ELISA LEWIS: So hello, everyone, and happy Global Accessibility Awareness Day. We're so glad that you're joining us to celebrate. We're excited to have you here for the presentation Woke Up Blind, Now I'm Here.

My name is Elisa Lewis. I'm from 3Play Media, and I'll be moderating today. I'm a fair-skinned woman in my late 20s. I have long, dark-brown hair. I'm wearing glasses and a navy blue shirt with the words "accessibility matters." And my pronouns are she/her.

I'm joined today by Lachi. Lachi is an award-winning creative artist and prolific EDM singer-songwriter. Her works have debuted on national dance charts and editorial lists, amassing millions of streams and finding placements on TV, radio, and feature film. Thank you so much. And with that, I'll hand it over to Lachi, who has a wonderful presentation prepared.

LACHI: Thank you so very much for that introduction. My name is Lachi, she/her, Black woman, cornrows. I am wearing a pink-and-white shirt that has braille on it. And the braille says "that's what I need" from a brand called Twin, set up by two twins, who apparently wanted to make clothing with braille on it. So here I am wearing it for you for Global Access Day.

I'm really excited to be here and to share my experience with you all. Anyone who knows me knows that I am a huge disability culture and inclusion advocate. And I know that it's Accessibility Day, but I really like to talk about the culture and inclusion side of disability.

And so, as was pointed out, I am a recording artist. And I've been lucky enough to have traveled the world for my art and been celebrated in several ways, especially in dance music, and become Grammy board member-- what-- and found my own organization uplifting other recording artists. But it wasn't always that easy, especially as a woman who was born legally blind intersectioned with race and gender in America.

So I want to tell you all a fun little story that actually goes over what disability culture is. And not enough people talk about disability and the culture that it is. What disability culture is is the contributions, and the music, and the art, and the words, and the thoughts, and ideas of people with disabilities. And of course, it should be celebrated.

But apart from that, apart from literal the word "culture" as it pertains to culture, I'm talking about the commonalities between people with disabilities that you really need to think about inside and outside of the workplace. So when you have these talks, it's always very, oh, this is what you're supposed to do, HR, HR, whatever. No. That's not what I'm here to talk about. I'm here to talk about what you can take outside of the office with you in your personal life, because, apparently, 76% of at least New York City is either disabled, has a close friend or family who has a disability-- neurodiversity, chronic illness, rare disease, or deafness.

So I want to talk about the commonalities that people with disability have. And those commonalities are made up to create disability culture. And that's drive and determination, living in a world and trying to succeed in a world that wasn't built or made for you; creative problem-solving, trying to get around and live in a world that wasn't made for you; and grit above stigma, trying to find pride despite the stigma that society throws at you. I mean, I'm talking about winning when life is on hard.

So I have a really great, kind of ridiculous story for you that is my personal experience. And I swear up and down it is a 100% true story. All of my stories are true. And people keep going, Lachi, are these stories true? Yes. These stories are true. This is what happens when you live in a world that's not built for you, and you're also ambitious.

So I like telling the story about the day I woke up blind. So I've always been low vision. And so I was told, maybe in 2017 or so, that I was going to start having my vision deteriorate. And so I went through a very mini grieving period. But I just started to ignore it again.

And then one day, lo and behold, I woke up one morning, opened my eyes, and didn't realize they were open. I was blind. All I could see was water, really. So it was like water over my eyes.

And being the person that I am, I just kind of sat up and said, OK. All right. What do we do now? They told me I was going to go blind. So let's see how we're going to work with this.

I called my partner. And I said, I believe I just woke up blind. What do I do? And his response was, oh no. Go outside, and get on the train, and go to the hospital. So I realized he wasn't going to be much help.

And as I got up, and started feeling around, and tried to brush my teeth, and figure things out, you know what I thought to myself? You know what? I am going to go outside, go to the train, and go to the hospital, because this is ridiculous, and I'm an adult.

So there you have it, the determination and the drive. My first thought was, sure, I'm going to go to the hospital, even though I'm 100% blind. And at that time, I didn't have a cane, or I don't have a guide dog. I'm just going to go from 99th Street in Harlem to the hospital on 14th Street.

So I get as cute as I think I am, go downstairs, graze along the banister, graze along the balustrade outside, and find myself wobbling. I know my area, my neighborhood. I get to the end of the block. A couple of guys on the corner hoot and holler, the same old guys on the corner. They always ask me for my number. I always ignore them.

Today, I said, sure, to the guy who was closest. And I said, sure, let's walk and talk. Sure. I'll give you a shot today. So I say, can you-- let's cross the street together. Creativity-- there is the creative problem-solving.

