>> Shelly Christensen: Welcome to the third of four webinars in the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Interest Network 2023 series, called Pathways to Belonging: Supporting the Spiritual and Faith Community Interests of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Hi, my name is Shelly Christensen. I use the she series of pronouns. I'm a white woman, I have dark curly hair, and I'm wearing red glasses. I'm wearing a burgundy top and a beige and black sweater. Behind me is a gray wall, a bookcase, and a Tiffany table lamp. I'm the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility, and a member of the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network. RespectAbility is a diverse, disability-led nonprofit that works to create systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. Our mission is to fight stigma and attach opportunities -- oh, and advance opportunities, yes, so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community life as they choose. This webinar series is a collaboration between Religion and Spirituality Interest Network of AAIDD and RespectAbility. Next slide please. Just some accessibility notes. And also, I want to inform you that this webinar is being recorded, so you'll receive the link via email afterwards. And ASL interpretation and real-time live transcription are recorded -- you can pin the interpreter to ensure they're visible throughout the presentation, and there's a link in the chat box to view the live transcript in a separate window. We invite you to put your questions for our speakers in the Q&A box. And open captions are added -- and you'll find it at RespectAbility after -- when the webinar will be posted on our website. One other note: the PowerPoint for this presentation is available for download right now at RespectAbility.org/AAIDD-2023-series, and that will be in the chat as well. So I want to introduce our speakers in just a moment. Over 60 percent of disabled people report a desire to participate in their faith communities, and this statistic has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years, despite the increasing awareness and interest in faith communities and congregations' efforts to create accessible spaces and worship opportunities. Disabled people and their allies are making inroads in efforts to promote inclusion in many community activities, and this webinar series centers on direct support professionals to use their facilitation skills to address faith religious and spiritual needs and interests. This supports individual meaning -- individual and meaningful participation by a disabled person to be included and feel a sense of belonging in their chosen spiritual communities. Religious congregations and spiritual organizations provide networking opportunities for jobs, housing, and transportation, in addition to the social emotional and connectedness that all of us seek. 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 religious and or faith communities. We hope that DSPs who participate in this webinar series will begin to facilitate this important work with the people they support, and take time to address their own spiritual needs and well-being. Pleasure -- it's a pleasure to welcome our presenters. Rev. Sarah VanderZee McKenney, MDiv is the creator and coordinator of Spiritual Support Program at Stone Belt Arc in Bloomington, Indiana. Sarah is working on her Doctorate of Ministry in Disability -- and Ministry at Western Theological Seminary in Holland Michigan. She has published articles in Frontline Initiative and Presbyterians Today centered on inclusion and belonging of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or IDD, in faith communities. She is the president of the non-profit -- Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association, and is the past chair of Presbyterians for Disability Concerns. Sarah is a member of the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network of AAIDD and Fallen Walls Ministry, which supports people with disabilities in ministerial leadership. Sarah holds a masters of divinity degree and was ordained by the Presbyterian Church USA. And Sarah lives with dyslexia and ADHD. Please join me in welcoming Tammy Besser, LCSW, NCG. And she -- Tammy has worked with people with disabilities across the lifespan and their families for over 35 years in direct support, clinical management, administrative, and consultative roles. In her current role at Jewish Family -- Jewish Child and Family Services, sorry, JCFS in Chicago, she consults with faith communities on accessibility and inclusion, coordinates and supervises mental health services, Sibshops and case management. And Tammy provides consultation about disability across the organization, and coordinates and runs monthly "Creating Community Conversations" for staff. Without further ado, it's my pleasure to welcome Tammy and Sarah.

>> Tammy Besser: Yes, thank you Shelly for that lovely introduction. I'm Tammy Besser. I use she/her/hers pronouns. I'm a late middle-aged woman with short white gray hair, blue eyes, and glasses. I'm wearing black headphones over my head. I'm wearing a deep purple shirt. And my background is a blue-pink-green tropical explosion. And there is, when I move my head, a little bookcase behind me. Sarah and I designed this presentation specifically for service providers, those of you who are supporting individuals disabilities. We hope to expand how you think about faith communities and think about relationships with faith communities today. We'll talk about a variety of activities that occur that the individuals we support can participate in, either beyond or in place of the weekly ritual gatherings of services or worship that occurs in synagogues and churches and temples and mosques and meeting rooms everywhere. There are a variety of ways that spiritual and religious needs can be met. And we're also going to talk about additional ways that collaborating with and developing relationships with faith communities as organizations can be beneficial to everybody. And before we dive into that content, Sarah is going to be talking about what we mean about -- by religious and spiritual health needs. Next slide.

