

Transcript “Disability Inclusion VI: Disability Inclusion Efforts.

Hi. Welcome, everyone. Thank you so much for coming to our webinar on the disability inclusion efforts of some of our fellow Mansfield participants. Before we get into it, can you please rename yourself on Zoom to include your name and your organization so we can know who all is here? Closed captioning has been activated for this call, so if you'd like to see the captions, please click on More, Captions, and Show Captions for access.

And please note that the chat is limited to only speak with the host, so please send me send any messages that you have to my Diversity Lab colleagues. I might not see your message, so please send it to someone else because I'll be really focused on trying to talk. This call will be recorded for future viewing, so don't worry if you don't catch everything.

And before we get into it, I'd like to remind you about our disability inclusion commitments. So far, more than 100 law firms in the US, UK, and Canada are partnering with Diversity Lab to continue building a culture of inclusion for people with disabilities by implementing one or more of the actions on our disability inclusion commitments list. So if you would like more information about that, please contact Kavita.

And turning to our topic today, I would like to welcome our wonderful speakers. First, we have Laura Greenspan. She's the director of US litigation and investigations and legal diversity, equity, and inclusion lead at Astellas Pharma US. We also have Raegan Henderson, Director of Culture, Inclusion, and Diversity at Dorsey Whitney. And we have Emmi Machiraju, senior inclusion and diversity manager at BCLP in the UK. So thank you so much for joining us.

I'm going to start with our questions. I'll start with you, Laura, first. Can you just tell us your background and your connection to disability and inclusion?

Sure. Thanks, Courtney. And so glad to be here with you and everyone else today. My personal background in connection to disability inclusion-- I don't quite know when it started, but really, for as long as I can remember, I've had an interest in disability issues. It's just something that I was always interested in as a child, and then in high school, the elective that I chose, or one of the electives that I chose every semester, was to be a peer mentor in one of the classrooms for students with developmental or other disabilities that profoundly affected their ability to learn.

I also spent my summers in high school serving as a one-on-one aide to a little girl with disabilities as she attended summer camp, which, by having the aid, allowed her to have inclusive and successful summer camp experience. And then my interest and experience in disability inclusion ended up working well for me when I learned for the first time in college that I too have disabilities, and perhaps even more so beneficial when I had twins who collectively have several disabilities, and all of our disabilities are invisible or non-apparent. So that is something that I'm particularly passionate about.

Awesome. Thank you so much. Reagan, can you let us know your background and your connection to disability inclusion?

Yeah, sure. I have been at Dorsey for about six years now versus kind of the sole diversity professional and then now, thankfully, with a small team, and I've always really been interested in disability inclusion, just personally as somebody who also has sort of invisible disabilities in form of autoimmune disorder and

hearing loss. And so when I kind of came into the firm, I thought it was really important for me to understand what we were doing around it.

And the first way to make sure that we were on par was to take the disability and equality index survey. The first time we took that survey, we didn't get 100, and so I really used that score to start mapping out some of the initiatives that I wanted to implement around disability inclusion. And that's really my connection to it and how I've sort of worked on it professionally.

Excellent. Thank you. Emmi, can you talk to us about your background and your connection to disability inclusion?

Sure. Thank you very much. So I've been in the legal industry and in an I&D role now for nearly 10 years-- coming up, sort of nine years. And when I first started in my-- not BCLP-- at a different law firm, disability was one of the focus areas that I looked after initially, and back in the day was absolutely something that we wanted to focus on-- we probably didn't know enough about. So I really took it to heart to try to understand more about it-- learn about it-- and what we can do as an organization.

I'm not disabled. I do have some family members who have disabilities either in terms of medical conditions and from a kind of a mental health perspective as well, so that's always been the kind of personal driver. But a lot of it has just been to try to make the workplace much more accessible and inclusive, and I think whilst it's nice to see that we've done quite a bit of-- made quite a bit of progress in the industry, but also in BCLP as well, I think it's one of those areas that so much more work is needed to be done.

I agree. Awesome. Thank you so much for sharing. Emmi, I'll stick with you. Can you start on the question of how disability inclusion fits into your organization's core values?

Sure. Thank you. It's an absolute key pillar of everything that we do. As diversity professionals, we have to focus on a few different areas, but I think disability is one of those things that is an absolute sort of foundational area. I think what we-- I've noticed along the years is that how we can make the workplace, like I said, accessible but also inclusive and have that supportive environment.

