>> Lesley Hennen: Okay! Hello everyone. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Lesley Hennen. I am the Entertainment and News Media Associate at RespectAbility my pronouns are she her. And a visual description - I am a white woman with long brown hair. I'm currently wearing a black t-shirt from BRIC that says Representation Matters. And I have a virtual background behind me with the RespectAbility logo in yellow and white. And yeah, thank you all so much for being here. I'm also a writer and an alumni of RespectAbility's Lab for entertainment professionals with disabilities. Now that I'm working on Staff at RespectAbility, I have the opportunity to help shape a lot of the programming of our Labs and meet other disabled creatives, just like the folks that we have on our panel here today. A couple quick housekeeping things: if you'd like to view the ASL interpreter in a larger screen, we invite you to just pin their video which will spotlight the video throughout the entire panel. We also have live captioning that is available in this Zoom. You can view those captions by clicking the CC bottom at the bottom of the Zoom toolbar, or you can also click the link that my colleague Isabella has just posted in the chat. Thank you Isabella. And we will be taking questions during the second half of this panel, so you can feel free to add your questions into the Q&A box also at the bottom of the Zoom toolbar at any point throughout the panel, and we'll be getting to them in about the last 15 minutes or so. Okay, so today we have a bunch of really great Lab alumni from RespectAbility here to talk with us on the panel, and I'm going to have each of them kind of come on camera and introduce themselves. I'm going to just go down my screen. So first we have Sam Krauss, if you want to come on and just give us a brief intro about who you are.

>> Sam Krauss: Hi there. My name is Sam Krauss. I am a television writer. My visual description – I'm a white man in a power wheelchair. I've got hazel eyes, brown hair, and I'm sitting in a green room - it's my bedroom. And I also am an alumni or alumnus of RespectAbility's Entertainment Lab, and also a current entertainment Apprentice, so I'm really happy to be here.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yay, thanks for being here, Sam. Now let's go to Myles Hunt.

>> Myles Hunt: Hi everyone. My name is Myles Hunt. A visual description: I'm a Caucasian male with gold glasses, brown curly hair, and a yellow shirt. And I am a visual artist based out of Ridgewood, New York, and alumnus of the Fall Children's Content Lab, and very happy to be here.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yes, very happy you're here. Okay, and let's go to Jeremy Hsing.

>> Jeremy Hsing: Hi everyone, I'm Jeremy. My pronouns are he/him. I'm a Taiwanese American male with black hair, black glasses, and a black hoodie, so everything black. I am a humanistic Sci-Fi TV writer, and I am also currently the RespectAbility Entertainment News and Media Apprentice, and I was also lucky enough over the summer to be part of the RespectAbility Entertainment Lab.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yay, thank you all for being here. Super excited to dive into this conversation. And today we're just going to chat a little bit about -- breaking in to the entertainment industry and building a community with -- other disabled creative professionals just like ourselves. [barking in background] That's my dog. She loves to make an appearance whenever I'm doing live events. [laughs] So you might hear her throughout this as well. But let's just start out with a question. So you all participated in some of RespectAbility's pipeline programming. I myself also did the Entertainment Lab in summer of 2020. So let's talk a little bit maybe -- how all of you kind of got started on this path to the entertainment industry, and how that led you to RespectAbility. Whoever wants to go first, or I can call on people.

>> Sam Krauss: I can go first. Hi. In terms of, like, how I decided to be a writer -- a television writer, I think I always loved entertainment. I loved movies, television, so very typical things. But I -- I think the genesis of my love for entertainment came from my disability in particular. Entertainment or television and movies felt incredibly accessible, and so when I started, like, performing and doing theater and then -- and doing all sorts of things just acting, singing, music, and writing, it just felt like I was not really limited by the inaccessibility of the world. I could actually do something fun and cool. And so I think I was like around the age of 17. I reached out to my -- a friend, her name's Lauren, and she's a television writer and she had a show called Awkward. And I decided -- I don't know why -- at 17 that I was just gonna be friends and -- and make a connection and learn from Lauren. And through the years she's been a mentor and just the best human being on planet Earth. And years -- I think I was in undergrad -- she invited me into one of her writer's rooms just to visit and I sat in that room. It was for On My Block, and it's on Netflix, it's a great show. And it was the first couple weeks that they had been in the room and I sat and watched everyone pitch their stories. And I just sort of knew right away that that's what I wanted to do too. And so then I started taking meaningful steps towards becoming a television writer, going to grad school, doing the Labs. I found RespectAbility by following other disabled television writers who posted about it, and I believe on Instagram. So anyway, that's that's my long story, but that's how I, you know, decided to enter the world of entertainment, so.

>> Lesley Hennen: I love that. Yeah, what a cool experience also to have that opportunity to kind of sit in on a writer's room when you're -- like, I remember when I first learned, like, what a writer's room was, I had a similar reaction of, like, "oh, this is what I want to do all day."

