**Inclusive Art Vermont**

**Arts Access Summit**

**March 28, 2023**

**Panel Discussion: Accessibility from the Artist’s Perspective**

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Hello, welcome back. And welcome to folks who are joining us for the first time this afternoon. My name's Heidi Swevens. I use she/they pronouns. The Director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts Vermont, which is a big title that means I just get to connect with artists and people in community like today. Really grateful to be here with all of you.

I want to be brief in my introduction. For access I'll do a visual description. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair. And today I'm wearing a burnt orange shirt, and behind me white wall, ceilings, with a hue of turquoise. And I want to just overview. This is accessibility from the artists' perspectives. We have had a lot of email conversations, so it will be great to be in the same digital video space. We're going to have the artists do brief introductions. We will share their social media, their websites, in the chat box so you can take a deeper dive into some of the information about them outside of this time. And then we're going to go through a series of a couple prompts, two different prompts. We'll have time for questions, and then we want to begin and end with the artists, so we're going to invite the artists to wrap up with one final thought after the conversation today at the end of our time. So, Jeff, I'd like to turn it over to you now for the brief introduction. Thanks, Jeff. Thanks for being here.

**JEFF KASPER:** Hi, everyone. I'm Jeff. I'll do a quick, you know, visual description.

**ZOOM:** Recording in progress. (Video starts)

**JEFF KASPER:** First of all, my name is Jeff Kasper, I go by he/him/his. I am a light-skinned Black man of mixed ethnic descent, sort of have brown skin, a really... my facial hair is always changing, so I have to remember. Right now I have a brown mustache and kind of like a brown goatee, very tightly shaven. And I wear almost all the time almost only black, so black hoodie and light purple knit cap that my husband made, and I'm just against a white background.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Great. Jeff, this is Heidi, do you want to offer one to two sentences about your artistic practice? I know that's hard. Sort of a tag line.

**JEFF KASPER:** I'm an artist and educator, and I work along a few different categories. I kind of merge graphic design, public art, participatory learning, and contemplative practices, and my work centers on concepts of social support, proximity, and safety. ( [www.jeffkasper.co](http://www.jeffkasper.co/) )

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Jeff. We'll pass it on to karen next.

**KAREN KROLAK:** Hi, I'm karen Krolak, she/her. In the spirit of something that Kayla Hamilton, who is a low-vision choreographer out of New York asked, I will give two different versions of a visual description. The one Kayla likes is instead of a description of what I'm wearing, what I look like, more of the sense of what I feel like today, and I am a pale woman with a lot of gray and a lot of white hair. So I feel like I'm a reflection of the stormy sky that's outside today. I am a middle-aged white woman, really long tangled white hair that is been wrapped up with some forks on my head in a gray T-shirt sitting in front of an upcycled centers that were made into a hospital gown as part of one of my projects a few years ago. I'm currently on an unexpected artist residency in a hotel, which I've been on for five weeks since my family got displaced from our home by a contractor who released asbestos everywhere and my home became an environmental hazard site. And I am also a free range collaborator, whose work involves everything from choreography, to writing, to installation pieces, to clothing, textiles, and things that are very tactile.

I am, in addition to being an independent artist, the co-artistic director of Monkeyhouse ( <https://www.monkeyhouselovesme.com/> ) , an award winning nonprofit that connects communities to choreography. Currently, I'm on the unceded territory of the Pawtucket and Wampanoag here in the state of Massachusetts.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, karen. Aurora Berger, you're next.

**AURORA BERGER:** Hey, y'all. My name's Aurora Berger. I'm  I use she/her pronouns. Quick visual description, I'm sitting in a  actually sitting in a recording studio, because I'm at work and I'm hiding from my students. But there's a like gold polka dotted curtain behind me. I have bright pink hair, light skinned white woman, wearing rectangular glasses and wearing a blue sweater.