>> Sarah McKenney: So hi everyone. I am Sarah McKenney. I use she/her pronouns. Behind me I'm -- middle age 30 something years old, I have dark hair, I'm wearing like a beige jacket with a grayish blue dress. Behind me you'll see a bookcase filled with books, fidgets, coloring material, and many more miscellaneous objects and tools that I use with my job. So before we kind of dive into how we can connect -- how agencies and service providers can connect with faith communities, I want to spend just a little bit of time defining what we mean by spiritual health. Next slide. So in the first -- I kind of use it into -- I -- try and describe spirituality in two different primary categories, the first being the big questions category. Next. So the big questions category, you might be -- these are ways in which that every person or most people explore kind of these big questions, such as "how did I get here?" Next. "Who am I?" And what I mean by who am I, not just my name, but who am I as a person, what do I like, what are my -- who am I connected to other people? "Is there a God? If so, what are they like?" "What is good and bad? Who or what decides that?" So ethical questions or moral questions. "What is my purpose? What is OUR purpose as humans -- humanity -- collective?" "Why do bad things happen?" Not an easy question -- not an easy answer to that question. "What comes after death?" So these are questions that many of us explore to some degree that don't necessarily have easy quick answers. And we continue to kind of explore these in some way in our lives. The next category are what I would call the spiritual needs category. So this includes -- some examples might be "joy." How do you experience joy in your life? What are your friendships? Actually having friendships -- not paid relationships, not staff friendships, the friendships between somebody and somebody who's paid to be with them is not the same as a mutual friendship. Having a sense of purpose in your life. Love. Belonging. And again, here I'm talking about actual mutual friendships, real belonging. Connection. Feeling valued. And being needed. So these are spiritual needs that we all seek in some way -- and are at the core of why we do what we do in life. Why do we make the choices we make? Why do we like what we like? These -- the big questions category and the spiritual needs category really are the areas that drive what we do in our lives, and that we seek out in our lives. Next slide.

>> Tammy Besser: So there are many doorways that can become portals into faith communities. From outside they often seem centered on that weekly ritual service. That's what's on the sign outside, it's telling you what time to join them each week. And we know that services aren't for everyone. They can be big and loud and crowded. They can be too quiet and regimented. There's too much movement, there's too little movement. And the characteristics of services don't always match people's needs, wants, preferences, and sensitivities. And it's also sometimes difficult to make those connections, those seeds that may sprout into relationships in louder and more crowded environments. So in preparation for the presentation today, I engaged in an exploration of faith communities in the neighborhoods I work in and where the individuals we support live. Any of you are welcome to do this, it's a really good idea. I just went to Google maps of a particular area -- a fairly small geographic range, put in faith communities, and up pop, like, 30 different faith communities. And there were organizations in there that I'd driven by or walked by for decades and knew absolutely nothing about. So I just started digging into some of the websites. I also -- noted who didn't have a website. They might have had a social media presence instead, but started just kind of digging in. And I found there were so many activities and events that anyone could participate in that it wasn't just saying this is for members, this is for whoever, this is what we do. And it was welcoming. And so this slide and the next slide, we're just going to highlight some of the things we found. This isn't an exhaustive list by any measure, this was just some particular things that stood out at a couple of the congregations that I looked at. I just looked at a handful, there were a lot more we could have dug into. So there was everything from different ways to participate. There were soup kitchens and community feasts, just even how -- those were labeled, that it might look like the same thing but the terminology made a difference. And there are ways that people could sign up to volunteer. It could be -- one of them had a sign up where you could do sign up for the cooking and preparation, or you could sign up for the cleanup -- the serving and cleanup, that's the order it goes in. Or you could sign up for both. Each was an hour and a half, it would -- you knew exactly if this is when it starts, this is when it ends, and these are what the tasks are. Another offered a food pantry where there was weekly unloading of trucks and stocking, prepping things for distribution, while another was soliciting a group of volunteers to assist at a local food pantry on a particular day of the week, once a month, on a regular basis. There was a thrift store that had hours of operation where they needed assistance. Another with an annual rummage sale, where for an entire week, there were ways somebody could participate from -- 9 in the morning till 10 at night in preparation, running, and takedown of this annual sale. While near -- most people had weekly opportunities to study sacred texts, there was a huge number of book groups, from fiction group, to non-fiction group, to international authors. There was an intergenerational book club. There was one that had a one congregation, one book that they were studying over an entire year. And I will say with audiobooks these days, book clubs are far more accessible. We support a couple of individuals who are part of a book club that, when it changed the day of week and time of day that the book club was being held, we had to completely help them rearrange and support them in everything else they did during the week. It was the most important thing, it was their community, it was the highlight of the week, and we made sure that happened. But that could be where that connection happens for someone you're supporting. There were knitting groups -- from learning how to knit, to creating items that are going to be given away, and that were in service.

