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So that's where I want to dive in today just to kind of give you an idea.

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Let me pull this up real quick.

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So kind of get us on the same page.

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Okay.

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So today we're, we're going to be talking about Ready or not, here we come virtual world so defining community defining where we started and where we have gotten to today.

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And then the next time so in two months I hope that you join me at that point.

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We have leveling leveling the virtual playing field. June 9. And then that will be learning together and sharing our experience. And then the next part will be to their community and beyond.

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So we're going to be talking about community and how that can really, what are what are we defining that now, how are we going to go forward with this, how are we going to make sure we're reaching the people that we've been able to reach now, and continue

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that work.

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So, in that let's jump into it.

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I want to hear from you all.

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How are you all defining community, the definition online is a unified body of individuals such as people with common interests, living in a particular area itself.

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So, we've defined community as who we are around those people. And I think before coded we define that as physically around us.

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And so, as we're talking about this too. I want you to think today of the center. And in general, you have to do community activities, what does that look like, how has that been carried out before.

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What have you thought outside of the box of how we traditionally know of a center.

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And if you're waiting for me to introduce the speakers, just want to say, you all are the speakers. So again, that mute button corner of your menu bar.

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So I'm interested to hear what everybody is defining and I, Mike beers, I do want to start with you because y'all have been defining community very interesting for a while.

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Right on Thank you sir. Um, this is Michael beers.

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From Missoula, Montana. Um, I think, looking at the definition you put up there Sierra, um, that's really where we've tried to get back to.

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And I don't know about anybody else on the call.

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But in my ears and independent living.

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I don't know that I've seen a real focus on people.

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When it comes to community, I think, for variety of reasons our emphasis seems to be when we say community living it. Do you have a place to live, of your choice.

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I'm of your choice. And do you have employment, and those one of those things are really, really important. Um, in the entire person's life community is not a physical place to us, community is not Missoula community is a group of people that honestly

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give a shit.

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Whether you show up or not. And when you don't they call, and they care and wonder where you're at and building, like in that that definition it says interest so building community more on interest, then label.

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Um, I think it's something that we've really tried to focus on pre pandemic and definitely during the pandemic to say, you know, that's what we're missing we're missing that human connection.

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And that human community. And how do we access back when we can't actually be in the same room, so.

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So yeah, that's a little bit of the approach we've taken.

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Thank you for sharing that, I guess, does anybody else want to jump in, how are you defining community before.

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Is it the people that are around you word is that the people that had this shared interest.

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Is it certain pockets of people are populations or groups.

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I'll jump in and page widget she her hers, and I'm in Greenville, South Carolina with Abel South Carolina, and I oversee our youth programs and so, um, I think, for, for us, we, we find that we have different pockets of community so the youth is it is

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a huge part of that but it's not the, the only part of that. So when we look at, like, our organization as a community, making sure we're representing all those that we're serving, and that includes youth because that's a huge population that we serve.

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So having us on staff, and then same one we're, we're in the, in our community right whatever that whatever that looks like so when we're working with agencies to to represent that disability voice.

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If it's used focus are we bringing youth with us so being mindful of of the spaces that we're in and and what seats are empty so to say.

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And then I don't know about other skills but we were doing some online things before, and we were kind of keeping those separate and this this shift of doing everything virtually has really got us rethinking on on this idea and our approach of how can

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we know we had a US online hangout and a us in person hangout and send the those became two separate communities and so how can we pull that hybrid model and and maybe connect those that we hadn't thought to connect before, how can we run that at the

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same time so that they're interacting with one another and and building another sense of community

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Yeah, if I may jump in here. I'm Steve Woodard from lift and Billings, and the comments that have been made so far, definitely. Excellent. I would just like to add to that that our community also includes the other service providers that we want to collaborate

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with to provide services to people with disabilities.

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So, we are constantly reaching out there to remind people that we're here where we're available or able to help when needed. So in a nutshell.