I am an artist, writer, and educator. I live in Vermont. I teach K through high school visual art. And I do a lot of work as an artist with selfportrait perception of bodies in spaces and social and cultural understandings of what disability is. And I'm a primarily a photographer. ( <http://auroraberger.com/> )

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Great. Thank you. So, let's get into the first prompt. I'm going to say this out loud, and know we've all had time to think about it. But in what ways do your artistic practice and accessibility intersect? Again, we're going to begin with Jeff.

**JEFF KASPER:** I think a lot about how we can practice, you know, creating a trauma-sensitive culture in our spaces of learning. And in our kind of collective spaces, whether that be, you know, museums, or cultural institutions, or schools, so I really am thinking about how often we are... many people, probably everyone, has experienced traumatic events that impact them in their day-to-day life. And that carries over to your, you know, when you're learning, that carries over to when you're walking into a space of art, that carries over to so many places and often we don't have the opportunity to really acknowledge that and honor that, and, you know, work with others and share that information and feel heard. That's really what I focus... you know, I focus on building those spaces in my work. As I mentioned, I am primarily working, well, in graphic design, as well as in sort of public social spaces. I create installations and public artworks. I like to, you know, really provide learning materials and sort of experiential, yeah, like moments where we can kind of like show up kind of authentically with another person, or with groups of people. And much of my work, yeah, centers around sort of how do we communicate how we feel safe with others, and how do we build safety collectively. Yeah. That's, you know, and I think about those very much so as accessibility concerns, because many of the places where we find ourselves are not hospitable. And even if art can be sort of the refuge momentarily, I think that's a pretty good thing.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Beautiful. This is Heidi again. Thank you for that. And sounds like we'll pass it over to karen next for, you know, in what ways does your artistic practice intersect with accessibility.

**KAREN KROLAK:** So, you know, it's fascinating. I was thinking about this question over the weekend, and I think where my practice began intersecting was when I was in the 8th grade, and I grew up training in the hyper-ableist world of ballet. And I studied at a school that is a world-renowned school in the Boston area that I won't name, and had a teacher whose teaching techniques unbeknownst to me caused me to break my back in two places. And I kept dancing on it until I eventually destroyed one of my knees. And when I went into a doctor to look at the knee, he was like, oh, I see you study with this particular teacher. And can you bend over and touch the floor without pain? And then when I did he was like, so, do you have pain here and here? I was like, I do. He was like, all right, we're going to get your knees and back done. When he was meeting with my parents when I was getting the things done, he's like this happens to so many of this woman's students. She berates them into continuing to dance after they've broken their backs. I'm just hoping we don't have to re-break it.

So, when I started teaching as a dance teacher, it was a big goal of mine to think about how long people could dance for and how to change the way that I was training people to be able to really work with the tools of their body and not to be able to push them out of a range. And began really thinking about the idea that as a choreographer, as a teacher in the dance world, that my materials were people first. And that really shifted a lot of things.

And then when I was in college, the people that I studied dance under, my degree is actually in linguistics. I did dance as kind of an obsession during college and got to study with a bunch of professional dancers. This is going to sound terrible. They all died of various things within a year and a half of me graduating, but the thing that was fascinating was when they got these chronic illnesses, they didn't leave the classroom. They continued teaching in front of us and gave this example of how to be able to continue working. And it was the first time for me as someone within the dance world seeing people allowed to be able to share what their own bodies were going through. And it left a huge, huge impact on me in the way that not just that I taught, but saw myself as a teacher.

So, when I began in 2003 dealing with having a diagnosis of a really super rare health condition, there's less than 240 cases in the world, I didn't feel like I had to give things up. And one of the big challenges that I see within talking to doctors about my health condition is the idea that identifying as disabled means you want to stop doing things, you want permission not to have to work, rather than identifying as disabled as a way to be able to give yourself permission to get the tools you need to be able to work.

And, so, I tried dealing with these things in the way that I think most people in the dance world do. If you don't have a visible disability, you hide it. And that worked really poorly for me, but I kept doing it up until 2012 when a car crash killed my mom, dad, and brother. And oddly enough having PTSD and having medical professionals talk to me about having to stop and really like watching how you went back into teaching shifted for me how I thought about my own personhood and permission to be able to show what was going on.

