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SANDY HO:

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Disability & Philanthropy Forum's Disability Equity Series. My name is Sandy Ho and I'm the new executive director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. I use she/her pronouns, and today I'm coming to you all from the unceded land of the Massachusetts, Pawtucket, and Naumkeag, also known as Boston. As part of our accessibility commitment and practice, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm an Asian American woman with short, dark, wavy hair. And I'm wearing a button-up blue denim shirt. And my background is blurred on Zoom. Today my access needs are met with the support of CART captioning.

So just to move into a few housekeeping items, for today there are two ways to access our live captions. You can use the CC button that's at the bottom of your screen, or to access the captions in a separate window, you're also welcome to use the link in the external caption viewer that will be available in the chat. During today's webinar, only our moderators, panelists and sign language interpreter will be on camera. The audience members will be muted. And this webinar is being recorded, and so everybody will be receiving a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we will be using the chat to share links with folks, it will not be available to audience members. So if you are interested in submitting a question to our panelists, we ask that you please use the Q&A button that's at the bottom of your screen to share any questions during today's session. Our panelists will do their best to integrate your question into this discussion as they come in, and we'll also be making time at the end for Q&A. If the Q&A button is inaccessible to you, feel free to email your question directly to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org.

I'm so excited for today's topic around pride, joy, and vision for the future, and it's my absolute delight to now introduce Kristy Trautmann, Executive Director of FISA Foundation. Kristy is joined on the panel by two disabled artists, creatives and leaders, Jen White-Johnson, who's an artist, activist, and designer, an educator, and Naomi Ortiz, the poet, writer, and visual artist. You can learn more about our panelists today from their bios that are linked in the chat. With that said, Kristy, take it away.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Thank you so much, Sandy, for that. My name is Kristy Trautmann. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a white lesbian woman. I have short gray hair. I'm wearing glasses and a green blazer. And I'm using a Zoom background of a wonderful collection of books, which makes me very happy. My access needs are met by the wonderful support of the Forum staff working behind the scenes on this webinar. I'm speaking to you today from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is unceded ancestral land of the Monongahela, Shawandasse and Haudenosaunee people. As Sandy said, I'm executive director of FISA Foundation, which is a health conversion foundation focused on equity and justice related to disability and gender and race. I'm very proud to participate in the Disability & Philanthropy Forum and work with other funders to advance disability inclusion, rights, and justice. And I am so honored to moderate today's session on disability, pride, joy, and visions for the future.

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So with that, I invite you to settle in for this program. Maybe close the other tabs you have open on your screen, take a deep breath, maybe roll your shoulders or your head, whatever you need to feel really present today, because we are blessed to spend time with our panelists, two talented and renowned artists, educators, and activists, Jen White-Johnson and Naomi Ortiz. Welcome, Jen and Naomi. There is so much I admire and could lift up about your work, your values, your accomplishments, but we agreed that we don't want to spend our limited time today with me reading your formal bios, which are linked in the chat. I also wanted to mention and call out that both of you have such beautiful, juicy, interesting websites to explore that include examples of your creative work, and I hope others will explore those as well. So instead, I'll invite you to introduce yourselves briefly. Jen, let's start with you, followed by Naomi.

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Yes, it is a pleasure and honor. I'm Jen White-Johnson. I use she/they pronouns. I'm a caramel-skinned Afro-Puerto Rican woman. I'm currently in Orlando, Florida visiting my family, which is home of the ancestral land of the Seminole and the Miccosukee and the Mascogo people. And I'm also neurodivergent and I identify as having a disability. And I'm wearing a white T-shirt, a short-sleeve T-shirt that says "radical" in big, black, bold text. Thank you so much.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

This is Kristy. Slides got shared a little prematurely. Let's hear from Naomi and give her an opportunity to say hello first.