Not only does it, of course, impact positively our disabled colleagues, but I think at the end of the day, it's good for everyone. And there's a lot of things that, either if you've been diagnosed or identified with having a disability, that can help. But actually, I think if we just become much more better at talking about it, being open, raising awareness around disabilities and how they impact or don't impact someone's career or how they operate on a day-to-day basis, I think we can, in the end, make it better for absolutely everyone.

And I'm sure we'll come on to talk about it more as well, but I think it evolves as well. So where we started out more as, what is disability? How can managers support? Then becomes a bit more nuanced around neurodivergence, for example, and how does mental health fit into that? So I think looking at it as a broad approach, but also then being able to support individuals who have that specific requirements, for example. So we're really focused on that at BCLP.

Excellent. You raise the point that I want to highlight that disability inclusion does make things better for everyone, and that would be true if this was a fixed group, but that is even more true. This is a group that is changing all the time. Things happen, illnesses happen, and we happen to be in a pandemic right now and so making it part of your culture to be aware of what accommodations people need or how people need to belong or the ways that people just work differently is just very, very important. So thank you for highlighting that. Laura, I'll go to you next on how disability inclusion fits into your organization's values.

Yeah, thank you. So I'll speak at least for this particular question about the Astellas legal department in particular. Obviously our company has some core values-- many core values-- relating to DEI and disability in particular, which I'll speak a little bit later. But in terms of the legal department, which I'm a part of at Astellas, we believe that having diversity in all areas, whether that be background, ability, thought, experience, that that really creates a more dynamic and successful organization, and that enables us to provide the best possible service that we can both to our internal clients and the patients that we serve as a pharmaceutical company.

And so based on that, our general counsel wanted someone in legal dedicated to driving forward legal's diversity and inclusion mission. So in April of 2023, I was asked to take on the role of legal DEI lead in addition to serving in my more standard legal role as a litigation and investigations lawyer for the company.

At that point, the legal department had already done quite a bit over the previous several years with respect to DEI. It wasn't as though I was stepping into something-- a blank slate. There was a lot already built up, but there was nothing disability-specific.

And so I very much thought that was a gaping hole that needed to be filled. And so one of the first things I did in my new role was to create what we call an inclusion resource team dedicated to promoting the understanding and awareness of disability issues. We had multiple inclusion resource teams dedicated to addressing other forms of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but nothing on disability. And so thought that was essential.

And this helps to ensure that all members of our legal department who have disabilities feel like they are valued and that they can be their true selves at work. And I'll talk a little bit more about what the group does a little bit later, but I think just adding that in is a really big step in actually bringing our values into action.

OK. Thank you. Reagan, how does disability inclusion fit into your firm's core values?

Yeah, my answer is a bit simpler. Just kind of straightforward. The firm's strategic plan has sort of specific language and goals about the retention of lawyers and business professionals in the disability community and then also to increase the representation of this group. And so firm's management is responsible for making sure those goals are carried out along with my team. And so it's 100% a core value. We have metrics around it, and that's how it fits into our firm's plan.

Excellent. Thank you. Being part of the strategic goals of your firm kind of ensures that even when the people change, that's still something that's being worked on, and so we encourage things like that. That's great to hear. Reagan, can you start with the next question, which is how you promote an inclusive culture that encourages open dialogue about disability?

Yeah. I think when I first did Disability Equality Index, which I highly recommend anybody do, if they haven't, if you haven't, one of the things that I just understood and took away from it is that there is a lot of stigma around open dialogue about having a disability or maybe having somebody in your home who has a disability.

And so one of the things we didn't have when we took the survey was we did not have a resource group around disability. And so that was one of a first thing that we really undertook was making sure that we had a resource group. That resource group has attorneys and business professionals from across our

firm. And they share shared interests and really create a community for each other. And I think that has really started an open dialogue about disability.

Our managing partner sends a weekly email out to the firm. And it's an interesting email about firm happenings, but he always makes it a point to include topics around diversity, including disability. And so it's created a dialogue because our firm's managing partner is opening up to the entire firm about that. And then last, we really do our best to educate people about the different types of disabilities that could be represented in the firm. And so we have education programs quite often throughout the year, or emails, informationally, that go out. And so those are some of the big ways, I think, that we're doing that. But frankly, and I know we'll talk about this in a little bit, but we did a self-identification survey. We resurveyed the firm. And in doing that, we, I think, created a lot of dialogue around disability that maybe hadn't been there before and opened up more conversations.

But we just sent out an email around, I think, it was Employee Disability Awareness Month. And the first email I got back was from an attorney saying, hey, thank you so much for sending this. I've never been open about the fact that I have a disability, but I do. And I'd like to know where I can update my self-identification. So I do think that things like that do promote and help people feel comfortable coming forward or being more open about their disabilities in the workplace.