And in 2015 I went back to grad school, and was in a program where I started trying to be able to tie together various parts of myself in an interdisciplinary arts program, but also trying to be able to grapple with the fact that my body was changing, my sense of self was changing, and I needed to be able to rethink that. And for the second semester of school, I couldn't go back, because I was back in the hospital dealing with my health condition, and that's when I began building and researching hospital gowns and thinking about what makes a hospital stay difficult. And doing all this research on how we are when we're in health situations changes the outcomes of things that, in fact, in England, where a lot of things are different because of socialized medicine, they've done studies that found if you actually had different hospital gowns, just that, that reflected the dignity of the person, health outcomes were better.

And, so, I began doing this series of odd projects all related around health, which then began to be something that was influencing my dance, and then began to be something that made me stop and look at what am I missing right now as I try to talk to people. And part of what I realized was that I was struggling to be able to talk about what had happened after the crash that killed my family and the changes that were going on with me, because we literally don't have words. When you're an adult and lose parents, apparently you don't get to be an orphan. When you're a sibling, you're nothing. Even though the health outcomes of people that lose siblings  but we don't name it, we don't talk about it. I think about things like that on days like today, because I was born in Nashville, not that far from the school yesterday that just had this tragic shooting again. And we are instead counting the number of people who died, rather than the number of people whose lives will never be the same because of what happened, because they've lost a student, they've lost a sibling, a friend, you know, a sense of safety within a place that's supposed to be safe. So, I created a project called the [Dictionary of Negative Space](https://dictionaryofnegativespace.com/), which doesn't name these words. It puts a blank space there, numbers it, and tries to be able to define it and show you how difficult it becomes to talk. And that has been kind of the center point for a lot of the work that I've done, whether it's in dance, whether it's in textiles, whether it's in writing projects for the last seven years. And I've really been working on how do we look at where we don't have language as a way of helping people to connect one another and potentially even to look at what would make us give words to things and what things we choose to value in our culture, you know. For example, we still don't have a word for mother who loses a child, but we do have MILF, SMILF, DILF and other things because that's a way to sell those people and objectify them rather than looking at them as humans who have gone through a traumatic loss. Sam, I see your comment about this makes me think about the nonverbal community, as well. I feel like within disability there's a whole segment of how this relates to things that is different from just grief. And I think that's a really important part of where I see the intersections and potentials for the future. I will stop talking now so somebody else can talk, but thank you.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Karen. In my vision noticing some head nods on the screen. So, appreciate. I'm going to pass it to Aurora and then we'll kind of circle back around to you, Jeff.

**AURORA BERGER:** Thanks. So, I'm sitting here thinking about this as I'm listening to Jeff and karen talk. And I think for me, my practice ties a lot of things together. Like I said, I am a writer and also an educator. And a visual artist. And I think to me, access is about artistic literacy and providing artistic literacy within the disabled community, within queer communities, within the general population, within kids, right. I, literally, 20 minutes ago was sitting in a room full of 6 year olds talking about shapes and sewing and how do you make things out of materials. And how do you tell your story with those materials that you have in front of you. So, for me, a lot of my art is about taking the materials I have, and my usual method of that is photography, but it sometimes is water color, sometimes it's writing, and sometimes it's, you know, doing a session in a conference like this.

And using my knowledge, my words, my ability to share my ideas to hopefully bring some of that literacy to other people and share that access to all of the ridiculous amounts of books and things that I've read that, you know, are now all stored inside my brain and I would love to share them with other people. And I was speaking to somebody yesterday actually about why I became a teacher. And I was telling the story that I've written about before of a professor that I had in college, her name was Gret Antilla, and she used to let me hide in her office. She was my education professor, but I straight-up would hide in her office all day, curl up in a chair in her office, and she would toss peanut butter cups at me. She was like, listen, clearly, this is what you need. You don't need me to harass you about your deadlines or remind you that you have a meeting later, or ask you why you're not in class right now. Clearly, what you need right now is someone to sort of toss chocolate at you and let you hide in their office. So, she would. As an educator, that always stuck with me. That idea of giving people what it is that they need to be able to make progress, and then be able to do incredible things. I wouldn't be a teacher if wasn't for her and working with the kids I work with if it wasn't for her. I think about the fact she was a professor for 30, 40 years, as an education professor, and there are probably hundreds, if not thousands of teachers in this country now, who she probably had that affect on. And, hopefully, we're all out there trying to make individual connections with our students and give them what they need and not just what, you know, the state says that they need to learn. And I could go on forever about education, but it comes back to the way that I feel as an artist, because as an artist, I want those same things for people. I want them to be able to get what they need out of my art and out of my writing, and also be able to share the things that I care about.