>> Sam Krauss: Oh my God I know! It was just like, oh my God, Lesley, it was just the best. And I talk about it all the time and, you know, it gave me a lot of opportunities later on. And I can talk about that later, but it's just I, you know, I made a friend and that friend was nice enough to, you know, let me see her world and she's, you know, just the best. So yeah.

>> Lesley Hennen: I love that. We'll get -- we're gonna talk about making friends a little bit in the next question, so we'll circle back to that. But let's go over to Jeremy.

>> Jeremy Hsing: Yeah. My pursuit of a career in entertainment was when -- ever since I was little, I've always loved writing, and just, like, human interaction, how people communicate with each other. I initially thought my path would be more towards journalism, and that's what I devoted most of my high school education towards. But once I went to college, I made the pivot to psychology, and I was planning on becoming an art therapist. And then once the pandemic happened, I realized that I wanted to really tell my own stories and help other people, and storytelling allows me to do both of those, and also allows me to explore my curiosity of, like, human interaction, the psychology of character, stuff like that. So I started applying a lot of internships. And then I was lucky enough to be an intern at the Center for Scholars and Storytellers in which Yalda was actually one of, like, the presenters yesterday, day one, talking about all the data that the Center for Scholars and Storytellers is doing. And they did a collaboration with RespectAbility -- I think it was with Tatiana Lee, who -- it was, like, through Clubhouse, so that's where RespectAbility was on my radar. And then I leveraged my internship at CSS to become a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Intern at Warner/Discovery, which is led by Karen Horne, who was a moderator in another panel yesterday at BRIC Summit. And they had an early career boot camp where I got to hear about what everything RespectAbility stands for, and that's when I knew that I wanted to be part of it.

>> Lesley Hennen: Amazing. Thank you so much for that. And I love how already we have two totally different ways of kind of breaking in, but also, like, similar themes. I think that's important to recognize like there is no one way to break into this industry. Like, everyone has a totally different journey, and they're all totally valid. But let's go over to Myles.

>> Myles Hunt: Thanks Lesley. So my foray into the entertainment industry was through my -- I'm hearing impaired, I have my AirPods in now -- but when I was younger I learned how to lip read and communicate that way. And part of that involved speech therapy. And everyone was learning their syllables by clapping their hands like this. But for me I started doing it like this. Like, I don't know, it just clicked that way. I call these guys the guys, and it just became a thing. And then right off the bat -- who are the best people to do the syllables with? Sesame Street and the Muppets. And I became obsessed. I wanted to be involved in that world, I felt so represented in that world, and a bunch of cool diverse different accepting people. And I was like I have to go there. It was a linear focus, I have to be a part of that, I have to get in. And then in college -- I lucked out by getting an internship for two summers with the Jim Henson company, got to -- go on Sesame Street -- be immersed in the creative atmosphere, and I was just like, this is the world I want to live in, but how can I take it a step further. And since then, my prerogative has been to make a animated series in the same vein of a Sesame Street-feel -- everyone's included, everyone's accepted, everyone's -- part of this -- group who are just striving to -- make something great. And so that's what I've been doing, and that's been part of my journey through there that I reached out to RespectAbility a couple years ago for advice, and at the time I think it was just -- it wasn't perfect timing at either -- everything too much was going on, too much was -- on everyone's plate. And then the Lab popped up on my feed and I applied on a whim. Like oh, this could be fun. And it ended up being, like, I got in and it ended up being a wonderful time, and -- the rest is history. [chuckles]

>> Lesley Hennen: Yay, yes, thank you so much for sharing that. Let's go back to kind of the idea of networking. I feel like it's a very loaded word, people say it a lot in this industry. I always prefer to think of networking as just making friends, right, because I think it takes a little bit of the pressure for -- at least for me -- off of like, oh, I have to make this very important professional connection with this person and my career depends on it, where really, I feel like, you know, in entertainment specifically, oftentimes the jobs that we're working, you spend a lot of time with -- the same group of people so you -- it's kind of a combination of like -- being really talented, working really hard, and then also, like, finding the -- your group of people that you want to keep working with over and over again. So do any of you have kind of some other tips for networking, how to make it feel a little less intimidating or overwhelming, especially when you're first kind of starting to break in? Myles?

>> Myles Hunt: I think the thing that worked out the best in my experience has been not to close yourself up to people who may not necessarily be in your field. I've talked with so many, you know, people, all the way from -- corporate life to purely artistic world to -- science -- science driven, educational driven, but somehow all these things kind of intertwine in some way, and you never know when someone years later says, oh I remember you, you were you're the guy talking about the Muppets, so cool. I got my friend doing this thing, I don't know how you could be connected to it, give him a chance. And I mean that's how I even got my internship with the Jim Henson Company. It was a friend of mine's friend who was a children's book author, like, oh, I know this person loves Sesame Street, let me put you two and two together. And I mean you just -- just never know. And I think you just have to -- be vocal about what you're trying to do in this space, because it's interesting, people want to learn more about it, and it's a great conversation starter, and a really -- and everyone has a great story and it sticks in your mind, and you never know where that could lead. So talk to everybody if you can.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, so true. And I think that I want to highlight what you said about -- really being vocal about what you -- it is you want to do -- whatever that might be, just continually putting it out into the universe, and also other people around you will pick up on that. And in my experience people in the industry do really want to help each other out, and, like, help each other kind of climb that ladder, because we've all climbed that ladder in different ways [chuckles]. In my experience at least that's been definitely something I didn't expect coming in. But, yeah, you never know where one connection might lead you. But Sam or Jeremy, do you have any -- any tips or some, like, we've kind of -- dived into the next question a little bit already, but any, like, stories of -- this unexpected connection led you to something -- totally, because you never know where your next kind of job or connection is going to come from?