Great. Thank you so much, Raegan. That leadership being involved in letting people know this isn't just some side thing that you need to care about on your own is such a big signal for people like me. And then also, education and communication about a topic and not just seeming like something that, I need to check a box on, just so someone knows I exist, but there are actual things being done to make my life better, that's always comforting. And that makes me feel like I belong. So I'm glad to hear about that. Emmi, can you talk to us about promoting an inclusive culture and encouraging open dialogue about disability?

Yeah. No, absolutely. Thank you. And very, very similarly to what Raegan was saying as well, I think it's having that leadership support, but hearing personal perspectives, having people, if they feel comfortable, to open up about their experiences around disability, either how it impacts them. They might be caring for someone with a disability. All of that will impact their day-to-day work. And it helps us to understand how we can better support as well.

I think, just to add on that, so in the UK, it's something that we want to make a global approach at some point, but we're just working through all the local legislation and cultural nuances. But in the UK, we've got something called the Personal Adjustments Plan. And essentially, it just centralizes and provides support for that adjustments requesting process, especially for those familiar with the UK approach to what we have trainees coming in.

And in a two-year period, they will change their seat four times. So for someone who's still relatively junior or very junior in their careers, coming in and potentially having to ask over and over again to have some specific adjustments made, it just makes it easier for them, and hopefully, creates an easier dialogue between their supervisor as well.

So anyway, so the way I talk about that is that for anyone joining the firm, we provide that already throughout the onboarding process. So we talk about in recruitment that, of course, we have an accessible recruitment process. If anyone would require any adjustments made to that, they have a personal contact. And once that onboarding process kicks off, we share the plan already so that day 1 is, you're ready to go if there is something that you need.

Now, very conscious that people don't always fill it in, because it can still be quite a nervous time. You're not sure how people will take what-- or you don't want to get anything in the way of starting your job and already requesting something. And we're absolutely fine with people filling it in afterwards and having those conversations when they feel comfortable to. And they know that there is a culture that is trusting and open.

But I think it's important to have it there as a symbol, as a sign to say, look, we want to support you from day 1. We want to make sure that whatever you need to make your life a little bit easier at work, we're here to help with.

So that, and along with then, of course, our affinity groups, et cetera, and those personal experiences, we call it our voices, essentially, our storytelling campaign. And in both regions, we've done some really fantastic work around sharing those perspectives, which I always find so amazing that people share actually quite personal things about their day-to-day or actually, about the people they care for or their family members. So I think the more we can encourage that, the better.

Excellent. Thank you. Ongoing dialogue and also making things more seamless and creating less barriers, so people can understand they're meant to get the things that they need to work better, and it's not purposefully difficult or confusing or anything like that. Those are important things to remember.

Thank you.

Laura, can you talk about creating an open dialogue. I know you hinted on some of the groups that you have, but can we hear more about that?

Yeah, absolutely. So at a company level, at least in the US, we have an employee resource group that is focused on disability issues. And that's great, because people can self-select at the time that they join the company or really, at any time that they want to be part of that group and get involved, or just go to some of the educational sessions or programming, and get involved and be part of the dialogue to the level and extent that they want to.

But we also, as I said, have disabilities IRG, because we, of course, have to use a different acronym in the corporate world. And within legal, we have that specific group. And I think that has been a really great start and encouraging open dialogue within our legal department.

So through programming, we've had and will continue to have-- we've made progress just by talking about disability-related issues. I'll talk about it a little bit more later, hopefully. But one of the first things we did was have a disability 101 session, like, what is disability? What are different types of disability?

Because I think, for the people who are not familiar with the issue themselves and/or don't have family members who have disabilities and things like that, I think just a very basic understanding and awareness of what disability is. The fact that people can be disabled at certain points in time and not other points in time, you might not be disabled most of your life and then become disabled, I think has been eye opening to people and also helpful in just understanding the issue that really, it's a group that any of us can be a part of at certain points in our lives. My race, my ethnicity is not going to change, but my disability status could.

So I think, just acknowledging that this is part of the lived experience for so many of us is so important, not only to make those with disabilities feel seen, but also to provide the tools and even just, like I said, the vocabulary to those who do not have disabilities to help with the inclusion process.

Thank you so much. Yes. The disability humanity issue is not some other group that you don't belong to. This is something that it matters to everyone or should matter to everyone. Thank you, Laura. So, Laura,

I'll stick with you. Can you talk about the self-ID process and how you're asking lawyers and professionals to identify as disabled?