And, so, I think a lot about as an artist, deconstructing like the hyper-medicalized and hyper-elite art world and thinking about ways to exist within a hyper-ableist setting that we all do, and sharing my perspectives through my art. And then hopefully as people are able to interact with my art, they can understand some of my perspectives and, hopefully, that can open up a little bit of dialogue and maybe some changes.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Great. This is Heidi, thank you, Aurora. And I'm just going to pause for a minute

**KAT REDNISS:** I think I'm going to do exactly what you ask, just a couple things in the chat.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thank you.

**KAT REDNISS:** Perfect. So, there's links to all of these artists' work in the chats, and then we also have Sam said ‘This makes me think of nonverbal community”, which karen mentioned. Emerson “Remember seeing something in the beginning of the pandemic for each person lost, there were eight or nine people left grieving in the wake of their loved ones death. Thank you for sharing that, karen.” Gratitude for the reflection and all of you. So, go forth and continue, but thank you all for just the openness and sharing so far.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Yeah, thank you, Kat. I was also going to say, you know, just a pause in terms of all of that information. I feel like this is going to be the beginning of what could be so many conversations. So, I'm going to pause and take it in and just we're going to shift gears a little bit after this very brief pause, because, you know, the disability, the ableism, there's a lot of barriers still. So, the next prompt will be... is what barriers still exist in creative communities, and, you know, what would you like to have adjusted or changed about them? How to remove them. Jeff, I'm going to begin with you. And, yeah.

**JEFF KASPER:** Thank you. Jeff here. I, you know, really deeply resonate with what karen and Aurora shared, especially how education, you know, our education as artists and as teachers are, you know, inextricably linked to where we are now and have profound impact. And that's, you know, what I want to speak to a bit and what I think a little bit... well, a lot a bit... in my practice, in my own research, is, you know, how can we as either as artists facilitating learning, experiences, or as teachers who are working in arts-based methods, how and perhaps are even training future artists or future non-artists who are using their creativity in many places, how can we center support in those spaces of learning? And that's something that I feel art school and art education doesn't always do. And I  probably never does. And that, you know, I teach  I, of course, teach in community contexts, but also formally am a professor and teach at the University of Massachusetts currently. And, you know, there are countless times where students come to my office and are like, hey, I need to hide, or I need to cry, or I need to just feel heard. And a lot of the times that  or have panic attacks  a lot of the time these are completely the result of the conditions that we as educators sometimes subject them to, right. And we can really rework our classrooms, we can rework our curricula, to really center personal and peer support, and we can focus on, you know, how we need to show up for each other while also, you know, developing our artistry and developing our skills. These things don't have to be separate, and they aren't actually separate in practice. So, I think one of the biggest obstacles for our field is really rectifying this sort of, you know, especially in the visual arts, how do I say, this myth of the lone artist genius, and the myth of the, you know, the individual artist who can do it all and doesn't have personal challenges, and really recenter the collective support. Because in reality, that is what, you know, sustains our art worlds, our communities, and ourselves.

So, I think, yeah, we need to, you know, center disabled and ill voices in our classrooms, and we need to, you know, be there for our students and create systems that they can be there for each other, and that that's not separate from artistry at all.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** This is Heidi. Thank you, Jeff. I really am refraining from wanting to ask more questions. So, I'm sitting and just appreciating the richness of this content. And karen, I'm going to invite you to take on the barrier prompt.