>> Sarah McKenney: So something to note is, again, so if you think of the spiritual needs and those big questions, and so, like, in these examples that Tammy is giving, how are those spiritual needs then being met in these areas? So you, as a direct support staff, or you know, the service provider, the people who are supporting people with disabilities, you're helping to get to know them, getting to know what is most important in their life, and then helping them explore how those needs are going to then be met in these various ways to connect with the faith community.

>> Tammy Besser: And these are also places that someone could try something out for the first time and see if this is the thing for them. So we get into the, you know, people who are concerned about the environment, there's everything -- from environmental justice, where people are doing policy work, to gardening and landscaping and participating in urban farming. Worked with a gentleman who had been raised on a farm, and hadn't had an opportunity to do that, and once we were able to get him connected with doing some gardening with a local community, who he was and what mattered to him changed completely. His -- you could see how -- this was a much more -- a much happier person. Many organizations are often looking for -- of the faith communities are looking for religious education teachers. Somebody -- to work in the baby toddler room, helping out with preschool. I worked with a young woman who absolutely loved babies. Like, you'd just be in the grocery store and she's the person who's finding the babies and making the faces and getting those great smiles and everything, and really wanted to work in a preschool or daycare or something like that. Our employment specialists were having a difficult time finding an entree in any place who worked with one of those neighborhood -- just a neighbor actually. And she found a local church. They needed more hands in their infant toddler room during services, and they were open to her assisting. And so she started out there, and ended up spending her Sunday mornings there for years and years. She developed a relationship with families and other members of the church. We might look at and say she was volunteering her time, whereas she would also -- she would have described it as "this is my joy time of the week." And Sarah has Mikaela's story to share. Next slide.

>> Sarah McKenney: So in this image you see a young woman. She has blue hair. She does prefer -- she or she/her pronouns. She is wearing a teal sweater with some -- a pattern leggings that have green and blue in the leggings. She's talking on the phone, and there's actually a Christmas tree behind her. In her lap you will see there is a phone directory from her church. In one of my many -- and Mikaelas has given me permission to share this story, as her and I -- she actually shared her story on a webinar that we did. And in preparation for that webinar, I asked Michaela "how do you experience God?" And Michaela told me, "when I serve and help others." And then I said well, so tell me more "how does God show God's self to you in those moments?" And she said, "God reminds me I am important. I can help and serve others, and I can make a difference in other people's lives." Michaela has done many -- and she truly has done many acts of service. She -- and continues to do many acts of service. She helps at the coffee cart where -- at her faith community, where she sells Fair Trade coffee and tea and chocolate, so all of the funds go back to these farmers that -- I mean directly back to these farmers, so they get a larger percentage of the money. She helps at social hours -- the time -- the fellowship time after the worship service, and she helps to help the sweet -- get prepared the sweet treats and punch and get that ready for people, so when they are done with the worship service, they can partake and enjoy. She also helps to build -- she's been on multiple mission trips to West Virginia, where she helps to build ramps and decks for people who are in need of that and don't have the money or maybe the ability to do that themselves. And so she helps -- she's helped build those. She's very proud of the multiple power tools that she has used. Mikaelas does have a an arm that doesn't -- that has limited mobility, and it was -- it was never second guessed. Her faith community kind of said, all right, so here's this power tool. What do you need in order to -- what kind of support do you need in order to use this? And you know, there were times where she was like, "I don't need anything, I've got this." And she'd use her shoulder or have whatever -- you know, she knew how to adapt it and use that tool or that resource in the way that she needed to do -- to get the job done. So the question wasn't whether she could or couldn't, the question was, "well, how do we support you in doing this?" During COVID when there was not the church attending and all of these things and all these ways that she was participating in her faith community, she couldn't -- and this was a big -- she was -- she was really missing out on this quality aspect of her life, like many of us did. So what she did, all on her own, was she said well if I'm missing people then other people are probably missing people. If I'm lonely, other people are probably lonely. So she started her own phone call ministry, and started pulling out -- and that's what you see here in this picture is a picture of her pulling out the phone directory, the church directory, and starting to call people and checking in on them, and how they were doing, and talking to them, and having those conversations, and connecting once again, as that was a big spiritual need of hers that was not getting filled. The congregation actually recognized all of her leadership and -- taking initiative, so they ordained her as a deacon, so as an ordained leader in the congregation, which was wonderful and she's very proud of.