NAOMI ORTIZ:

Hello everyone. My name is Naomi Ortiz. I use they, and I'm okay with she pronouns. I'm a light-skinned Mestize with dark hair. And I'm wearing an embroidered shirt. And I am have hoop earrings and dark lipstick. And I'm sitting in front of two book covers, which for fun, probably appear backwards on your screen. One is Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice, with a woman meditating, holding a flower. And the other is Rituals for Climate Change: A Crip Struggle for Ecojustice, which has some artwork that we'll look at later. I am joining you from Tucson, which is the current and ancestral lands of the O'odham, and the contemporary settlement of the Yoeme, the Pascua Yaqui tribe of Arizona. This region is also part of the Sonoran Desert. I honor the land and the sky and the practices of listening, and I learned a lot about disability, joy from the plants and soil and animals of this place. Thank you.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Thank you so much. So let's dive in. As Sandy said, July is Disability Pride Month, and we celebrate the history of the Disability Civil Rights Movement, and recommit to working towards a future that's aligned with the liberatory practices and tenets of disability justice. One bit of wisdom that I keep on a tattered post-it note on my bulletin board goes like this, "the process we use to create change becomes the change we create." I'll say that again, the process we use to create change becomes the change we create. To me, this speaks to the importance of intentionality in how we are planting our seeds. It is hard to build a free, equitable, just, and

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inclusive future from a place of fear and exhaustion and survival mode. We need joyful expression to be part of the fabric that we're weaving together of our future. We had such a rich conversation, Jen and Naomi shared a lot in preparation for today. And so I want to start by asking each of you to share a little about your creative work and talk about your experience and expression of disability pride and joy. Jen, do you want to go first?

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Sure. Yeah, I think that disability pride is something that I'm still learning to practice every day, especially when we're in spaces that are so oppressive, especially against Black and Latina disabled women and non-binary folks, where we're still expected to comply and adapt to so many different oppressive structures. And so I feel like pride, disability pride specifically, is a space where we can definitely be our authentic selves, especially when it's still legal to pay disabled folks sub-minimum wages, and we're still not getting equitable treatment within the classroom, within community spaces, within university institutions, and where we're very much expected, like I said, to comply to these ableist discriminatory norms. And so I feel like pride is such a beautiful thing to uplift and to hold space for.

And I'm here just really representing the neurodivergent community and the disabled community, especially since I wasn't always necessarily encouraged when I was little to even identify as neurodivergent or having a disability. And it wasn't until much, much later into adulthood, and then into mothering, that I felt like I really need to hold space for these really beautiful moments of authenticity, especially since I have an autistic son. And he's here in the background, you may hear him a little bit, shuffling around in the background, so excuse me for that extra little bit of noise. So yeah, I feel like this opportunity in itself is a moment of disability pride for me.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

I love that. Jen, do you want to have the slides up so you can talk some about your work?

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

And so yeah, me and Naomi, we have some really beautiful art that we're going to share with you, because we're both very visual people, and we knew that we really couldn't come into this space without making sure that we brought some of our own disability pride and visual joy. And so the slide that you see here up on the screen is me at eight years old in Silver Spring, Maryland. And I had shared earlier that when I was younger, autism and ADHD looked very differently in little Black girls. And so I wasn't necessarily targeted or necessarily looked at as being someone who may have high support needs, because I was masking a lot, I was really just looking for self-validation, and I was always very agreeable, but in essence, I wish that I could hold space to be rambunctious and a little wild, but I always felt like I had to be shushed and I had to be quieted, and especially within the school system. And so that's something that I try to deviate from as I'm raising my own autistic kid.

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And so it's just so beautiful to be able to be 43, and now being able to really say, "I'm neurodivergent, I'm disabled, I'm a mother, I'm an artist, designer, activist, and I love making zines and collages." And so these next few slides are going to take you a bit into my world. So yeah, that's little eight-year-old me on screen. I have these little pigtails, and wearing a red dress. And so, one of the statistics that it's really important to point out, and myself and Naomi, we're really going to talk a lot about what it's like to be Native American, to be Latina, to be Black, and to experience those very discriminatory practices. And it's really important that you understand what frames our work, because there is a legitimate war that continues to be held against Black disabled women, women of color, Latina women, and then also non-binary folks that are still looking to have their identities affirmed.

And so the statistic that you see on screen here, in white bold text it says that Black disabled women and girls experience economic insecurity at higher rates, often due to job loss, sub-minimum wages, as low as \$2.13 per hour, for folks who are disabled and who were trying to work, and who were looking for that equitable treatment. And so there's a serious issue when it comes to reduced pay that's caused by those barriers. And so often as artists, because we don't necessarily want to deal with capitalistic norms and societal norms, and this clinical model of disability, as artists, we're often really trying to define our own sense of purpose, our own sense of vision, because we know that we have to be the brunt of our income, whether it's our art, whether it's our writings, whether it's our journalism, whether it's the community work that we're doing or events like this, this is really what we love to do, because we know that if we were working in mainstream or in corporate America, we would really be denied the opportunity to practice what makes us unique and what makes us joyful and authentic.