>> Sam Krauss: I'm just gonna say every -- by the way everything that Myles and Lesley said, absolutely. I think -- I'm trying to think of a great -- I reached out to a showrunner. I'm a gay man, and -- I decided all right, you're gay, you're disabled, you're all of these things. It'd be kind of fabulous to get to know writers, TV writers, who are also a part of the same communities. And so I reached out to a showrunner and she did Queer as Folk, a couple other things. But I just, like, said hi, I would love to connect. I said, I'm a queer writer, I'm a baby writer, I'm an -- an emerging writer, and I just want to connect. And she was lovely. And so we talked -- briefly back and forth just through IG --Instagram, but literally I think a year later, because of that brief correspondence, I was able to invite her to, like, come hang out with me in my writer's group for like 50 minutes. And she just sat with us and talked with us. And you know, there's five of us. And it was just from me connecting with someone that I had something a little bit in common with. And yeah, so that's, like, my story. And I -- I think also knowing, like, where to find people. So -- so like I think the greatest thing you can do is make a list, watch all the shows you love, then check out the credits of the show, target -- sort of -- the the writers that you just love. Maybe they wrote an episode you're just obsessed with. And then you can look them up on IG, Twitter, anything, LinkedIn. And then just say hi, I would love to just connect. And they're not like -- they're not going to be, like, ew, get away. And most of the time, in fact, if you say I would love to do, like, a Zoom coffee or I would love to like just learn a little bit from you, they're going to be really excited to do that, 'cause secretly everyone wants to pass on knowledge and it's worked for me to do that, and I know. Also WGA's directory, writer's directory, it works! And so I can talk about that later, but it's just, there's all kinds of ways, so that's my thoughts on that.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, that's great I agree. I think this kind of era of -- the pandemic put everyone online and I think the virtual networking is here to stay. I think it's made networking so much more accessible for everyone. [chuckles] It's so much easier to hop on a quick Zoom or a Google Meet -- than it is to, like, plan and schedule and coordinate a coffee. Like, as much as I want to meet people in person, it's so much easier for me to commit to like, yeah, let's -- here's a Zoom link, I'd love to talk for -- from this time to this time. And I think that's something people can definitely take advantage of is, like, reaching out and just asking to chat. And Sam, I think that was how you and I first connected, right, was our scripts both had made it to the finalist stage of this contest, and you had reached out and then --

>> Sam Krauss: Yes!

>> Lesley Hennen: We talked, and then a few weeks later I was interviewing you for the Lab, and I was, like, wait. So yeah -- reach out to everyone, definitely take advantage of the virtual networking, the social media, that's a -- that's a great tip. Let's talk a little bit about some ways that the industry is changing and becoming more inclusive of people with disabilities. I mean, we all know we still have a long way to go, but I do think that we are starting to see at least -- more awareness of accessibility and, like, the importance of including disabled people in the room, hiring disabled people in all areas, behind the camera, in front of the camera -- What are some things you've noticed or maybe sometimes that you've successfully advocated for yourself in the room? I know that's a big -- a big thing that -- for me, I didn't grow up, like, knowing how to advocate for myself so that's been kind of, like, a lifelong [chuckles] journey of figuring out how to do that. And for me it's been, like, watching other people advocate for themselves and learning, like, oh, this is a thing that I could also ask for that could help me, like -- my disability -- I was born with club feet so I -- it's difficult for me to stand for really long periods of time. So if I'm ever on set, like, I'll just ask for a spare Apple box to sit down, and that's a very simple thing for [chuckles] a production to provide. And I didn't even know that that was a thing I could ask for until I saw someone else do it, so, yeah -- any thoughts around that sort of big [chuckles] big question? Myles.