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That's that.

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This is, this is really bad from.

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Tonight, we're in Los Angeles, California. Hello.

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So, um, I came to meet the disability rights movement in the mid 80s, and for, for, for us, then we found community I found community. As the people who like, like, like myself who were wheelchair users.

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Most of us then we're fighting for accessible transportation.

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So, if our community was issue driven. So, it was also mostly the community that, that, that share that issue.

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And then when we fought for the ADA are different RARR, disability, other disability focused organizations, we found them we found each other we got to know the other members of different disabilities and so our, our community grew, and I think we got

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out of our silos. And that was wonderful and we were going to the capital every year that was really wonderful. And then we got to know that technology.

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And so there was the phone, the internet. And so our community even grew, and then the lockdown so with the lockdown St. Paul when we were all taken by surprise and we grieve, as a community, but we were not mindful of zoom.

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And as we thought that that.

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I think the average of us thought that the computer is only for some things, but then we, we, we got link to zoom and walk, voila, we opened a community, right.

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So, we're doing that here. And, but I think we still tend to be

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working around our own individual communities, and.

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And so, we, we still need feel the need to reach out. I think the the opening of the state would give us that give us that opportunity.

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But also I feel that the political climate. Even if we're able to to link, you know more and more we're being divided.

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So that's really the challenge to our community. So for, for us, community is really this organic thing that has to rise above everything, because if we don't join with each other.

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We're also a forest or also.

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So, anyway, thank you.

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>> GENE: Hi this is Jean from Utica, New York. We are selective in the middle of New York. I agree with the speaker from California. I think we are more sideload now.

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Oneida County is surrounded by red counties. For one you cannot talk politics about disability issues with certain people. That somewhere thinking. But I think the influx of more virtual meetings has made it easier to connect.

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So I would disagree with the definition of shared a common interest. I think for more focused on where we need to go and what we need to be successful as unlike Washington obviously. But yeah, I think because of those last four years, we've been more sideload for political reasons which is unfortunate. That's my take.

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>> NADINE: my name is Nadine Autry. I worked the Center for Independent Living in Frederick. Since the pandemic we been working virtually and I find in the past they did not want to come close to us and they had funding and they don't touch us. I have found last year organizations would invite us to their meetings because there are things that they need and we need because we are all virtual.

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We've come together in the state of Maryland in a way we have never done before. It's different for some the other people listing that and said so before.

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>> ELIZABETH: This is Elizabeth from Disability Rights and Resources in Birmingham Alabama. I agree with what everybody is saying and prior to the pandemic, when we talked about the community at my center, it was nebulous. We are here for the community, right? But just generic Alabama kind of people with disabilities I think one thing that really helped us was that Cares Act funds were able to get.

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We got people with disabilities in rural areas that we were not able to reach before and bring them into our virtual meetings. They joined several of our stability action coalition meetings and are happy hour events. There was a lot of great good virtual support groups. Like Michael said which I agree with, these are people that we all give me shit about each other and you can feel that.

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That has made our center grow. Another area we find to help ourselves inside the centers community I think prior to the pandemic and this had a lot more to do with staff turnover than the pandemic but we didn't talk about our own disabilities within our center. Once we started to be able to recognize hey I have a disability and tell me about yours as well. That helped us be members of the community.

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Prior it was us and them but now we have stretched that line where we are all in these happy hour meetings, we are not just staff members but people with disabilities. That really helped us.

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>> SIERRA: I had an idea for this call that was going to be about this but you all have already blown my mind and I want to go in five different directions! Just to emphasize what you had shared, sometimes we get stuck in that work cycle where we are working and these are our consumers. Understanding that's what sets us apart as the centers for independent living, we are our own peers.

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We provide that mentoring support by a lot of us being people with disabilities are having that lived experience with somebody with a disability. I think that's awesome. Anyone else want to share what community looks like for you all? We are kind of going off script but what does community look like for you? I love it.

