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AFRICAN AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON DISABILITIES

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Determined to Lead During the Pandemic

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>> NICHOLAS BLUM: All right, everyone. Welcome. My name is Nick Blum. I work for the institute for human development at Northern Arizona University. It's a pleasure to be here tonight for this session. I'm just going to spend a couple minutes covering some of the housekeeping for Zoom and Facebook and everything we're doing with an eye towards accessibility here. And then I'm going to turn it over to Natalie Luna Rose who is going to introduce the moderator tonight. And then we're going to get started.

So the first thing I want to mention is there's closed captions available. There's a live transcript CC button at the bottom of your Zoom screen. You may have to click that and say "show subtitles" or "show full transcript." There's also an external captioning link that I posted in the chat and I will pose again after I finish talking, if you prefer to see the captions on a separate screen.

The next is we have ASL interpreters working today. So that's ASL interpreter Audrey and ASL interpreter Lynette. They are co-hosts. That means they are at the top of the participant list. One way to find the experts is you find their name and click on the "more" button and pin their individual so it will show up big on your screen. We will also spotlight the ASL interpreters as they switch off. That's kind of a global thing we'll do. But you can always change things with your pinning settings. We found it's very helpful if you move your mouse to the top right-hand corner of the screen. There's a button that says "view." You click "view," there's all sorts of different options for how you view. We recommend the "gallery mode" or "side-by-side gallery."

The last thing is we are going to be showing slides at the beginning and at the end of this presentation. And when we start or end a slide share, you might find that your view changes. So you might have to reset your settings after something is shared or after it stops being shared.

I think those are the things that I wanted to cover. Myself and Jeff -- oh, if you're watching us on Facebook right now, you might have to turn on captions there as well. There's a gear button at the bottom of the video screen. You toggle that on. And the external CART link will work there. We will be monitoring the chat if you have technical questions or issues. I believe there's going to be time for Q&A at the end.

So please share questions or comments in the chat. And we'll do our best to gather them and have them for the panel later.

So with that, I'm going to pass it over to Natalie Luna Rose from ACDL.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: Good evening, everybody. I'm the communications and outreach manager from the Arizona Center for Disability Law. We have two offices, one in Tucson and one in Phoenix. I am in Tucson this evening. And as Nick said, we're hoping to see if those who have -- are joining us for the first time want to tell us where you're from. I know a lot of the country is really cold right now, so I'm not going to rub it in that we live in Arizona.



(laughter).

So, anyway, glad you're here. Before we get started with this evening's session which I think it will be fun and interesting and it's always great to hear from our younger citizens and what they're going through and what's happening with them during this pandemic and just in general.

Our sponsors this evening, Valley Toyota Dealers, Arizona Center for African American Resources. Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Sonoran UCEDD, Institute for Human Development at NAU, Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council, Diversity Ability, Inc., Mark's the Spot, Uniques, Valley of the Sun United Way, and the Arizona Center for Disability Law.

So this evening's session is a panel of, I think, a good variety of students. And I'm going to pass it off to our moderator, Calvin Cook, who's also a member of our board at ACDL.

So, Calvin, if you are ready, I'm going to pass it on to you.

Calvin?

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Natalie. If I can have the questions and share the screen.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Okay. The screen share is up, if we can have Calvin and Natalie turn off their cameras.

All right, Calvin. We're good to go.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay. Hi. My name is Calvin, and welcome to this presentation titled "Determined to Lead During the Pandemic." A panel presentation of Arizona Youth Leaders. And if I may have our leaders introduce themselves that would be great, starting with Amira.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: Hi.

>> CALVIN COOK: And Mateo?

>> AMIRA HEPNER: My name is Amira Hepner. Am I finished or do you want me to add anything else?

>> CALVIN COOK: I am just wanting our leaders to say hello.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: Oh, okay.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Hello, my name is Mateo TreeTop.

>> CALVIN COOK: And Isaac and Nikki?

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: My name is Isaac Zwinger-Nathanson.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: Hello, I'm Nikki Trevizo.

>> CALVIN COOK: Thank you. Next slide, please.

Arizona Youth Leadership Initiatives is a combination of peer-based mentoring, training, and support services provided through Arizona, by and for youth who have disabilities and other



diversities. These individuals are a diverse group of trained peers. Let's meet some of these AzYIL alumni now.

A leader is defined as a person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country. A leader is also a person followed by others.

The first person that you lead is you! Next slide, please

And here we have some questions for our panel of leaders. I'm going to ask the first question, and I would like Amira to start. The first question is: What have you learned about personal leadership? And how has this insight been helpful to you, especially during the pandemic?

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: So I'm going to invite all of our panelists to turn on their cameras now as we go through these questions.

We saw you for a minute, Calvin. But then it went off again.

