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**1:15 P.M. ET**

OPERATOR: The conference has now started. This conference is now being recorded.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Hello, and welcome. This is Jennifer Mizrahi from RespectAbility. And I'm absolutely delighted that you've decided to join us for this really interesting webinar today on some proven best practices that I think will get you very excited about the wonderful work that's being done by Gateways: Access to Jewish Education in Boston, work we believe should be replicated in other places. RespectAbility is a nonprofit organization. We are not partisan and we don't have any sort of affiliation with Gateways in terms of any profit-making motives. We're just in the business of finding great ideas and sharing great ideas with terrific people like those of you who have joined us for this webinar today. We have the pleasure of working with Gateways and with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington on some really nice innovative ideas that are being done in the field. So we're delighted that today we're bringing you the program called Mitzvah Mensches.

Now, we recognize that many of the people who are listening to the webinar today are not Jewish so you may not know what the term Mitzvah Mensches means. Well it's a Hebrew word Hebrew for Mitzvah means good deed or commandment and Mensches are people who are good people who are nice people so this is a really nice way to call the program, Mitzvah Mensches. But essentially it's a program of good deeds that is by and for people with and without disabilities who are treated totally equally through this program. So it's a terrific pre-employment program for people with disabilities. It's a fabulous opportunity for people without disabilities to have the pleasure and experience of working with talented people with disabilities.

We've got two experts who are going to walk us through their ground-breaking work. The first is Arlene Remz, who is the Executive Director of Gateways: Access to Jewish Education, the central organization for Jewish special education in Greater Boston.

She began her career in special-ed as a counselor at the Tikvah program at Camp

Ramah in New England but for many years in her professional life in special-ed was separate from her volunteer work in the Jewish community but through Gateways she's brought together these two passions working to ensure that every Jewish child can access a Jewish education so bringing together both the disability work and the faith-based work in the same way.

Nancy Mager is the director of Jewish Education Programs for Gateways and has worked in the field of special education as a teacher and consultant and administrator for over 20 years. Nancy has extensive training and experience in Autism Spectrum Disorders, applied behavioral analysis, and Social Thinking. She holds a master's in education from Simmons College through the New England Center for Children's Partnership Program and a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Boston University. And day to day she is managing this innovative ground-breaking program that, again, we believe is something that should be replicated across the country and broadly both inside and outside of the faith-based communities.

So I turn it over to the two of you to take us on this journey, thank you very much for being our speakers today.

ARLENE REMZ: Thank you, Jennifer this is Arlene, as Jennifer mentioned, Gateways is the central organization for Jewish special education in Boston. And what we do is we provide educational programs and support services for students with disabilities. As well as professional development for educators. And we provide that in multiple settings, in Jewish day schools, in Hebrew and religious schools and in preschools throughout the Greater Boston area.

Amongst our programs are those that focus specifically on disability awareness, on training and inclusion, on peer and leadership development for teens. Really helping all teens, both those with and without disabilities, to become better citizens in an inclusive world.

Today what -- in a moment I'm going to turn it over to Nancy who is going to share with you one of our programs, which we call Mitzvah Mensches. Mitzvah Mensches is an inclusive teen youth group program where the overt curriculum as Nancy will explain is teen philanthropy. However, the underlying curriculum is the development of social skills. Really the overall goal is creating a successful social environment, a meaningful and successful social environment for teens both with and without disabilities. At this point let me turn it over to Nancy.

NANCY MAGER: Hi, everyone, thank you, Arlene, and thank you, Jennifer. It's a

pleasure to be here.

Mitzvah Mensches is, as you heard an inclusive philanthropic youth group and we have teens that join us from the age of 13 all the way through high school. And they come to us through a variety of channels and for a variety of reasons. Some of the teens come to us because they need community service hours. And because we're a philanthropic group, that qualifies. Others are coming because they want to engage with people with various abilities or disabilities and find us through that channel. And other people come because they have a disability and it's a place that welcomes them as well as provides support and accommodations so that they can be fully included in all of the activities.

But one of my favorite things that someone said upon joining the group is they wanted to join it because they thought it was important that groups like this exist. And after being there for a while, the young teenager has really come to love the group for many more reasons than that. But I thought that was a particularly interesting reason for wanting to join. That he felt that it was an important thing to support and to say, there should be more things like this that exist and available to teens. So we have a philosophy that we use to plan our activities, to plan our year, and to support all participants.