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>> MALCOM: I agree with most of the prayer speakers and I think community at large, there are people that couldn't participate before and ouch much broader. That's the way I will say it. Even when you have peer groups and stuff like that, it's not limited to people who can show up. We can employ staff to engage in stuff. Even though there was subdivision in the past, I think things are getting much better.

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The Cares Act and other things coming our way, stuff like that. Just wanted to add that.

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>> ALILEEN: I'm in Watertown, New York just a little bit north of Gene. As has been described before, we are a rural community and it disability community because of the county we are in but now that we have Zoom, bigger. Anyone can join the support group. It's not like I cannot get that group or cannot be in the advocacy thing, now it's like spooning out of the water. Anybody can be anywhere just about!

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Once we improve the accessibility of the technology, that is because that is still a problem and access to the Internet is a little bit of a problem. It's a smaller version of the transportation problem we used to have. Community used to be defined by transportation like who we can gather around but now it's much bigger for us.

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>> KATHY: This is Kathy from Northwest Georgia Center for Independent Living. Before this whole year past of COVID, we did a conference call or something like that on a three way phone or whatever but this year we have learned a lot of technology and a lot of tips and shortcuts. So our community has grown that much as far as tech goes and as far as making our consumers more aware and feeling more comfortable

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using technology.

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>> SCOTT: Even though it's been a whole year, I'm on the whole technology thing. For me, thank you can't meet personal credit. I've heard consumers who will call for the skills but then hide behind the technology! They use it as an excuse not to get out there. It's like I'm with you and it has helped me but at the same time, it has hidden people who need that peripheral interaction.

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So to me it's like a two edged sword.

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>> MELS: just going off of that, this could definitely be coming off as me part of Gen Z but Internet natives, I lived on the Internet growing up. If anybody knows what Neopets was, I met my fiancé on Neopets when we were 14 years old! Having those connections specifically as an undiagnosed artistic at the time, having that ability to connect online was a game changer for me. That's where my major friends can from.

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That's I just wanted to share that just so we can be careful when we are talking about what is a real social connection because some of the best social connections I have had our through the Internet. I have friends I have never met in person before! But we kept them all the time if we can get our tendrils to line up!

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Just having this past year has been a lot but being able to connect with people online and having that be accessible, a lot of the times I will have my camera off because I cannot sit up for long periods of time. I need to lay down so this has increased accessibly for me. I'm excited to have input event again I know moving forward, we are aiming at hybrid just so we can reach our communities.

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>> SIERRA: this is one of the reasons I wanted to have this conversation what Mels pointed out. Outside of your center, are community has been moving online. People are meeting on dating apps or online platforms. We've had schools move to online classes as an option. There are so many meet ups that happen in social media platforms that when you originally started learning about social media you had to learn about Facebook. She mastered that, it was it.

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Now it's like how many can you mention cheddar time!

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There text and images and everything. As society we been moving more towards this so there is much of the society that is thought comfortable here.

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It also goes to show that at that point we had a choice to join in. That's what I think I am really wanting to capture.

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Thank you Scott and Mels for sharing that because it shows where we voluntarily went and where we are comfortable. Some people that we have been thrust into this. Go ahead, Jen.

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>> JEN: one of the issues we ran into in rural eastern Montana is Internet service. People being able to afford good Internet service. It is hard to zoom with these deep rural communities.

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Another liftoff covers 18 counties and redo 10 and half of those over here.

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Our people are spread out. Our closest town is 38 miles away.

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And we are one of the bigger towns out here! [CHUCKLING]

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There might be a town of 300 people and their Internet is sketchy as heck, sell services in between. I can tell you every spot you're going to lose it. I feel like we are running into a different problem than people who are in a bigger city.

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Even in Billings, it's a bigger area and I feel like easier access to Internet than over here [CHUCKLING]. Thank you.

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>> GENE: Does that mean you guys deserve two senators? I'm joking!

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>> JEN: I'll take them all!

