**Letter From Our Leadership**

Dear Colleagues and Supporters,

We are extraordinarily pleased and proud to share this Annual Report with you! 2022 was an exciting year for us – a time of **transition, transformation, and growth**. Early in the year, we moved into the next phase of organizational development by bringing aboard [Dr. Deborah Fisher](https://www.respectability.org/2022/02/deborah-fisher-interim-ceo/) as Interim President and CEO and then appointing [Ariel Simms, Esq.](https://www.respectability.org/2022/05/ariel-simms-named-ceo/) as the organization’s next President and CEO in May.

We expanded our full-time staff from 18 employees at the end of 2021 to [24 employees as of December 2022](https://www.respectability.org/about-us/staff/). This growth occurred across departments including Entertainment and News Media, Policy and Workforce Development, Faith Inclusion and Belonging, Marketing and Communications, Inclusive Philanthropy and Development, and Operations. It also represented a whopping 33% staffing increase!

**Our impact has only increased** as our team’s capacity has strengthened. Each core ingredient to our "secret sauce" is integrally connected with all others, accelerating our momentum from the resulting synergy. This has included:

* Bolstering high-level subject matter expertise by bringing aboard **three new department leaders**, including [Graciano Petersen](https://www.respectability.org/2017/12/graciano-petersen/), [Wally Tablit](https://www.respectability.org/2017/12/wally-tablit/), and [Shelly Christensen](https://www.respectability.org/2017/12/shelly-christensen/).
* **Advancing authentic narratives** about disability that inherently embrace high expectations and a belief in the limitless potential of the disability community.
* Partnering with the disability community to **advance public policy** within the arenas of education, employment, transportation, and civic engagement.
* **Expanding our leadership programs** to nurture the growth of emerging leaders who come from every part of the disability community.
* Collaborating closely with communities of faith by **building on our historic Jewish inclusion work**.

Further strengthening our impact in 2022, we renewed and deepened our [commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility](https://www.respectability.org/deia/) (DEIA). Elevating DEIA principles within every aspect of internal and external operations and at an intersectional level is a core tenet of our organizational identity and our advocacy. Internally, we have made important changes to our policies, practices, and procedures to center equity. In partnership with our staff and Board, we are actively building an organizational culture of inclusion and belonging and reintroducing RespectAbility as a convener and collaborator in all areas of our work.

Throughout this report, you’ll find highlights of our 2022 accomplishments across the three core components of our theory of change: **Advancing Opportunities**, **Changing Attitudes**, and **Developing Leaders**.

**Developing Leaders:** We empower diverse people with disabilities to gain the training, skills, contacts and opportunities they need to have seats at decision-making tables.

**Changing Attitudes:** Increasing diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systematic change in how society views and values people with disabilities.

**Advancing Opportunities:** We seek and promote best practices in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement so people with disabilities can succeed, just like anyone else.

Our incredible team – integrally combining the steadfast work of our Board members, Advisors, staff, apprentices, and partners – makes strides every day in pursuit of our mission: **To fight stigmas and advance opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community.**

NONE of our milestones – each of which is the result of proactively working across the full diversity of the disability community and all political perspectives – could have been possible without **supporters and partners like you**. That is why, as we celebrate all that we have done, we set our sights on the incredible future that we have ahead and the boundless possibilities that come with it.

Together, with all that is before us, the only limits are that of the imagination!

Sincerely and In Solidarity,

**Olegario “Ollie” D. Cantos VII, Esq.**

Chairman, Board of Directors

**Ariel A. Simms, Esq.**

President and Chief Executive Officer

**Advancing Opportunities**

Advancing opportunities means that we take down barriers to education, employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement and create pipelines to enable disabled individuals to lead the lives of their choosing.

“Since joining RespectAbility, I have enjoyed playing a part in creating collective impact on the disability community in so many ways – both big and small. I have appreciated the collaborations and synergy that make this organization thrive and succeed.” – Wally Tablit, Senior Director of Policy and Workforce Development

In 2022, we advanced opportunities across our four pillars: Policy and Workforce Development, Entertainment and News Media, Faith Inclusion and Belonging, and Leadership Development. Our Policy team kicked off two major new initiatives to build know-how and remove barriers to employment. Our Entertainment and News Media team deepened its partnerships and secured employment opportunities for Lab alumni. Our Faith Inclusion team expanded beyond the Jewish community to reach new faith and spiritual communities in our inclusion work. And our Leadership team placed Apprentices in externships and mentored an Apprentice of their own. Below, we’ve captured some of these highlights.