So first we have to give the teens both with and without disabilities who may not always have much in common, at least in the beginning, we have to give them a reason to be together. And so we do that, as you'll see coming up, with finding things that they care about as a group. And in giving them shared unique experiences so that they have something meaningful to talk about. And while we're doing that, as Arlene mentioned, we're giving them the tools to give back. We're teaching them about these social skills they will need in order to participate in philanthropy. And all teens are really empowered to make a difference.

What's interesting is for some of our teenagers who have a disability, they have been in school. And they are always on the receiving end of getting help. They are very infrequently given the opportunity to help someone else. And for most people, giving help and asking for help is not -- getting help or asking for help it's a-- it's not easy it's easier to give help instead of being on the receiving end so it's really empowering for many of our teens to be able to truly give back in a way that matters. So as I said, we embed social skills within social action projects. And what that does is it gives everyone the ability to participate. Not always in the same way. But everyone can participate.

And it builds this community of like-minded teens, of teens that are now caring about similar things that are having joint experiences that are really interesting and unique. And we do so by structuring the activities using both visual supports, physical accommodations, technology, things like that, and often break up into small group work. And then come together with the larger group to share our accomplishments. But the projects are all very meaningful to the teens. And done in a really teen-friendly way. So we tend to do things sometimes that are little silly, a little out of the ordinary. But by doing so, it really allows the teens to be willing to take risks and to trust one another to support each other and to think outside of the box.

So the first thing we do is try to build a community and give teens something to talk about. So as we're finding out what they care about, we are planning teen friendly typical youth group activities that create these shared experiences. So in the upper left corner you see a kid blowing a bubble. And that was part of a game that they had a big bubble blowing contest. Again, not something so out of the ordinary. But when you have two kids who don't have a lot in common and don't have much to talk about initially and then you put them together doing something silly or ridiculous or on the right-hand side where you see them holding a 12-foot-long snake, suddenly they have something to talk about.

In the lower portion of the screen there are some candles burning in some doughnuts. So at Hanukkah time in December it's traditional to light what we call a menorah. And it's also traditional to eat doughnuts. When we have snacks with the teens, we always try to be a little creative. And they have to figure out how the snack corresponds with our activities. So here we made that menorah out of doughnuts. And then the final picture on the lower left, the teens had 18 minutes to build the tallest sculpture they could out of spaghetti sticks, a yard of tape and a balance a marshmallow on it. It requires collaboration. And we specifically pair teens together with various abilities so there are different strengths in the group and different areas of challenge in the group. So they really have to support one another.

And not only does it give them unique shared experiences and things to talk about, which is really helpful for the sort of awkward moments when something isn't so structured. But they start to trust one another. And start to understand what each other's abilities are and what they might need help with, which really comes in handy as we start to do more meaningful projects throughout the year.

So the next thing is that we're structuring everything for success. So we try to level the playing field by having multiple accommodations. There's always a schedule that's posted up on the board so everyone knows what's happening and when it's happening.

We have them placed around the room, as well. So that's very helpful for kids -- or teenagers or anyone that likes to know what's happening in advance.

And here you can see the schedule does leave a little bit of mystery to it. Where it doesn't exactly say what's going on. But allows the kids, again, to have a conversation about what does that mean. And we are just sort of setting the stage to foster social interaction. As well as give support for predictability for kids who really need it sometimes.

Here is another example of a visual support where the teens were decorating cookies to demonstrate an interest that they had. So we use about 14 different initial organizational themes to help guide us in picking a philanthropy or cause we care about. In this particular lesson the teens had narrowed down their interest to the environment, Israel or children. So this was a voting activity. Rather than just raising your hand to cast a vote or writing it down on a slip of paper, for snack that night we were decorating cookies but before they could eat the cookies had to cast their vote they had to decorate it to represent one of those three themes. But again rather than just telling people what to do, we create a visual support so that everyone will understand what the step-by-step instructions were.

The next thing that's important is finding out what matters to the teens. On the next two slides you'll see two versions of the exact same questions. This first slide asks the teens what kind of giver are you? Like what way do you want to give back to the community? And it's written mostly with words for someone who can read and answer questions.

On the next slide you'll see it's the exact same questions and I'll toggle between the two in a minute so you can compare and contrast. But it's the exact same questions, however, the answers have picture symbols to support readers who are just emerging as readers or might need a picture cue to help them understand the context of language. And I'll toggle back now for a minute. So this is an example of ways of supporting multiple learners. This also would have other variations for students that maybe need to access this through technology, to sort of hear a question out loud and have it repeated again. I don't have that example for you today. But you can use your imagination that this could be put onto, you know, an iPad or a computer, and could be read aloud and someone could replay the question as many times as they needed.