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>> GENE: You can have our too!

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>> NADINE: everybody's faced moved on me but I think it was Jen who said hybrid. Pre-COBIT we were thinking how in the world are we going to provide some of the services? Now we can provide them either over Google Meet or Facebook Live there are so many different ways. Before I was not tech savvy, I knew how to use my basic computer to pay my bills but I have come into the 21st century and whatever the next interest going to be.

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We've come out of the desert into a watery place where we are able to provide the services.

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We were like what are we going to do, we closed it down! But we are able to even specialize.

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One of the problems we had issues with over the past five or six years with the center was getting youth involved in getting those youth who would want to connect and identify a disabled.

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Reaching out through Facebook and social media and getting our platforms updated, they are coming out of the woodwork and even coming out to assist us in building our platforms for what we need.

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In one way it's the pandemic is like oh my gosh (ugh). But on the other hand we offer certain things online that we couldn't in person depending on the individual wants.

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>> SIERRA: so many people can agree it has been a tough year but many good has come out of it as well. You took Community and went really brought within I love it. I'm going to launch a poll. We will do another one afterwards but before COVID, what did community mean for your center?

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What were you actively engaged with? Which communities? It may not be the same interest or populations or settings where people are. If you could just take a minute.

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Before COVID, where were your centers actively working? What populations and what kinds of settings?

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Who was considered community before COVID? It could be any of these that are in the list here.

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's ability community, schools and colleges, communities without disabilities, communities of marginalized groups, nursing homes, group homes, prison and/or juvenile justice systems, for-profit businesses, nonprofit businesses, foster system.

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I find it very interesting we are not 100% for disability community [CHUCKLING] but we are still going

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Votes are starting to slow up. It looks good we are on the same disability community page there. I threw in some new pieces to see that engagement as well. It looks like other nonprofits was a popular one. We all kind of have that same mission so that's understandable. Foster system. About 30% right now is community without people of disabilities. 50% nursing homes, 42% group homes,. I'm going to go ahead and end it. That's where we're at.

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I wanted to know where we were at with a lot of different things to see who we were working with.

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As we are talking going forward defining that community is so important.

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We kind of jumped into this but how you are defining community now and how it has morphed or merged into new areas and major expand into what you are already doing.

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I wrote it wrong but I do want to launch one more since we are not after COVID. That's the part I don't like. But the next poll is the same exact thing, I want to know what does that look like for you now?

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How are you defining community now? While we're in COVID, who is your center actively engaging with now? The same categories are listed: Disability Community, Nonprofit Organizations, For-Profit Businesses, Community of Marginalized Individuals, Prison and/or Juvenile Justice Systems, Nursing Homes, Coupons, Schools/Colleges, Community without Disabilities, Foster Care.

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Disability COmmunity area engaging more with the disability community in this pole, that's great! [CHUCKLING]

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Almost 100%! 96%. But also 76% for nonprofit organizations. It looks like the percentages are up. 59% schools and colleges, 43% communities without disability. About the same with for-profit businesses in an increase for marginalized communities as well.

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COVID has been tough and we lost a lot of people and it has been horrible. I feel like just these two right here kind of show us what we been doing, reaching out to new places.

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As we continue the conversation, we have about 20 minutes left. I'm sure you have to run to another zoom because I don't want to get in the way of that!

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Let's continue with this and We Want to Keep Expanding. One More Person Had Their Hand up. What Programming Were You Doing before? In What Ways Were You Already Own? Nadine Talked a little bit about you all amped up your social media. It's like who has time for social media when you're actually doing the programming and services?

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>> NADINE: we were missing the young sector. I had heard of Instagram but never been on it. That has all changed now!

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>> SIERRA: Paige, I'm going to pick on you. Y'all have done an amazing job the last several years. What was your social media presence before?

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>> PAIGE: I can't take any of that credit because it's not in my job description and I think that's a huge part of it.