>> Myles Hunt: I think -- I think the representation and the familiarity is definitely more prominent in 2023, and hopefully it will continue that way. I think the big part of it is more people are -- due to the -- not only just due to the pandemic, but also due to virtual conversations, people are more familiar, they're understanding, they're empathizing a little bit more. And it's not -- it's just -- it's not daunting to see it there. I mean we see it in the Secret Sex Lives of College Girls, to CODA, which won the Oscar last year, which -- as a hard of hearing person with many deaf friends and -- part of that community, it was so great to see that. But there's still some drawback in some places. For example -- the current show that I am pitching has a deaf character as the lead, and a lot of the time when I talked to executives in the space, it's either half -- half understand what I'm going for, or the other half are going, oh, so you want this to be a completely deaf show, everybody's deaf, speaking ASL. And I'm like, that would be amazing and very cool, but no it just -- happens to be a deaf musician with his friends who are -- hearing, but they also have diverse disabilities themselves or diversity and included, just like the real world is. And it kind of goes over their head a little bit because they don't understand how they can make it work. And then I have to -- I feel like I always have to go this extra mile to just put it in perspective for them, which I think is helpful for them, but also just for the creative standpoint, like, it's just a story I want to tell, how we're going to tell it accurately with ASL, with interpretation, lip reading, closed captioning, how is all that going to come into play, especially in an animated medium. But I think the exciting thing is people are talking about it, and they want to talk about it, and they understand the value of it about using it in an appropriate way. I think one show, Secret Sex Lives of College Girls, they did really well with that many times. But I think there's also great programming where they talk about it, but it's not, like, the -- it's not, like, hitting the nail on the head so to speak, it's just, yep, there's a deaf guy there, that's it. It's not like, oh, we have to all put a lens right on him and learn everything about this deaf character. He's just -- he's just there being involved just like we all are. And it's getting better for sure. Of course it's gonna take -- I don't even know how long it's gonna take, but it's always going to be a constant Improvement, but it's good to see it happening.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, I agree. Sam or Jeremy, do you have any thoughts on that question?

>> Jeremy Hsing: You can go, Sam.

>> Sam Krauss: Are you sure? Yeah, well,mine's very quick. I was gonna say there's a show -- 'cause Myles is talking about some great representation -- there's a show I ended up writing about for my ECE for grad school, and it was called Everything's Gonna Be Okay, is by Josh Thomas, who actually, through writing this show, discovered that he was on the spectrum. But in the show before he makes this discovery, which I think I just ruined the season arc for everyone, so sorry if you haven't watched it. Damn it. Oh well. But the point is he writes really well. He writes the characters very well and he incorporates disability and queerness in such a fun way. But yeah, that was -- I'm seeing that on screen and -- or seeing stuff like that on screen is exciting and I think it makes me, certainly, feel better when I have accommodations or things that I need to ask for, because people are seeing more of me or people that look like me on screen. So yeah.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah. I mean that's just one of many reasons why that representation is so important is just to get the awareness and -- yeah -- everything you said. Jeremy, if you have something?

>> Jeremy Hsing: Yeah I mean I would definitely want to give a shout out to Warner Discovery in that I always felt like I was in an inclusive and accessible space when I was able to be a production assistant on one of their shoots. They had a production accessibility coordinator, which is the first time I've ever seen that. And it taught me the importance of setting that tone on any set. So that's what I did when I directed my own short. When we started the day I would just disclose to everyone my accessibility needs, and let them know that if they have any that they could let me know about them. But I do think that we do have a long way to go. I forgot who said it, but I remember someone said, like, the disability community is like where the LGBTQ community is like 20 years ago. Like, there's still a long way to go. And an example of that is I remember when I was trying to apply to a position and I remember someone giving me the advice that you shouldn't disclose -- that you have generalized anxiety and stuff like that, because it could make them not necessarily consciously reject you but it makes them, like, scared to choose you over someone who is quote unquote, like, "more easy to work with."

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, and that's such a good point that some of that, just, unconscious bias definitely still exists for all different types of identities. And I think -- again the more we -- I loved how you shared about -- you share your own accommodation needs and just kind of -- I just feel them more like we keep talking about it, the more everyone's just going to get more comfortable with -- their own kind of journeys in understanding of disability and accessibility. Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about -- I mean, there's so many different pipeline programs. We've all -- we've talked about some of RespectAbility's, you've all mentioned others. Like, there's so many different really great opportunities for emerging creatives to kind of break in or just start getting their work out there. Do you all have any tips for kind of navigating that -- the application process -- it can be a little daunting, I think, for people that are trying to break in or -- who choose to go the contest or pipeline route. But any thoughts around that?

>> Jeremy Hsing: I think that the number one thing that matters, maybe even more than your work, is your branding and your point of view. In many ways, I feel like it's better to write an okay script that is saying something -- then like a retread of a story that we've all seen a million times. And that's really what these programs and contests are looking for. A lot of times you are told to draw from your own lived experience so that you could have that unique perspective that makes you different from other applicants.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, such a good point and I think myself, as someone who applies to a lot of programs and also is now in the position where I'm often interviewing people for these types of programs, I think my biggest tip is to really just be as specific as possible about what it is you want to do. Like, just be true to yourself, like, tell them what you want to do, like, what is your point of view. I think it's really easy sometimes to think like -- I want -- I just want to be in the room, I want to I'll do anything, like, put me anywhere. And I totally resonate with that as well. But being on the other side, I've realized, like, it's so much easier to -- like, you remember specific things that people tell you about themselves, and specific things about their personal stories and journeys, and it just gives us on the other side, like, an easier time to, like, oh I know exactly who to connect you with, like, you'd be a great fit for this project, and I'd love to -- if it's a little -- it just makes it easier for the -- for people I think to connect you or put you in, like, the specific program that is gonna be right for you. Yeah. Sam or Myles, any thoughts?