Sure. So there is a voluntary question on our company job application that asks whether the applicant has one or more disabilities, which is probably pretty standard for a lot of, at least, the US-based firms and companies. But within legal specifically, for purposes of our participation in the Mansfield program, we decided that we wanted to do a self-identification survey that address issues, including disability, but also other issues that are relevant to our participation in the certification program.

And so we had all US and Canadian legal employees complete a self-identification survey. Our general counsel made completion of the survey mandatory. That did not mean that people couldn't opt out of answering any particular question that they didn't feel comfortable answering, as certain people did, but she said, you must complete the survey. You must engage with the survey and complete it. And so we very easily got 100% participation out of our US and Canadian legal employees.

And of course, like I said, one of the questions asks whether you have one or more disabilities. And I can tell you, as the one person who has access to that data, the vast majority of our employees felt comfortable answering the question about whether they have a disability, which, I think, is a testament to the Inclusive culture that we have within our legal department.

One other comments I'll make about this is that I think, it actually cause a lot of our legal employees to realize for the first time that they have a disability. Because wanting to make sure that we captured everyone, when we created the survey and sent it out, we had a very long list of things that could be included within the definition of a disability. And obviously, it wasn't exhaustive, but it was pretty detailed. And I had a lot of people reach out to me as the one who was running the survey, saying, I have this particular condition. Does that qualify as a disability? And I think it either does or doesn't to some people. It depends on how it affects you and things like that.

But I think it was really eye-opening to a lot of people that they're like, oh, yeah, I do struggle with that, actually, or I have this medical condition that affects my ability to work some days or things like that, and never actually realized before that that was considered a disability. And so like I said, I think it was eye-opening for people. And I'm really glad, if for no other reason, that we did it.

Excellent. Thank you. That's such an important thing to remember, that a lot of people who haven't had to engage with maybe disability benefits or who can still work, they're not identifying as disabled because they're just getting through their daily living, however they do best, without understanding that the materials for whatever program or whatever law will consider them as disabled. And maybe they just socially don't identify that way, but there is something happening in their life because of being a part of this group or having a certain impairment.

And so it's up to them whether they want to be in the groups and read the literature and things like that, but they do count when it comes down to counting. And so a lot of people do find out when they end up reading these definitions or lists. So thank you.

Raegan, I'll go to you next. Can you talk about whether you're asking lawyers to self-ID and how that's happening?

Yeah. Yeah. We ask all of our new hires. They're given the option to self-identify in several categories, including disability. I'll say that about two years ago, similar to Laura's point, we had some realization that one, we felt like maybe the data we had collected over the years-- some people had been in the firm for 40 years and had never been asked to re-self-identify, wasn't great. And then also, we realized that

specifically with disability, that that can change over the span of someone's career. And so we wanted to resurvey the firm to collect better information.

And so we had a pretty big campaign around it. It was intense. We had our managing partner. We had practice group leaders, marketing professionals, our chief marketing officer sending emails about the importance of self-identification data. Me and members of my team sort of went to different meetings to express why this self-identification data was so important to the firm and the things that we were doing. And then we also rolled out diversity data policy that really was very clear about how we use self-identification data, both internally and with respect to our clients. And I think that gave people some peace in mind about how their data was being used. I think, a lot of times, if you don't have a policy or you're not clear about it, it's like, it goes to HR, and hopefully, it stays in HR. And I think, that can vary.

And then also, in the disability category, we laid out better definitions about what that looked like for folks and had better examples. And like Laura said, I think that really helped some people.

And then we also just made sure we gave people the option to-- they could share their self-identification data, but they could opt out of having that data ever shared disaggregated, especially in relation to our clients or any specific opportunities we may have for members of the disability community. And that did help a lot. We had a lot of people who identified as disabled but opted out of having their information ever disaggregated.

And this was really important. I mean, this, with the resource group, our firm went from being around 3% of our attorney and business professional population was identified with disabilities to now, I think we're at maybe 12%, so almost like four times increase. And I think that is directly related to this. And then our resource groups having leadership involved and really pushing how important the data was a big success for us. And something we plan on doing every 5 to 10 years, we'll do a big resurvey of the firm.

Great. Thank you so much, Raegan. You mentioned educating people about why you're even asking and having a policy. I think that is so important for all of historically underrepresented groups. Sometimes, we can get focused on our perspective and just needing the information. And why aren't people given the information? But they need to understand, where it's going? Who gets to see it? Can I have levels of consent? Can you know what no one else? Things like that.