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We had a young staff member who was really devoted to a good bit of that and has been.

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Obviously it has grown in this COVID year. It became almost the main means of communication a lot of times.

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But I think we did a lot of campaigns and a lot of our grant work and tagging our funders and supporting them.

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It is good to model accessibility where things aren't always super accessible.

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Social media is a huge part of that.

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It's really cool our staff meetings come in and there are auto captions and alt text is a setting. We been doing image description for so long and we will still do that but it's exciting to see some of these pieces come into play on the social media platforms.

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That is something we've been doing for long-term across multiples like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. Some of our youth programs have unique social media. We are exploring Discord for our alumni based on their interest and a lot of them sharing their handles.

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We figured it was a platform we need to be on! Explained that with each other I think is really great then taking our guidance from youth.

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It's helpful in connecting schools. Schools have a lot of Facebook pages and the teachers are on it and they are part of groups, support groups and teacher groups.

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It has given us more connections the same way that if we are at a table for some interagency meeting trying to connect with those people doing the same thing as the Facebook groups. I'm hoping I'm touching on what you are hoping to hear [CHUCKLING]

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>> SIERRA: Yes. That was exactly it. You all did a great job with images on Instagram. If you're not familiar with it, it's all images and making it accessible to everybody as a challenge. It takes extra work, not just words like you can do on Facebook. Has to be an image description

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They've done that in other areas as well.

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As far as programming, what did virtual programming look like for everybody? A couple people talk about what that looked like before COVID and we all know that we have been forced there.

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Did you have any online programming that was existent before that has been able to maintain through any of that through this last year?

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>> Before we had Zoom, we were in so many Meetings That It Was Superfluous and Exciting but There Were so Many That There Was No Time to Implement the Best of Ideas. We Were Trying and Are Still Trying and the Good Ideas Pile up. But There's Only so Much Daytime and so Many Other Parts of Our Lives.

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We have to find the balance so it can get very enthusiastic and have so many meetings but we have to be realistic about what is our discussion really for to achieving the goals.

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>> NADINE: I hate to say so much but this is where I get to come in and talk to the people who are going through the same thing.

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We didn't have any platforms to do anything that way. However, in speaking with some of the individuals they would contact us and in reaching out BS social media, we started an audiobook club where people will come and listen to a book and then we have a conversation about a book we are reading at that time he line we do chapter by chapter at time so that's growing.

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We also have something called the Freedom Train where we have different individuals in the community. Positive things we're doing at our center.

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Here in the center of independent living in Maryland, the centers of gotten together and have a program called "I am" meaning I am amplified getting out to the people disabilities in Maryland. We do trainings about different things and have speakers about different topics. We are building our platform little by little as an agency and all the centers together in Maryland.

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>> MICHAEL: Speaking from our base program which is our community engagement center, before COVID it was a physical location where we would hold daily programming's and we were open to students for dropping. I would say before COVID, our virtual presence, our Facebook page like sharing pictures and photos of the things that are happening physically. But also messenger groups are a way to connect those individuals that were part of the programs in between sessions.

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So if you are involved the improv class and you want to stay connected in between those times, the Messages groups serve that purpose. Also give us an opportunity to make announcements like if a class is canceled.

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Our staff and volunteers have been great likely. Most every program has been moved virtually. With a little bit of tweaking we were able to figure out how to do improv over Zoom which is fun because you end up being a 24 hour news correspondent the entire time.

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I would say the programs have either grown or we have added a response. Our RPG nights, role-playing games. Most people are familiar with Dungeons & Dragons as a platform, but there are others.

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To borrow a phrase from April colleague, we're all about putting the chocolate on the vegetables. Yes we are planning Dungeons & Dragons and we also have a wrestling group but we are using it to build confidence.

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For those of you are not familiar with RPG, it's about creating a character and taking them through a story. You are learning all sorts of soft skills as well as some very practical things.

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And engaging in something people are interested in. We just added a photography group which we didn't have before.