>> Sam Krauss: I was gonna say absolutely I think -- definitely -- I'm really not an expert at it at all, and so -- and also I think with Lesley's because I know you review applications. It's like an incredible way to sort of see what is out there, and -- so I haven't had like the bird's eye view. But I do think -- I don't know and Lesley can let me know -- but I do think it's cool if you submit consistently to the same one, like, over, like, throughout the years, because I don't know if it's -- in RespectAbility, I think that matters, I don't know, but Lesley can tell you all that. But with other programs I think if you apply one year and you don't get in, but then you apply the next year or the next cycle, for some reason, I've gotten really lucky, and I think that had something to do with it. So that's my one tip is to apply to the same ones consistently.

>> Lesley Hennen: No I think you're totally right, and I've heard from other folks that are on different -- review boards for different programs, and people really do keep track of -- the work that you're submitting. And I -- one thing that -- one takeaway that I've gotten from being on the other side of this process is so often it is -- has no reflection whatsoever on you, like, or your work if you don't get into something. It's such a -- like, a very specific process of picking -- the right combination of people for this particular cohort, because we really want to at least -- RespectAbility, I can speak towards us specifically, we really want to make sure that we're building a cohort of people that are going to play off of each other's specific strengths and -- just learn a lot. It's a lot of factors that go into it besides just -- the work and talent and experience. Like, everyone -- that applies for our programs is so talented and it's often a very very difficult decision who -- we end up picking. But yeah, that's all good points. Well we can -- that actually is a great segue into our next question which is -- all of you have been a part of different RespectAbility programs that we've offered, so I'd love to kind of go to each of you to share a little bit about your experience. You know, if folks are interested too in applying, what can they expect? Let's go to Jeremy first, because you were in our in-person L.A. Entertainment Lab this past summer, and then also now you're an apprentice with us, so do you wanna share just a little bit about the two programs and what you kind of experienced in both of them?

>> Jeremy Hsing: Yeah I think what makes the Lab at RespectAbility -- the in-person Lab specifically -- different from most is that it is through that lens of disability, and teaching you how to advocate for yourself. And it also teaches you basically how to have that point of view and how to polish that personal branding so that you could be ready for the industry to get jobs. And I think the thing that allowed me to have a really great experience was that I just viewed it through the lens of learning. I feel like that's the number one thing that motivates me to get out of bed every day. So every day when I would go to an event, I would make sure to have done research on the panelists so that I could ask questions that aren't generic, that are very specific to that person. And then also always made a note to send thank you emails and stay in touch with all of them. And I feel like that was a huge reason why I was able to also get the entertainment media Apprenticeship, because I -- even though I am like a -- homebody introvert and I would much rather, like, just be in my room and just be a potato, I really used, like, my journalism and therapist background to make genuine connections with everyone in the Lab. And yeah, I'm very lucky now to be one of the Apprentices at RespectAbility, and I'm starting to get behind the scenes look at, like, the admin work that we do on a daily basis. And I'm gonna start working on some, like, consulting projects which is really cool because that'll allow me to have my stories be more inclusive as well.

>> Lesley Hennen: Awesome. Yeah, thank you for sharing all of that. And then Sam, you participated in our Virtual Lab which is kind of the same version that Jeremy described, but all online which we -- the Lab originally started in 2019 as this, you know, people would come into RespectAbility saying, you know, oh we'd love to hire a disabled writer or disabled director but we don't know any. And so we now can turn around and say -- we have, like, over 150 very talented disabled people that are already working in the industry, so please hire them [chuckles] -- and that have all been through our programs. And then we now have a in person and a virtual cohort every year. So Sam, do you want to talk a little bit about your experience in the virtual Lab?

>> Sam Krauss: Absolutely. When I did the interview for RespectAbility -- with -- first with Lesley and then my last interview was with Lauren, who's the VP. She's the big boss. And so -- she's -- the -- she'll give you the thumbs up if you're, I guess, right for the program. And she did ask me. She said "virtual or in person?" And I chose virtual because I just -- I was about to graduate college and the pandemic was -- it's still here, and so I wasn't ready yet. So anyway -- so the virtual -- you do a bunch of group sessions, you're meeting executives, you're meeting DEIA folks who are experts at, like, accessibility and all the -- conversations around diversity. And they sort of give you helpful tips for some of the programs that they run, the pipeline programs -- I know there's a bunch of them for, like, Disney, ABC, Warner Brothers -- I don't need to name them all. But so -- you meet with those folks. One thing that we learned that stuck with me is because I'm a television writer, and so I needed structure on how to, like, make connections and just basic business, sort of, terms. And so I remember -- RespectAbility invited a guest, Tena, and she's an executive I think. She used to be an executive at ABC or Disney, and she's fantastic. But she ran through sort of what you needed to know to be ready to, like, do meetings. And she defined a general, a staff -- staffing meeting, and a pitch meeting. And she said as as a television writer, those are the three kinds of meetings that you're going to be doing. The general is typically -- it's just a friendly, like, hello, where it's like a catch-up session, so maybe you've already met 'em, but there's no, like, overall business agenda, you're just saying hello. Staffing is exactly what it sounds like. It's when someone's looking to hire a writer. And then pitching is when you're obviously pitching a story or pitching a series or pitching -- maybe there's an open writing project that they want to bring in a new writer for. So learning stuff like that was incredibly valuable. And then a thousand other things. But -- but yeah. So you're getting a lot of knowledge within a six week program. It's a lot, but once you're done, you're ready -- so yeah, that was my experience.