And still, at the end of the day, just remember, some of us have our first name, even, because our parents were so mindful about us being cold out of processes based on our gender and race. And so you're asking for another bit of information about us when we've been raised to be very protective and try to make sure we can get all the opportunities.

And so what you've already said about just creating that environment where it seems like there's a point to the question that benefits me and not just the institution, and also just a plan on things-- we're focused on this and it matters because of these reasons. And that can help some of the people who are hesitant give the information, but still give grace for those who are not going to share.

Emmi, can you talk to us a bit about how your firm is approaching self-ID?

Sure. I won't repeat everything that Laura and Raegan has said. Again, similar process. So across our UK and US offices, we ask about disability. We're working across our continental European, our Middle East, and Asian offices. If we can start asking some of the data as well, there's some very specific laws that, at the moment, stop us from doing that, but we hope that we can make a bit of headway there.

But very similarly, it's something that we ask on people joining the firm. We also do ask in the recruitment process. It's all voluntary, anyway, but just to see how many people are applying and if we could do a little bit of that recruitment waterfall data analysis as well.

But yeah, so we have to report to our regulator, every two years, our diversity data, anyway, in the UK. So I think people are relatively comfortable with the approach and the fact that we need to constantly refresh and make sure people are going back in there and checking that their data is still correct. And again, you can opt out from any question. And due to GDPR laws as well, at any point, people can withdraw their consent from the entire exercise.

So we want to make that clear. And I completely agree, the education is so important about why we're asking the state, and what we're using it for. And the one thing that we're looking at hopefully, start of next year-- well, we asked two questions from-- sorry, my light keeps going off, all about ESG over here.

So we're asking about, if you identify with having a disability, how much it impacts your day-to-day life? And then hopefully, we'll add a third question in about neurodiversity as well. It's something that we're being asked about much more.

And I know there's a little bit of conversation about those who are neurodivergent, whether they always would identify as having a disability, for example. So to have something that allows people to self-ID into those areas as well without necessarily having to tick the disability box. So something that we're looking at for next year.

Excellent. Thank you so much. Some of those questions, when you're getting a survey, and you're reading questions like that that are more nuanced and show that you understand some information about a person and whether they are part of a community or whether they're technically under the definition. I think that gives more comfort to the idea that these people know what they're talking about, they've thought about this, they're using this understanding and this tool in a reasonable way. And so I appreciate you sharing those questions.

So next, I think everyone has already talked about their disability employee resource groups or affinity groups. Does anyone want to add anything about who's on the groups, or what activities the groups engage in, or any additional information that you haven't already touched on?

I'm happy to do that. Yeah. So like I said, company wide, at least in the US, hopefully, it starts to become more of a global thing as well, because we're a global pharma company. But we have an abilities employee resource group, which is an alliance of employees who seek to raise awareness of the impact that various types of disabilities, whether they be physical, mental, emotional have on the Acellus community. And there's advocacy and education, volunteerism to educate the community, employees of the company, and just to promote diversity and inclusivity of employees with disability.

And just in case it's helpful, I'll talk about a couple things that the resource group does. They started within the past couple years, holding a cancer support group meeting. And those are monthly meetings to provide an opportunity to share experiences, offer and receive support, and really, just connect with others who understand the cancer journey.

And it's open to everyone, but it's especially targeted toward those who are currently a cancer patient, those who are survivors, caregivers, who have a loved one who's dealing with a diagnosis and treatment. And I know that the people who participate in that are very grateful that they have that opportunity at work.

Similarly, we have an emotional well-being support group, which are again, voluntary monthly meetings to support one another just through listening, sharing, providing resources. It's like an informal group therapy session that, again, people can access, things like that, cancer support groups, or group therapy sessions, or just online groups or whatnot through a lot of different channels.

But I think it's meaningful to people to have that available to them at their workplace and with their colleagues. And obviously, only people who are willing to participate, participate. But seeing that other people do, I think, makes people more willing to do it themselves and find support and some value through it.

And then both the company-wide group and the legal-specific group engage in just ad hoc programming and communications on more specific topics, as well as volunteerism as well. And then I'll just finish with a little bit of discussion about what our legal-specific group does.

So we've done things. For example, it was said that October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. So last year in October, we had a discussion on the impact of having one or more disabilities on employment, everyone's experience in the workplace, whether you have a disability or not, because you have an experience in the workplace, if you have a disability, particularly, experience yourself. But even for those who don't, you're working with people who have disabilities, and you, therefore, have a workplace experience based on disability inclusion in the workplace.