So here we are, walking across the street. And we go catty-corner, and we're walking down the street. And I'm learning about this guy's life. Apparently, he's a construction worker. And he was actually only in town for a few days, and whatever, blah, blah, blah.

We get to the corner where the train is. I actually ask him to buy me a kombucha at the corner store, which he does. And then I send him on his merry way. So now I'm at the train. It's also a lesson on the independence of interdependence that folks with disabilities have to work with to make things work. And I don't actually think I ever gave the guy my number. I don't remember. I doubt it.

So I get on the train because I utilize the wave of humanity. I mean, it's New York, so everyone is just bustling. And I just kind of waft into the train. So here I am, sitting on the train with my kombucha on my way to 14th Street.

Here's a funny aside that has nothing to do with the story. So I spin-- I'm trying to open the kombucha. And I start feeling it dribble down my hands, but I'm blind, so I don't know what's going on. I'm like, oh, it's just open it a little. And I open it a little bit more, and a little bit more is dribbling down my hands.

If you've ever had a kombucha, you know what's happening. It's living bacteria juice. And they're all saying, we're ready to explode. So I do one more big turn, and the entire drink explodes, just like a-- and apparently, everyone next to me had moved away. But it exploded. And now I'm not only blind, but I am a green blob.

So I'm this huge mass of green blob and sludge, and I'm sitting on the train. And I remember a beautiful, sweet young woman comes over to me with this very thin, I believe, Dunkin' Donuts napkin and says, here. And I say, thank you. It doesn't really do anything. I think it evaporates as soon as it gets near me.

Train doors open. I blob out. And if you've ever had a kombucha, you know exactly what I mean by a slimy blob. And again, a lesson in intersectionality-- I have a cop-- I ask a police officer where I am and what's going on. Frankly, I believe he approached me. And he helps me out of the train station.

And knowing where I am, I knew I was near a clothing store, one of my favorites, Strawberry's. I go into Strawberry's, and the cop drops me off at Strawberry's. And so I start wandering around the store. And I start being followed, not because I'm Black, but because I'm green. And this woman goes, just pick out anything. Just pick out anything.

So I pick out a shirt. And I say, are you a cashier or something? And she goes, yes. And I say, here's $10 for this shirt. No clue who she is. And I change in the store. And I leave.

And I end up getting out. And someone, a nice citizen, helps hail a cab for me. And I take a cab the other two avenues to the hospital. So I make it to the hospital.

But here's the best part about it. That shirt that I randomly picked out-- I don't know if you can see this. But this was the shirt. I couldn't see. I was blind. The shirt says-- what does it say? "Even on my worst day, I'm still killing it" was literally the shirt I picked out.

So the reason I tell you this story, the reason I like to share this story is because all of the aspects of disability culture are showcased in my journey. There's that determination and that drive because society-- I live in a society that's built to make sure I don't succeed.

And so I have to create my own success, which brings me to the next point of creativity and problem-solving. So I have to be creative, link arms with this guy that I just met that I always say no to. Let's try him out, and let's get him to the train.

It also brings me to that grit despite stigma. So because I'm so used to being stared at, none of that really fazed me, because I'm already a Black, blind woman trying to make it in America. What's adding green, right?

And lastly, interdependence-- the independence of interdependence. It's OK to ask for help. It's OK. It's a source of strength to ask for help.

So that story I love sharing with folks, because, at the end of the day, 26% of Americans have a disability, some form of disability, and go through their form or their trial of waking up blind, and still making it, and still running at the same pace as those who are nondisabled. And this is why we're here to show exposure to this concept of disability culture.

So I want to share a few slides with you guys really quickly just to go over just a few concepts. I'm going to share my screen. And every once in a while, you'll see me get really close to the screen because I am legally blind. Let's see if that shares. Am I sharing?

ELISA LEWIS: You are sharing your screen.

LACHI: I'm sharing my screen. And it says Disability Culture and Inclusion?

ELISA LEWIS: It does, yes.

LACHI: Yes, perfect. Awesome. So we're going to talk today about disability culture and inclusion, which I've gone over a little bit. But the thing that I really want to impress upon everyone here is that it's not about compliance. It's about intentionally allowing everyone in your life to be a part of your life. Disability is a natural form of diversity. We're all born with different minds and bodies, and that's what I want you to walk away with.

Like I said, 26% of Americans have some form of disability. That's one in four. So basically, look to your left and to your right, and to your front and behind you. 1.25 of those people will have some form of disability, neurodiversity, chronic illness, rare disease.