The next slide, I dive in a little bit more into, I was talking about how I suppressed a lot of my own neurodivergency when I was little. And in high school and early college, I knew that I was different and I knew that I was always seeking love and joy, but I never really knew how to ask for it, because I really didn't express it in ways that other people express their wants and their needs. And so autistic joy as an act of resistance is me literally just reclaiming and me wanting to really affirm the stories that I felt comfortable to tell when I was little. And so what you see here on the screen is a photozine, since I love graphic design, I love photography, and I love being able to use zine-making and photobook making as a space for cultural storytelling, and using storytelling as a voice for autistic advocacy and activism.

And so in 2018, I was able to publish my first photozine entitled KNOX ROXS. And then in 2024, I was able to publish, basically a retrospective honoring my son's autistic journey. So it's literally an entire photozine that documents ages one to six. And then the second edition documents six to ages 11. So his entire beautiful autistic journey, but not necessarily telling it from this clinical, oppressive lens, but through a lens of justice and joy, and just again, being able to reaffirm what autistic joy looks like within a Black family, when often we feel like we're being erased from cultural media and we're often being silenced. And so I really wanted to be able to share how my own lived experience really inspires the visual work that I do. The next slide-

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

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Hey Jen, this is Kristy. I love this. I'm so glad that you shared about KNOX ROXS and about your zine-making process. I wonder if we could put a pin in your slides right now and switch over and hear a little bit from Naomi, and then we can come back and you can complete the rest of your slides, does that work for you? Perfect, awesome. Naomi, so over to you. I know you want to share some of your visual art and a poem as well.

NAOMI ORTIZ:

Thanks. Oh, I love that so much, Jen. Thank you for sharing those thoughts and opening us up in such a beautiful way. If you want to bring up the slides. Great, thank you. So one of the things for me that is very important is questions. And oftentimes I feel like my art really is an exploration of questions that I have in the world, just trying to understand things better and trying to connect to the world in a deeper, more authentic way, in a more joyful way. One of the questions I had several years ago was around this concept of joy, and how do we learn about joy, what does joy really look like in real life? And through sitting and deeply thinking about this, what kept coming to my mind was faces of elders in my life, elders, disabled elders that I've had a privilege of connecting to, elders in my cultural communities. And so what came out is this poem that talks a little bit and I feel like weaves in different things people have actually said and, or demonstrated to me just by the ways that they share their lives.

And so I'd like to invite you, if it feels good and is accessible for you, you can close your eyes, or you can just take a moment. And I'd love for you to imagine an elder in your life, or somebody who you wish was an elder in your life, maybe saying a few of these lines to you. And this piece is called Majestic Disabled/Queer/People of Color Elders Instruct How to Dance in the Struggle. "Drag that chair out to the dance floor, find your own beat, the one that brings chin, shoulders, hips, wrists, alive, with palms open, grasp air abundant from sky, pull down into lungs, embrace. Sit, sway, take a minute, before arms emboldened cross, to caress chest, spirit, soul. The lyrics might steam with desire, cumbia with done me wrong, but what they really say is, when there is struggle, there must also be a tending of joy. How do we tend joy? There is no secret. You can't with just the power of your mind actually will things to change. Yet, every ancestor who came before seasoned that shoulder pump and jut with optimism.

"Fingers will always trace where you end and the world begins. The mistake is to not understand movement - is sensuous love, exalted joy, a return to the singular pain of being alive. Movement smells like — salty sweat sobaco, the cataclysmic sulfur of creation, blessed juniper smoke drenching space from bundle lit. Grrrl, you can't pound the floor with a clenched jaw. You got to open that mouth to sing — to determine the taste, to chew up and spit out, digest truth through body to soil. It all goes back to the soil. With those hands waving up - reach out, touch what lives at your side, your other side. Shimmy weight from hip, to hip to balance constitute ground. Own those spasmic, rhythmic vibrations to unearth the foundation underneath which was tolerated before. De-stabilize the unexpected. Endure surprise, the soft punch to the gut. Pause, in the middle of everything. Rest. Then, return fist to center, ribcage, breasts, twirl heart need between fingers, wrist rotate to catch the stem, pull it towards the light, with a swing, thrust, release."