>> CALVIN COOK: Does anybody need me to repeat the question? I was wondering if Amira could start.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: Yes.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay. One moment. So the question is: What have you learned about Personal Leadership, and how has this insight been helpful to you, especially during the pandemic?

>> AMIRA HEPNER: So, for Personal Leadership, I'm putting more effort into it. I am more motivated and I'm becoming more involved with other people. It's definitely becoming more involved with people and kind of being together as a group and becoming a leader. I'm finished.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay. Thank you, Amira. If I may have Mateo go next.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: So what I'm doing for Personal Leadership is really (chuckles) kind of taking, I guess, I will look more inward for myself and trying to access -- well, not access but trying to pull out these emotions that have been kind of bubbling around to me and kind of using them towards being more empathetic towards other people within the situation that we're in. Because really this is a time where we really should be very, very patient with each other due to most of us being in a confined space. That's what I have learned.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Mateo. If I may have Nikki go next.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: Yeah. So as for Personal Leadership, I feel like so far I have learned that it's kind of -- it's something difficult to kind of like, I guess, perfect. And it takes a lot of, like, work to kind of be, I guess, the perfect leader. And it all starts with -- it's harder during the pandemic especially with school and stuff and having to take control of your own education and stuff. And I think that the insight that I have learned, I guess, during the pandemic is definitely going to be helpful



when we return back to going back to classes in person and stuff. I feel like this difficult situation has only been helping us to move forward. But, yeah.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Nikki. And last, but not least, Isaac.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: So for Personal Leadership, I think that I've really have learned a lot about myself as -- on an individualistic point in that how, you know, I do -- a lot of what I would do normally in person and how I have now adapted it to online, but I think more so just kind of knowing my limits around how long I can be on a screen, knowing how to really stay concentrated, even though there are many distractions within my household. And I think that one thing that's really important during this unprecedented time is that we have to really band together, not as one -- not as individual groups but as a whole. I think that we have to help each other with anything and everything that is feasible and, of course, legal. But if someone needs help with an assignment and you know how to solve it, you know, I think it's important that you reach out and offer that support. If one is just having a bad day, hop on a Zoom call with them and just have a little chat if it fits your schedule. These kind of things that we might do a ton when we were meeting with each other and hanging out, we would be able to pick up on these things. It's definitely not easy to pick it up when you're in a confined space but it's even harder to pick up on camera where you only see a face or a face and a shoulder or maybe not a face at you will. So I think that it's important that we set aside the differences that we may have and really band together because we're not going to get through this pandemic if we're not all doing what's needed but also if we're not helping one another in ways that, you know, we can. And I think it's important to make those efforts as much as possible.

>> CALVIN COOK: I definitely agree. Thank you, all.

Nicholas, if you may show the other question.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: I'm just going to -- can I just read the question and then Jeff is going to post it in the chat. I'd rather not share the screen because we got it set up working right now.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Question two is: In what ways have you demonstrated leadership skills while interacting with others?

>> CALVIN COOK: If Amira may answer first.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: So with the leadership skills, I've learned how to kind of really interact with other people. Being a Deaf person, there's a lot of miscommunication with hearing people. I have to try to read their lips. We have to write back and forth. They try to gesture. So it's really trying to figure out how to communicate with them. I'm very friendly and social with everybody, and I'm helping them learn a different perspective and a different culture and have them understand that



we really are all equal and that we can understand each other and collaborate. It's just more interacting and not being afraid to socialize with other people. And I'm finished. Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: All right. Thank you. Amira.

Mateo, if you may. Please.

If you may answer. Mateo, if you may answer.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Yes. Sorry. Technical difficulties.

So when it comes to demonstrating leadership skills, to me it's really just making sure -- sorry. I don't know what's going on. Let me -- let's go on to another person while I figure out what's going on here.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay. Thank you. Nikki, may you answer the question.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: So when interacting with others, actually there's plenty of ways you can show leadership skills. I think it starts with, like -- for example, like speaking to a friend about a difficult situation they're going through or taking the initiative to, like, help out peers with, like, you know, homework and stuff like that. That's just the few ways that I make sure to show leadership skills when interacting with others. Just making sure that I'm helping those around me as much as I can.

>> CALVIN COOK: All right. Thank you. Isaac, may you answer the question.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Certainly. So I think, you know, everyone has kind of said similar things. I think the other thing that's important to remember not just with interacting with others but with interacting with yourself, I think that it's important that, you know, you take care of yourself in the sense of you're getting some kind of exercise, you are eating properly, you're sleeping properly. You're not, you know, just confined to one room and eating, I don't know, burritos at 3:00 a.m. I think it's important that you really, really focus on your health because you know with everything going around, I think that you have to be on top of everything not just for yourself because if you are not a functioning person, you can't be -- you shouldn't be expected -- you can't be an effective leader for others. And I think that's really important.