We've done, like I said, a disability 101 primer for our legal employees to better understand disabilities, including those that are non-apparent, or invisible, or hidden, however, you might describe it, what neurodiversity is, things of that nature. We had a presentation by an award-winning disability advocate in the UK a few months ago, who discussed her experience as a deaf woman and disabled employee.

And then just a couple of weeks ago, we had a session on meditation. One of our legal colleagues has a side passion for meditation and is actually a certified meditation coach. And she educated all of us about what meditation is, how it can be beneficial to mental health. There's a spiritual connection to it as well, for those who find that to be an interesting hook to it. And actually, took us through a short meditation exercise. And it was just a nice break in the day.

Awesome. Thank you for sharing. I love the variety of programming and the different activities that you're doing, especially, things like volunteering, where you don't have to raise your hand and talk about yourself or identify yourself, you can still do this behavior that shows that there is a commitment to disability inclusion without maybe being a speaker yourself. I think that is really important.

And also, just the groups like the cancer support groups and the well-being, you try to say, bring your whole self to work, but sometimes, there are no clues that your whole self is wanted. Sometimes, it may seem like you're supposed to deal with these topics alone. And so when you're asking people to participate in these things, it really does prove that you are committed to their well-being. So thank you for sharing those ideas.

Did anyone else have anything to add on what your ERGs or affinity groups are doing around disability? Yeah, I can jump in just quickly, just from the law firm perspective. Our research group was started about two, three years ago. It's open to everyone. We were pretty intentional about that. So both business professionals and attorneys, we don't have stipulations around whether or not you're somebody who identifies with a disability, or maybe has a family member, or is an ally, or wants to learn more. We have it open to everyone.

The group has done quite a few things. And this is really based off of feedback from what people were looking for in a resource group, which was to build community. That was, I mean, the biggest thing was to feel like you had people who either could relate to your experience or wanted to learn more about the experiences.

So one of the things that they started was mentoring circles, which is so interesting when you have business professionals, and attorneys, and mentoring circles across different lines. And these were just small groups, maybe five to six people that met monthly in the firm to discuss topics related to disabilities in the workplace. And it was so impactful.

I mean, the kind of feedback we got was, this was the first time I felt like I had community at the firm. This was the time where I felt like I could really bring myself and had support from colleagues. And so it's something that, I think, was an amazing piece of this resource group. And then they do a lot of programming for the firm, education programming, et cetera, similar to what Laura was saying. And then lastly, they sent a quarterly newsletter out to the firm. And I think this is helpful for people who maybe aren't in the resource group or aren't as clued in, but they share resources for folks who could feel uncomfortable coming to the resource group's meetings. And then they also invite someone in the resource group to write a testimonial about their journeys and experiences, which has been, once again, that community piece, just having people coming forward and sharing their experiences has been great. And I was really worried, we were not going to have people who wanted to do that, because frankly, that's a big thing to want to share yourself to all of your colleagues across the firm and write it down. But every quarter, we've had more than enough volunteers who have been really open and wanting to share. And so that signaled to me that the resource group is on the right path. It's doing exactly what it's supposed to do. Yeah.

Thank you so much for sharing. It's really great that they feel safe to share with the firm and openly identify and just to build community with one another. And oftentimes, that could have been, the one thing that made them feel really engaged and made them stop feeling like they were just along the margins of the firm. And so that's so important for people to know that just being seen and being understood as a peer and as a community member is really, really invaluable. Thank you so much.

Emmi, did you want to add anything on ERGs?

Sure. Just very, very briefly. Again, I think, fantastic work that's already been mentioned, similar to us as well. We have had the UK network up and running for quite a few years now. And we started the US one earlier this year. And again, I think the momentum has been fantastic and to see both chapters, if you like, working together. Similar challenges, so there's going to be similar fixes and solutions, but also some cultural nuances, which is, I think, important to take into consideration.

But two things. Again, apologies for the lights. I'm just going to try to get them back on. We run a listening or an engagement survey firm-wide one recently. And we were able to disaggregate the data by diversity characteristics. So we were able to look at our disabled community within BCLP and see, do they feel included? Do they feel a sense of belonging, psychological safety, et cetera?

So that was really interesting. And we definitely noticed that there's more work to be done. So we ran some listening exercises, specifically with those groups sponsored by we call it the Enable group, but it was open for everyone because again, not everyone wants to be a part of the network or affinity group. So we're still picking apart a lot of that.