This is an example of how we start our year and come back to this actually multiple times throughout the year. So this is a graphic organizer that helps guide both the teens in the philanthropy group and us in figuring out what we want to support, what

kind of organizations they want to support. And what we are going to do to support them.

So let me see if I can get my pointer up here. Here we go. My red dot. It's my first time doing a webinar. So bear with me. You'll see here at the top, these top three boxes where the red dot is, it says theme. And this is where we narrow down from about 14 different themes to the top 3. Themes are things that are problems in the world that exist.

ARLENE REMZ: Just to interject the 14 came from the kids themselves, the group They generated them through a series of activities.

NANCY MAGER: Absolutely. So before the year starts -- or as the year really begins, we're doing a lot of games and activities where kids are telling us what they are interested in. And from that we're pulling out some themes that might relate to problems. So it could be technology. It could be health. It could be children. Animals. Those would all be typical themes. And then we would get down to our top 3 themes. And that's when this chart would come into the classroom and remain there for the year.

Once we have identified a couple of themes that the teams have -- teens have told us they are interested in, we move down to the organizational level. And here the educators typically are finding organizations that are in line with the theme. Once in a while teens do come to us and say, I have a nonprofit that I've supported the past few years or that I'm really interested in. Can we learn about and support that philanthropy or that nonprofit? So sometimes that happens. And it aligns. Other times it's educators that behind the scenes are finding organizations that are in line with the themes that the teens are interested in. And as educators what we're looking for in organizations are places that need help in some way. Ways that we can give back. And at Mitzvah Mensches we teach the teens that for our purposes there are three ways of giving back to any organization. One would be giving your time. So volunteering and donating time. A second would be donating money. And the third would be a product that you either make or create or collect to donate. So we're ideally looking for organizations where we can give back in all three ways. That doesn't always happen.

There are times where an organization is so compelling and so meaningful to the teens. But the only thing really the organization needs is money. Or the only thing they want is volunteer time. So sometimes that's okay. But ideally we're finding multiple venues. And that's because sometimes when it comes time to give back, the

activity of giving back isn't 100% ideal for every participant. So we want to say, like, if you don't love volunteering your time at a fundraiser or at a soup kitchen or wherever it is we're going to volunteer, that's okay. You can still help this organization. So it's really nice when there are multiple ways. And then below that you see these five boxes that say activities. And this is where the teens brainstorm with us activities of giving back. So what would be some activities that they could do for donating their time to an organization? Their money, how could they get money? What kind of fundraisers could they do to make money? Or collect money? And what kinds of products an organization might need from us. And again, how could we collect them or create those products?

And we use this, again, throughout the year and refer back to it with the teens over and over again. Our theme may be hunger. The organization is no child should be hungry. And then here are ways that we can give back. We're going to have a bake sale and show up at the 5K and sell the baked goods. We're going to raise some money doing that. And then we're also going to donate food that we have collected. So those might be multiple ways of giving back to one particular organization.

So here is an example of the themes this year that the teens selected from. They told us they were really interested in children. So that was the theme, the top box in the organizational chart. So after multiple activities, children kept popping up. And then beyond that, there were some subcategories that really were a dead even tie. So health care, education, I see a little while, and bullying. So as educators met we said well let's combine those themes and we'll look for organizations and narrow the theme down further. So that those four things would still be tied to children in some way.

The teens then voted on these initiatives to narrow it down yet further to find actual causes and organizations that they wanted to support and give back to. So here you can see two images that took place in the classroom. The one at the top was a compare and contrast of Magen David Adom which is the Israeli Red Cross and the American Red Cross. So the students looked at how they were different. There was some -- I can't remember now, there was some game show type game that earned them pieces for each of the sides of the compare and contrast. And here in the classroom you can see this is the organizational chart that had been completed previously. Over here you'll see the schedule of the day is listed for the teens, as well, so they can see what's happening during the course of the evening.

So this is in the beginning of the unit where the teens were just starting to learn about what the difference was between the two organizations. And then down in the lower right there's a representative from the Israeli Red Cross that had come to our

group and he spoke to the teens about what they did and how the teens could be supportive to the organization. Once they have decided what they are going to support, they have to figure out how they are going to give back to that organization.

So here we have two boys in the top left that are creating a budget for their project. So they are using their phone to look up the cost of things. And in the lower right hand corner we have students doing the same thing, also creating a budget, but using very different tools. On the chalkboard or the whiteboard here, we have different types of products they needed to create for their budget. And then the cost of them -- the cost of each item is listed below it. So the teens knew they had about \$200 to spend. And had to figure out how they would spend that money. And so for some of our students and teens, they needed the visual supports and more of a narrow choice. And other teens were very comfortable hopping on their phones and figuring out exactly what they wanted. So there's multiple ways of accessing the same end result for the teens.

