>> Shelly Christensen: Hello! Welcome to the second of four webinars in the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network series: Pathways to Belonging: Supporting the Spiritual and Faith Community Interests of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. My name is Shelly Christensen. My pronouns are she hers, and I'm a white female. I have dark curly brown hair and I'm wearing blue glasses. I'm also wearing a coral colored sweater. Behind me is a light gray wall, a tiffany style lamp, and a bouquet of red, purple, and yellow flowers. I'm the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility, and I'm also a member of the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network. RespectAbility is a diverse disability-led non-profit that works to create systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. Our faith inclusion and belonging team centers our work to amplify the voices of people with disabilities to belong and participate in one's chosen community of faith. We collaborate and partner with diverse faith-based and disability organizations, and this webinar series is a collaboration between the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network and RespectAbility. The Religion and Spirituality Interest Network centers on elevating spirituality and participation in faith community life through education and collaboration. In addition to our annual webinar series, the Network meets annually at the AAIDD conference, which will be held in Pittsburgh in early June on June 5th. The network will host a forum on current issues and trends in faith and disability. Yvonne, if you could put the next slide up please. This webinar is being recorded and you will receive the link via emails in a few days. To turn on the captions, which are live, click on the CC button in Zoom. And you can pin the interpreter to ensure they are visible throughout the presentation. To view live transcript in a separate -- could you go back please, thank you. To view live transcript in a separate window, use the link in the chat box. And then I'm going to invite you to put your questions in the chat box as we go through our presentation, and we'll be able to address the Q&A as soon as the presentation is over, so we've saved some time at the end of the presentation. Over 60 percent of people with disabilities report a desire to participate in their faith communities. Disabled people and their allies are making inroads to promote inclusion in many community activities, but for support providers, caregivers, and direct support professionals, very little has been done to inform, educate, and build skills that promote exploring, discovering, and participating in the process of finding the religious, faith, and/or spiritual community of one's choosing. This webinar series introduces DSPs to adapt facilitation skills used in other components of people's lives, including job and vocational searches and social and recreational participation, to address faith and spiritual needs and interests. This supports individual and meaningful participation by people with disabilities in their faith communities, opening doors to many opportunities to be included and to belong. In collaboration with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals, the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network developed an e-badge that addresses the journey DSPs take with the people they support to discover their religious and or faith communities. And we hope that DSPs who participate in this webinar series will begin to facilitate this important work with the people they support, as well as take time to address their own spiritual needs and well-being. And that is precisely what we will hear about today. And I'm going to introduce you to our wonderful panel of presenters. Sharon Gomez is the Chief Compliance and Privacy Officer at Evergreen Life Services in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Sharon developed and implemented a quality enhancement system, utilizing the personal outcome measures on the Council on Quality and Leadership - CQL - and created in-service training programs in the area of quality for Evergreen, and for each of its operating divisions. Sharon is also the past president of AAIDD, and has served in numerous -- leadership positions for the association. Yvonne A. Miller Nixon is the Quality Enhancement Director at Evergreen Life Services, where she coordinates all agency practices related to quality. Yvonne facilitates the development of quality improvement plans for 16 divisions in six states. She assured personal outcome -- personal outcomes interviews were conducted for a 10 to 15 percent sample of people served in six states each year. She also conducted over 40 percent of these interviews herself. Jarrod Adams is the Evergreen State Executive Director for Tennessee, where he is responsible for all the operations of all five divisions in Tennessee, representing over -- almost 200 individuals served and over 200 total staff. Jarrod also co-wrote a non-violent crisis system that Evergreen currently uses in five states. Karen Towery is the Executive Director who is responsible for the overall operation of all programs and services in North Central Texas. Karen oversees the daily operation of the division and establishes and implements policies and procedures which assure the best interests of people served, staff, and facilities. Well, I'm gonna turn it over to my friend Sharon Gomez. Hi Sharon!