>> Tammy Besser: So, how can individuals get involved is just really -- a continuation of what do faith communities have to offer, where else can people we support make connections and start their journey to belonging and making friends? This -- there are tons of groups. There's young adult groups, there's retirement groups, there's women's groups, there's men's groups, there's the Crohn's group -- that was the one that interested me. Then there are all the -- different types of support that are often -- caregiver support, depression support, grief and loss support. And thinking about do the individuals we're working with -- is there support outside of what we're doing in our own organizations? Can they connect with other people to get those needs met, to get those supports needs met? It's great to have the natural supports. There are all sorts of musical ways to get involved, from small choral groups to large choirs. There was a klezmer band and there was an in-house rock band. There were calls for musicians to get together and just jam and/or participate in a Sunday service or a Friday night, or do it on an ongoing or regular basis. The soccer was one of my surprises. This is -- my own bias was showing on this, so we all want to check our bias when we're going "I think I know what happens in that large community." This is a congregation I have passed by for decades, and all I knew of them was that whenever I was running late for work, the funeral -- procession was leaving their parking lot and I was going to end up late. So I had -- I didn't realize until I looked at their website, like, I have this bias that they're an older aging congregation, they're probably, you know, creaking along because that was my entire experience of them. They had a whole area of their website devoted to soccer. It was a really youthful congregation -- at least that's how their website presented. But it was a nice surprise. There was one that had an 80s dance party. I support somebody who, like, the 80s is his jam. He finds trivia nights that are 1980s. He'll go out to the revival movie theater when they're showing, like, the best 1980s movies. Like, this is his thing. And for him to go to a 1980s dance party, this is a place where he might meet people who share that passion. And this was happening in a local congregation. And then there are all the ways that people share meals and break bread together, from friendship dinners meeting in different people's houses, to trying out new local restaurants -- once a month, to kind of the fundraising pancake breakfasts where you can help cook, you can help clean up, you can help serve, you can help welcome, or you can just go and eat pancakes and enjoy the fellowship of whoever is there. And you know, the fried chicken dinner was at one where it's just, okay, they have a monthly fried chicken dinner. So there's tons of ways to engage socially.

>> Sarah McKenney: So before we move on to the next slide, one thing I want to point out is -- so we're talking about, like, all of the different access points to just faith communities. So not just worship. And I don't want to say just worship to minimize the worship experience, but worship is one aspect in what a faith community might do. As you can see, there's all of these different -- many other options as ways to interact with the faith community. But if you even narrow it down to just using one of these examples -- just the pancake breakfast. There's so many different aspects -- oh, I lost my train of thought. There's so many different access points -- that was what I was looking for -- there's so many different access points just to the pancake breakfast. Like Tammy said, it could be eating the pancakes. It could be -- maybe you don't like pancakes but you want to come and just hang out. Maybe it's actually helping. Maybe you pass out just the napkins. Maybe you greet people. Maybe you're actually flipping the pancakes or pouring the batter or mixing the batter. There's so many different ways that one could participate in this. Even before the pancake breakfast, the advertising and helping to get the word out. So there's so many different ways that one person could interact with this one activity. So also kind of keep -- each thing is very multi-dimensional. Next slide. So now we're going to look at Thomas's story. And I'm not going to say much. I'm going to let this little video clip tell -- the story. Next slide, and go ahead and play the video. You can turn your mic on. How do you -- I know you've talked to me a lot about Jubilee, which is a young adults Ministry group at your church. How do you belong -- how do you know that you belong at Jubilee?

