Supporting Individual Preferences to Find Their Faith Community." And we're excited our presenters are from Evergreen Life Services, and they've done extensive work in assessments. And they actually have a spiritual assessment. And they're going to show us how to support an individual's preference and participation in their chosen spiritual and religious expressions and practices. You can register, right on your screen is the link to the webinar series. You can register for the remaining three webinars in the series. And if you go to www.RespectAbility.org/AAIDD-2023-series/ and it's -- thank you Eric for putting that in the chat. I also want to thank our wonderful -- ASL interpreter, our CART provider today. And I want to thank Eric Ascher who has been running tech -- for today. And on that note, on behalf of the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network and RespectAbility, thank you for joining us, and I'll see you next month!