And 70% of people with disabilities have a nonvisible disability. So they have anxiety. They have dyslexia. They have chronic pains that you cannot tell. Some people are legally blind, but they appear sighted, like I do in often cases. So it is always really good to be intentional about the fact that we're all intersectioned with something. And so that's what I want you to walk away with.

30 million Americans are hard of hearing or deaf. And another 30 million are blind or visually impaired. And actually, sometimes those overlap. So it is really important to make sure that, as you traverse through life, you're saying, and knowing, and using the appropriate words that allow for folks in those two realms and beyond to feel not singled out and not excluded.

36 million female Americans have a disability. And I like to say this number, but the truth of the matter is that most of the women with disabilities are Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans. So they're already intersectioned with the classism that they have to overcome. They are cross-stereotyped.

And a lot of them feel the need to hide their disability so that they can try to get ahead, seeing their other marginalizations as a hindrance as well, seeing the fact that they already have trouble getting health care as a hindrance as well, seeing the fact that they already have trouble avoiding the gaslight, trouble being heard for the accommodations that they need.

So I really like to emphasize the woman number because it is very high, but it often is intersectioned with race. And when that happens, it is good to be extra mindful of the gaslight.

7 million children with disabilities, a lot of whom are in lower-class families. So I love to share these stats because I don't want anyone to walk away going, well, I didn't know how many. Really? That many? Yes, really that many.

So we're going to talk about a little bit more on culture, what true inclusion is. And then we're going to celebrate accessibility for a little bit since, well, it is Global Accessibility Awareness Day. And that's a mouthful. I don't know who came up with that, but I do like GAAD, so we're going to celebrate GAAD.

Disability culture has many definitions. But myself and my friends at RAMPD, we just like to talk about it as the contributions that folks with natural forms of diversity contribute to society and that these deserve to be celebrated, whether it be the music that comes from folks with disabilities, the stories, the poetry, the art, or whether it's just the words, the lived experiences, the points of view. They are all very necessary. They bring a perspective that is a honed, outside-of-the-box perspective.

And here's some fun stats, as well, that I didn't add. But 72%-- I mean, 3Play, you guys know this. Your productivity goes up when you incorporate folks with disabilities in your administrative staff and in your boardroom. But you know what? Your quality of life-- because again, I'm not talking about HR. I'm talking about you. Your quality of life increases when you incorporate friends with disabilities into your circle.

I don't know if any of you volunteer at theaters or whatever. But when you incorporate folks with disabilities to be a part of those showcases or to be a part of the work you're doing, your life is enriched because you are more open-minded.

You ever meet somebody who's never left their hometown? And then all of a sudden, they travel to Europe. And then they come back, and they're all worldly. And they have an English accent, and they know wines. That's what happens when you bring different folks into your life.

I did want to highlight language, though, because language is important. And I'm starting to run short on time. So I want to say a few things very quickly about language. Say "disabled." Say "disability." It's fine.

I'm so passionate about this. You can google what I think about this because I could go on forever. But if we want to be respectful of culture, of course, we have to be respectful of the language and how we speak to people. "Differently abled" is a euphemism. And there's nothing wrong with being disabled that you need to euphemize. So avoid "differently abled" if you can.

"Handicapped" originally means "beggar." So instead of saying "handicapped," use a different word. You guys at 3Play know. We're not beggars. I'm not a beggar.

And "special needs"-- people aren't really in love with that because my needs are just needs. They're not special. I'm excited that there's someone doing ASL here, but that's not a special need. That's an interpreter doing language for folks who need to hear that language. That's just a need.

Let's talk about inclusion. Inclusion is not just about giving access to things. It's about accommodating that access. It's about making folks feel as if they belong, as if you want them to succeed. That's what inclusion is. You know what? I just lightbulbed myself.

But really, inclusion is when someone comes to you, and you say to yourself, I want this person to succeed. What do I got to do to make you succeed? That's what inclusion is. That's what true inclusion is.

I like to talk about what I call intentional listening. And what intentional listening is is-- it's a little more than active listening. Active listening is making sure you're catching what the person is saying, that you're not just thinking about your own response. But I like to say, intentional listening is coming up with things based on what you're hearing, coming up with solutions, coming up with next steps, opening your mind to how you can make this person's life, your life in the world better based on what they're saying.

If somebody comes to you and says, I need a larger screen, your eventual thought can be, how can I make it so that anyone who needs a larger screen can easily get it, perhaps without the barrier of being embarrassed on how to ask for it? So that's what intentional listening is. It's about wanting someone to succeed and wanting everyone to succeed just based on what you're hearing.

And as we all know, inclusion isn't just your neighbor at the desk. Inclusion is on the board level. Inclusion is within your circle of friends. Inclusion is when you see a friend that maybe has an injury and has to use a crutch or a cane, and letting them know that that's fine, and just being a part of it, and not being awkward, and not being afraid to ask the person what they need instead of assuming.