>> Thomas: I have friends there. I hang out with the same people and get to know them. There are lots of events. I have made friends from Jubilee and hang out with them separate from Jubilee. I hang out with [name] once a month and I have hung out with others, like Riley, Marcus, and others. They mean a lot to me because they are friendly, they're a lot of fun to hang out with. I like to hang out with my friends and stuff by myself. I spend the time with the church family for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. It means a lot to me because I don't have a family who I can spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with. So this gives me an opportunity to spend that time with a family and feel special. I have enjoyed being a part of Jubilee because it's a young adult group, and I'm able to hang out with people who are closer to my age and do fun things with. I have learned about praying. I like that we pray at Jubilee. I feel like praying helps me to believe in myself, and I like hearing about praying and talking to God.

>> Sarah McKenney: Thank you so much Thomas. You shared a lot of things, examples. Can you tell me a little bit about how those examples make you feel, how all that makes you feel?

>> Thomas: I feel great. I feel pumped. They're a lot nice and kind. They love having me in Jubilee and being friends with me. I like being their friends. When I passed my driving exam, they all celebrated with me and congratulating me on the success.

>> Sarah McKenney: So it sounds like having somebody to celebrate the successes and maybe be there with -- you in the -- any challenges. How do you experience God when you are with your friends there at Jubilee?

>> Thomas: I feel God is there when I hang out with my friends and they are being kind and loving. I went on the free trip to Holiday World with the church group. They also do trips for free where we spend a couple of nights at the hotel sometimes. This is special because I am able to participate in these fun activities with my friends, and money isn't an issue.

>> Sarah McKenney: That's -- and it's hugely helpful, but I also see that -- I also hear you talk about God -- as you experience God through those friendships when people are loving and kind to you.

>> Thomas: Yeah.

>> Sarah McKenney: So the only other thing that I will note is this is one example, as -- this is one example for Thomas. His access point was not the worship service on Sunday. The access point for him was starting off with joining the young adult group that met on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the various activities that they do. He now actually attends worship on Sundays, but -- and actually, I will also say that last week, he became an official voting member of that congregation now, and was baptized for the first time. So -- but the access -- the point is is the access point was actually a young adult group that met during the week, which also, if you're looking at transportation, staff could help him get there throughout the week, where they didn't have as many staff on Sundays. So they were able to get him and start getting those relationships connected throughout the week, and then those relationships became the natural supports that then provided the transportation on Sundays and those other days. But first of all, it started with the interest -- what his number one interest was was activities and bonding and connecting with people through activities. Tammy.

>> Tammy Besser: Yeah. Yeah, we talked about all those multiple entry points. And I also just want to say that people can have relationships with multiple Faith communities. It's not just one. You can knit at one, you can help out with the soup kitchen with another, you can garden somewhere else, and attend a service elsewhere if you choose to go to a service.

>> Sarah McKenney: Absolutely.

>> Tammy Besser: So we're transitioning into other ways that our organizations can work together. Volunteering is a big one. Faith communities are full of people that often want to help. I work for a multi-service organization, so we're serving individuals, families, and communities across the lifespan, and not just individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. So we have a variety of ways that we can partner with organizations, and have done lots of things such as school supply drives -- we have a school -- coat drives in the winter, toy drives, you see one right here, toiletries in the beginning of the pandemic. We've got so many. There still is a huge number of shampoos and toothbrushes and toothpaste in the supply closet next to my office. And the way people contribute -- it could be money, it could be in kind, it could be we had 20 volunteers who packed the gifts. We've often had big wrapping parties when it's been gifts. And in addition, we also do things where we have congregations who sign on to co-assist us with refugee resettlement, with decorating and helping and furnishing homes for families, as well as ongoing support such as rides to doctors appointments, accompanying people to register their kids for school, and all sorts of assistance with understanding our country and culture. Next slide.