I think another thing for when it comes to interacting, you know, helping others when you can, taking initiatives in things that you might see as an issue. One example might be you don't -- you're running out of -- maybe not a good example. So, I guess, just if you notice that you're in a group of friends on Zoom and you can sense someone's not comfortable with a topic that's being talked about or something like that, maybe try to redirect the conversation so that you can avoid making people further uncomfortable. Or something -- just taking into account and being observant on surroundings that you put yourself in and that people kind of have you be in. So if you have the ability to just make it so that everyone is comfortable and that everyone is also actively participating because, you know,



I think at least for me, I think it's important that we do socialize with your friends because, you know, we as humans are very social creatures. So you take something away like in-person interaction, try to substitute with online interaction, whether it's through video games or just general Zoom chats or Zoom calls or start up a server with your friends or group chat, as slowly as we get more open to having safe and nondangerous meeting spaces where you can meet with your friends, do those -- if you are going to meet with your friends, do them responsibly and do it -- and jeopardizing their health, your health, and other people's health that may be in the vicinity.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Isaac. And, Mateo, if you want to go ahead right now, can you answer the question?

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Yes. I think I got everything working again. So what I was saying previously was that, I've been taking the initiative to help a lot of my friends just talk things out during these times. Because being in a confined space can definitely make people experience cabin fever. Plus, the mundanity of waking up, sitting in the same chair looking at the same place, looking at the same screen with the same people depending on the situation can really take a toll with people's psyche and sense of being.

Just in talking to my friends, making sure they know that, you know, as much as they can in a responsible sense, just very -- what Isaac was saying. Vary your possibilities and what you're doing every day so you don't get in this rut. And sometimes even just take time for yourself. If it means shutting yourself away in your room for, like, an hour or two a day, that's fine. Even though we are social creatures, we're also creatures that if we have too much socialability, especially for some of us, that can also be a great detriment. So it's creating this kind of balance of being social and anti-social, depending on a person's needs. Physical as well as psychological well-being in a moment-to-moment setting. So that's what I have.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Mateo.

And everyone else, thank you.

Our next question is: What is your process when confronting a challenging decision? If Amira may start for us.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: So my process to facing a challenge is, you know, for being a Deaf person, I have a lot of challenges that I do have to face. And sometimes hearing people will look down on me. They don't want to try to communicate with me or figure out how they can interact with me, so now we have that six-feet social distance. So it's a lot harder to communicate with hearing people with writing, with pen and paper. So with COVID, that's a little bit more difficult because you're standing too far apart. You can try to show them and see if they can read it and then see if they can answer. Like, if I'm texting them, I will put it on my phone and show them and see if they



will answer. I will explain to them and kind of expand. So with Deaf people, it's kind of approaching challenges with hearing people and how do you communicate with them. And really it's kind of an individual basis. It could be work, school, interpreters, things like that. There's many different things that come into approaching challenges for me when working with hearing people. Trying to read lips. Right now with Zoom, it's super frustrating because the Internet freezes and I can't see the teacher or the interpreter. Some people get mad or embarrassed. So, I mean, it's a really good experience what's going on right now because we are having to approach challenges and I'm having to approach these challenges in a different way because of COVID and having that social distancing.

And I'm done. Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Amira.

If you are able, Mateo, if you may share your response.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: So my process is really taking kind of a reminder that technology isn't perfect. I'm pretty sure we've seen that on a day-to-day basis. Just with the Internet, even though we have this great tool of communication at our fingertips, whether it's our phone or it's our computer, tablet, whatever Internet-accessing device you have, just like power, just like water, just like a lot of these other things that we need to be successful in day-to-day life, there isn't an abundanceness of bandwidth, Internet. So to make a long story short, I think really it's just patience. It's patience that is kind of my process.

Take things as they come. If things aren't going according to plan, just take a minute, breathe. Just restart.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Mateo.

Nikki, if you may go next, that would be great.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: Yeah. So what process when confronting a challenging decision is kind of lay out my options and see out what the effects of each one of them. Just to make sure everything is clear, I usually don't like -- usually when a difficult situation arises, I'll, like, stress out. So I like to take time to make decisions or else I will just make a decision quickly. But, yeah, I think just laying out all your options and seeing what benefits you most is the best way probably to confront a challenging decision.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Nikki. And, Isaac, if you may.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: So I think one thing that I do in terms of processing a challenge is -- it's very similar to everyone else's. Weighing out my options and seeing what benefits me the most. I think another aspect that I look at is how it might affect other individuals that may be impacted or affected by my decision because I think we don't really think about some of the effects that might happen to people until it's too late. And so I think it's important to talk to the people that



you trust. And it can be a different group of people for different things. But I think it's important that you make decisions based on information that you have and based on information that you may be provided. And I think that it's important that you consult with people that you trust, of course. But you consult with people that may be a little older or who may be knowledgeable about one thing but not knowledgeable about the other things. I think it's important to kind of round yourself out with those kind of people. Because for a lot of us on this panel, we're all still very young. And I think that it's important that we surround ourselves with like-minded peers, of course. But I think we also surround ourselves with a little more -- with older people like our parents or maybe someone you trust that might be a teacher or a therapist or someone that you trust and is knowledgeable about a specific field.