But one really practical thing actually that the group has gotten involved in is with the help of the technology team. They've started to research and test out lots of assistive software, for example, and look at actually, the tools that already exist through Microsoft Office, for example, and put together really practical resources, so little tips and tricks, did you know that this already exists things, which again, it's really, really simple, but we've heard lots of feedback that just for someone to take the time to make it easy for people to access, that has actually revolutionized how they work on a day-to-day basis.

So it's been nice. It's almost, like I said, really simple, but the group felt, I think, quite proud that they were able to really do something that was meaningful. So yeah, hopefully, more to come.

Excellent. I love that idea of sharing of accessibility tools, and not just for those who ask for it or something happens, but everyone's life can be made better. I tell everyone who will listen that my computer reads everything to me. I use my eyes as little as possible. And you don't have to have a vision problem or a diagnosed learning disability to get improvement from these tools. So that's a really cool idea. Thank you.

I had a follow up question, Laura, on your support groups. Are those groups led by or moderated by DI personnel? Or are they confidential? Or how are those run? How do you make sure it's safe?

Yeah, they are certainly confidential. And there's a slide of ground rules that is shown at the beginning of the session. And actually, even, I think, goes out with each calendar invite, talking about the confidential nature of it and things of that nature. But it's actually not led by any DI professionals at our company. It's just led by volunteers within the company who are members of the employee resource group, who have decided that they want to take on the role of leading these things.

And I think, all of them have some experience with the particular topic that they're leading the support group on, but that's really it. They're just otherwise, professionals with the company doing a host of different things in their day job, but have, for whatever reason, experience with whether it be cancer support as a survivor themselves, who can offer guidance and things like that to other people, who are, perhaps, going through it at the moment or have a loved one who is, or people who just have dealt with mental health challenges themselves, who can offer a safe place for an emotional being discussion and really just facilitate the discussion among other employees. So yeah, it's all done by a group of passionate volunteers who do it for the well-being of their peers.

Thank you. So this next question is just for whoever wants to answer, because we've already touched on leadership's involvement. So if anyone wants to add, how does leadership support disability inclusion efforts within your organization?

I could jump in there. Sorry. I think we're quite [INAUDIBLE] there. Yeah. So we have something called our Global Inclusion and Diversity Action Board, which is essentially our governing body around inclusion and diversity. So it's made up of partners, senior business services leaders as well, who either they chair one of these employee resource groups, or maybe they're on the firm's board, or leadership team or, partner promotions committee, something that gives them an influential role and their passion about inclusion and diversity as well.

So we have our representatives from the Enable group who sit on that globally. And together, I think, it's been really lovely to see, actually, that they work together. So whilst there's specific focus areas, disability being one of them, but actually, the more they talk amongst themselves about challenges faced, I think they come, again, to this idea that they're similar challenges, and they're similar solutions, and it's not

taking away from one area if we focus on disability inclusion, for example, because it will benefit everyone.

So they work together. And we have briefings to our CEO, to our leadership team and board periodically to make sure that they are aware of what's going on, being really proactive in, is there law changes? Are there, like I said, the engagement survey? Are we finding that our disabled colleagues are not feeling quite as included or expressing that they've got challenges that are not being addressed, for example? So we try to do that as often as possible and make sure that our leaders have a really, again, practical role in that as well, and they're quite visible in their support. I really, I think it was Raegan who mentioned around the managing partner sending a note out as well, and mentioning that, I think, having things like that is really key to make sure it's not just lip service, actually, it's talking about how it matters.

And one thing, one practical thing, for example, in the UK that we've launched is having a ring fence budget around adjustments, for example. So it's anything around assistive software, facilities, if we need to have building audits, et cetera, as well.

So I think it's important, the budget is there, but actually, we can centralize it, we can track it. We can make sure that no one else can nip into the budget to pay for something. It's there and it's being used. So it was great to see our leaders lobby that and make sure that they're constantly checking in on how we're using it as well.

Awesome. Thank you. Raegan.

Yeah. Kind of Similar. I think, one of the things that I will say is that our managing partner, he's a member of the Disability Resource Group. He shows up to the programming. I think people see that, and it makes a difference. He has a great open door policy. And so I think when people see him on those calls, they go to him with concerns.

But beyond that, all of our resource groups have sponsors from our Management and Policy Committee. And really, those sponsors are tasked with taking any of the concerns or things that come out of the resource group that the firm should be addressing to the management level. And I think, that, as we were talking about, of gives them a very specific role that they have and really gets them engaged with that specific group, which is great.