>> Sarah McKenney: So there are four pictures on this screen. These are pictures of just one event that Stone Belt, a service provider, did a joint volunteer opportunity through one of the local Benedictine oblates, one of the Catholic Benedictine oblates. So instead of always being the recipients of service, we are encouraging our community to be partners in volunteer work and do that volunteer work together. So we were benefiting -- Stone Belt was benefiting by having the Benedictine oblate members come and help clean our classrooms and get them reorganized for our employment fundamentals day program. And then we also -- we also did a stuffed animal drive for the weeks prior to this event, and people also could make cards that went along with the stuffed animals, and those were donated to a local alzheimer's unit for the patients there. So this was a collaborative work. You have people with -- so in the first picture on the left, there are people who with -- people with and without disabilities gathered together making some cards to go with those stuffed animals. In the upper middle, there is a picture of, again, men and women with and without disabilities in -- standing -- holding their hands in a circle and they are all saying a prayer before they begin their work. In the bottom middle, there is a big pile of those stuffed animals that they collected in the weeks coming up to the event. And then the top right corner, there is a picture, again, of some women with and without disabilities who are working to clean out one of the refrigerators. And so again, they're working together, they're smiling and posing, and they're collaborating and working together. Next slide. Another example of this collaborating, working, mutually benefiting from service projects and partnering with a faith community. This was a partnership with First United Methodist, and -- where again, we as Stone Belt benefited from their help, their labor in helping to clean our garden -- and clean up and prep our garden for this spring, where we -- where one of the employment fundamentals day programs will be growing food in their garden, and then using the food in their cooking classes. So in the bottom left picture, you will see people with and with disabilities out as they are using various garden tools to dig and -- dig up old bushes, actually, and rake and stir up the soil to prep the soil. In the upper left corner, after they worked hard, they celebrated in Fellowship while playing bingo, and having some good old-fashioned fun. And so in the top left corner, you see two women who are celebrating the fact that they just got -- win bingo and they are celebrating together. In the top right corner you will see some guys with and without disabilities hanging out together, playing bingo, talking and chatting with each other. And in the bottom right corner, you will see a woman who is -- who uses a wheelchair, and she is working -- she's checking out the prizes. She just looks like she just won, and so she's checking out the prizes, and so there's a gentleman there that's kind of showing her what there is and helping her, supporting her in choosing what she wants as her bingo prize. Next slide. Oh yes, if you have questions, please feel free to use the Q&A box to type in those questions, and we'll -- we will do our best to answer those.

>> Tammy Besser: I need to unmute a little bit quicker. Okay. We want to go on to employment. Our organization does a great deal of work on helping people with employment in -- across a spectrum of employment goals and desired outcomes, from customized employment and carve outs of a couple hours a week position, to helping people get full-time employ -- get and maintain full-time employment without formal support. And just a reminder that faith communities are employers. They have small jobs, they have large jobs, there are jobs that the people we work with and support might be perfect for. And this is a place for job developers, develop relationships, those who are looking to help. And congregations are filled with people who are employed and work at places that might need additional staff, as well as they have their own networks. We have done brainstorming sessions -- our job developers have -- with small groups and congregations. We develop individual -- an employment profile with individuals, and they participate with if they choose to. But it's a way of brainstorming where might be the best place. Who knows who? Who knows somebody down the street, and really trying to brainstorm where might we find the right job for this person? Where might we develop the right job for this person? Where might we do a carve out? And those small groups are often a nice entry point into congregations, especially if you're looking -- you have geographic parameters around where somebody's looking for a job, and that particular faith community is in that geographic area. And it's a fairly easy ask and fairly easy to do. We're frequently looking for people who will do mock interviews with the individuals we are trying to help get employment. We found our staff were far too responsive or far too nuanced, that we need people who are out there doing interviews regularly and to help in how do you interview and with the interviewing skills. Faith communities are also great places for recruiting staff. Again, as we talk about networks, and as we know, there's DSP shortages and shortages across the country in social service staff. Faith communities are possible places to recruit staff. We all know job -- you get jobs by who you know. You've heard things by word of mouth. And congregations are just filled with people who might be helped -- helped. They also are places -- I'm thinking of some of our gig workers, and Sarah's going to talk about some very specific asks for artists.