And I think that by doing that, you allow for yourself to be informed and making decisions that best benefit you or also best benefit people around you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, all.

And our next question is: What challenges have influenced your self-determination in the last year? And how have you overcome them? If Amira may start, that would be great.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: So a lot of my challenges are with hearing people because I am a Deaf person. So really it's a challenge to try to interact. It's a challenge for both hearing and Deaf people in those situations. So, for example, now with COVID, hearing people are using masks, and I can't read their lips. So with the mask it's really hard. I'm struggling as a Deaf person how do I interact with these people if I can't see their mouths? So, you know, a way to overcome this is to have paper. You can use technology, like, with your phone, writing back and forth or texting, using kind of facial expressions and gestures. Like, if I need something -- so just kind of gesturing and their facial expressions will show me what they need. Especially with the masks. Now with COVID, we're kind of stuck trying to communicate. So even gesturing would be one thing that would help. Just like showing them what you have to do, just pointing, oh, you want paper. Or you have to go to the bathroom. Just pointing that out and showing the person. There's going to be struggles with communication, yes. But if you're patient, you can be successful and you can overcome this challenge. Do not give up. You can do it.

Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Amira.

Mateo, if you may go next.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Okay. So a challenge that is very particular to me and probably a few other people is getting used to using Zoom. I know a lot of people, especially for school, it's tough. That's definitely for my case. Whether it's Zoom or Webex or anything other technologies like this,



it's definitely a challenge. because you are constantly looking at a screen. You are constantly looking at people that aren't there. So not only is it a mental trick, but also it's -- well, I mean, people physically there with you. Oops.

There we go. Sorry about that.

It's this. Sometimes I cut in. Sometimes I cut out. It kind of is frustrating. And, again, a way to work around this is just, again, having patience. Varying what you do. Just being understanding and aware of what's out there besides just where you are right now.

I think that just about covers it.

>> CALVIN COOK: Thank you, Mateo. And I agree technology can be a struggle. If you may, Nikki, if you may go next, that would be great.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: Yeah. So a lot of the challenges that have influenced my self-determination kind of have to do with being social. That's one of my biggest challenges. So an example that I can think of is I'm kind of like -- I recently moved out to college and I was having a lot of difficulty kind of -- I was having difficulty putting myself out there and getting what I need. And I got to the point I would struggle with basic things like going to the grocery store, just to avoid having conversation because I just really don't know how. It got to the point I would struggle to get in an elevator, just to avoid elevator conversations. To overcome that, it was difficult -- it was difficult but I think what I ended up doing was kind of putting myself out there more and more. And kind of putting myself in uncomfortable conversations and initiating conversations with strangers. That's how I was able to overcome, like -- not overcome because I'm still dealing with social anxieties and social issues. But kind of how to make them a lot more easier for me, to make it easier to deal with. So, yeah.

>> CALVIN COOK: Thank you, Nikki. And, Isaac, if you may go next.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: I think for me, I would say I'm a little mix of both Amira and Nikki. I'm a very social person. I love to meet new people. Being a college student I was able to go on campus, sit at the library, do my homework and someone show up and be like, hey, can I sit here and just having little small talk. Down the line, you end up having a class with that person and so you study and other scenarios where you meet new people. And now for an instant, it's gone. So that aspect of my life which I really enjoy is now gone. And you can -- you can do all the Zooms and all the video chats that you want. But at the end of the day, it's not the same as having a face-to-face conversation with someone because there's just other aspects of having a conversation and getting to know someone but aren't verbal.

(No audio).

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Hey, Isaac. We lost your audio.



>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Can you hear me? What was the last thing you heard? I didn't realize -- I flipped the switch that's on my mic and didn't realize I did that. What was the last thing you guys heard?

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: It was just for about the last 15 seconds or so.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: I guess just starting from where I think 15 seconds ago is to have interactions in person is a lot different than having interactions with people online because you don't get that physical and the spacing -- or the situational awareness that comes with meeting people in person.