I think the last thing I'm going to say on inclusion is, whenever you deal with a person with a disability, make sure you speak to them and not their handler. That's a huge thing for me because I'll walk around-- I'm blind, so I'll be walking around with my cane in an airport, and just going where I got to go. And someone will go like-- the attendant or something will be like, hey, does she need help, to someone beside me.

And then the person beside me will be like, who? I don't know who she is. What are you talking about? I don't know where she's going. Maybe you ask her. And so always talk to the person. And even if they have an intellectual disability or hard of hearing, face them when you speak to them.

Lastly, accessibility-- sorry about that. Lastly, I want to go over accessibility. There are several ways that I like to define accessibility. It's not just access to spaces, or access to technology, or maybe access to devices. You can bring someone else in to talk about that kind of access. You can look up ADA laws.

But we're talking in the context of cultural disability, societal access. It's systemic access from the bottom to the top, from education, from opportunity, from being able to learn how to do a resume, being able to have, at your fingertips, the information that other folks have. Those are the kinds of accessibilities that are lacking for folks who are intersectioned with disability, especially those intersections with race, gender, queerness, and class.

And I'm going to say a word that many of you are going to cringe. Please don't plug your ears. I swear I'm only going to say this very briefly. But I was in a room talking with folks about NFTs and Web3. Don't leave, please. I'm not going to talk too much about it.

But they were just talking about, oh, we need to have chief-- what were they calling it? They're like, we need to have chief NFT officer-- not NFT-- chief Bitcoin officers or whatever, you know? And everyone's using Web3. And it's the way of the future. And sooner or later, we're going to be teaching it in elementary school.

And I'm like, have any of you all in this world thought about the fact that folks intersectioned with race, gender, queerness, and disability have absolutely no idea what you're talking about and are not at that level? There is this disconnect of folks who are raised on computers and raised in what I would call accessible society, and not recognizing what life would be like without that kind of access. I mean without-- pretty low-tier access to just everyday things.

Here's a great example. Here's a great stat about the lack of access. So did you know that 50% of Black men with disabilities-- I mean half of Black men with disabilities, will be arrested by 28? Now, that's very young. And that is just a stat. That is a truth. That is statistically proven, if you can call stats proof.

Half-- so if you are a Black man with a disability, you are 50% just going to be arrested by 28. That's not because they're Black. That's not because they're male. And that's not because they're disabled. It's a combination of the fact that they don't have access to what I call accessible society, things that you have access to, that folks have access to from elementary school that make you safe, that make you walk out of the house.

And you're part of that agreement. We all have an agreement here as humans. And not everybody gets to be a part of that handshake. And so that's the kind of access I'm talking about. I want to know how we can start having more young folks with disabilities have access to resume building, have access to just knowing how to advocate and approach.

I think one of the ways that you, just as a human-- you know, how can I help? I'm just some guy. I don't know. Well, in terms of social access, one of the things that you can do is be very intentional about people, just period.

A lot of times, people that are intersectioned with disability, neurodiversity, queerness, and race and gender are afraid to advocate, afraid to be themselves, and afraid to share their story, especially younger millennials and Gen Zs, because there's this what I would call an overarching gaslight that shines brighter than true light of folks thinking that, if they advocate or if they share their successes, that they're being braggadocious, and that they don't deserve to celebrate themselves, or they don't deserve to ask for things.

It's good for you to be intentional and ask folks, what's up? How are you? Learn about folks' lives. It's not just about saying hello. It's about saying "hi, and." And giving that intention to someone, giving that "high, and" to someone, can change their whole life. And you had no idea.

You don't know what happens to someone when they go home and they lay their head on the pillow, when they talk to their partner, when they move on to things. But you could have been that one electron bouncing the right way that really helped change and make them decide, you know what? I will advocate and stand up.

OK. So I want to talk a little bit about RAMPD while I just have a couple more minutes left. So RAMPD is my organization. So as I said earlier, I am a recording artist. And what I like to do is I like to, like I've done with you all, talk about disability culture and inclusion.

And I feel that, like with hip-hop introducing Black culture, and with country hand-holding us through rural culture, and other forms of world music allowing us to see into cultures in a very emotional way, I want to uplift disability culture through music. I believe music is going to be the way that we really start getting a lot of these stories into mainstream discussion.