>> Lesley Hennen: Awesome, thank you. Yeah -- the goal of the entertainment Labs is really to kind of get disabled creatives in front of people in hiring positions all across different areas of the industry to kind of help -- just put people in the position to kind of keep those conversations going and learn more about -- how they could get hired and kind of demystifying, hopefully, some of those things that you mentioned, Sam, like the difference between a general meeting and a staffing meeting or -- various different things that we all have to navigate in this industry. But Myles, you participated in our brand new Lab in this past fall which was the Children's Content Lab, sponsored by Netflix -- thank you Netflix -- in New York Do you want to talk a little bit about that experience?

>> Myles Hunt: Yeah. First off, it was simply amazing. It exceeded every one of my expectations going in. I really didn't know what the experience was going to be like, but it was just being thrown into a room of great contemporary creative writers and developers in the disability community or had connection to disability in some form. It was just so refreshing and -- just so nice. And we -- got to go to different studios here in New York City and meet with different industry folks and kind of learn about what's going on, where the direction of entertainment is going in regard for children audience. And then we did -- we were able to do some virtual sessions and kind of meet other people that way and workshop our own stories, which was really exciting, because at the very end of the Lab we were able to present 10 minutes of each of our individual stories to a live audience of our peers, and family and guests, and really see -- the world we created in action. And it was just -- I mean that in itself was something so valuable that you rarely get as a creator, especially as a writer to showcase it -- like a table read but in an audience in an auditorium. It was just wonderful. But I think -- the most rewarding bit was you were working with people who got it. They got what we were trying to bring to the table, they understood your story, they understood your energy, and you understood theirs. And then they wanted to champion you every step of the way. They wanted to edit, they wanted to review things, they offered their suggestions. And I can't tell you -- my thing was -- my initial draft from my show kit, I had to -- I had no idea that so many people were going to be providing so much great insight. And it turned into such a beautiful thing at the end. One of my -- one of the Lab fellows created a -- a plush character to showcase at the Showcase. And it was just -- she didn't have to do that and it was just above and beyond. But it just it felt like people were in your corner, and now we're just -- we have a complete rapport, we're giving each other insight to this day. And, "oh Myles -- you should apply to this -- grant" or "would you mind taking a look at my script?" And -- that's -- what every creative wants. You want to be involved, you want to keep that involvement going. And so it was just great and I think everyone who can be involved in the future, you'll love every second of it.

>> Lesley Hennen: Amazing. I remember that puppet that [chuckles] was created for your show by another Lab fellow which was incredible. Yeah, let's talk -- one last question before we head into our Q&A -- but Myles, you talked a little bit about -- that community with your other Lab fellows, like -- continuing past the pipeline program which I think is such an important aspect of like -- what happens after the -- pipeline program, how do you kind of continue building that community? Do you all have any tips for kind of you know staying in touch, both with the Lab fellows that you met and also, like, kind of leveraging the contacts of people you met, like, industry folks in the Lab? It all can feel a little overwhelming, I know, especially when you first -- you're -- it's done and now you're like, "now what do I do?" Do you have any advice or tips there?

>> Myles Hunt: Yeah. I think just be honest and consistent. If you have a question don't be afraid to ask it to your new colleagues you meet, and even the people who you met at these different studios. I have had so many -- since the Lab ended in the fall, I've had so many wonderful conversations with executives, other writers, producers who we met at these studios who just want to offer their two cents or their time. And with the people in the Lab, at our core, it's just they -- I think it's kind of like the same way you would be about talking with your friends -- "Hey, I need your help with something," or -- reiterating the fact that I'm here to help you too. If you have a project you want to advice on, if you have a project that you're conceptualizing but you don't know where to go, let's hop on a Zoom call. Let's do it, let's make it happen. I don't care if it's -- a late after dinner thing that we're all filing into a Zoom, we're tired, we had a full day, we want to do it. We want to help each other out. And I think you just keep the conversation -- open a Slack channel -- exchange texts, and -- I know it sounds so simple but it's -- I know some people are very nervous about, "can I get your number" or "can I -- keep talking to you?" Ask them, and they'll be honest with you, and just keep that conversation going.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, such a good point. And I think one thing we like to do is -- have everyone kind of fill out a form of, like, how they prefer to be contacted, and we share that with the other Lab fellows ahead of time so you know, like, okay, this person prefers email, this person prefers texts or phone calls, this person like social media, and this person is open to anything. And I think that can be a really helpful way to -- kind of get over that first hurdle of, like, oh I wanna contact this person, but I don't know how to, like, keep that going. But -- so I think that's something that we can all maybe normalize in everyday life of, like, oh, "how do you prefer to be contacted?" I think that's a nice way to just kind of keep that going. Any other thoughts from Sam or Jeremy, otherwise we'll jump into our -- I already see lots of great questions in our Q&A box, so. [chuckles]