The other thing that often the teens do is write grants to fund their work. So we have a generous donor that has provided some seed money for the teens. So she set aside some money that's intended for our teens to use so that they can do philanthropic work. And so they are requesting money from this fund in order to pay for things for their fundraisers. So you'll see in a few minutes that we had a zumbathon. And made some greeting cards and fleece blankets to sell to raise money for the Israeli Red Cross. And those things of course cost money. It costs money to buy the materials to then sell. So they wrote a grant to request money to pay for the materials and to pay for the zumbathon.

In addition to that, they then raised money. But this allowed them to have some seed money to start and allowed all of their fundraising efforts to be given back to the organization of choice, rather than to come out of their profits, if you will.

So here is an image of them donating their time. And this was a literacy unit that we did a couple of years ago. And the organization is called More Than Words and it is a youth bookstore that's in Boston. And what's particularly interesting about this bookstore is not only can you get some great books for a really great price, but the bookstore not only employees at-risk youth but has a whole training program to sort of rehabilitate them before they make bad choices.

So there's a cafe in the bookstore, which is -- this is downstairs in the bookstore but there's a cafe where the at-risk youth are employed. And a bookstore there, as well. And then in the basement is where the at-risk youth are also sorting books, scanning them into the computers, and then filling orders for a lot of Amazon book requests.

When you buy a used book on Amazon, it might come from More Than Words. So our teens went, they met with the at-risk youth that gave them a tour of the facility. And then helped them that night with sorting and scanning books and shelving them and things like that. So it was an evening of time where they learned how the bookstore worked. But also learned a little bit about the program for supporting at-risk youth.

And here is where it shows an example of teens giving back with materials or a product. So in the top left hand corner, we did a unit for Birthday Wishes which is also a local organization that throws birthday parties for children in homeless shelters. So through that unit, the teens did multiple things to support Birthday Wishes they donated their time by throwing a birthday party they donated money after doing a fundraising they wrote a check to Birthday Wishes and then they also donated two birthday parties worth of materials. So birthday presents and goody bags and cake mix and frosting and candles and paper goods, everything you would need to throw a birthday party. And Birthday Wishes have some shelters where they have people come in to throw the party and other shelters where visitors are not allowed so they need just the birthday supplies to throw the party themselves. So you can see the teens preparing for that.

And then below the teens are assembling dry soup mix to send to the Ukraine for an elder hostel. So again, they needed seed money to pay for the soup mix, which was great. But then just donated the product and it got sent over to the Ukraine

ARLENE REMZ: I want to just interject something about Birthday Wishes because Nancy mentioned that occasionally our group would go and actually host a birthday party. What's important to recognize is that the -- our group was an inclusive group of kids with and without disabilities going to basically run activities and do a magic show for kids in a shelter, for homeless kids in a shelter. The young man who led the magic show is someone with a disability. It is not that often that you have kids -- teens with disabilities that are in a position to be able to go and actually do the hands-on volunteering with the different -- with a different population.

NANCY MAGER: What was also particularly interesting in that unit is we had to do a lot of training around social skills and social thinking so that our teens would be successful in running a birthday party. Unfortunately the whole group couldn't go and run the birthday party. The shelter just doesn't have that much space. So we could only bring about five teenagers with us. But we made sure that we had a mix of teens with various skills. But throughout the unit, everyone had to learn to create visual support so that the children at the shelter would know how to play the games at the party. The teens created a schedule of visual supports so that the kids at the birthday party would know what was coming up and happening. Which tends to support all kids.

And it's better for all kids just having that predictability. And then some of the social skills around what happens if you lose at a game, how would they help a child who might be disappointed if they lost pin the tail on the donkey or didn't get the color balloon they wanted. Things that often people take for granted but kids feel really big and sometimes have really big reactions to. We needed our teens to be able to manage that. Both to manage it themselves, if there was an upset or disappointment or something unexpected happened. And to help the kids in the shelter. And so for that unit, it went on for almost an entire year. So not only were they learning about why poverty exists and how people become homeless and why it's important for kids in a shelter to still have a birthday party. But they were learning about the organization Birthday Wishes and what they do to give back. And then there was a huge piece on both the life skills and the social thinking skills around birthdays and presents, wrapping a present so it looks nice. You know, how to gracefully accept a present maybe that you don't like was something really important for our kids to understand. And so we spent time on all of these things. We taught them to bake cakes and decorate cakes.