>> Sharon Gomez: Hi everyone. I am Sharon Gomez. And today, I am wearing a white jacket with a plum colored turtleneck. I have sharp brown hair and I wear glasses. And in the background, you will see my China hutch, with my collection of teacups and teapots. And I'm here today to -- talk with you about Evergreen's practices with regard to supporting people in their religious beliefs and practices. So that first slide you're looking at is really our agenda. We will go through Evergreen as a faith-based organization. We will share the elements of our policy related to religious practices. We will share the elements of our assessment, and we will talk about how the elements of the assessment and the elements of the outcome measurement, which Yvonne will talk with you about, go together to develop strategies to increase the level of participation people have in their religious practices. Yvonne will review the outcome measure, and then we will go through some personal stories that really illustrate how we move from assessment to participation, but more important, we move from participation to contribution to belonging. Next slide. So Evergreen is -- our legal name is Evergreen Presbyterian Ministries, and we have a formal covenant with the Presbyterian Church. We are a faith-based organization organized in 1959 on the principles of religious freedom. In fact, our first president of our company was a Presbyterian minister. And he saw the need to support people in their religious beliefs and practices, but not only that, to -- help them to have productive lives in the community. So we're very proud of our heritage. We believe that supporting people in their religious beliefs and practices is a primary focus of the services that we provide. We also recognize that -- faith is an important aspect of life, not only for those we serve, but for all of us as well. We believe people have the right to choose their own level of spirituality. We are committed to supporting people to have that level of spirituality they choose, and we're committed to working with faith communities to welcome and include people. Next slide. So we have a policy that includes very -- several elements. It includes the element of spirituality, which is an integral part of the person-centered plan. From that -- from the policy comes our assessment, which is administered to people upon becoming a part of the Evergreen family, and annually thereafter. People are given assistance to participate in religious practices, but they are not coerced. Religious study materials are made available to people as they desire. We encourage individual and corporate prayer. Supports are provided in conjunction with the faith community to assist people to exercise special rights or sacraments of the faith community. We provide transportation to religious events, if desired, or we coordinate with the different churches to obtain transportation. And our Executive Directors of our divisions are responsible for the implementation of this policy. So the policy really filters through to all aspects of our company. And from the top down we are committed to making sure that people have the level of spirituality they desire. Next slide. Okay, here you see the elements of the assessment that we developed. Again, it's administered to people upon becoming a part of the Evergreen family and annually thereafter. We look at things like what -- is the person's faith preference, what level of participation they desire, do they desire more information and supports to participate? We provide assistance or ask if they desire assistance to practice the traditions of the chosen faith. We ask if they desire assistance with communication, and what that might look like. Some people just need to visit different places of worship -- to make a decision about where they would like to participate, if they want to participate at all. We ask if they need assistance with transportation. And then another important aspect of faith is are there other faith-based activities, besides attending church or synagogue, that they would like to participate in, such as being of service to people in the community? And then -- next slide -- and then the data that we derive from those assessments, along with the data that Yvonne gets from the outcome interviews -- that all goes into the person-centered plan, where the circle of support around the person looks at strategies that can be developed to assist with and increase the person's level of participation in their chosen faith community. Next slide. And that's you, Yvonne!

>> Yvonne A. Miller-Nixon: All right, so I'm Yvonne. I have to describe myself. I have long dark brown hair, very pale skin, tortoise shell round glasses, and black outfit. My background is blurred. You can see my blue walls and my brown desk, but they're blurry. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the outcomes measurement that we do. It's specifically for the area of religion. So for the purposes of how we do this, I always start out with, "are you religious?" Because if somebody isn't and have no desire or that's not something they want to do, we don't want to make them do it. We want to make sure that that is honored also, especially if somebody's living in a group setting, we don't want to see that they're coerced or having to go to religious services when they would prefer not to. The other thing I do want to point out is most -- actually all of our services at Evergreen were spread out across, what, five, six states? It's pretty much in the Bible Belt. So most of -- if not all at this point, I would say most -- of the people we serve are of various Christian faiths, so that's where our focus is on the stories, because that's who we serve. All right. So how we -- as Sharon said earlier -- we're faith-based based organization, that's how we got started, and that's why we thought it was important to add this outcome about people practice their religious beliefs or assist in the practice. So some of the questions we asked during the outcomes interview with the person or people who know them best, the first thing is are you religious or not, or various ways to ask that. If they are, then I ask, well what religion are you, you know, do you attend whatever community that's associated with that religion, do you get to choose where you attend, are you going often enough, are you involved in other things in your faith community, would you like to be involved, do you need any help to be involved? We also ask questions about supports they might need at their home to practice their faith. You know, some people may need help reading religious scriptures or with prayer or -- all sorts of things. Let me go to the next slide. Whoops I want to say something else. Oh, okay. So just -- this is just a matter of course as far as Evergreen from the data we've collected the past -- this is maybe three or four years -- of the people we've interviewed, which is now up to 20 percent of the people we serve, and we serve maybe a thousand. So 76 percent of those people say they are supported in what they want to be going to their -- the place of worship of their choice, being helped at home in the areas they want help in, or also included in this are people who don't want any involvement, and they -- they don't have that and that's what they desire. So all that's included. So we can always get better, but that's where we're at right now. Some of the things that I and the other person who does these outcome interviews -- what we've discovered over the past few years, these are some ways people are supported to practice their religious faith. They're attending the place of worship of their choice, their direct support staff are assisting them in prayer when they want or -- and reading their bibles in the case of many of the people we serve. They might have, I want to say tapes, but it's CDs -- CDs of the Bible that they want to listen to. They like to listen to gospel music, that's important to some people. During all the COVID restrictions, we found out people were supported by, you know, watching live streams on Facebook, sometimes on staff phones, so that they could be a part of that service, even though they weren't there, or watching a favorite service on TV. Yeah. And the other things I run into -- and this will come out in the stories -- are people are being supported to -- have active roles in their Church, like they are part of prison ministries, I think Karen's going to talk about that. People that I've talked to have been ushers in their church or members of their choir where they're actually singing in the choir every Sunday, bringing cupcakes for potlucks that the church might have, so all those things are a way people -- ways people are involved in their churches. And we're going to talk more about that in the stories, which are next -- no, we have barriers. I think -- yes. So I am done with my sections, so Jarrod will be talking about some of the barriers in helping people be involved.