>> Sam Krauss: I was just going to say -- very quickly because I'm mindful of time -- I think writer's groups are really important, so if you can get -- right now I'm in a writer's group. There's five of us. We all -- Kim Manky from my Lab but also Myles -- she did Myles's lab as well -- she sort of really organized it. And it's five writers. We all love comedy, we all love TV, and so we meet once a month and we bring on guests to come -- hang out with us. And I think that's really valuable, so -- and it's all over Zoom so -- it's, like, really easy. So writers groups are great. So that's my --

>> Lesley Hennen: I love that, yeah. I definitely use the Zoom Iif you can find a Kim Manky, highly recommend.

>> Sam Krauss: We love her!

>> Lesley Hennen: Everybody needs a Kim Manky in their lives.

>> Sam Krauss: I agree.

>> Lesley Hennen: All right. So let's move over to some Q&A. Let me see. Let's see -- I want to see if I can answer some of these quick ones. "What is the average age range of applicants to the summer Lab?" Great question. It really is a range, like, we have everyone from, like, early 20s, all the way to people in their 50s, and everyone in between. It's hard for me to say the average, because it does vary so greatly from cohort to cohort, but it's definitely -- everyone is there -- sharing different levels of experience. Many people are coming from previous careers, like I myself used to work in PR, public relations, and then I pivoted into writing, and so there's lots of other people with similar backgrounds, regardless of their age -- had multiple different careers or life experiences. Let's see. "Can you speak to the difference between the Labs and Apprenticeships?" Yes. So the -- Labs are really for folks who are looking to go into -- the entertainment industry, like, working on set, behind the camera, or in, like, the studio system and development -- more of, like, the creative side of things. And then our apprenticeships are -- we always welcome folks that are kind of looking to go into that area as well, but it's a little bit more about learning sort of the -- advocacy side of things that we do at RespectAbility as well. And a little bit, like, you're kind of working on projects with our Staff of, like, organizing some of our Lab programs, and reaching out to different speakers, and organizing events like this one, and it's a little bit more of, like, the nonprofit and advocacy side of things as well. Let's see. Da da da. I think those are the fast ones. Okay, let's see. Oh, this is a good question. "Hi everyone. Thank you for sharing your perspectives and stories about disability representation. What are some examples and tropes you try to avoid when it comes to representing characters and themes in the disability community? Also, how do you deal with criticism when some aren't pleased with its execution and representation?" Great question. I can think of a lot of tropes we try to avoid, but do any of you have thoughts and want to kick that one off? Myles.

>> Myles Hunt: I think try to -- if you're gonna tell a story with -- and I think that across the board, not only on disability, but in -- any representation, you're gonna tell that story and make sure you have accurate people involved who can assist with that. Make sure that -- share it with those people if you -- are not of that, and make sure the language is correct, make sure the discussion is ongoing, and credit everybody involved. And then make sure -- if -- you can get there there as best you can. It's never going to be 100 percent perfect. There never will be -- there's always going to be some criticisms, something you forgot, something that is new and developing. I've had a lot of -- I've had a lot of deaf creatives have issue -- I wrote a paired children's book with my proposed animated series around a deaf drummer just to showcase and give a visual representation to people so they could see what's going on. I had a lot of deaf people be very upset with how it wasn't all deaf people in a room, or it wasn't the entire cast or characters weren't deaf. I mean I even had that -- an issue when I was growing up. A lot of -- since I wear hearing aids, there were a lot of people who criticized my parents for giving me hearing aids and not teaching -- having me learn ASL. But you know, I learned lip reading and had speech therapy at the same way. So a lot of my stories are kind of in that realm. And I try to defend what I'm trying to tell with that -- those examples in place, but I am also welcome to the criticism and want to bring those people to the table too, so we can tell a more accurate story. So I think it's -- you just have to listen [unintelligible] but you have to listen to what's going on and I have to do that very well all the time. But really, just don't be so hard on yourself. Nobody's gonna get it 100 percent right, just, yeah, try your best and just be smart and know the right people to bring on board.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, all great and we love to say -- the disability community is not a monolith -- and no community is -- [chuckles] where everyone's going to have different opinions on representation and -- the disability community is really the most intersectional -- anybody can be disabled regardless of your other identities. So really taking that into account of, you know, there's just so much nuance and variety in the disability -- community, such a good point. But Sam or Jeremy, any thoughts on that question, or any tropes that you try to avoid?

>> Jeremy Hsing: I definitely try to avoid, like, where people with disabilities are used for, like, inspirational moments or if they're vilified, and yeah, I feel like a lot of times, the most important thing if you're portraying something that is not from your lived experience is to do the research and to talk to people with that experience. And that's the best way that you could show allyship and capture that authenticity.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yeah, great point.