And with that concept, I founded an organization called RAMPD, Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities. And we're top artists, and songwriters, and composers, and folks who work throughout the industry that have disabilities-- neurodiversities, deafness, rare disease, chronic illness, things of that nature, nonvisible disabilities-- who advocate for all creators with disabilities, whether it be trying to get folks jobs and internships or get more folks on stages, get more folks in boards in the music industry, in the entertainment industry so that we can have more visibility.

Because I do believe that, once you start seeing more of something, you can relate to it better. If you had a best friend that was in a wheelchair, then you wouldn't be so weirded out when you see someone out in the wild in a wheelchair. And so that's sort of the concept we want to do with showcasing music entertainment.

We've had the pleasure of working with the Grammys to get a ramp at the Grammys and ASL on the carpet. We've worked with other major brands, like Women in Music, and all sorts of other-- BMI, ASCAP. All of the brands that you know that have to do with music that you don't really know, but you kind of know, we work with them. And we've been covered all over, everywhere from *Forbes* to Billboard, for our work.

And so while I have you, I just thought it'd be really important and fun to impress upon you how joyous it is to celebrate disability culture. And we do that here at RAMPD. So I am going to switch out and play just a really short clip about RAMPD. I believe this has its own captioning, as well.

So we shall see how this works out. Lachi, can you figure out how to do this? I'm going to be so proud of myself if I can play this video. Let's see. There we go.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- An explosion of sparks reveals the shimmering silhouette of a ball above a 16th note, the RAMPD logo.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- Hey, everyone. It is Lachi, she/her, Black girl, cornrows. And I am the founder and president of RAMPD. I am really, really excited for this fast-growing coalition that we have at RAMPD, where songwriters, musicians, composers, engineers, producers, music agents, label reps, stagehands, sound techs can come together who identify as disabled, who identify as deaf, having a rare disease, or a neurodiversity, and beyond, and celebrate disability culture.

- Hi there. My name is Adrian Anantawan.

- I'm Neesa Sunar.

- Hey, this is Question.

- I'm Tabi.

- My name is Namel TapWaterz Norris.

- My name's Molly Joyce.

- I'm Stephen Letnes.

- Lisa Sinderman.

- My name is Gaelynn Lea.

- Mercedes Yvonne.

- Andrea Jennings.

- James Ian. And I'm a founding member of RAMPD.

- I'm a member of RAMPD.

- Member of RAMPD.

- Member of RAMPD.

- I'm a proud member of RAMPD.

- My name is Lachi, and I'm proud member of RAMPD.

- My name is Precious Perez. I am a member of RAMPD. For too long, recording artists and music professionals with disabilities have been excluded from opportunities, events, and experiences due to both lack of accessibility and lack of consideration. In the mainstream society, disability is viewed as something that is broken. And those of us with disabilities are seen as less than. It's time for that narrative to change. And those of us in RAMPD will be the ones to change it to ensure that people with disabilities are not only viewed as equal, but as qualified, competent, and respectable.

- One in four Americans and one in six globally have some form of disability. And it's time for the music industry to recognize us. 70% of musicians with a disability conceal the fact for fear of damaging a relationship. With just 3.1% of roles portraying a person with a disability, there is a measurable lack in visibility of disability culture in the media.

- (SINGING) Pushing up, pushing up through the dirt just like a seed.

- RAMPD is here to change that.

- (SINGING) But you're never quite a flower. You feel more just like a weed. Driving through, driving through, you want to know where you are going. But the windshield's [INAUDIBLE].

LACHI: All right. All right, all right, all right.

- (SINGING) You never get to see.

[END PLAYBACK]

LACHI: I always love to share that because it's such a powerful showcase of our coalition and showcase of just the beauty of celebrating disability. It always makes me smile. That's why I have this big corny smile on my face every time I see it.

But a lot of folks with disabilities do feel alone and feel like there's no community. And so that's one thing that I offer over at RAMPD, but there are so many other organizations and places that you can find disability culture at its height. And honestly, I think that 3Play is a great place that celebrates access and a place for folks to go to incorporate that access.

And that's one of the reasons I didn't want to focus too much on accessibility and the stuff you all already know. I just want y'all as individuals to walk away with ways that you can actually implement inclusion and culture in your own personal life, in your own personal circles, beyond compliance, wanting folks to feel like they belong, but, honestly, at the end of the day, looking at someone in the eyes and going, how can I help you win? How can I support your success? Thank you so much. And that's me.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you so much, Lachi. We will get started with Q&A in just a moment. We do have lots of questions in. And I encourage everyone-- just getting them ready here. But I encourage everyone to keep them coming in the chat window or directly in the Q&A window, as well. So the first question that we have is, what are ways that companies can promote disability inclusion in the workplace?