**KAREN KROLAK:** I also just want to say to Jeff, absolutely, yes, I totally agree. I feel like where I notice a lot of barriers is in funding. I feel like it's not just that there aren't specific funds that you can apply to to be able to get accommodations for a lot of different fields. I feel like the fact that most major grants now require the artists, who are usually the lowest paid person within the structure of things, to be able to offer ways to reach marginalized audiences, especially disabled, and yet those funders themselves don't even take the time to figure out ways to have forms that don't require hours of writing, that aren't saying you need to explain your idea in the least amount of characters possible, which is even for people that are really comfortable writing, a really difficult task to be able to condense things down into that chunk of information. That don't include in their budgets specific accessibility lines that's under other, and then they wonder why people aren't focusing that as an important part of what they are doing. That don't include panelists who have disabilities, who have any knowledge of artists working within Crip aesthetics, who are continuing to assert labels that are based on ableism and elitism and qualifiers and biases without having to think about that. And are really not last year I was on the National Endowment for the Arts panel for dance and was really quite saddened by the fact I was the only panelist within my group who identified as having a disability, that when we went through and looked at a lot of the grants that were coming in, there wasn't a lot of scrutiny going on into how funds were being used, that people would say things like I'm going to hire an ASL interpreter, but weren't saying they were going to have a connection with the Deaf community. Or they were talking about what they were doing to give hope to people with disabilities by bringing in a national artist who doesn't identify as disabled to come in and teach them that they could do something. I find that attitude that is really condescending as part of this mandate.

And then I also feel that a lot of organizations are being forced into positions where they have to do something that is kind of performance accommodations without really investing into it. For example, there's an organization that I'm currently working for who got $70,000 to upgrade their stair lift. That stair lift is beautiful, it's shiny, there's no instructions on how to use it. When you go to the building and call ahead and say I'm coming in and need to be able to use the stair lift, you get somebody who's like I don't know how to use that. Or my favorite was we only use it during performances. Why would we need it other times? Because you have disabled artists who are working for your institution and as many times I called in, I have still not been able to get someone. We now know people can come downstairs and let me in another door, but we haven't rectified making their $70,000 investment usable by the communities they want to have coming in. And I feel like this pressure to do this so they can then say they are accessible, so they can then get their other grants, isn't really looking at what is real accessibility and what would make people feel welcome in those spaces. I'll pass it to you now, Aurora.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, karen.

**AURORA BERGER:** Kind of on a similar idea, I want to echo karen in saying that I strongly agree with what Jeff was talking about in terms of centering support and creating communities of care within our institutions. I really agree. I don't think art school is really ever a supportive place. And I say that as someone who talks to high schoolers who are like should I go to art school? I'm like, oh... let's talk about what your goal is there. Maybe, but let's discuss that goal.

But I think sort of adding on to what karen was just talking about, the other thing that goes into this grants and funding world that really sustains anybody who wants to be a full-time professional artist, is that you need to have access to health care. And in this non-universal health care world, that is not a given. And so that means that you're either working  you have to either be married to get somebody else's health care, you need to be buying it from the marketplace and hope you live in a state that subsidizes that well. You need to be working two jobs while doing other things so you can afford health care, or full-time at one job, part-time at another, grant writing to get funding. That's not a sustainable thing literally for anyone, much less for disabled people. And if you happen to be in that weird space that I was in for years, where I was just earning under the Medicaid cap, and I couldn't earn more money, or I would lose my health insurance, there's no support for people in that situation, especially from grant funding organizations. And I won an award from a fairly large disability art organization. I won like a big grant, and I was super excited about it, and I was like, okay, I have to figure out how to accept this money in a way that would not drop me off Medicaid, because I still have to go to the doctor.