>> Jarrod Adams: Hello, I'm Jarrod Adams. I have brown straight hair, a mediocre at best mustache. I'm wearing a black sweater, and my background is a template that I use of a famous library in Italy that I find to be beautiful. So I got tasked with talking about some of the barriers we've had over the years when it comes to our individuals that we serve being able to have the faith experience that they want. And so we want to take it from a mindset of things that we have found that helped us solve these barriers. So the first thing is the barrier that anybody that works in this field has, and that's going to be around staffing. We all know staffing can be an issue for any type of services that we do. So some of the ways that we were able to kind of help with our staffing issues. We were able to, in some instances, bring on PRN staff that were specifically looking at coming to help with taking the individuals to the service of their choice, to the place of worship of their choice, finding people that we could bring in specifically to do that, to make sure that -- let's say if you had some individuals that lived in a home together, one individual wanted to go to one service, one wanted to go to another, we didn't want that to be a barrier, so we sometimes had to bring in PRN staff. Now as staffing got a little more lean, one of the things we were able to look at is natural supports. And one of our divisions in Knoxville -- we've had some people that actually are DSPs that work with our individuals, and they have a close relationship with them, and they actually become a natural support, and they will come back and get one of those individuals and take them to church off the clock. They just go together and then they have dinner together, like, they truly have a great relationship with those individuals. So another way you can look at staffing barriers is through natural supports, building relationships with those people that are in the churches. And of course all these things we talk about throughout here, the common theme is going to be building relationships. Our individuals building relationships with the places of worship and the individuals there, but our staff as well building relationships. So that's going to be key for for all of these things. Next, transportation. So sometimes, once again, you might only have one vehicle assigned to a location where you might have multiple people residing. So transportation could get tricky. So sometimes you have to have communication around who's going where. This individual is going to a service in a similar area, so we just set up a route where our individuals make sure they get to those places of worship. You can also talk with your local transit. It might be a bus line that comes by there, you know, or you might be able to talk with -- we have staff right here where we can arrange for the individuals, which is also great because they get additional community involvement in inclusion. So that's another way that you can look at, you know, getting around transportation issues. And then once again, natural supports, where you might have someone that can come and actually pick those individuals up and take them to their service of their choice. Next, we have community perception. And specifically, what we had found is sometimes when we would first go maybe to a new place of worship, there might be people that were tentative or lots of questions. So what we have discovered is if you do a lot of leg work on the front end -- as staff we go and say, hey, you know, we have some individuals that are interested in coming and being at your place of worship, and just talking with them, letting them know we're coming, and then as you can, especially if you can -- you introduce the individual that's going there to the -- the leadership, and say, you know, hey, this individual loves this style of worship, they want to come be part of this. We've had to do that in the past where we wanted to make sure that they were not tentative. And then once again, building relationships. So as we've had individuals maybe attending a house of worship where -- and I hate to say it, sometimes you'll have other parishioners that are concerned, or just trying to -- one of the things we suggested that -- this has been a few years ago is -- hey, can we have, like, a dinner where everyone's together and where we can get to know each other and there's no pressure, you know? And that actually worked out really well where everyone kind of got to mingle and meet each other, and I felt like that worked out really well. So just trying to build relationships and change perceptions out there, you know? For the most part, I feel like communities have been very welcoming, but when they're not, trying to change the perception around that. So accessibility. This is something we've ran into as well in the past is maybe there's a place of worship that an individual wants to go, but they have accessibility issues. So I actually just talked to a church not long ago, and tried to help them find a grant to be able to build a ramp, and so they were able to -- I don't know if they've achieved it yet, but I know that they wrote a grant to be able to get a ramp to make their location a little more accessible for all people. So that worked out really well. But going in ahead of time and making sure that you understand if there's any accessibility issues, what those look like, how you can overcome them, and if there's something there more permanent, maybe working with that place of worship, like I said, to maybe get a grant or something of that nature. And then communication. You know, to me, once again this is all about building relationships. And that's the beautiful thing to me about the faith-based community is the relationships that our individuals are building at these churches. You know, it truly becomes like family, and it's just beautiful to see, and it all revolves around communication and having open lines of communication, so that if there are any barriers, any issues of any kind, they feel welcome to come and talk with you and express that. So as with everything else, communication is key to being able to overcome any barriers that you come across. So that's all for me. And we will move on to the next slide, beginning our stories.