**In 2022, our team…**

* Developed a model Medicaid buy-in plan in partnership with the United Spinal Association to allow disabled employees to maintain their personal care or other medical benefits while also working, saving states money
* Built partnerships with experts in vocational rehabilitation and entrepreneurship at state agencies and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) to create best practices

“I’m very proud of my association with RespectAbility, as I feel it is an organization that does great good in the world and that is making a significant impact in favor of disability inclusion, in conjunction with DEIA and intersectionality, all principles that are fundamental to building a more equitable and just society.” – Craig Leen, Board of Directors

* Deepened our partnership with Nielsen Research, including a [new study](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/26/arts/television/disability-representation-tv-movies-study.html) on closing the inclusion gap for people with disabilities in media representation and a [new initiative](https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/disability-representation-tv-data-nielsen-gracenote-1235453240/) to track on-screen disability representation as part of its inclusion data
* Worked with the California Film Commission to place alumni in paid internships, including two to work in post-production for an Amazon Studios project
* Successfully transitioned the former Jewish Inclusion department to the Faith Inclusion and Belonging department to serve as a convener, collaborator, and content developer in multi-faith disability inclusion
* Produced several new resources to help faith communities be more inclusive, including our Inclusive Congregations Guide and the Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) [2023 program guide](https://www.respectability.org/jdaim/)
* Added partnerships with the Institute on Theology and Disability and American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Religion and Spirituality Interest Network

“The solution is inclusion - in employment, education, and the media. Inclusion of those with a disability makes the country a better place, and more to the point, dramatically improves the lives of each individual who is included.” – Hon. Steve Bartlett, Immediate Past Chair, Board of Directors

**We placed Entertainment Lab alumni in a variety of productions, including five on the crew of the Apple TV+ series “Best Foot Forward.”**

**Changing Attitudes**

Changing attitudes means that we challenge stigma and amplify authentic narratives on disability. We’re proud to be a “nothing about us, without us” organization, led by those with a diversity of disabilities and other intersectional identities. Disabled people are the best experts on their lived experience, and we work to promote this reality across our four pillars.

“I love my job! I feel respected, valued, and supported to lead my team on the transformative work of the of the Faith Inclusion and Belonging department. Our amazing staff and Apprentices at RespectAbility are a joy to work with!” – Shelly Christensen, Senior Director of Faith Inclusion

The [Entertainment and News Media team](https://www.respectability.org/entertainment-news-media/) worked on more than 175 TV episodes and films. The [Policy team](https://www.respectability.org/policy/) spotlighted employers with successful disability inclusion programs and trained more than 400 people on best practices for disability employment. The Faith Inclusion team gave presentations around the country, including collaborating with a church to produce a [5-part webinar series](https://www.respectability.org/2022/11/bible-study-st-lukes/). And the [Disability Training and Speakers Bureau](https://www.respectability.org/speakers-bureau/) expanded their clientele, reaching more industries and sectors than ever before. Across our departments, we changed attitudes through more than 105 trainings and speaking engagements and 4 e-newsletters.

**In 2022, our team…**

* Completed 19 entertainment and news media-related speaking engagements, including at the Golden Globes and U.S. State Department, and 21 trainings for more than 2,500 people at a variety of studios and production companies

“The Warner Bros. Discovery Access team and RespectAbility have forged a strong partnership in a multitude of ways. From advising on best practices for our Talent Spotlight program, to providing resources and expertise for our Early Career Bootcamp, RespectAbility is an invaluable organization that has helped strengthen our efforts across the board.” - Grace Moss, Warner Bros. Discovery

* Conducted 54 disability inclusion trainings, including for Bausch + Lomb, Publicis Groupe, and Mayo Clinic
* Expanded consulting clientele to include medical organizations and schools, law firms, marketing firms, as well as offices in the federal government
* For National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2022, spotlighted 3 employers who are successfully hiring disabled workers: [Alaska Airlines](https://www.respectability.org/2022/10/ndeam-alaska-airlines/), [JP Morgan Chase](https://www.respectability.org/2022/10/ndeam-jpmorganchase/), and [Procter & Gamble](https://www.respectability.org/2022/10/employer-spotlight-pg-global/)
* Directly trained more than 400 people in best practices around employment through webinars and presentations at conferences
* Collaborated with St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Long Beach, California to produce a [5-part webinar series](https://www.respectability.org/2022/11/bible-study-st-lukes/) on Disability in the Torah and Christian Bible

“I love RespectAbility for its commitment to diversity and to actually listening to, and utilizing, the skills and gifts of people with disabilities in a number of crucial public arenas.” – Bill Gaventa, Board of Directors