>> Sarah McKenney: Yeah, next slide. So just looking at one example, just the example of art, there are multiple ways that you can reach out to the faith communities to help just with employment on the topic of art. So at Stone Belt, we have an art studio, where artists with disabilities explore and learn about artists, art techniques, and then their artwork is sold in our Stone Belt store, but also in galleries all around town. A faith community --just again on the topic of art -- a faith community could host a gallery wall in their -- building. They could have artists with disabilities show their artwork on their walls and have it be available to buy to the community, but also to members of that congregation. The congregation itself could purchase the use of an image, so the -- so not necessarily the art piece -- the original art piece, but an image of that art piece, to like a -- JPEG version of the art piece to go into bulletins or slideshows or websites or social media and other signage. So however you use images in your congregation's material, you might use artwork of people with disabilities and purchase that image. You could also commission artwork for specific projects, for advertisements, for a special worship service or event. You can also utilize artists with disabilities in your communities that need art -- and design. So -- and the list goes on, and we can sit here and actually brainstorm all the ways that we could hire disabled artists and their artwork. And so, you know, the list could go on and on. Next slide.

>> Tammy Besser: Okay. Moving it -- we talked a little bit about some volunteer work and some collaboration, that volunteer recruitment isn't just about service projects, which we talked about previously. Faith communities are places where you might develop relationships, that you're developing board members, that you're developing people who might be help with fundraising projects, that might be potential funders, as well as meeting people with expertise that you may only need once or twice a year, or for a one-time project that you don't normally run across in your social service networks. I don't run into architects. Those kinds of things where we might need some of that expertise. Also, faith communities have lots of space. As -- office sizes are shrinking, faith communities are great places for large meetings. We actually host a number of trainings in faith communities around our area. They're great for annual staff events. We've also rented space -- for ongoing projects as well. Before I get into some of this -- I'll probably have to say that my organization does a lot of community work. And we have done so much community work over the years that it's developed into an entire department of community services. And so I'm not saying all of you should develop department of community services, but starting points are what is your outreach -- every one of our organizations has particular expertise that the community might benefit from, that any faith community might benefit from. And starting with small things like offering community education on -- its autism awareness month, we're doing an hour on myth busting on autism, and offer it, and let people know that this is what you're doing. Offering things on disability etiquette. There's something every month -- in our field, be it it's Down syndrome month, or developmental disabilities month, or disability employment awareness month, you can offer an hour. You can do it virtual. You let people know and then you might -- and be open to being invited in for conversations about your expertise. That's a great place to start on kind of that journey of how do we start relationships, where do we start in our community outreach, and continuing it and tending to those relationships, and continuing to offer it time after time after time, and after about the seventh time, someone will say yes. We also do a lot of co-sponsorships with congregations on mental health awareness month, domestic violence prevention month, abuse prevention months. There's a lot of different things. We've developed into -- just as some examples, where we do training for professionals and lay leaders on being care ambassadors, kind of the people who are the caring committees is the name of them in some congregations. We have liaisons with some local congregations where we have regular contact with clergy staff and lay leaders and congregants in order to support and link them with the variety of different services and providing our social service expertise individually within those congregations.

>> Shelly Christensen: I just want -- this is Shelly I just [crosstalk] pop in and and tell you we have some questions --

>> Tammy Besser: Great, we can pause right there.

>> Shelly Christensen: Well thank you. I want to say thank you. I really think that describing the religious and spiritual health needs in the beginning of the webinar is so helpful in terms of understanding, you know, sometimes the things that -- that hold people back that might hold a DSP back or be unsure about or a service provider or a congregation. How to approach somebody --is it different than how you'd approach anyone else? So we have a question from Debby Fisher, who by the way is the President of the Religion and Spirituality Interest Network, thank you Debby. And her question is "can you describe strategies providers can offer to their DSPs to help them assist people they support to access all these resources, particularly if the faith communities are different from the ones the DSPs belong to?" Thank you Debby. Go ahead!