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Thank you. And if we could go back, I just want to do a visual description. These are some of the paintings that come forward in my work. This first piece is called Mending. And I'll just make a comment about this poem. This piece was actually selected by a dance company. And I think this is cool. One of my favorite things is when artists, with consent of course, make art from other people's art, where it's a collaborative, or sometimes not collaborative, but with permission, built upon. A dance company selected this poem and a few other poems, and they choreographed a dance to it, they filmed it, and it became this very cool installation that they showed at museums all around the world. Cid Pearlman Dance is the company that did this. So it was just really fun to see a work built on in that way. So this piece is called Mending. It's a painting of a maguey plant with a tall flower stalk growing out of the center of the plant. On each stalk arm, there are different objects, a raven, candles, a ribbon with Milagros, a heart with cholla flowers, three monarch butterflies are flying by. In the background is sand and mountains. This painting is on the cover of my most recent book, Rituals for Climate Change. We can go to the next slide.

This piece is titled Reciprocation. Again, the things that we give, land, and have historically always given land, which is blood, especially for those of us who bleed on a monthly basis. So this is a uterus shedding blood down the center of the painting, which merges with oak tree roots on one side and acorn on the other, and roots with a yucca on one side and a yucca seed pod across from the yucca plant. It gathers at the bottom in a pool to soak into the soil. And the last slide. So this shows sandstone cliffs, walls and formations, a raven flies, and their larger shadow glides across the cliff, a small flowering plant grows in a patch of dirt on the side of the cliff. And the title of this piece is Canción. Thank you.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Naomi, this is Kristy. I am so moved by what you shared with your poem and the stories and the beautiful artwork. I love the way that you called up our elders to bless us with the words that you shared, and especially the title, How to Dance in the Struggle, which is I think where many of us find ourselves right now in this troubled world, your reminder that joy needs tending, and that while we can get frozen sometimes in the pain and in the struggle, that joy calls us to move, that is beautiful to hear about the dance company. I could totally see how this could be translated in that way. Thank you so much for sharing this with us. We're going to come back a little bit later to where you ended around the deep connection to the earth, but first I want to go back and pick up Jen and the slides that she wanted to continue to share.

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Yes, thank you, Naomi, that was so beautiful. And just continuing to just ground us in our connection to how much the earth needs to continue to speak to us and then letting disabled voices lead that conversation, especially since our earth is what holds us and what calls us to rest. And we need to be at one with our earth, especially with the slide that we see here on screen. So many of our young people, especially students in the K-12 system, are impacted by community injustices, like climate injustices. And so if they don't even have their basic needs within the community, just accessible and clean air in and outside of buildings, where buildings

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and themselves are toxic spaces, we're doing them a huge injustice. And this stat on the screen, something else that really helps to inform how much our kids are being discriminated against, disabled kids, we're talking about 1.1 million Black students who have diagnosed disabilities, the deck of oppression is literally stacked against them in and outside of their school systems, within their institutions. And due to things like redlining where they are subjected to live in very toxic spaces, lead poisoning, where they're living in food deserts, spaces where they don't have access to community gardens, where they don't have access to the basic needs that they need to be able to tend to the earth.

And what ends up happening to a lot of these communities of color is that we're undersourced, we're underfunded. And the school system isn't always necessarily playing a really good part to make sure that our kids are being taken care of, and even their families, and there's a shortage of special educators. And on the next slide, I really try to address that by creating manifestos. And so what you see here on screen, similar to Naomi's poem, I really hold space for voices of, again, like I said earlier, reclamation, specifically what are anti-ableist practices that we can actually practice and highlight within our work, specifically from an art-education perspective. And so what you see here up on screen is a yellow, bold-colored poster design that says the words The Anti-Ableist Art Educators Manifesto, and it has nine principles. So it's a call to action. And so it's really beautiful that we have Naomi's poems and Naomi's writings, and we have my manifestos to be able to really understand how language justice is so important, and the disabled voice, it's so important that we have space and room to be able to make these really bold declarations, where we're reclaiming the land, all of these things that have always been ours, that institutions have used to basically erase us from the conversation.