So there were a lot of different pieces that went into it. And of course that gave the teens a lot of things to talk about. There was one night where we spent playing birthday party games that are intended for four-year-olds like pin the tail on the donkey and musical chairs. So the teens were old enough and far enough from playing those games that it was fun to revisit them again and just very silly and gave them something to talk about with one another. And this particular unit really bonded the group together in a very unique way. And years later we have repeated the unit a few times. And teens who have participated bring it up again and again as something really meaningful that they did in high school.

Here is another example of something that the teens did that was really interesting. A few years ago we wrote a grant to get money to purchase adaptive bikes. And then these adaptive bikes came to us unassembled. And the teens had to assemble the bikes. And then they got loaded onto a U-Haul driven across the state and were donated to an organization that essentially gives bikes to kids with disabilities so that they can ride bikes so they are sort of adaptive bikes if you will so our teens had to figure out how to build them so we had to create accommodations for instructions for anyone who has ever put together a bike or furniture from IKEA you may know it's not always so easy to follow those instructions manuals. So we used some technology. There were some videos online that helped us. We created some visuals ourselves. And we did bring in some adult help for this. But it was also another unique opportunity for teens to build something and work together.

ARLENE REMZ: This is Arlene. As Nancy mentioned before, occasionally the kids actually have fundraisers. They figure out what they can make to sell. Or athon as she mentioned, the zumbathon.

NANCY MAGER: So here the teens were planning a fundraiser to raise money and this was last year in the picture here where my red dot is, the kids were making cards to turn into greeting cards to sell. So it's not always easy to get anyone who is not naturally artistic to make something nice enough to sell. So in order to make this sort of an accommodation for anyone who is not artistic, regardless of abilities, we got some sort of funky rollers and paints. And had the teens fill the page with paint and then we photographed the pictures very close up. And then those images got printed on greeting cards. So it didn't really matter if you were artistic or not. It was more sort of text architectural and just sort of funky and cool. And then they bundled the cards at a later date. And the picture on the right you can see they are creating fleece blankets so we went to the craft store and bought these kits. Excuse me. And they tied the blankets and later we had a fundraiser.

ARLENE REMZ: One thing I want to add it may not be totally apparent from the pictures, but this is a very, very inclusive group. And it has a range of teens. Some have very visible disabilities. Some do not have visible disabilities. Some have identified disabilities, some do not have identified disabilities. What the teachers make sure to do is make sure whatever activity it is they are doing is accessible so that there is a way for every single student to feel successful. So if we're making greeting cards we want to make sure that there are several kids in the group who have physical disabilities and are not able to draw in a more traditional manner. We want to make sure we have adapted to the activity so they are able to fully participate in both art activities, when it's a zumbathon, we want to make sure it's a fully accessible zumbathon, when it's a bubble soccer-a-thon we figured out how to make it accessible for students in wheelchairs, et cetera.

NANCY MAGER: What you can't see in the pictures is the physical adaptations for each of these activities that Arlene is referring to. So for painting we built up some of the paint brushes for students who have difficulty with fine motor and grasping and releasing things. So there were sort of straps that teens could slip their hands into if they had a hard time holding the rollers and brushes and they worked in pairs to do things and for the fleece blankets we have adaptive scissors for cutting, we made marks on the blankets so they knew where to cut or teens could choose to not do cutting at all if that's something they didn't like to do and could participate on working on the blankets in another way.

All right. Moving ahead. So here is a picture from our zumbathon. This was a tough sell for some of the boys that didn't think it seemed cool at first. Even wondered if they should show up that night. But we made it cool and fun. And had all 30 teens, again both with and without disabilities doing zumba and in this picture doing I believe some Moroccan belly dancing. And again, it was something unique and silly and ridiculous enough that everyone had something to talk about. It was a real bonding experience for a lot of them. A place where some of the teens could really show off their dancing skills after years of dance lessons. So felt really comfortable doing it. But it gave them something to talk about. And prior to the night that the teens had to fundraise for it and get sponsored to come and dance and we tell the teens that they can ask neighbors, they can ask family members, they can just donate the money themselves. That we want everyone to donate something. But we don't care what the amount is. So there's no pressure. It's not a competition. But just the idea that everyone is contributing some amount and I believe in this event we did have 100% participation which is really exciting for us and the teens thought it was a really great night.