And I think that's been a struggle for me. And in some ways I've been doing that is to be available for my friends and reach out to people in my classes, even if they are online. Reach out to them, create group chats that we're helping each other with homework but we're also just helping each other communicate about our frustrations with a class or just helping each other out in that way. And then also, you know, reaching out to old friends that you may not talk to on a regular basis, I think, is also important. I think checking up on people that you know and you know enough about to know that they might need the extra support. And I think that it's fairly important that we, again, have patience. Internet connection is not the greatest. One might have excellent Internet connection and another person might not. So being patient with those people -- or being patient with everyone that you talk to. And I think just being very willing to go with the flow because -- in times that are very uncertain for a lot of people, I think it's important that you really understand and get to really trying to be patient but also just get to know what people need and knowing the things that people might lack in. So I think just being calm and cool and collective are very important steps to making sure that you're good but you're not upsetting other people or you're not -- you may not upset but you're not inconveniencing other people. I think it's important that we just allow for ourselves to be patient and not be as up tight for change because change is inevitable for us. And we're finding new ways every day to make things happen. So just kind of go with it. If it doesn't work for you, that's okay. Just still be patient because at the end of the day, everyone's going through the same thing you are in greater or less ways than you can think of.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: I think we may have lost Calvin.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: I see that.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: I found him. Calvin, you should be able to activate your camera again.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, I'm here.

One moment. Sorry.

It happens to the best of us.



(laughter).

Okay. So thank you. I'm on the next question, correct?

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Yes.

>> CALVIN COOK: So this is question five, I believe. What I'm -- excuse me. With the drastic changes in education recently, what are some ways in which you have used self-advocacy to ensure your success? If Amira may start, that would be great.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: For successful advocacy, I go to a Deaf school but I go to another school to take classes for, like, a JTED program. So the whole class is hearing, and I have an interpreter and there's teachers there. So I have to get used to how do I interact with them. So the example would be the IEP meeting. I have accommodations. Like, I have extended time for homework that's due. So notetakers because I can't watch the interpreter and then take notes at the same time. That's impossible for me. So I have a person that will take the notes for me so I can watch the interpreter and I'm not missing anything and I'm not falling behind in my classes and my education isn't falling behind. I take advantage of tutors. There's afterschool office hours to catch up and tutoring I can do.

Sometimes the teachers, they'll have to kind of accept that it's, like, late. So it's a lot to do with Deaf and hearing. But myself, I'm Deaf. So sometimes I need extended time. Now, I'm not going to take all the extended time. I'm not going to wait until the end of the semester and then turn in all my work because then what would I do. So the goal is for me to use that extended time to help me finish my assignments. And I explain that to my teachers and all the peers I have in my classes with me.

Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Amira. And, Mateo, if you are able, may you go next.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Sure.

So for me, what's interesting is that a lot of my teachers and professors have really taken into account the drastic change in education, and they've actually met all of the students halfway. This usually takes the form of -- besides tuition, no extra cost for classes, providing kits if it's a more hands-on course. And really that has helped a lot because it is usually teachers that don't necessarily, I guess, in regular times have the teaching philosophies of going the extra mile. I think they've kind of rearranged their -- really, it's not necessarily a thing of accommodations than it's a thing of people being more compassionate and understanding to everyone and appreciating what they have now as it pertains to people with disabilities. I have also done a lot more with -- (audio dropped out) -- that's all I have to say.

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay, thank you, Mateo. Nikki, if you may.



>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Before you start, Nikki, Mateo is not on the main screen. I wasn't sure if that was an issue for Facebook Live. I just wanted to point that out.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Thank you, Isaac. It's not an issue for Facebook. When his Internet is dropping out, it's been dropping the spotlight.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: I figured he was speaking, I thought I would mention it but I didn't want to interrupt him.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Go ahead, Calvin. Sorry for the interruption.

>> CALVIN COOK: Nikki, if you may go next, that would be great.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: So with the changes in education recently, what I've been doing is reaching out to the DRC a lot. That's the disability resource center. And I've been communicating a lot with my professors to kind of make sure that my needs are, like, met. For example, when I can't attend class certain day, I will email my professors and make sure that I get the help that I need so I'll be able to do well. But, yeah, just mostly communicating with my professors, my peers, and with the disability resource center as well.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you, Nikki. Isaac, may you go next.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Yeah. So I have learned very quickly having done two -- wait, let me think about this. A semester, half a semester, and -- almost a semester and a half, going on to two and a half semesters that online learning sucks. (chuckles). At least for me. I do not do well with that because having a vision disability, it is not always going to be accessible. And that's the case with in-person classes as well. But I think that there are some pros and cons to online learning, but I would say more cons than pros.