LACHI: So there are several ways that companies can promote disability inclusion in the workplace from the top to the bottom. First and foremost, actively incorporating disability in your talent pool, like in your talent search, being intentional about looking for disability. Now, I know that people go, oh, well, that may not be fair to other diversities. But the truth of the matter is, because disability has been so invisible for so long, it's not a matter of favoritism. It's just a matter of intentionality, making sure that folks have that option.

Secondly, another thing that I love to say to folks is the last thing you want to ever happen in your company-- the last, last thing-- is to find out someone has a disability in their exit interview. You want people to feel comfortable being able to stand up for themselves and ask for accommodation. You want to foster a place where folks can feel safe either asking for accommodations, whether or not they have a disability.

And one of the ways to do that, obviously, is, again, to have a workplace that showcases disability, but also, of course, to have talks like these where someone comes in and talks about disability beyond compliance. Your coworkers should definitely have situations where they can come together and discuss these things in a healthy manner.

So those will just be two little nuggets that I give. I really think that incorporating it into your talent pool is one of the most major ways, but also fostering an environment of accommodation, not just for people with disabilities, but all the way around so people feel safe to advocate.

ELISA LEWIS: Great. Thank you. The next question that we have is, can you talk about the technology you use in your daily life that allows you to be successful in your work?

LACHI: I'm going to say one word, and it's "shortcut." Well, I think that might be two words. But I use shortcuts-- shortcuts everywhere, shortcuts in life, but shortcuts all over my computer.

So I record artists in my home studio. And now my reputation precedes me, where people know that they're coming to work with a blind producer. But a lot of times, folks will see me working at the computer, and never looking up, and also not looking at what I'm typing because I'm blind. But it's because I'm able to navigate using screen-reading software, and using all of the shortcuts that I create and all the templates that I create to make sure things are comfortable for me. That's one of the things I use.

I do use a cane to get around and navigate. All of my canes are glamorous and beautiful because white and red doesn't match everything. And I also use-- what other technologies do I use? Gosh. I use screen zoom because I'm legally blind, and I'm not total blind. So I'll use screen zoom.

I'll use text to speech and speech to text to do a lot of my work, to the point where people on an elevator is just going to know what's going on in my entire life. I'll be leaving a text for some guy like, well, why didn't you call me last night, comma? You suck, smiley face, wait, frowny face, erase frowny face. And so those are some of the technologies I use.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you so much. The next question we have is, what are some recommendations that you have for individuals to become better allies?

LACHI: I have so much to say on allyship. This could have been an ally seminar, too. But a few tidbits that I'll have you walk away with is intentionality is the biggest, biggest word-- I mean capital I. An ally is not an ally if they are performative. So there has to be true, honest intentionality, especially, like I said, looking in someone's eyes and wanting to support their success.

There's been a lot of-- one way to not be a good ally is to tell someone how to hurt. So if you're helping someone, and they are screaming because they're in pain, telling them, you're not supposed to be screaming. You're supposed to be thanking me for helping you. You are not supposed to be-- how dare you criticize my allyship. That's you telling someone who's hurting how to hurt.

And as an ally, you should be screaming right along with them. So that's one of the big topics in our circle right now in disability justice about a lot of allies fall into this trap of feeling that, well, because I'm an ally, I should be rewarded. But that's performative. That's not the intention of an ally. The intention of an ally is to look someone in the eye and say, how can I support your success?

And so, really, honestly, it is just listening. Like I said, it's intentional listening, making sure that you can find ways to win with folks, but also really honestly asking the person. Ask folks. Don't assume. Treat folks like adults. Do not infantilize. And the most important thing, and you should-- everyone knows this-- is that let the true light shine brighter than the gaslight.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you so much. The next question that we have are, are there any resources you would recommend for learning more about appropriate and inclusive language?

LACHI: About appropriate and inclusive language?

ELISA LEWIS: Yes.

LACHI: Yeah. Honestly, there's actually this great website, this great resource. Oh, man. I should have wrote it down. There's actually a website that has disability language--

[PHONE RINGING]

Oh, sorry about that-- that has disability-inclusive language. I think if you google it, you'll find out what it is. But it has about-- it has maybe 75 to 90 words that are used in the disability sphere. And it'll let you know which ones are good and which ones are currently being contested.

But frankly, there is a lot online about what you should or shouldn't say. But I think when we send out-- maybe when we send out any kind of follow-up materials, I want to dig out that actual website because I trust it. And there's a lot of things online that will tell people what to do or say that may not be the best situation. So I want to actually go and dig out that resource that I really trust. And I'll have them send it out.

ELISA LEWIS: Yeah. We can definitely send that out in our follow-up. We also just heard from someone who mentioned People First has a document on their website [INAUDIBLE].