>> Sharon Gomez: Okay that's me. So before I start with the story of Joseph, Jimmy, Rocky, and Mitchell, I wanted to add one thing. This -- this concept of spirituality is very important to all Evergreen members, including our board of directors. And they think that this is so important that the outcome measure that we use -- people being supported in their religious beliefs and practices -- that is an outcome that they track on an annual basis to see how well that we're doing. So each quarter we have committee meetings, and they want to have information on how well we're doing on supporting people in their religious beliefs and practices. So I think that that demonstrates their -- their commitment to us being a faith-based organization from the top down. So I wanted to add that. Okay, now I want to introduce you to Joseph, Jimmy, Rocky, and Mitchell, who are four guys that live together in a home in Southwest Louisiana. And they began their faith journey by attending church with one of their staff members, and -- found a very welcoming place from the very beginning. And so, they became members of the Morning Star Baptist Church, where they now serve as Ushers at church. They participate in bible study and they enjoy church fellowships. They found Morning Star to be a welcoming place for them, and the congregation welcomes them with open arms, I'm told. One day I want to go to church with them and see. Okay, next slide? So this is my friend David. And David actually goes to church with me. We attend the same church. David's family is a member of this church as well, but David did not begin his active participation in the church until he came to live at Evergreen. He lives in an apartment with two other men, and they live in an apartment in Southwest Louisiana as well. When David started going to church, he was not a baptized believer, and he asked for assistance in baptism. And so we -- we provided that. He attends church on a regular basis. He rides the church bus to and from church. He participates in Bible study -- in the Bible study in our Sanctuary with all the other adults. And he waits on the Lord's table -- we take communion every Sunday and he waits on the Lord's table. He's led closing prayer. And he really enjoys church fellowships, as well as the men's prayer breakfast, which by the way, was instituted at David's request. He wanted a time for just the guys to get together and hang out and study scripture, and so that is now a part of our church. Okay, next slide.

>> Yvonne A. Miller-Nixon: All right, I'm going to talk about Tammy. This is Yvonne again. So this is -- this is kind of a bittersweet one. Tammy actually passed away in the past year, I believe. But -- it's a part of her story. So Tammy lived in our -- in Central Louisiana, and was served there in a supportive living program. She was very very very involved in her church, which was the Sanctuary of Praise Fellowship in Pineville or Alexandria, Louisiana. She actually helped -- was involved in her church. She had some really good friends in her church that actually helped support her. And there's some pictures here of Tammy with her friends from church. Tammy assisted with church members who were deaf. She helped sign for them. She was a full member of the church. You know, oftentimes what I see, and I'm sure y'all see that too, is people may be involved in a church but they're not officially members. Like, no one has supported them to take that other step with whatever the church or the place of worship desires. You know, some require that, oh, you have to be baptized, or you have to give a statement of faith that's in the Christian tradition. But she was, you know, a full member of that church. She was a part of her women's ministry at the church. One of the things that -- came out from one of her outcomes interviews -- she was selected when we randomly select people -- is she actually expressed -- she was talking about her faith. She expressed a desire to be cremated and have her ashes sprinkled around roses at the church. So -- you know, as I said, she had passed away. So when that happened, since we knew about that -- or -- the people that worked with her knew about that -- they talked to the ladies -- her friends at the church, they actually planted yellow rose bushes, because that's her favorite flower, around the church. And that's where her ashes are today. So this kind of shows the -- full scope of somebody being really involved and having those friendships and connections, and making me sad now. So that's Tammy's story.