>> Sarah McKenney: So my -- this is Sarah -- so one of the things that I would recommend is get to know your neighborhood. So get to know your community. And you can do this alongside the individual with the disability -- exploring with them what are those things that mean most important to them. And it might be starting with a simple question of what do you like? What -- what's the most important thing in your life? And exploring that, watching their life, watching what they enjoy to do, what they enjoy doing, and then exploring together what are their options. You can look at websites, but also you can just explore, visit different faith communities, see what is going. Talk about what they liked and didn't like when they went, and use it as kind of active learning. But yeah, you can use websites to figure out what people do in those faith communities or social media, but I also encourage people to just kind of go and check it out, and then check back in with that person with a disability that you're supporting to see what they liked, what they didn't like, what else that they're looking for. Because they may not actually know exactly what they want if they don't know what all their options are. So some of it's just going to be exploration and discovering as to what even is out there.

>> Tammy Besser: Yeah, I'll second with Sarah -- please get to know your communities in the -- broader goal of community inclusion, community integration, just the walking your community and getting to know it and what's here and being curious is important. I -- also in Debby's question, I don't necessarily assume that a DSP even has a faith community or has an understanding of it, and those are conversations about what's your anxiety? Tell me what it is what are you afraid of, what's keeping you back, what's holding you back, what's happened? And -- that's a conversation with our -- staff, because we have to understand where -- we don't know until we ask, it's the same thing with the individuals we support

>> Shelly Christensen: Thank you both. One thing -- that really stood out in your presentation -- a lot of us think that faith community participation really revolves around worship. And yet there's so many different ways for people to belong. And I -- what I love about this -- and what you presented is that some of the fears that a DSP may have about going to a service with somebody because that is the only way to participate has, I think, been diffused by the fact that there are just so many ways that maybe aren't religious, that aren't necessarily faith-based, but are people coming together with mutual interests.

>> Sarah McKenney: And even if they are faith-based, somebody may not -- their ideal way of worshiping is not sitting and listening, their ideal way of worshiping is engaging in dialogue and connecting directly with people, and that is how they experience God interacting in their life, kind of that practical application, versus necessarily the traditional ritual.

>> Tammy Besser: That's why Thomas's story resonates, I mean he experiences God in the love in those relationship. I mean what -- and those relationships happen with the -- interactive engaged things that are happening in these congregations. There are a lot of different ways for the spirit to be nurtured.

>> Shelly Christensen: Amen. [laughter] One more question. We have about two more minutes. What conversations do you have with congregations prior to bringing the people you support in a faith community to ensure it's a welcoming and supportive environment?

>> Tammy Besser: In two minutes, Shelly? [laughter and crosstalk] It depends on the congregation and it depends on the individual. And if it's an unknown congregation, it's talking with the individual are -- what we're just going to jump in and is that okay. Some individuals and staff are much better with that than others. And does every congregation need prep? Making that assumption -- I don't know that we want to make that assumption that every congregation needs prep for every individual we might bring to any event that's happening. Short answer.

>> Sarah McKenney: And I -- would also add to that -- I don't -- it also -- it depends. So like, one knowing --knowing kind of where congregations -- knowing -- getting some feel for what you know about each congregation. I hesitate about the prep stuff, because it's like, I want that person to be -- to feel and experience what is going on in that congregation. The only other thing that I would also add is having that person check in. What did the --again, what did they like, what did they dislike? And then also, if you have a bad experience -- if you go into some -- in a place, and there is that congregant that makes that ableist comment. Taking a breath, making sure, okay, is that that individual that said that? Or is that actual representation of what the whole congregation feels? And stuff like that, because sometimes there are just individuals that will say and do things, and you -- that's something to address separately, but that doesn't mean that that whole congregation necessarily feels that way. So it's sometimes you have to do that.

>> Tammy Besser: And sometimes that's talking to the staff supporting them versus the individual. Sadly the individuals we support are really used to ableist comments coming all over the place. And sometimes they're like, oh, it's -- it's just one -- I hear that all the time. But you know to this other person -- yeah. And I think it often is -- it hurts the hearts of our staff more.

>> Shelly Christensen: I want to thank you, Sarah and Tammy for a wonderful hour, for the work that you do, and for sharing that with us. And I want to invite everyone to join us on May 17th for our next webinar: Community Connectedness and Technology. Anne Masters and Shea Tanis will share how tools such as virtual platforms, communication technologies, connected communities, and cognitive cognitively accessible solutions are applied in innovative ways to access religious and spiritual environments. So that is May 17th. Thank you to our captioner, and -- Bill, our ASL interpreter, and thank you all so much for joining us today. We wish you a pleasant rest of your day. Thank you!