So, I was getting... I was calling, you know, like Vermont legal aid trying to get some person to tell me how do I accept this money in a way I won't lose my health insurance. And I was getting calls from the organization being like, listen, you're the only person who hasn't signed their dispersement thing yet, you're holding everybody from getting their money. What, what, you're a disability organization, how am I the first person you're having this encounter with? I can't be, frankly. And the amount of ableism that is coming from a disability organization that the whole goal of them existing is to uplift disabled artists, is like putting a strong barrier on me being able to accept it. So, to the extent they were like, no, we can't write the check to your mom. Can't write the check to some other thing. It was ridiculous. Anyway, I got bailed out by the fact we were still in an economic crisis and technically we were still in a state of emergency and couldn't cancel my Medicaid. So, I just accepted it and was like, well, at least the pandemic brought one good thing.

But now I work two jobs and have to buy, you know, insurance from the marketplace, and it's incredibly expensive, and it's not sustainable, and the idea of a lot of these residencies that require you to sort of uproot yourself, move somewhere for a month, forego all of your medical care. That's not an option for a lot of people that have transfusions, or any kind of weekly appointment that they need to go and deal with, or scans, or anything. And I've looked at a lot of programs where I've been really interested in applying and says you can't leave campus for two months. Well, there goes that.

So, I think that all of those are things that are not being considered at a baseline level for massive organizations that claim to be uplifting marginalized people. And that's something that really needs to change in order to even claim that they are breaking barriers.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** This is Heidi, thank you, Aurora, and Jeff and karen. I'm noticing our time. We can open it up to questions, and I want to include the three artists on the panel in those questions, because if there's something that another artist said, we have  we'll make time for some of those comments and responses, or yeah I agree with that, or yes/and. So, open it up at this point, and I know Kat is magically behind the scenes for access to read anything that comes in from the chat box. And if you want to unmute and ask a question that way, please feel free to also do that, whatever way is most comfortable from the audience.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan. I just wanted to share in the chat Alexandra shared, “Yes, Jeff. Karen, so true.” Melissa, “Authenticity, absolutely necessary, agree, karen.” Karen wrote “thank you, Kelly and Melissa.” Darlene, “Accessibility is way beyond just ramps and elevators.” Sam, “omg”, in response to I think what Aurora was talking about trying to navigate funding and Medicaid. And then karen, “Those complications are so important when working with undocumented workers or immigrants working on visas.”

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** This is Heidi, thank you, Megan. One of you was behind the scenes with the chat box magic and accessibility.

**MEGAN:** We're both behind the scenes.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** So, what questions or responses?

**MEGAN:** I do have Libby just added into the chat, “How do you continue to share and be vulnerable about these personal experiences? And I'm fan girling each of you so hard. Thank you for this amazingness.” I echo that sentiment, too.

**KAREN KROLAK:** If I can jump in on Libby's question for a second. I think part of what really helps me to keep being vulnerable about these experiences is, one, both being a white woman named karen and feeling like I really have a duty to have to work hard to embrace the fact that there's a lot of other populations who have been banging their heads into a wall for a long time, and that my very name is the symbol of the problems that they face, that there's a part of me that feels like I need to be able to step up and make it better for the other multimarginalized people within our community.

But I think also one of the things that's really been important to me is seeing how that vulnerability opens doors for other people. Back in 2015 I, on the night before my dead brother's birthday, just randomly wound up at a moth story slam and got on the stage and told a story about him. And I thought as I was doing it, this is only going to be helpful for me. And then two weeks later I got an email from someone whose child had been in the audience, who had been there as part of a friend's birthday party, but another child from their grade had died that weekend in a car crash. And they apparently repeated that story at the funeral for this child who died, and the person who was there like recognized that it was from me, and reached out to say I heard you did this, and I want you to know it had ripples. And that made me go from feeling like I'm just whining, being indulgent, to there's something of value in my vulnerability that's allowing other people to process something. And on the days when I get really frustrated or really embarrassed that I've been living in a hotel for five weeks, or this is the state of my life, it helps me remember I'm just one of many people going through crap right now. I'm certainly not the worst displaced person in the world in this moment when there's a world going on, there's earthquakes in places, there's tornados. So it helps to have a sense of humility around even like the struggles that we each have.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** This is Heidi, thanks, karen. Jeff or Aurora, do you want to respond to the question from the chat box around vulnerability?