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In Montana we are still socially distancing wearing masks and a lot of communities but the weather is getting nicer so what can we do to not be on All the Time? Some of the High School Students Were Really into Photography so Now We Meet Once a Week to Share the Photos We've Taken on Social Media and Then Talk about Them over Assume.

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\*Zoom

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They give us tips and take a better picture. And when you're not on Zoom, take a walk and take a picture of nature or something like that. So we had to trigger programming.

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>> CALIF STAFF: What we have been doing with our programming is helping to create a safe place to talk about whatever emotions we are going through.

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A lot of people have been feeling very isolated and down. We looked into not only improving our own Internet,

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And our technology, but also how we can reach out to communities who don't have the option to go somewhere or have time to drive out to meet up.

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We created something called Let's Connect which is a peer to peer program. We have a lot of people calling for this peer to peer counseling. A lot of people talking about suicide or feeling depressed or isolated who need extra resources.

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By having someone come in and talk about these things, they can hear stories about how somebody is going through something going to the same situation and they can talk about how they worked through that. People who are hosting our meetings, if they ever see someone who could use extra resources, they will direct them towards CalLife

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Whether it's access to food or housing or whatever benefits they might need. That's what we really helped with which is building our technology that we really never thought we needed to do. Not need to do but it was addressed quicker.

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Also how are we going to help support people at a difficult time and what we can do for them.

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>> SIERRA: we have time for one more person to go if you want to share what your programming looks like now

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>> NADINE: regarding the cares act funds, we do outreach to nursing homes and I think we delivered 6 to 8 Chromebooks to people who were missing their family in a place of depression. We were ever to reach out to them so they could connect with families again and just be a part of what they need to be a part of

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Some of them are now part of our book club! Someone had mentioned they created something to help and that I am program we did, so many people are isolated and they didn't have a place they could go to share.

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I'm grateful we are learning from each other in this meeting.

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>> JED: One thing during the pandemic is we got money for a grant and we have been distributing those Echo Dots that run Alexa. many of ourconsumers are of a particular age. We could give them a Chromebook but they didn't know what to do with it.

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Alexa, as long as you have the ability to talk which granted, some people don't, but for those that do that may not be able to see a monitor, they can just tell Alexa to play Yellowstone public radio or tell me a joke or something.

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We found that that has connected people to something in the outside world that they might not have access to provided of course they have Internet and a reliable connection which tend to be a problem out of Billings.

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Our senator said in a house debate committee about 5G technology for some of the larger urban areas of our country. We are talking about 5G in 2.Montana, we don't have 1G!

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>> NADINE: we've also given similar to older adults and their the greatest.

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>> SIERRA: I want to lunch one more poll just before the end. How do you feel about your services? Stronger now than before COVID? Now you have to pick one! [CHUCKLING] I will break the rule of not discussing afterwards but we will keep discussing.

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Remember this is just the first part, seeing where we were and where we were going. I want us all to join back together if you are able to in June or if you have a coworker or more centers that are not here today to jump in.

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The next one will be leveling the virtual plane on June 9 at the same time Eastern. We are more positive than we are negative, somewhat agree is the highest. I feel like that's good.

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I do want to make sure you see this. That is our next call will be on June 9, 2:00 PM Eastern time like I said. We will pick up right where we left off today, what you have going on. Maybe that will look different in June. I also want to talk about where those gaps are.

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I want to jump into that discussion again of rural areas that are inaccessible due to access and how we're meeting that. Also how do we make sure we are meeting what are consumer needs and maybe there is new information we learned today that we hadn't thought of.

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Then we talked about the confidence of having to teach that technology to ourselves and our concerns. I invite you to join us in June and the third part will be in August. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

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I really thank you all for being here today.

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We are all centers for independent living and if we could benefit our community even more discussing. Look forward to seeing everyone back June 9! Have a great day!

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>> MULTIPLE VOICES: Thanks so much!