So for education, I took last semester and I did -- I tried last semester as a fully online and really, really disliked it. And I was thinking this semester, I don't want to do it again. But I realized that everyone is going through this. It's not just me. And if someone can figure it out, if everyone else can figure it out, that I shouldn't be crying about difficulties. Not to say that my difficulties are the same or equally valued, but I think it might -- and I also think that my issues might be different as well. But I think that if I am going to be -- if I want to continue my education, I'm just going to have to step up to the occasion and learn how to do things online because you never know, God forbid, that we have another pandemic where we have to be isolated from everyone again. So I think that I took the initiative by kind of really settling down and learning how to do online school, even though I don't like it. And I think that it's important that I continue my education because otherwise I'd spend all my day playing video games which isn't productive and isn't being an active citizen. And I think that it's important that I continue my education but I continue to grow as a person because that's the only way to take a horrible thing and make it so that it works for you.



And for things that I've done that have helped me in school is I do get my -- I do get accommodations from the DRC, like Nikki. I'm assuming like many other people. It's similar to an IEP for K-12 schools.

I also do -- the DRC can only do so much. So at the beginning of each semester, even before COVID hit, I always emailed the professors and the TA and the DRC coordinator who is assigned to me. And I make sure that they know that I am a student in their class and I make sure that all of them know I do have a disability and to let them know that I have certain accommodations but that I would like to work with them individually to make sure that if there needs to be another accommodation that isn't necessarily required by the DRC but it's an accommodation like sending me a PowerPoint 30 minutes before class, that they can make these accommodations for me.

And the reason I do this rather than doing it verbally so is if I get into a place where I'm asking for an accommodation that was agreed upon through written agreement, I have that in a document. I have it in a place where I can go back and say: You did say XYZ would be given to me on this date. And that allows for me as a student to be holding my teachers accountable. But it also allows for me to allow teachers to help me. And I think that's important.

I also think that's important to start with opening a dialogue with all your professors because at the end -- because they can give you support when they need it. They're not there to make you suffer, although I sometimes wonder. But being a student -- being a child of two English professors, I learned very quickly that, you know, if you don't ask for the help, you won't get it. And they won't know that you need it. So it's important that you communicate with them.

It's also important that you communicate with your peers if you are in group work. Make sure that group knows what's best for you in terms of how you work. And so if that means that you have to take -- you have to say, hey, I need to say something before you start the work, do that. Don't be afraid to speak out about your needs because at the end of the day, especially in a group situation, if one person doesn't do the work, everyone is affected by that.

So don't be slacking. But also be sure that your needs are heard. And I think the other thing, too, is for education at least is to, you know, try to plan out your weeks.

I know it's really hard to know what day is what. I thought today was three weeks ago, you know? And so I have a calendar. We all have a phone. We all have computers. So use your calendar on your phone. Use your calendar on your computer. Buy an actual calendar and/or planner and stick it on your wall where you work. Do little things that allow you to be accountable for yourself. And if you do miss a deadline for an assignment or a quiz or something, email your professor. Don't just say I'm not going to do it because X, Y and Z. Email your professor.

And I think that's important to really work on that.



And I think the other thing is communicate with your classmates just in general. If you are not having a good day, just be like, hey, can someone tell me what's happening during this class. I'm just not having it today. I say that it's okay to miss one or two classes because everything is so just uncertain. There can be imagines. There can just be whatever.

If you are just not having the day, you just can't come to class because you feel awful, you're just not in a space where you can focus, reach out to your classmates. Reach out to your friends who maybe are in your class. Be proactive about asking for help and receiving help because at the end of the day, we're all here trying to do a common goal, whether it's being a teacher or whether it's be a student.

No one wants to see you fail. Everyone would much prefer you succeed. So just be productive about that.

Other than that, I think the other things have been said previously are exactly what you need to do, too.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, all. And I'm going to go on to the next question. This question is: What tips do you have for young people who have disabilities who wish to take a more active role in choosing the life they want to live? If Amira can start, that would be great.

But I also want to make the panelists aware that we have about 20 minutes left.

>> AMIRA HEPNER: Okay. Can you repeat the question again, please?

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. The question is: What tips do you have for young people who have disabilities who wish to take a more active role in choosing the life that they want to live?

>> AMIRA HEPNER: Okay. So some tips or advice for people who have disabilities, this is really in general. So sometimes people feel really isolated or awkward and they don't want to socialize. But you should still be involved. Like, for me, I'll say: Hi, my name is Amira. I've had a good life. My experience is a little bit different than theirs. Deaf people, hearing people, we all have disabilities. We all have some issues and problems.

Am I Deaf? Yes. I have different problems or issues, like with communicating with hearing people. It's a lot of writing back and forth. There's other issues that are related to my disability.

And then people learn that, oh, I'm kind of the same as Amira. I can do things. So it's kind of just like helping them give them that little bit of tip and information. If you want to help people, great. Because I really like to help people. And we all learn different things.

So, for example, some people look down on people who have disabilities. And it's really offensive, and then you have low self-esteem. So maybe they don't know about your disability or what to do or how to try to communicate and interact with you. So you have to teach them about your disability. And it can be inspirational. And they can understand that, hey, we have similarities.