**AURORA BERGER:** Yeah. I'd be happy to. This is Aurora. This is actually... so, if you peruse my website now, a lot of my work is naked self-portraits, and Megan is laughing at me. So, this is a question I get asked a lot. And I have a couple different responses. One is that making art is the best form of therapy I've ever found. And I could have kept it all separate and, you know, secret, and kept it all in my little boxes in my room, but sharing it has made it so much more therapeutic, honestly, because I've been able to talk about the experiences that I'm making art about. Most of my art is made about processing. It's not necessarily like going out and saying I have this piece of art that I've envisioned and going to go create it. It's much more of an I'm going to wander around in the woods and for lack of a less foul language, fuck around and find out what happens. But the reality is, it's there because it needs to happen. And, hopefully, it helps other people who also need to find some kind of expression.

And the other reason kind of goes with what karen said about having a lot of privilege. I am a white woman, I'm queer, but I live in Vermont, so that's not a huge barrier here. And I am, you know, invisibly disabled and am able to walk up stairs and stuff, so at the moment I've gotten access to a lot of places, and I am super educated, had the opportunity to go to college, read disability textbooks, figure out stuff for myself, and I like to share that with other people, because those aren't opportunities that are universally available to people. And I would feel really honestly silly having all of that knowledge inside my head and gatekeeping it. That's the honest answer.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** This is Heidi, thanks, Aurora. Honesty is a value. Yeah. And I'm going to just ask you, Jeff, it's always okay to pass, but kind of hand it over to you if there's something in response for the question around vulnerability.

**JEFF KASPER:** I would love to just actually instead of responding, love to just read this really quick quote. And this is June Jordan the poet. This was written in 1970, it's a personal letter, just an excerpt. I think it speaks to this. And it goes like this, "And for ourselves, the intrinsic purpose is to reach and to remember and to declare our commitment to all things living without deceit, without fear, and without reservation. We do what we can and by doing it, we keep ourselves trusting, which is to say vulnerable. And more than that, what can anyone ask?"

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Beautiful. Thank you. Thank you, Jeff. I'm going to ask you, can you read that one more time, if you would, please, and maybe there's some way that it can also go in the chat box.

**JEFF KASPER:** Yes, I have it as an image, but I can retype it after, for sure.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan, I'll look for a link for online, and also just sharing karen put a heart emoji up after you finished reading, Jeff.

**JEFF KASPER:** So, this is Jeff again, and I will read this quote from June Jordan, and this is a personal letter that she wrote in 1970. And the quote is, "And for ourselves, the intrinsic purpose... in quotes... is to reach and to remember and to declare our commitment to all things living. And without deceit. Without fear. And without reservation. We do what we can, and by doing it, we keep ourselves trusting, which is to say vulnerable. And more than that, what can anyone ask?"

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Beautiful. So, we have time for about, you know, ten more minutes, so questions, responses, heart emoji expressions with your voice.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan. In the chat, Kelly wrote “Thank you, Jeff.” And Whitney shared, “Jeff, green heart emoji, sparkling stars emoji.” (Train sounds).

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** I'm hearing the train behind me, not sure if that's audible, so I'm going to mute myself for a moment. (Train horn). Maybe not. This is the assistive tech where I turn off the voice and sometimes that means I do other things by accident, if we can model imperfection. This is me being human.

So, I'm going to, if there's no questions from the audience at this point, Megan, am I accurate in that?

**MEGAN:** One just popped in.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Okay, I'll pause again. What's the question?

**MEGAN:** No worries, literally just popped in the chat. Keilani shared “Have you found any resources to help with grant writing when you are low on spoons?” Good question, Keilani.

**JEFF KASPER:** I can jump in. This is Jeff here. I can't stress enough the, I guess, kind of profound impact that body doubling has. And for folks who don't know that term, really setting  body doubling is setting up a time to really just sit with someone else when you're doing a task. And I often support other folks in this way, particularly around grant writing, and people help me, as well. Just, you know, asking for someone to sit with you and sometimes even, you know, I've had times where I've dictated things and someone's written it for me, or vice versa, right. And I find that, yeah, leaning into working with others and being transparent about the fact that you really would love to get this grant and get this in, but maybe could use some help. I think people in your networks of support understand that. And there's a big opportunity there. So, that's what I would share.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thank you.