>> Jarrod Adams: All right I get to talk about Vertis. He's -- as you can see, man this guy is dapper. He's got a great personality, just lively. And he's one of those examples of where -- when we talk with him and we -- when you do the faith assessment that Evergreen has, he might say, okay, I am of the Christian faith, but there's so many different types of services you can attend. And we had to find the right place of worship for Vertis. He actually sings in the choir and he likes a more charismatic style of worship. And he likes a little more high energy. And he has found a place that he loves -- he loves to go there and be part of the fellowship, to sing, and just the energy -- and you can see the smile on his face. This is his Sunday best church outfit, and he was ready to roll. And he's just a great character with a great voice and just a booming personality. It just comes alives. Loves church, loves to go and be part of that body, so we wanted to make sure we included him within this, because you know, being able to differentiate what style of worship service you go to is a big deal. So he was able to find a place that he loves and he feels valued in part of that church family. And I think I got the next slide too. Yes, Amos. So Amos goes to a little church outside of Knoxville, Tennessee, hidden by some dogwood trees if you're a Morgan Wallen fan. He loves to participate in Bible study. He loves singing solos at church. And you can see it's one of those small churches where it's very close-knit family, and you never know when the pastor might just say, "Amos, will you come up and sing" whatever it is, "Amazing Grace?" And he has no fear. He'll just walk right up. You can see in this picture he's standing right at the front of the church, just walked right up and he will -- belt out a solo. He is highly involved. They have a food pantry where they give out food to people that are needy in their community, and Amos serves in that food pantry as well, and loves to help organize and hand out food. He is a part of the men's ministry there, so he has become very close with all the men with that group. And any -- any type of work they have going on, he wants to be there. He wants to be part of it. Whatever they're doing -- if they're cleaning, if they're working on something, if they're handing out coats or food, he is right there. He is part of it. And he is a valuable member and a loved member of that church community, and just a great voice for our community within that church.

>> Karen Towery: Thank you Jarrod. So that brings the slides to me. My name is Karen, hello everyone, I'm so happy to be here. I am wearing a black jacket with a green shirt underneath. I have long hair that's at best [chuckles] multi-colored, and I'm just happy to be here. The slide that we have up right now says "if we do nothing." And it basically says individuals possess spirituality in spite of our process. I do believe that our individuals possess a lot of spirituality, and it's our process -- Evergreen's process -- to bring that out. That's why the process is so important that Evergreen has in place is to bring that out. And I say this because of the folks that I have worked with -- that I've been honored to work with. Prior to doing our assessment process and doing this, they bring to the table amazing spirituality. I truly believe this population is a lot closer to God than a lot of us [laughs] claim to be. Just -- it's a very simple, a very raw, a very real relationship that they have with their higher power. I said God, Yvonne stated that we're in the Bible Belt. But in who their higher power is, and maybe at some point it was a process of, is there something more than me, or looking at the clouds, or looking at the sky, and realizing there's a creator or there's something that's more than me that got them there. But I do like to think there's that red -- the red phone that they pick up and have a straight line to God. And I depend on that a lot from -- with the people that we serve. But I did have a young man, his name is Rob. And I don't have a picture of him, but I do have pictures on my slide of folks that are handing out goody -- they're not goody bags, they're care bags so -- to a homeless population here in Fort Worth. And in the bags, there's shampoo, there's conditioner, there's soap, there's a toothbrush, there's toothpaste, like, all of these kind of things that [coughs] maybe we don't think of for taking -- just take for granted that we have. And so they have packed these bags and they're handing them out. And the idea came from one of our individuals. And in fact, it came out of a conversation that said that -- we were talking about, you know God, his higher power is God, and then if you're -- if you believe in God, you got to be good, and you got to do good things. And this was something that he wanted to do. And so we said, okay, well let's do it. And we got the things together and packed these bags and went down and let them just mingle and get to know and love on this -- this population. And it was really pretty awesome. We are fortunate that we do partner with churches, and they look forward to -- we've partnered with a church that does a lot with the -- the homeless families. And so there's a church that will rent a snow cone machine, and our guys then have volunteered to go out and to make these snow cones and hand them out to the kids, and to -- play with and just kind of intermingle with the kids. So anyway it's just -- I think it's just -- it's the feeling of being good to others, and I I really like to think that a lot of times, you know, our folks are cared for. And so in taking on these roles and doing these things, as Rob says, are good things because we love God, they get to be a caretaker for other people, rather than always being cared for, and I think that that's vitally important. Next slide please. [coughs] Oops. This is -- this slide -- is