And then finally, after we had sold our fleece blankets and greeting cards and had our zumbathon, we invited the representative from the Israeli Red Cross back to our program where we created a large check for over \$1100. And so the teens were really proud of raising that amount of money. And the representative was really sort of blown away by the group's effort.

Finally, at the end of the year, we always celebrate our successes. So these were images from last year's end-of-year celebration. You can just barely see part of this big video game box on the outside here, what it is, it's like a cool tricked out bus. On the outside it has three or four large flat screen TVs attached to video gaming systems. I believe they are Wyoming, that the Wii platform which requires movement so groups of teens can play different games. The group of girls here were doing a dancing game and the boys here I think were doing maybe Wii tennis or Wii baseball or something like that. And then inside the box you can see there's all sorts of fun lights and visual effects going on and again three or four large flat screen TVs with Xbox and PlayStations so the teens could play video games inside.

And then beyond the bus we had some other activities going on, so if someone really wasn't into the video game system, we had other activities and snacks going on. This was a huge hit for the teens. Again, something really novel, even though they play video games at home, most of them have never seen a bus where 25 or 30 people could all play video games at the same time in the same space. It was just a really fun night, again, something to give them something to talk about. An opportunity to reflect

on the year and their accomplishments. And just a lot of fun.

In summation, we're all about building skills and forging relationships. Sometimes teens with and without disabilities lack skills that don't let them fully participate. And again, that doesn't always matter if you have a disability or not. It's -- lacking a skill makes it difficult sometimes to participate. So we try to make sure to give the teens the skills they need so that they can participate or adapt the activity if there seems to be an obstacle in the way of learning a skill, we adapt it so that everyone can participate in some way. And we try to support them building relationships. We've had teens that have come to us that have been incredibly shy and resistant to joining the group physically, even though they are in the room and we try to meet them where they are at. Both by finding things that they are going to be really motivated and interested in participating in, and just in sharing again some of these silly activities.

We make sure that the accommodations are there. And the curriculum is really driven and guided by the teens' interests. So we're not just saying that we're going to help kids in a homeless shelter because the adults think that's a good idea. We've got -- we got that idea because the teens have told us they are interested in children. And helping them.

And here is our final slide. You can see they are wearing their Mitzvah Mensches superhero T-shirts. They designed these last year in a T-shirt design contest and it was a culmination of several ideas. But they have a great time together. And I think learned a lot. This year they are working on their second unit right now. The first unit was for the Jewish National Fund and Israeli has something called the Indoor Recreation Center an indoor playground that's protected from missile strikes. So they fundraised for them. And they raised about \$1,000 for that organization. And now we're in the middle of our second unit for Hope and Comfort which is a local organization that provides toiletries to people in poverty that might not have access. So they are planning fundraisers and going to volunteer at that organization in the next two weeks.

ARLENE REMZ: That organization has a warehouse where they put together kits to be distributed to as Nancy said people in poverty. So as we're planning to go there, we're also thinking about how can we make sure that the activity of putting together these kits of you know several toothbrushes and toothpaste and shampoo and soaps is something that every student -- every teen in our program can do. We have some kids with cerebral palsy who have limited mobility. We have kids that have some difficulty following directions. So we'll make sure that the directions are prepared in multiple ways. We'll have some visual directions. We'll make sure that it's -- the activity is set

up so that the students with mobility issues will be able to either pair with somebody else to make a kit, we'll find which part of the kit assembly they are able to do. And even the awareness by other kids of like, gee, if we're going some place like that, we have to make sure that the place is handicap accessible and has ramps, that's something that all of the kids are now aware of is an important ingredient.

NANCY MAGER: So we are done with this part of the presentation and happy to open it up to any questions people may have at this time

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Arlene and Nancy, I really can't thank you enough on behalf of RespectAbility. We're just delighted to see what Gateways is doing in this remarkable program that we believe should be replicated. You can see their contact information right here on the screen. Also you can see my contact information on the screen. But operator, if you can go ahead and let people know how they can ask a question. My understanding is they can do it either online or by telephone. Michelle, how do they go about doing that?

OPERATOR: If they are on the web they can send in a question via the chat window and if they have called in they can press 7 followed by the hash key on their phone to queue up for verbal questions.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: So now we turn it over to questions. While people are typing in their questions or getting in queue, maybe you can tell us, Nancy, a little bit about some of the types of disabilities that some of these teens have and how they let you know through the intake process what kinds of accommodations and supports would enable them to be successful in your program.