And so in addition to the Anti-Ableist Art Educators Manifesto, there's the Black Neurodivergence Manifesto, that again really holds space for conversations on how can we uplift acceptance, how can we create with and not for, how can we make sure that our differences should embolden us, how can we make sure that we value all bodies and minds, and how can we really ignite the fact that allyship is sacrifice, that if you're non-disabled and if you're abusing the land and you're abusing the earth, or you're abusing a disabled person's mind, and you want for them to change, so you're essentially uncomfortable with someone's disability? But allyship is not performative, you can't just say that you want to be able to hold space for our access needs, but then you don't necessarily show up and you're not present in ways where you can actually assist us and help us, or create alongside us and not for us or about us.

And so the next slide, I think that's the last slide, is the Black Disabled Lives Matter Symbol. So a lot of the work that I do is basically defacing property. It's public property that's meant to oppress us, but it's like, "What would it look like if we just created spaces of complete liberation when it comes to the Black and Brown disabled voice?" And so in 2020, as a response to everything that was happening with Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Elijah McClain, so many voices that had been silenced due to just ableist oppression and just straight up racism, it was time to create a symbol that really held space for how we need to be able to proclaim that our lives, not just one kind of body or one kind of mind, matters, but Black queer lives, Black

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disabled lives, Black trans lives, Latino lives, Native lives, we all really need to be able to be given that space to be the leaders that we've always been.

So yeah, that's just a little bit of the artwork. And it's a Black Power fist that is painted onto a yellow brick wall. And it has an infinity symbol that is right on the wrist of the Black Power fist. So it's a really important symbol that really helps to understand that intersectionality between race, between disability, and how we need to be able to make sure that Black lives, Black disabled lives especially, are not erased from this conversation on disability justice. And I think that that's the last slide, because yeah, I want to be able to get into the Q&A and just more fun stuff. Yeah.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Perfect, Jen, thank you so much. This is Kristy. Where you ended, the ferocity of your message, about the anger of needing to navigate the amount of oppression, makes space for the kind of art that you're talking about, filling in with your own beautiful, joyful images. I love the juxtaposition of that. And actually, your remarks about allyship and the ways that schools and systems really push out ties to one of our audience questions. So we're going to circle back to that in a minute, but first I want to pivot back to Naomi and where we left that conversation. These weave together so beautifully, the themes and threads that you're talking about, about environmental justice. And so do you want to pick up there, Naomi, to talk about your work around environmental justice and disability justice?

NAOMI ORTIZ:

This is Naomi. Sure. I think that that question is so big. And when I went to tackle it, that's not actually where I started. I really started from a place of fear. And for me, a relationship with place has always been part of my self-care. It's always been something outside of human relationships that I can brace against and find love and joy in, and connection and support. And it's something I relied a lot on when writing my initial book, was I interviewed a bunch of people, but talking about self-care for people practicing social justice work, what resources do we have to support ourselves and to help us have these moments of calm or spaciousness that we need in order to keep going? So that was a really big key piece for me, but then as I've been out and paying attention to the land, and to be very clear, I'm a wheelchair user, so for my to be out and pay attention to the land, it's often at the edge of a parking lot, it's very much on this cusp of human-dominated and wild spaces here in the desert. But even in these cusp spaces, these in-between spaces, it's so obvious that things are getting drier and hotter.

And so I found myself really feeling so afraid and wanting to turn away, like, "What do I do with this?" Especially as a disabled person who can't maybe dive into the action items of like, "I'm going to go out and pick invasive buffelgrass, or do things to actively support..." And so I was noticing my own desire to turn away. And it's funny, because there is a definition of ableism that talks about a fear of vulnerability as a foundational element of why disabled people are excluded and discriminated against. And I also know as a disabled person that my vulnerability can be a great source of authentic connection and joy, because I have to ask and receive help every day from folks around me.