titled "Meet Roberto," and it has a picture of one of the people that we served. His name is Roberto. Very very precious Hispanic male. And he came to be -- to receive services from us in 2003. He came from a facility that was -- it's shameful that it was even allowed to be a facility for folks to live in. Very dark, lonley, just kind of a stale state of existence. And then he came to us. And you would really believe and think that coming from an environment like that, a dark and dank and stale existence, and I only say that -- I'm describing it because that's what I felt and thought when I went to that facility and saw it for the first time -- that he would -- that he would kind of feel the same way or exhibit some behaviors or actions that mimicked where he lived. But no. When he got out of that facility and came to be in one of our facilities in 2003, he had his things -- but on top of all of his things when we unpacked them was his Bible. And he brought with him -- his Bible that he took with him everywhere he went. It was vitally important for him to have his bible with him. And he would open up every day, without fail, open up his bible and start rewriting the bible -- into these notebooks. And he filled in his time with us -- and unfortunately, Roberto passed less than a year ago in 2022 -- we have hundreds of notebooks that are filled with Roberto writing down what he's reading, seeing in his bible, and putting them into a notebook. And when he would see or what he thought were people in need, he would try to give his notebooks to them. He always wanted to pray for people. He wasn't verbal -- I mean, he used a lot of vocalizations, but he would gesture and he would tell you to come here, and whenever you come near, he would point to his Bible, and he would grab your hands, and he would start praying in the way that he would pray. I mean just like -- you could feel it in your soul. Again, kind of reinforcing that I believe that these guys have that -- the red phone straight to god and really just encompass spirituality like it's supposed to be. Anyway, just an amazing fellow. I feel very honored to have been able to spend time with him over the past, oh, 19 years. It was -- it was pretty wonderful. Next slide please. This slide is titled meet Charlie. Charlie is a young, tall, thin, Hispanic male. Just a really really neat guy. He also had limited communication skills. But one thing that he always wanted to do and always could get his words out is he wanted to pray every day. He would come and find me all the time and say, "can we pray, it's time to pray." And I would say "okay, Charlie, what do you want to pray for?" And he always, first and foremost, wanted to pray for his mom, which is a good boy, always wanted to pray for his mom, good guy. He wanted to pray for the day, and he always wanted to pray for his friends. And so he would put his hands up, and insist that I put my hands around his. And I would pray first and then he would pray. And if it was good and we were done, he would say amen. If not, I would just pray until he said amen. And sometimes it was two minutes, and sometimes it was 15 minutes. I just let him lead that. But he would seek me out -- and I know that if I was not around, he would seek other folks out to be able to just be together and hold hands and pray. "I love Jesus," he would say "I love Jesus. I love Jesus." And anybody that would listen, he would go and tell them that he loved Jesus. He very much enjoyed listening to praise and worship music. And you could just see when -- when asked what do you want to hear, what do you want to listen to, this is what he would want to listen to. And when he would turn it on, you could just see his face would change, his body would change, and he was just getting filled with what he needed to be filled with at that time, listening to praise and worship music. Love Charlie. Next slide please. This slide is titled "Meet Loretta." And this lady, she's 86 years old right now, and she is a spitfire. She also came out of the same facility that Roberto did. So again, you would think that she would mimic the situation and the environment that she came out of, but she absolutely did not. She showed up on the scene full of joy and laughter and love. Loved people so much, just loved people. And very early on -- I just saw that she just had this way, like, she had this -- she knew when someone needed prayer. She knew when someone needed that interface, and to just have some pray for them. She -- she had done it to me several times. If I would come into the office and she would maybe think that I was upset or depressed or sad, and she wouldn't even ask, she'd just go honey, let me pray for you. And here we go. And she'd lay hands on me, and she would start praying. And every single time she knew exactly what I needed prayer for, and just blessed -- blessed me to the core. And not just me, just everybody that she met. I mean I feel like -- really, I feel like that -- that's Loretta's mission on this Earth, is to be a -- prayer intercessor for folks that need it. And she just -- she just has this radar, and she knows. And when someone needs prayer she seeks them out. It's like [beeping noises] bam, she gets them. And she's praying for them. And it's amazing -- she's an amazing lady. She attends Saint Phillips Presbyterian Church. They absolutely love her there, embrace her, and how could you not, right, because she's also praying for all of those folks as well too. She loves meeting new people. And after she talks to you for a little bit, then she says let's pray. "Let me pray for you." So anyway, love Loretta. Wish everyone here could meet Loretta. Next slide please. This slide is titled "Faith Community." And I'll just read the first part -- "the house of FAITH is the building, the community is the people." So it has a picture of Bobby, and we also -- we served Bobby from starting at 2003. Bobby passed away