NANCY MAGER: Absolutely. So we have both what I would call visible disabilities and hidden disabilities. So some of the visible disabilities might be things like cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. And sometimes autism. And hidden disabilities may be autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders or attention deficit disorders or OCD, things like that that teens may or may not want to share with us.

ARLENE REMZ: Anxiety.

NANCY MAGER: Some anxiety. Things of that nature. Sometimes they are very open with us. And other times they are less open. The recruitment process and finding out about that is the same for all teens at this point. So there's an application that any teen who wants to participate in the program fills out. And anyone here can certainly see that application. It's on our Website. If you go to programs, you'll get to the menu

where it says Mitzvah Menschen The name of our program. And it will link you to the application. We really only ask one or two questions about if they have -- need any special accommodations. The majority of students that have a disability, before they apply, we have at least to this point found their parent has reached out to us first either by email or phone and given us some information. And so we will have more of an in-depth conversation at that point. But if they want to, they can certainly put it down in writing. Typically we're finding out more about the nuance issues of teens on the application so if someone has a reading disability and doesn't want to be called onto read aloud or if they have anxiety or certain phobias or fears or they have Tourettes and want us to be aware. If they are having ticks and how to handle that with the rest of the group. So the rest of the questions on the application are pretty mundane. More about why you want to be part of a group like this. Just sort of the 411 so we know who to contact if there's a problem or how to reach them by email. Go ahead. The recruitment happens through a lot of social media, word of mouth, and our Website.

ARLENE REMZ: And many of the students with the more identified disabilities have been students in our other programs through the year when they were younger. They were in our Sunday Jewish educational program. But what's really very different about this is that unlike our Sunday program, where we have students with disabilities who are paired with neurotypical teens who are acting as their teen volunteer, here everybody is a -- it's an -- it's an inclusive youth group some kids have visible disabilities some have invisible disabilities some don't have any disability at all but everybody is a Mensch and everybody wants to be there and participate together in teen philanthropy activities in a really fun and engaging and youth group kind of way.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Fabulous –

NANCY MAGER: There's two questions on the chat.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Yes, before we go there let me put in a plug for a couple of things coming up very exciting. We have a webinar coming up on March 18th that's on federations and how a Jewish community or a community foundation or a United Way can support equality and inclusion beyond and throughout the community agencies and our guest speaker is on March 18th at 1:30 Eastern Time will be Steve Rakitt CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and Lisa Handelsmann an amazing coordinator for the Federation System in Greater Washington and then we have another great program on teens coming up with the DC Community Center Community Service Program that's very similar to this only that it's more intense and it's a camp program where they do this kind of work over the summer in a day camp type of setting and they are doing really just direct service, people with and without disabilities that are together.

For the questions that are on the web, let me just, first of all, say yes we will be providing you with this PowerPoint presentation so that you can have that. And it was asked what is the ratio of neurotypical and teens with special needs? And how do you recruit for the program intake process?

You've covered some of that but maybe you can go in a little more depth.

NANCY MAGER: Sure the ratio this year is about one-third teens with identified disabilities and two-thirds teens without identified disabilities. Of the two-thirds that do not have an identified disability, I know that there are teens that have and need some support. But they, again, are more of those hidden disabilities. Like I know they have some anxiety. We have one student who has Aspergers whose parent has told me that but she doesn't identify that way to any of her peers so things like that may exist but of identified disabilities it's about one-third to two-thirds and as far as -- go ahead.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Do these kids go to an inclusion classroom or are they in segregated classrooms for disability special programs?

NANCY MAGER: It really varies by student to student and the districts that they are in. We have some students that are in private schools that are just for kids with disabilities. We have kids that are in their public schools, both fully included with some level of support or you know go to a resource or Learning Center or there may be some special program within their public high schools. And then we have other kids that are in Jewish day schools that have some support in the Jewish day schools but don't identify as having a disability.

ARLENE REMZ: One interesting byproduct of this program that we have found is that there are some teens that are in public school together. But never interacted. You know, students with identified disability who has been in the same high school as some other kids but to be honest, their social worlds never intersected. And suddenly they became friends through Mitzvah Mensches, they had as Nancy talked about before, they had shared activities, they had shared experiences. Gee, remember last Wednesday night when we played that ridiculous game of whatever. And kids -- and we heard from kids and from parents that these teens were actually interacting at public school, sitting with each other at lunch, which is something that had never happened despite many years of being together in inclusive public school programs their social lives never interacted but in Mitzvah Mensches which we sometimes call creating a social life through social action, they actually became true friends and started interacting outside of the program. We also -- I remember a number of years ago there was a young woman who because of Mitzvah Mensches ended up joining BBYO together with

some of the peers the neurotypical peers who were in Mitzvah Mensches. And she got involved in BBYO only because of that. She never would have gone, this is somebody who had never joined social clubs before. This was her first social interactive experience as a teenager. And it gave her the confidence and the peers to go with to go to BBYO.