And even if a person has a disability, they can do so many different things. So you have to learn different perspectives and different cultures. There's many different things and many different opportunities.

Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Amira. Mateo, may you go next.

>> MATEO TreeTOP: Yes.

Some of my tips are understanding where you kind of come from.

One of the biggest things that have helped me as a person with a disability is understanding my culture, understanding why things were done in a different way. Even if your culture is American culture, there's many different varieties of American culture and belief.

It's really understanding your roots and understanding just how you yourself do the things that you do or why people around you do the things that you do. It can help you achieve a more active, more role in your life because the people around you are most likely are going to be the people rooting for you and working along these people, getting to know them on a more fundamental level is going to help you in the long run and understanding that they might not -- they're not out there to get you is very much important.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you so much, Mateo. Nikki, if you may go next.

>> NIKKI TREVIZO: Yeah. So some tips that I have for other people with disabilities would kind of be just put yourself out there more and it's something that you can really nerve wracking. But it's really beneficial to be able to put yourself out there and take a stand for what you need and to be successful. I think once you are able to get that down, you are able to reach out to people and get all those opportunities that are being put in your way and take advantage of, like -- take advantage of, like -- yeah, just the opportunities that are being given to you. Even if it could be nerve wracking to speak to others or communicate with other people.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, Nikki. Isaac, if you may go next.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Yeah, so I think as a young person, I think that it's important that you find things that you like and things that you don't like. I think it's also important to be knowledgeable about things, such as paying -- how to pay bills and how to buy things online. I'm sure everyone has gotten good about that. Learning how to budget, being active about the news and just being active in the world that you live in. I think it's also important that you find people that are going to support you and are going to be backing you in your corner because that's also really important to have. And I think just -- put yourself in situations that you aren't necessarily going to be comfortable with right away. Part of being an adult is to learn and adapt. With people with disabilities, we all know about how to adapt and adjust to things that aren't best suited for us.



But I think if you put yourself out in situations that isn't your little bubble, that you can grow from that. And I think that's important to really push yourself and push yourself in a way that's positive for you. A perfect example would be going to college. If a four-year or two-year college isn't for you, then don't put yourself in it.

But there are vocational schools. There are other schools and kind of trainings that you can gain so that you can be productive. And don't sell yourself short. Be positive about who you are as an individual. For example, I for the longest time feel from the age of 8 to the age of 12 I wanted to be an Air Force pilot and fly those fancy F-15s and landing on aircraft carriers.

Reality is, the Air Force and the military isn't going to want someone to be flying a \$4 billion aircraft who doesn't see very well. I mean, who could have guessed, right?

But I think that figuring out who I was and learning my passions, I have been able to really do the things that I love and do them well.

I've learned that if you love your job, even if it doesn't pay you the big million, six-figure budget that everyone wants, I think you get rewards that aren't monetary that outweigh that of money. And I think that's important that you do the thing that you love and you do it well.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. Thank you, all.

I think for the sake of time, can we go on to the next slide, Nicholas.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: Yeah, sure. Hold on one second.

>> CALVIN COOK: I want to make sure people have time for questions.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: I'm going to invite all the panelists to turn off their cameras as we switch back to the slides.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes. So thank you to our panelists for those great responses.

Becoming an Arizona Youth Leader starts with graduating from Arizona Youth Leadership Forum.

Next slide, please

Arizona Youth Leadership Forum, or AzYLF, an innovative, five-day summer conference for youth who have disabilities, as they prepare for and experience transition to adulthood. Prior to the pandemic, AzYLF conferences were held in several regions of Arizona with a goal of building capacity in youth who have disabilities throughout Arizona.

In 2020, though, four five-day summer conferences were held virtually.

Next slide, please

Arizona youth who have completed at least one year of high school, up through age 29, who have a desire to interact effectively with peer -- excuse me, with peer and elder role models and who have a desire to increase Personal Leadership, self-reliance, and self-advocacy skills may apply for AzYLF.



Up to 25 individuals for each conference are selected as delegates to participate in a dynamic experience that focuses on self-discovery, leadership development, career exploration, effective advocacy, and personal empowerment through heightened awareness of disability history and culture.

Next slide, please. Recruitment for AzYLF 2021 will soon begin! Far more information, visit the Diversity Ability, Incorporated website at diverseabilityincorporated.org.

Next slide, please.

And with that, if there are any questions or comments, that would be great.

Thank you.

>> NICHOLAS BLUM: I invite all the panelists to turn their cameras back on.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: Hi. I'm going to keep my camera off just because we've got a full screen here. So we do have a few questions coming in. From Shannon Rivas: To any panelist: Has any one of you had issues with classwork during the elementary school years?

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: I guess that's a hard question to answer. In what respects to classwork would an issue be?