LACHI: That may actually be the document I'm talking about.

ELISA LEWIS: OK. We can definitely follow up. And we'll share a direct link with everyone so that we can get that resource out. Thank you. The next question that we have is, what is one piece of advice you would give to someone else who has a seemingly insurmountable barrier to overcome?

LACHI: So I have three responses, namely because I've had-- I've been there. Number one-- these are going to sound annoying because they're going to not be quick fixes. And they're going to be things you've heard before and you didn't want to do because they sounded annoying. But when you finally actually sit down and do it, it really does help.

One of the things I really love to do is to keep a gratitude journal. It turns out that the reason things are insurmountable a lot of times is actually in our own head. And what a gratitude journal does is basically just writing maybe three to five things down that you're grateful for once a day, if you're up for it, or even just once a week.

And what that does is that it starts to chip away at that ball, like that Gordian knot in your head of, I can't surmount. I can't surpass. That really helps a lot, and it's been proven in different ways here and there.

But I just know of myself that it is very helpful and useful. And sometimes you can jump off the wagon, and get back on, and resharpen that saw. But I say, keep a gratitude journal. It really, really helps for you to focus on the world isn't actually out to get you.

Number two is positive affirmations. I know, again, I say it with a smile because I know we've all heard it. And we think, oh, gosh. You want me to stand in a power pose in front of a mirror and go, I'm superwoman? It doesn't have to be that corny, but at the end of the day, it really feels good when someone tells you you're smart.

Shallow as it is, it feels good when someone tells you you're pretty. It feels good when someone tells you you did a great job. It feels good when someone pats you on the back. You feel kind of good.

Why can't that person just be you? Your brain doesn't know. So be the one that tells you those things so that you can feel good for a second, so that you can stand up for yourself against those negative feelings that you have there.

And then the third thing that I would-- the third thing that I would suggest is to decide what you want to do. Decide what your answer is, and then work backwards. Figure out how you want to actually achieve it the way you want to with no one else involved.

And try to see how you can figure it out, because one of the things I've found is I lived a life of shoulder pads, heavy shoulder pads. People would put all their shoulder pads on me and turn me this way, turn me that way. And I don't want shoulder pads to be running my life. So I want to figure out what I want to do, figure out how I want to get there, and not listen so heavily to all of the people grabbing my shoulders and trying to point me which way they think I should go.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you so much. I love that. The next one we have here-- somebody said, I could listen all day. Do you have any plans for a book?

LACHI: Oh my gosh. I actually do. I don't even know if I'm allowed to talk about this. My publisher is probably going to be very upset, but I do. So I think that might be all that I can say right now. But I definitely want to talk about disability culture and my experience as a woman intersectioned with disability, race, and gender trying to become a leader in America, trying to become this big star in America, trying to become this big entertainer.

And as I've been going around telling people about my journey of just all of the out-of-the-box things-- I can list off all of the just out-of-the-box things I've done to just get to this point in my life. They're just so fun over a beer. And then just to kind of intertwine that with, really, things that I-- the hard lessons that I had to learn and to share that with folks. So there is a book in the works. But I can't say anything more than that, or else my agent will leave me.

ELISA LEWIS: Sounds good. Just a follow-up to that, since that's all you can say for right now, where is the best place for people to follow you online and follow any updates for when that book may or may not happen?

LACHI: So you can go to lachimusic.com. There, you can just find my press, and updates, and music, and join my mailing list, because we do have a lot of really cool things coming up. I know that I've teamed up with Broadway's streaming service, Broadstream. And we're going to be putting out some music videos combining blindness and deafness to electronic dance music. So who wouldn't want to at least see what that's about?

And then we just got this really great grant from Pop Culture Collaborative to put together an album just celebrating disability culture, talking about disability in a major way, and having music videos accompanying it. So we're just doing a lot of really cool stuff apart from touring and talking to folks like you. And so definitely just stay in touch. And of course, I'm all over the place online @lachimusic, and I'm very active. So I'm going to be up there, as well.

ELISA LEWIS: Awesome. The next question that we have, someone's asking, could you talk a little bit more about the many layers of diversity within disability? I noticed that you intentionally name some of them when you speak-- for example, chronic illness, deaf, neurodiversity, et cetera. And I'm interested in this as a person with invisible chronic illness.

LACHI: So there are, frankly, as many disabilities as, really, there are humans. The reason I name the ones that I do is because those are easily accessible, and they're more blanket.

But frankly, when we talk about that stat, that 26%, that's pre-COVID. There are a lot of folks coming out of COVID with different unnamed, unseen disabilities, folks having different things with long COVID, folks having situations like-- even one of my friends. She has narcolepsy. And it's hard for folks to understand that sometimes she's just going to have to take a break in the middle of the day.