in 2014. Bobby -- and it also has a picture of Bobby with his sister Dolly. We still serve Dolly, Dolly is 91 years old and still going strong. But they had no family. Let me just say everyone has family, right, but they didn't have a family that was involved with them, that followed them. I mean, just lost, like the lost families. So Evergreen is their family, their peers were their family. Bobby became sick in 2014 and passed away. It was the first time that -- I had had to, and I guess all of the the folks around it had -- we've just been very fortunate -- someone passed away that we were so close to and loved so much. And here we were faced with making the arrangements, which of course we could. But all of his housemates, they all had lived together for such a very long time. Just -- we just made the decision that we wanted his service to be in our Evergreen facility, and we wanted the folks that he loved, that he considered his family, to be the ones to do his service. So with his sister and with his housemates -- so there's also a picture on the slide of his housemates, and you can see him in the picture -- sat down and planned his service from A to Z. So they did it. I mean, they did it all. They -- we had singing, we had praise and worship, we had dancers that came and danced to Bobby's favorite song. We had a time of, you know, talking about Bobby. We had a video. His friends gave the eulogy. It was just led by his peers from the beginning to the end. And everybody wrote messages to Bobby. We put 'em in balloons. His favorite color was blue, we had blue balloons. We attached it to it, did a balloon release to Bobby. But I guess the thing that really hit me the most and really confirmed to me that this population -- just -- the spirituality is amazing, is during the service, I was bawling my eyes out. I just I was -- could barely breathe, bawling because I just loved this man so much, and -- it was just, you know, it was a death, it was a passing away. Well, his roommates got up at the end of the ceremony. And one of them turned and looked at me, because still, I'm just a mess crying, and he goes, "Bobby was sick. His stomach hurt. Now he's in heaven." And he's looking at me like, "don't you get it?" Like, what are you so sad about? Like -- he was here, he got sick, and now he's in heaven. Like, embrace that. And for me it was just very -- yes -- that's true. It really kind of got me back -- shook me back into that I should be so thankful that I had that time, and that these things happen, and that if you believe in God and in heaven, which these guys did especially -- and his name was Roger that told me that -- then we know that we'll see Bobby again in heaven, and he won't be sick and there won't be disabilities and we'll all be whole. So anyway that -- it was -- it was a pretty moving experience, one that I will treasure forever, and just, again, goes to show that any limitations that we have in this area, is what the limitations that we put on our folks, not from them at all. Next slide please. Let's see how much time I have left. Okay, this is gonna go really quick, and then I'm gonna wrap it up quickly. I believe that when we provide everything spiritual that Evergreen does, we do assessments, we provide the opportunity, we encourage it we do all that -- that is our glimpse of heaven here on Earth, and that -- the name of -- the title of the slide is "A Glimpse of Heaven." And I will just say that we had a dance group at one time, and this is how I know it, and this is how I had glimpsed heaven, and we would -- at the end of the dance group, I'd say what do you want to listen to, and they would always choose praise and worship. And we would turn it on, we'd be in the lots, and they would just grab hands and sing to the music. And -- I mean -- very soon into that, arms in the air, eyes closed, some of our folks would even go to the ground on their knees and just pray and pray and pray. And it's one of the most moving experiences that I -- had in my life, it was powerful. It's still powerful when I think about it, every single time it happened. And that just goes back to if we do absolutely nothing, that is still there in these folks. But we do have the responsibility to do everything that we can to provide the opportunity for spirituality and a spiritual experience -- self-directed, self-initiated in agreement. We got to let our guys exercise their right to spirituality, and that -- that's all I have, thank you.

>> Shelly Christensen: Well thank you everyone. You can -- you can leave --well that's okay, it could be this slide -- thank you for the presentation. What I was most struck by is -- that spirituality, faith, religion connection to that community is so critically important in people's lives, and to -- really build this -- elevate actually, as part of people's lives -- it's not the exception at Evergreen, it is part of Evergreen, and I really value that and appreciate that. And if people want to receive copies of -- the assessments, the materials that you have, Sharon has given us her email address. I'm going to ask Ben to or Eric actually to put that in the chat for everyone -- or actually, everyone's email address. Appreciate that, thank you so much. We have several questions. We're going to try and get through this, we have a hard stop at the top of the hour, so from Alexei Perez, who lives in South Florida where churches are not the most welcoming spaces for people with disabilities. The question is "can you speak to the tension that exists, if you've encountered it, where a church a person expresses they want to attend [unintelligible] help facilitate that is a church that hasn't welcomed people with disabilities from within. How do you as an organization partner with that church so they are open to welcome that person, and have you -- had to choose another church option for your clients if the churches you reach out to are not welcoming?"