* Gave presentations across the country, including to the executive leadership team at the Illif School of Theology, at the AAIDD Northeastern Region X Annual Conference, at the Institute on Theology and Disability, and to the Texas Disability Network
* Provided training for major foundations such as the Kresge Foundation on how to ensure people with disabilities are not left behind in philanthropic efforts
* Trained communications and foundation professionals in website and social media accessibility at ComNet 2022

**We consulted on Dreamworks’ “Madagascar: A Little Wild.” The show featured a young girl named and modeled after Deaf actress Shaylee Mansfield who was animated by using a video reference of her performing the role. In what is possibly a first for Deaf performers, she is credited alongside the audible voice actors for her sign over performance in the episode “Gloria’s Got ‘Em All.”**

**Developing Leaders**

Developing leaders means that we model the practice of training and empowering the next generation of leaders in disability advocacy across our pillars. This includes investing in our staff through professional development and building new pathways for employee recognition and advancement. We also created new policies to shape a workplace environment that centers equity and inclusion.

"I enjoy working at RespectAbility because I am an agent of change and the environment here was very much ready to make a shift. I am excited to part of the changing tide as we move toward a more human-centered organization for the staff. As we shift, everyone will be given the opportunity to develop and grow. As we do this work for the people with disabilities inside and outside of the organization, it is important for me that we allow our staff to thrive as well, and I'm happy to see so much growth and change in my short tenure." – Graciano Petersen, Senior Director for Talent, Culture, and Leadership Development

In 2022, RespectAbility trained 34 Apprentices: 12 Policy, 6 Entertainment Media, 3 Faith Inclusion, 6 Nonprofit Management, 2 Jewish Development, 4 Communications, and our first-ever Leadership Apprentice. The team also ran three Labs for 52 disabled entertainment professionals. More than 400 people have graduated from one of our pipeline programs since 2013.

In 2022, our Apprentices and Lab Fellows…

* Designed dozens of social media graphics, including [Disability History photo series](https://www.respectability.org/disability-history/), which received more than 1,200 Instagram likes
* Organized training events on disability inclusion in their respective congregations

“RespectAbility combines a disability-led approach with a team of global leaders in their field. This is what is needed to create the type of change we need. I am beyond proud that they have asked me to be an advisor.” – Tom Newman, RespectAbility Advisor

* Learned fundamental skills in grant writing, donor relations, budgeting, database management, and nonprofit administration
* Drafted testimony on disability issues and contributed to the midterm [Disability Voters’ Guides](https://therespectabilityreport.org/category/voters-guide/)
* Produced a Black History Month PSA, which aired on WarnerMedia’s platforms
* Consulted on 33 TV episodes and films
* Published more than 50 articles on inclusion in the faith, entertainment, and news media sectors, as well as film reviews
* Learned about program management, developing a leadership program, and DEIA efforts firsthand

“Working at RespectAbility as their first-ever Leadership Apprentice was awesome. I could be myself in my own skin as a person with a disability. I feel like I learned how to be a part of a community and workforce where you can grow and learn new things about yourself and hone your skills.” – Shira Leeder, Leadership Apprentice

* Found externships or job opportunities with ABFE, Activision Blizzard, Amazon Studios’ *Something From Tiffany's*, California Symphony Orchestra, Commercial Directors Diversity Program, Get Shot By A Girl Productions, JVS SoCal, The Kelsey, Kresge Foundation, Make A Wish Foundation, New York Women’s Foundation, and Oleb Media
* Joined our staff: Policy Associate [Rostom Dadian](https://www.respectability.org/2017/12/rostom-dadian-staff/) and Entertainment Media Coordinator [Isabella Vargas](https://www.respectability.org/2017/12/isabella-vargas-staff/)
* Thanks to support from Netflix’s Fund for Creative Equity, participated in a specialized Children’s Content Lab, featuring the work of 11 disabled children's content writers and 4 development fellows in front of 200 entertainment executives and members of the disability community
* Participated in Warner Bros. Discovery Access Bootcamp as part of the official RespectAbility delegation
* Were hired by major studios including Apple TV+, Netflix, Nickelodeon, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, and the Walt Disney Company
* Were chosen for other pipeline programming offered by entertainment studios and production companies

“I worked closely with RespectAbility to create our award-winning Entertainment Lab, and I am so proud to see the impact that it has made and continues to make in Hollywood, as well as in the lives of the people who have gone through the program.” – Delbert Whetter, Vice Chair, Board of Directors

**Our Fox Family Foundation Fellows produced the first-ever InVisions Curriculum and Eye Health Fair, bringing services to the blind and low vision community in L.A.**