There are folks that, even within blindness, have a vast spectrum of what blindness actually means. In the span of deafness, there is a vast spectrum between being hard of hearing, being deaf, or folks, who within that spectrum, identify culturally as deaf. When we talk about chronic illness and rare disease, folks with asthma can have chronic asthma.

In RAMPD, we talk about this a lot. In RAMPD, we have different sections of folks that have been clumping together because they're finally finding other musicians that have their disability. And even when they get together, the conversations they have are so varied with each other.

I'm thinking specifically of the different folks with chronic illness. While they share a lot of the difficulties of being able to meet mobile outside of the home, when they life about their experiences in the home, they're still very varied because their disability is so varied.

And then when we talk about rare disease, it's one of the reasons I make sure I say "rare disease," because a lot of folks have diseases that aren't named, that are misdiagnosed, and that are un- and underdiagnosed. And so when we talk about disability as an identity, not just a medical card, we're talking about those folks that are missed and underdiagnosed, folks that are perhaps on the spectrum.

And oh, the stories I hear about these pills and then these pills, and they're just trying things out, and even how that, in and of itself, is making things even worse. And then when we talk about the cross-section with mental illness, and when we talk about intellectual disabilities, and when we talk about learning disabilities and developmental disabilities, when we talk about schizophrenia, there's just so many to name.

But at the end of the day, it's just how our bodies slightly differ. And I think that the contributions that we all put forward should still be celebrated and respected.

ELISA LEWIS: Thank you. And we just have another few minutes. So we have a few more questions we'll try to get through before we wrap up. The next question is, are there things you've come across as a blind individual that have made your experience at events or in public spaces much better?

LACHI: Much better? I love it. Cutting lines is always fun. I wasn't always very outgoing and energetic as I am now. But now that I am, I'll dress to the nines. And I'll show up with my cane, and I turn heads.

I do work my blindness as privilege because everybody has privilege, and everyone knows that they're working it. So I work my blindness as privilege-- so things like making sure that I'm accommodated for, making sure that people see that I'm in the room.

And I'm a concertgoer. So I do go to concerts a lot. And I do make sure that I ask, what are your ADA things? Will I be able to have this or that? And so I reach out beforehand a lot of the times to the concerts I'm going to, which then gives me a great upper hand, because now I know some of the folks running it.

And then I use that to talk more about my career. And now all of a sudden, I'm playing at the show the next year. And again, I don't know if I'm an exception to the rule, but I definitely use it to my advantage as it pertains to my career.

ELISA LEWIS: Great. And then the last question I'll ask is, do you have any upcoming performances, either online or in-person?

LACHI: Yes. I do. You could go to my website, actually, to find it all out, lachimusic.com. But I can just say a few here. Where are you guys located? New York? This is national.

ELISA LEWIS: 3Play Media is located in Boston, but we have folks joining from all over.

LACHI: All over? Yeah, I do have some in-person. I do have some online stuff. I know that I have YAI, which has a big presence in New York. And they help intellectual disability children and adults. We're doing a whole dance party at the Central Park Bandshell on June 4. So if you're in the city, check that out.

We'll be doing a bunch of the disability pride shows. So I know we're doing Philly Pride on June 11. We're doing Pittsburgh Pride. I think that's July 23. We're doing New York Pride's Disability Unite, which is July 17.

We're doing some, and then sprinkled in between the tour stops, we're doing a lot of speaking engagements. So I know that I'll be speaking at the UN. I know that I'll be speaking/performing at Disability:IN down in Dallas. They're having their whole Inclusion Awards, which I know 3Play is going to be at. So I'm going to be hanging out with some of you all there.

But it's too many to name because June is Pride Month, and then July is Disability Pride Month. And then in there is Deaf-Blind Pride Week and Helen Keller Week. So, so much happens during June and July as it pertains to disability. So all I can say is just check out my website. And get in touch with me online. We're constantly updating.

ELISA LEWIS: Great. Thank you. We will certainly make sure that folks know where to find you online and hopefully see you in person.

LACHI: Yes.

ELISA LEWIS: So we are at time. Thank you, Lachi, for such a fabulous discussion of the intersectionality of race and disabilities. It was really great. I want to thank everyone who joined us today. Please do take a moment, attendees, to share your feedback on today's session via the link in the chat. And we wish everyone a great rest of GAAD and a wonderful afternoon. Thanks again.

LACHI: Thank you. Thank you guys so much. And check out RAMPD, RAMPD.org.

ELISA LEWIS: Absolutely. Take care.

LACHI: Bye.