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So I was like, "Oh man, I'm having this reaction that we talk about with ableism of wanting to turn away from where I'm seeing vulnerability," which is this place that I live. And so I did this deep dive into trying to process my emotions around it, and also to have conversations with the land, "What actually can I do to show up and support you, what does that look like?" And then my own struggle with sometimes being in relationships where things are not always balanced, sometimes we can get really hooked in and be too self-sacrificing. So anyway, I did a lot of that deeper work in my newest book, *Rituals for Climate Change*, but I think that there's a joy of pacing, going slower and observing nature, that I think as a disabled person I get to experience in nature. And yeah, I'll just leave it there, let Jen speak to it too.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

I love that. Thank you so much, Naomi, for bringing us to this place of how fear has the potential to shape us, and what we are looking at and what we look away from, and really leaning in and occupying that space for ourselves, wherever it is, at the edge of a parking lot, can pull us into new places and places of celebration. This is why I love being in conversation with artists like the two of you, to help us see things and open into new ways. I really appreciate that. Paying attention to the time, and there are so many questions that people want to ask both of you. And so I wonder if the next place we could go, Jen, is a question from one of our participants about school district accommodations. And what do you do when some schools are pivoting more in the direction of universal design for learning, and away from educational civil rights for students with disabilities that are leaving out some of the protections that are the guards against the school-to-prison pipeline, some of the things that you talked about earlier, is there anything you would like to say more about in that space?

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Yeah, and I mean, that's definitely a huge, broad question, and I feel like it's best to address it from my own lived experience and what I've specifically been through as it impacts my world. And I mean, I encourage my students to make sure... Because in addition to being a practicing photographer and designer, I also teach at a university. And just being able to hold space for the students' needs, and making sure that they hold the actual institution itself accountable, and knowing that even sometimes those accommodations letters are very vague and they're not necessarily as robust and thorough as they need to be, and they're just very general like, "I need more time taking tests, or I need to have a note-taker." But there's not conversations about like, "How as a disabled person, or as a student, or as a kid can I even feel like my identity and my culture is being celebrated, not necessarily from a logistical standpoint, but just from an actual human-based standpoint?"

So I definitely encourage my students to hold their professors accountable, and I have disability disclaimers written in my syllabus that hold space for my own access needs. And from day one, I always tell students like, "Hey, I have ADHD. And I wasn't always comfortable disclosing it, but just know that you can feel comfortable disclosing it in the classroom setting." So it's really interesting how I've worked within the university space for 10-plus years teaching at a historically Black college and university, where often students were misdiagnosed or they were

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never diagnosed, and they've had to spend the majority of their lives feeling ashamed of their disabilities, or thinking that their autism was a label and not necessarily a full-blown diagnosis that should be celebrated and should be accepted. And then with my son, having to advocate for his own one-on-one aid and additional adult support within the K-12 system, and being like, "Yeah, there is an actual IDEA Act that says that you're breaking the law if you don't actually hold space for my son's access needs and for his autism diagnosis. And if you're not willing to give him speech therapy and occupational therapy," and things that we had to advocate for since he was in kindergarten all the way up until fifth grade.

You have to be so familiar with policy and law because half of public school teachers aren't even really holding space for the IEPs, and how those themselves are their contracts. And so I've had to hack the IEP and write my own version of the IEP with my son, so that we write down what his challenges are. And it's literally an advocacy where we address, and it shifts and it changes every school year, where we're able to actually talk a little bit about like, "So what are some of the things that are difficult for you?" And so he's able to actually outline like, "I don't like mean people, I don't like being bullied within the classroom setting." And that includes being bullied from teachers, which oftentimes he is. So yeah, it's a lot. So that's just a little bit of my own lived experience when it comes to how I advocate for those access needs.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Jen, that's great. And this is Kristy. There's some of the zines that you just talked about, hacking the IEP process that are on your website. So I hope people will dig in and check that out. Great job diving in on a really open question and taking us to this important place, which actually is a jumping-off for a different question from the audience. And so this one to you, Naomi, is about how do you respond to the micro level of specific access accommodations? And so I'll just read the question, "How do you respond to accommodations efforts to improve disabled lives that don't significantly challenge the systemic and cultural nature of ableism? So micro interventions that leave the broader system intact, and how do you think about that tension alongside the fight for disability justice?" So only massive, complicated questions for this webinar.

NAOMI ORTIZ:

This is Naomi. I think that, yeah, that's such a challenge. And it goes back, I think to some of what Jen was saying for young folks, is that... So I grew up being obviously targeted as disabled, being physically disabled. And so everything I learned in systems when I was a child was about how to appear the least disabled as possible, and that it was my responsibility. If I wasn't included or if I was being made fun of in schools, then it was my responsibility to somehow figure out how to overcome who I am and blend in somehow magically, which of course doesn't work. And before I launched into writing and visual art full-time, I ran a national youth-run disability activist organization. And so, one of the things that I found with the young people that I was working with too is, so many of us are taught this in our systems. So then for us, that first level of just advocating for our own basic needs, feel so radical because we are always taught that it's our responsibility to somehow adapt to this non-disabled world.