And then finally, I meet with our managing partner every single week. And in those weekly calls, this is something that we discuss. And we're discussing diversity across the firm more broadly. And so I think having leadership that is engaged, and I think, having a managing partner I can go speak to every week, he's so involved in what's happening in the firm, he considers this his responsibility, and I am the administrative support that helps him execute that responsibility, has made a really big difference and I think, communicates to a lot of people in the firm that it is important.

100%. Thank you so much. That is really important. It's important for leadership to be engaged so it can be respected by others in the firm, but it also does signal to the people in the groups themselves that this matters and that they're taken seriously and considered a real part of the organization.

So let's see. I know we're running out of time. Can anyone touch on some of the challenges that you may have faced in creating a more disability-affirming environment and how you address them?

Yeah, I'm happy to speak to that briefly, since I know we're running low on time. One thing that I'm sure you'll hear a lot of corporate organizations, at least, talk about is budget and trying to get budget to bring in speakers or to help facilitate different programming, things like that. Even volunteer activities, sometimes, we need budget for. That's one thing that I've come up against a little bit.

There's also, really, I think, just long held misunderstandings, like I said, about what disability is and isn't. And I think through some of the things that we've done and I've heard that other organizations have done, I think, have helped to challenge those misunderstandings and course-correct.

And then I think, similarly, one challenge has been just changing workplace norms and expectations regarding social interactions and accommodations, and why someone might interact with certain way or not. And that it's not because they're not a dedicated employee or for a variety of different reasons, it might actually be because that's an impairment that they have and not because they're being disrespectful or this, that, or the other.

And assuming the best in people as opposed to assuming the worst and having to find out later like, oh, no, that's actually because this person just has a challenge with this particular component of operating in the workplace or whatnot. And it's just, like I said, better to assume the best in people and that they're doing things a certain way because that's the way they do it. And it doesn't mean it's bad, it's just different than the way you might do it or maybe a lot of other people do it. And so, like I said, just challenging those norms and expectations, I think, is probably always going to be an ongoing work in progress.

Absolutely. Thank you so much for raising that issue with the different social norms and some of the judgment, because changing people's minds on that is challenging, but education and understanding can kind of break down some of those barriers. So thank you for sharing that. Raegan, did you want to touch on some of the challenges that you faced?

Yeah, I was going to say, I'm just going to be real. When I first started working on disability inclusion, I mean, at some point, I was like, there's so many things I could be doing. I don't know what's going to be effective. And then I have to balance time and if we have the resources to do all these things.

And so, frankly, for me, one of the challenges has been, what should I be doing outside of what we're already doing? And so I think calls like this are so important. I've been taking notes, so like, oh, man, I should take that back to the firm. But just sharing resources is so important and figuring out where those resources are. It's why I've mentioned Disability IN so many times, because they do have great resources if you're kind of interested in learning more about what you can be doing.

Thank you so much. So check out Disability IN because that is a great point. Sometimes, just knowing that there's so much work to do can be a barrier to doing anything. And we understand that, so we're trying to pull out resources to help you. And just please reach out to us if you have ideas or questions, because this is very, very important to us too. Emmi, did you want to talk about any challenges and how you're addressing them?

Yeah. I mean, very, very similarly again. I think it's just starting somewhere and going with it. And you can't solve everything at the same time. And it's not an overnight change. A lot of it is around the attitudes, as has been discussed already.

So just try not to make too many assumptions. And to Raegan point, there's so many resources out there and people and organizations who are experts in this. So reach out and get help from there. Yeah, it'll make a difference, just you have to pick at it every day, and you'll get there.

Thank you so much. Yes. Remember, this is really just about making people safe, and effective, and a part of your organization. And that can take so many forms. And you really just start somewhere. And you get feedback, and you iterate over time, because nothing is going to be perfect, but that can't stop you from making progress.

And so I just want to thank all of our guest speakers who are really excellent. I know we could talk more about this. We definitely didn't get through all of our questions, but this has been really great. If anyone has a final word on some advice you'd like to offer organizations trying to get started or enhance their efforts, please share now. But I just wanted to say, thank you for what you have already shared so far. I don't have advice, but I just want to offer myself as a resource if anybody has questions or is looking for support. I know I really needed that when I was starting some of the efforts that we've undertaken, so I just want to offer that up.

Thanks so much, Raegan.

I'm happy to do the same. If anyone has a question or just ideas, they want to run by me for getting things started from a corporate legal department perspective, I'm happy to do that.

Awesome.

Likewise.

Perfect. Thank you so much, everyone. We'll see you next time. Please check your calendar to see what's coming up next, or reach out if you don't have it. Thanks again. And we'll see you next time.

Thank so.

Thank you.