>> Sam Krauss: I definitely agree with all of that, so.

>> Lesley Hennen: Yes, all great. Great question, thank you. Okay let's see. We have one person who's sharing that they cannot get any accessibility on set, that -- there's -- they're saying what they need, but it's just not happening. I just want to call that out because I think totally valid, very frustrating experience and -- it just speaks to how much more work does need to be done. And I think this is a situation where -- RespectAbility, we -- we can, if you feel comfortable, you can send us an email I'll drop my email in the chat or maybe Isabella can drop -- can drop it in. Feel free to reach out. We do a lot of just kind of trainings of, like, disability inclusion and accessibility on set, and why it's so important and -- we would definitely love to kind of start that conversation and help kind of take the advocacy off of some of the people that are -- having to both do their job and advocate for themselves, which can be a very exhausting experience. But yeah, sometimes it's tough and -- just, if possible, just finding someone on set that you can talk to, whether it's -- a producer or a PA or someone that might be able to advocate -- why this is so important for you. We also -- there's -- Jeremy, I think you mentioned the importance of having a Production Accessibility Coordinator on set. That's a position that we really advocate for all -- productions -- from big major studio down to like very small indie productions. And it's just really having a person on set whose job is to make sure that everyone -- disabled and non-disabled folks alike -- are having their accessibility needs met. And so just really having one person who's dedicated to that. And of course that sort of -- having that person there is -- it's gonna be the job of the people that are in hiring positions, so that's where -- if we can be pulled into those conversations, we definitely try to advocate and connect them with production accessibility coordinators. But yeah, that is a excellent question. Thank you so much for sharing. Let's see. Any other questions. I'm trying to go through. Mmm. Good question. So we have a deaf-blind screenwriter, and -- "how do you get past the -- 'we don't accept unsolicited queries' wall?" That's definitely a thing that -- new writers definitely run into. I know it is a very frustrating experience, and I also know from, like the -- on the studio side of things, often there are so many, like, legal reasons why they aren't able to accept unsolicited queries. But I guess do any of you have tips -- or I know Sam, I just want to call out your kind of writer's group idea of -- I think that's a really great way to -- you're not sending -- just sending unsolicited queries to these showrunners or -- sending unsolicited scripts to everyone, but you're still kind of getting that face time with execs. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? A little more?

>> Sam Krauss: Absolutely. That's a really great way --for the person who asked that question -- is to set up those Zoom coffees or those -- if you can organize a writer's group, because sometimes when it's more than one person, it makes the other -- the executive or the advanced writer -- more excited to come visit and hang out with you. So that is actually I would say the best way is to start off introductions first, maybe get a Zoom coffee with whoever. You know, maybe say hey, I love this movie that you did and I just -- I'm really interested in -- the kind of work that you all do. I would love to just grab a Zoom coffee, if you got, like, 15 minutes. And they're not, like, it's totally fine. Another thing to keep in mind is assistants are future executives. Like, that is what they are. They're -- they're basically executives, they're doing all of the reading, they're the ones that give the thumbs up if your script is bad or good, because they have to put it on their boss's desk. So like, reach out to some of those folks. LinkedIn -- every executive you could even conceive of is freaking on LinkedIn. Every assistant is as well. They list their names. So just send out some, like, hey, I would love to like learn more -- Zoom coffees, and then do the group -- the group coffee thing -- the writer's group thing -- just -- and it's often -- I would say, we have Nathan Barney, he's director of current program at ABC, he's our mentor for our writers group. So get someone to be, like, the -- sort of person to oversee it so -- it gives a little bit more legitimacy, and they'll guide you a little bit. So you can ask, like, you know, a more advanced writer to do that, so -- or an executive that you might be connected to. So yeah, try that first. And then you can send scripts, and it won't be a problem usually.

>> Lesley Hennen: That's a great, great tip. I definitely want to call out the assistants thing again, and that's so important. Like, yeah, assistants are the ones that are reading the scripts or watching the reels, and then pushing them up to their bosses saying, oh, I think we should meet with this person, I think we should work on this project. And I think that's -- so important. Sometimes -- you want to -- I want to talk to the head of this department, I want to talk to the head of this, but so often it's really reaching out to the more junior employees that I have found to be a little more beneficial and -- they often will have a little more time to meet with you as well. The higher ups can sometimes be a little bit more difficult to get a hold of, busier schedules and everything. So definitely a great great tip there. And I also want to call out that Isabella has posted a lot of great links in the chat. Don't forget to follow BRIC, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram. Thank you so much to the BRIC foundation for having us and setting up this amazing two-day summit. We also -- if you scroll a little further up -- we have links to our Entertainment Lab applications which will be opening for 2023 this upcoming Monday, February 13th. So definitely please head over there. We can't wait to see all of your applications. And yeah, that is now our time. Thank you so much to everyone that was on this panel and to BRIC for having us. This was so much fun. And yeah, I hope everyone had a good day!