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And so to shift that on a big scale, it was a lot about supporting myself, supporting young people that I was working with to know their own power and the power of disability community. And we did that through disability culture. And learning and connecting to disability culture, yes, it's sharing stories about discrimination and fights and things like that, but it's also disability humor, it is also how we move through the world interdependently. These parts are so huge, and we can have such different kinds of disabilities and relate so hard to other people's experiences. I can laugh at something that... I have a good friend who's blind, and we were joking the other day about something, and both of us can laugh about that because we're both disabled, and we understand that we both have these experiences that we can push fun at, because we have to laugh at it. And that builds community and that builds strength.

Here in Tucson, we've had our very first Disability Pride Day as a city, and we're coming up on our third year. And that's been so huge because disabled folks are so segregated on a day-to-day basis. So I think in answering the question, is moving from these individual access needs, which to give disabled folks credit, takes a lot of work, to this idea of systematic change, that's an investment in disability culture and pride and joy and the things that we're talking about today, because we need that reserve, we need to get in touch with our own power and the power of disability community.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

What a beautiful answer that weaves together all of that, and really pushes back on the toxic culture that we have about independence and isolation and bootstraps and all of that, to really be about connection and interdependence and celebration of all of that. So just a couple of last questions. We're drawing already close to the end of our hour. There are a number of people in the community that you're building just in this webinar who want to know about next steps. And so can either of you offer just one potential next step for people who are looking to move forward around disability justice, do you have one recommendation?

JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Yeah, and just jumping off from what Naomi was saying was, and something that I pointed out too, that we have to remember that it's a cultural conversation, and that if we don't necessarily feel like our souls are being uplifted and our culture is being uplifted, then we're going to feel siloed and we're going to feel erased, and even co-opted in terms of people taking our ideas or our definitions of what collective liberation looks like. So oftentimes what you'll see is folks like myself, like Naomi building our own disability cultural justice spaces. So whether we're writing or whether we're creating visual art, to me that's the future, there are disabled people in the future, in terms of our thoughts, the access that we're creating for our community. So we are the future. We're defining that, we're writing that future, because like Alice Wong says, we are the disabled oracles.

So it's find your community, we're building that community, we are the community, and we welcome you into our community. So I feel like that's the next steps, is how can we continue to just be in that community? Because I feel like a lot of disabled folks, they feel, "Hey, why am I in this alone? Why do I always feel like I'm the one that's advocating so much? Where is all of the

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solidarity?" The solidarity exists, but it just exists within these really powerful micro communities that we've built. So whether it's in Tucson, whether it's in Baltimore, whether it's in DC, there's so many beautiful spaces where you can find what's the political conversations that are being held within your disability community, "Who's writing about this? How can I follow that writer? Is there an event that's happening in my area, or is there a Zoom talk that I can attend?" To me, that's a really beautiful space to be able to make sure that you're connected. So the future is just making sure that you can stay connected, or what spaces of connection are you willing to build?

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Mm-hmm. So beautiful. And it's putting markers out in the world to be able to find each other. It's the art, it's the shared language, it's the symbols that allow community to really be built across distance and time and as people are able. This also leads into another question from the audience about how do you balance doing the drudge work of activism and needing to make space for art? And so Naomi, I'll give that one to you. And then I'm going to circle back, and just with our last couple of minutes, our audience is philanthropy. And so you can both be thinking about that, what's your message to funders in this space? But Naomi, do you want to talk about drudgery and art and making room and making time and leaving evidence?

NAOMI ORTIZ:

Is there a secret I missed somewhere about how to do that? This is the constant question. I think, Jen, you probably have so much to say on this too. But yeah, one of the things I think is really radical, that I'm trying to practice, and that actually I'm going to offer as a challenge to everybody who is on this webinar is, what does it mean to build a relationship with our own capacity? It's really hard, whether it's being an artist and having to hustle a lot and do your own work, of doing the work, showing the work, sharing the work, somehow finding funding for the work, to being a director of an organization and the myriad of responsibilities that are with that, all of this world functions in a way that we pretend that we don't have limits.