>> Sharon Gomez: Well I think Jarrod spoke to it earlier when he said you have to do -- you have to do the work up front. It could be that [coughs] you meet with the minister ahead of time. You -- sometimes they'll be two or three people in the congregation that are more open and welcoming, and you can latch on to them, and that helps to include -- include folks. I encountered -- not at Evergreen, but another organization that I worked for in another lifetime ago -- where people did not -- did not welcome the folks that we were serving in that organization. And so much so, that they would put them on a bus and send them to another congregation south of the town. And as you can imagine -- that wasn't very pleasing to me. And so what it -- takes is to -- to meet with people ahead of time and try to dispel their fears. A lot of times you have to go to that church yourself, and let them know that -- that you appreciate them being there. And just visit with them -- I've done several presentations at churches that will -- I hope would help welcome our folks. And so I think, like Jarrod said -- the best thing is just to do the grunt work ahead of time.

>> Shelly Christensen: Such a good point. I too have done a lot of training in congregations, just -- not just with clergy, but with the actual full scope of the congregation. A lot of times people don't even know what they don't even know, and so it's great to do that. We have one more question. This is from Donna, who says "thank you for sharing all this information which is so helpful." Donna wanted to know if you have any strategies to -- or encountered the situation of connecting to someone like Donna's son who is 30 years old, he's autistic, he can't do the larger settings like services. So -- how to connect somebody for whom that -- that larger programming creates some anxiety, and what strategies do you have to approach a church and help them build capacity to want to connect to someone? Maybe doing some dinners or puzzles or small group things, visiting him -- visiting a person at home. Any thoughts on that?

>> Sharon Gomez: Well at my church, we have what's called life groups, where we meet in people's homes. It's a -- it's a small setting, it's a very intimate setting. And it's a way for you to get to know just a smaller group of people on a very real basis. We -- we pray for each other. And sometimes folks like David, who I spoke of -- earlier, is also -- he also has autism. And so David fits real well in that small circle of friends too. And that's what we do on Sunday evenings. Instead of going back to church, we meet in people's homes in the evening. And so stuff like that -- if you can find a congregation that does stuff like that, I know of -- Jarrod spoke of real charismatic groups, I know that they typically have a midweek service that is not as well attended, and sometimes a smaller midweek service is a good place to make a connection.

>> Jarrod Adams: You also -- and this can be a segue for the future, because I believe it's going to happen -- technology can play a role in that. Being in an environment of your choosing where you still can -- some churches will have a place where they can go and it's a little bit quieter, where you still have the service, you're still in the building, the service is still happening. We've had people choose that. Do I want to be out in the main crowd, there's too many people, it's got lights, you know, we're in Tennessee. You know, if you -- if you throw a dart you're going to hit a church or a Dollar General. They're everywhere. So whatever flavor you're looking for you can find. So we're kind of -- it's hard for me when I hear, you know, that you're having a hard time finding something, but we have had churches that we have worked with where they created environments that were more inclusive, where they were like, okay, we understand that you want to be here in the building, but you don't want the surroundings of all -- you know, of all the lights and the -- once again, these are more charismatic churches where this has happened. Not everybody has lights and, you know, guitars and everything. But they actually had a side room where the service was still going, and the individual thrived in that, and that's what they chose to do. And then of course technology -- you can enjoy a service from your home -- from anywhere. And there's lots of ways, and I know you guys will speak to that in your future sessions about how technology can help with those issues too.

>> Shelly Christensen: Jarrod, thank you for the segue for our fourth webinar. But first please join me, everyone, in thanking our wonderful presenters from Evergreen Life Services today. And I want to thank Bill, who provided sign language interpretation, Christy, who provided live captioning. Again, those are staples of all the work that we do at RespectAbility. I want to thank everyone for joining us today as well. And I'm inviting you to join us for our next webinar in the series on April 19th. That will be looking at community organizations, and how they support people with disabilities to access spirituality and their faith communities of choice. So on that note, thank you all so very much, and we'll see you in a month.