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: It's not specified. So maybe in general or maybe there's an experience that you had during your elementary school years that you maybe want to expand upon.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Okay. Calvin, is it okay if I take this?

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, please.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Okay. So I think elementary -- I think K-12 is really, really difficult. Being someone with a visual impairment, you have -- you have a lot of challenges to overcome in that you have to learn Braille, you have to learn technology. You have to learn about accommodations and all these things.

Especially as a young, young kid, you don't want to be the one kid that looks different from everyone else. It just is innately going to happen. So I think for me, especially, all throughout elementary, I resisted to learn things that were going to benefit me in the long run because I didn't want to look different. And I think it's important that if you have a child who has a disability, you talk with them. You get to really -- get to know the challenges and their struggles and just remember about being a kid and remember how you wanted to be the cool kids wearing Converse and having a flip phone when you were in second grade. I don't know. But I think just having these conversations with your kid or with your students is important.

And I think the other important thing is to get your students and child involved in their IEPs and their 504s so that they understand what it is because that -- and let them in on these things because if



something isn't working in the class, sometimes they're not going to tell you and then it's their IEP and they're not going to mention it and that cycle is going to keep going and going.

By talking to them individually, you are getting that by -- if you are a teacher talking to them and getting that information. Especially for the parents and teachers, let the student talk. It is an IEP for them. Therefore, they should be the one making decisions about their education. And I cannot stress that enough.

And I think -- I'm not saying not to say to all of them to get an accommodation where they can. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying things that are reasonable. If they need more time, have them explain to you guys, the adults, why you need more time. It really makes more of an impact if the student has time and giving the attention for them to explain and express their needs. I think it's important to start that the K-12 -- sorry, in elementary because that cascading effect can happen in middle school and in high school. If they don't learn young, they're not -- they're going to be behind throughout the entirety of their educational career.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: Great answer, Isaac. Thank you so much. In the interest of time, we've got less than five minutes left, I'm just going to ask one more question. And maybe, Calvin, that can be directed to you.

From Pat Carney: I'm wondering if there's a network of leadership programs across states? Do you work within schools or more community-based? How do you do outreach?

>> CALVIN COOK: I would say that one program of leadership across the nation -- I'm not sure if you mean across the state of Arizona or the nation. But I would say that -- I would say that Self-advocates Becoming Empowered, that's one network that's across the nation, I believe. I am the president of a self-advocacy group. We are the Youth Action Council of Arizona. But I would say that you should definitely look at -- you should definitely look at SAVE. I believe they have a website.

And then I'm trying to look at... I'm trying to look at the question again, sorry.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: How do you do outreach with other organizations?

>> CALVIN COOK: Okay.

As I mentioned, I'm the president of a self-advocacy group that is part of the Youth Action Council, the Youth Action Council of Arizona. And we are sponsored by Southwest institute for Families and Children which is a nonprofit. So that's one organization that we're connected to.

I'm also a member at-large of People First of Arizona, which is another self-advocacy group. And then I am employed with Diversity Ability. So that's another organization that works with individuals with disability -- I mean, works with individuals with disabilities. And I just do my best to



stay connected with all of these groups and individuals that our allies of individuals with disabilities so I can stay in tune and I can just continue to be a support for this community.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: Okay. I know there's a couple more questions. But we are out of time. So as I put back on my camera just to say thank you to everybody for coming this evening. Calvin, Mateo, Isaac, Amira, Nikki, really appreciate your discussion this evening and telling us -- letting us adults know what you all are dealing with during this time of COVID.

So it will help us when we're working with our own agencies and our own families. So thank you very much.

And there will be copies of the chat and the video, most likely after the conference is over next week. It will be on the ACDL website and an email will go out to all of those who attended the conference so you can have copies of not just tonight's session but all sessions. I want to thank our ASL interpreter Audrey and Lynette. You guys are awesome. Thank you so much. I know we're missing our own one. Christina. Sorry about that. Thank you as well.

And great job. We've got a session coming Thursday night -- this is our last night session. So Thursday at 10:00 a.m. is our next session. If you have not signed up for it. Please do so. It's "Reasonable Accommodations, Modifications on Assistant Animals in COVID-19 During Fair Housing." It looks like it's -- it's getting to be a pretty full session. So if you are interested in accommodations and service animals, this might be a good session for you. I have put that registration link in the chat. I also had put a link to take the survey. I know some of you have said you have taken them in other sessions. It's supposed to be different. I'm not sure what's going on. But if you haven't, that's much appreciated.

Again, thank you for coming. We'll see you again soon.

>> ISAAC ZWINGER-NATHANSON: Thanks, everyone.

>> NATALIE LUNA ROSE: Thank you.

>> CALVIN COOK: Yes, thank you.