And I think one of the most radical things we can do is, we may not be able to respect our limits 100% of the time, but if we have a relationship with understanding what our capacity is, what we can do on a daily basis and not be completely dead to the world at the end of the day, that's a really, really important part of how we build a future together, because I mean, how are we going to understand the limits of the world we live in, the places that we live in if we don't understand or respect those limits within ourselves? So I think that building a relationship with capacity, challenging and incredibly life-changing. Again, then we build in more grace too, to respect those limits with the people and the places around us.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

That was incredibly powerful, you should write that down, I wrote it down for me. But something that I think we all just struggle so hard against, that myth that there's infinite possibility and productivity. So really, really appreciate that and take that to heart. So Jen, one minute. What is your message to philanthropy, what do you want to say to funders in this space?

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JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:

Yeah, I mean, I feel like rewatch this entire webinar. We were able to touch on so many beautiful just narratives and stories and our lived experiences, and that we're scholars, we're advocates. So I feel like there's so many different beautiful things that we can contribute to the space, like I said, where we're coming into this conversation on how do we be the change and create the change. Yeah. So I feel like rewatch the webinar as much as you can, because we're talking about what we've written, and then we're talking about how you can support what we have continued to write and show visually. And so whether that's if we want to curate an exhibition, if we want to be able to continue funding more zines, so that we can maybe host other writers and other artists, and create spaces so that artists feel like they have that community, that's why there's so many disabled folks that are creating artists hubs.

So whether it is like Able Zine that's out in the UK, whether it's Cripple Magazine or Sick Magazine, there's so many really beautiful spaces where they self-publish. And that's why zine-making is so important, we self-publish, we're not funded by any top-end corporations or big, huge funders, because we self-publish everything. Well, we do pay out of pocket for our own printing. And whether we're printing at universities or whether we're printing at libraries, or libraries are archiving our work, and so that way educators can get access to the special collection so that they can read through our manuscripts and see the artwork. So just to be able to fund the opportunity so that folks can have access to what we create, that's my biggest need.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Perfect. Perfect. So well said. Naomi?

NAOMI ORTIZ:

I wrote this down because I wanted to say it right. So finding each other through art is often how we stay alive. So finding each other through comedic showcase, through dance, through poetry, through writing, through residencies, through the experience of those things, and when I say finding each other, I mean all of us, finding each other through art is often how we stay alive, and hearing these stories. We deserve experiences of contentment and joy, but those are really difficult to cultivate, even if you have the most privilege in the world, if you were taught the way to be accepted and loved is to somehow overcome and change who you are. Creativity and community, give us a place to practice, asking hard questions, to explore many ways of living in the world, things like desire, and to understand and delve deeper into the ways we thrive and grow.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Oh, perfectly said. Thank you. And what a beautiful place to end. Thank you so much, Naomi and Jen. Thank you for all that was shared today, and all of the work that you do. I'm only sorry that this webinar is not going on for another six hours, because I would continue to be riveted by all that you have to say, but Sandy said no. And so we need to end here. Thank you with a full heart. So back to you, Sandy, to close us out.

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KAYLA (1SOURCE):

And Sandy, we don't hear your audio just yet, if you wouldn't mind unmuting for us.

KRISTY TRAUTMANN:

Hey, this is Kristy. It seems like maybe Sandy is having some tech troubles, so I just want to say... Oh, there's Sandy.

SANDY HO:

Okay. So sorry about that.

KAYLA (1SOURCE):

There it is.

SANDY HO:

I'm not sure what my Zoom was doing there. I cannot thank Kristy, Jen, and Naomi anymore for this truly joyful conversation that really activated so many of our sensory experiences. And all of us are so incredibly fortunate for the truths that were shared here. So thank you so much, especially for your calls to action to philanthropy, and that challenge, Naomi, that you proposed to all of us. This discussion truly highlighted how joy and disability culture requires labor. It is discipline, it is powerful, it is political, and it is such a life-giving vital resource, but that requires resources to sustain and expand. And so I really emphasize and invite funders in our audience to delve more deeply into the work of both Naomi and Jen. We thank our audience for all of your incredible questions, although unfortunately we weren't able to get to all of them, they will continue to inform future resources and programs of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum. Following the close of this session, you'll receive a short survey, it's also available in the chat. We really appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete that survey. And then finally, we hope that you'll join us for our next webinar on September 19 which enters disability and the care economy. Thank you everyone.