NANCY MAGER: BBYO is a youth group that is not specifically for people with disabilities but it's a much larger youth group sort of setting.

ARLENE REMZ: Thank you for that. (Chuckles).

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Taking a look at this program there's a lot of having fun and there's a lot of silliness but ultimately there's a continuum where you're hoping that these teens are going to go into internships in the future, go into employment in the future. How much of a vocational hat do you put on your head when you're doing this program? And what do you find to be helpful when you think about the pre-employment components of this program?

NANCY MAGER: So truthfully I'm not often thinking about the vocational skills required in a workplace like using a computer or filing things. But I am thinking about the social implications in a vocational setting. Because so often I think people with disabilities can get a job doing something vocational with support. But they often lose a job because of social mistakes. I think lagging skills around an actual task is much more tolerated and people -- employers and fellow employees are much more tolerant of that and remediating that. However, social mistakes I think are what really hinder people more often than not and getting along with co-workers or saying things that might offend people. So that we are always consistently thinking about and programing for, planning for, giving the teens the skills to get along with one another. And be appropriate in different settings.

I have one teenager who frequently will bring up inappropriate things, topics that you would not talk about in front of your teachers or your bosses or your parents. But things that would be perfectly acceptable to talk about with your friends when you're in your room alone or at the movies or hanging out. So we have done a lot of work with this teen about let's come up with topics that are appropriate for this setting. And let's discuss the topics that you have to save for outside of this setting. And that you can discuss the inappropriate jokes if you want to with friends from this program but not while you're at this program. So we are always thinking about that.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Right, so operator, are there any more questions? Can you

describe again one more time how people can do it on the phone and how people can just type in their questions, we have just a couple more minutes.

OPERATOR: Absolutely, again if you have called in please press 7 and the hash key on your phone or continue to submit chat questions in the lower left corner in the presentation window.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: If I can just ask our friends from Gateways, if people want to start their own program like this, what would your advice be about how you can start a program like this on your own?

NANCY MAGER: I think there's some simple things you can do. If you have groups of people whether they are teens, children or adults that are coming together to do anything, whether it's a philanthropic youth group or has some other goal or mission I think there are simple things you can do to structure it for success so that everyone can participate. And the first would be to think about how easy it is to daydream and lose track of words. To sort of put the important things that are being said in writing. So that means schedules being made available or agendas of meetings being made available. If possible in advance. So that people can be prepared and know what to expect that will eliminate anxiety and nervousness.

Structure things to limit the amount of downtime and sort of free chat at the beginning of events. That can be really off-putting for people I believe with disabilities and those without that have a hard time just walking into a room and not knowing where to sit and what to do. So I think that free time in the beginning would be better saved for later in the evening and instead structure the start of your program much more so.

And then two, think about for every activity you're doing how you would access this activity if you couldn't see, if you couldn't hear, if you had trouble communicating or had a physical challenge. Most often there's a pretty simple accommodation that can be made. We've had a few times where we haven't done an activity because we didn't feel that we could make appropriate accommodations so that everyone would be successful. And other years we have said we're going to try to do this anyway. And let people know that this might be difficult and that's okay if they want to participate for part of the time or in some way but not all ways. So I think flexibility is really key. And then just an open dialogue. When we have an open dialogue with our teens at the start of the year and we do an activity about just differences and being accepting of differences and acknowledging peoples' abilities and just being able to sort of help out when someone isn't able to do something.

JENNIFER MIZRAHI: Well, I want to thank you again. It was really a delight to have you. I don't see any other questions at this time. But I want to really remind everybody that we have a couple more webinars coming up soon. We have Steve Rakitt and Lisa Handelsmann coming up from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington making an entire community and all its agencies very inclusive of people with disabilities.

We have the DC JCC pre-employment community service teen program coming up with Erica Stein and we're looking forward to that very much on March 22nd. I want to thank Arlene Remz and Nancy Mager and I want to thank Gateways and our operator all for being with us today. And for those of you who tuned in with us I want to remind you that we will be putting the PowerPoint up on our Website so it will be available to you and I want to thank Hillary from our team in-house for helping coordinate this.

Nancy and Arlene, thank you for a terrific job and thank you, again, all of you who joined us. This concludes our webinar

OPERATOR: Recording has now stopped

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