**KAREN KROLAK:** This is karen. I totally agree with Jeff on this. In fact, I would go so far as to say develop a network of other artists even when you're applying for the same thing. Get together, pass it around, give each other feedback, be supportive. Monkeyhouse does have funding. We've gotten funding over the last two years for one-on-one mentoring. So, it's something to consider within other communities of whether there are grants. We got ours through a local cultural grant, we've gotten several now, because we were able to prove last year our buttress program, which was designed to help artists reach higher. We got a $4,500 grant to be able to support mentoring. And through that our artists raised over $100,000. So, it makes a huge difference in being able to have group writing sessions where we just got together in various public libraries and had people write at the same time and be able to get immediate feedback, or to have private sessions. And to have funding to help with accommodations has made huge, huge difference. And if any of you want help that way and are within the dance field, reach out. We have more funding this year. We just got a grant in while I've been on this from yet another organization being able to support that. So, reach out. I'm always looking for people to be able to help with that. And if you need it even beyond the skills of what we as individuals have, we're always interested in connecting you to a different mentor, as well.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, karen.

**AURORA BERGER:** I am not a grant writer, this is Aurora. I'm not a grant writer. I have written very few grants, mostly because I am, frankly, too tired to write a grant, which is a bummer. Because if I had funding, I could be maybe less tired and make art. But I did want to share a resource I find really helpful, which is The White Pube, which is an organization outside of London. They have a successfully funded grant library, where you can look at successful funding applications, and I'll link it here in a moment once I'm done talking, but it is a fantastic resource if you're looking for successful language that has been used in the past. ( <https://thewhitepube.co.uk/funding-library/> )

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Aurora, thanks, everybody. Were there more questions from the audience, Megan?

**MEGAN:** Yeah, Keilani said “Thank you.” I do not see any more questions in the chat. I'm going to just do a quick scroll. Also, if you want to  if you're comfortable and want to unmute, please feel free to do that, as well.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** If there aren't any... I have a curiosity based on some of what you've said. I know this was about accessibility from the artist perspectives, but all of you have mentioned support and community. So, we have a little time before this sort of wrap up and I'm curious if any one of you or all of you want to respond to what is community mean to you, and what's support mean to you, and kind of what's that look like, feel like, sound like. Yeah.

**AURORA BERGER:** I can go first. This is Aurora. This is actually something that I really struggle with. There's a fairly famous, infamous, piece of disability Crip lit pedagogy that centers around communities of care. And it's a book that I've always really struggled with, because coming from a super rural community as a person who can't drive, I don't have that physical community in the slightest. Like everything that's written in that book is completely irrelevant in my life. And that's something that I really struggled with as a person with a disability. And just generally living in a rural place.

So, for me that has definitely become, you know, more Internet-based community function. But it's something that I think probably would impact my life hugely if I had physical communities around me that I could interact with. And that's something that just as you go about sort of Internet and in-person disability communities and you hear that conversation, something that I encourage people to push back on, because I think it's a really sort of steeply held notion that exists for people when you live in a city and it's present for you. And it's just not true for rural America. So, that's that.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Aurora. Other responses out community support kind of what does that mean to you as a disabled artist?

**REBECCA:** This is Rebecca, can you all hear me?

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Yeah, Rebecca, yeah.

**REBECCA:** You can hear me?

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** You could speak up a little bit.

**REBECCA:** Okay, I just wanted to reenforce what Aurora just said and speak of it in my context. I... before pandemic, I was a very able-bodied artist and very much moving in circles of other able-bodied artists. Because I got COVID at the beginning of the pandemic, became long COVID, and as the pandemic begins to go back to the ways before, I haven't been able to join my communities of artists in the ways that I could before. So, I'm going through a whole process of, you know, speaking with the  I can't perform. I'm a musician, performing musician, and I can't perform in the ways I used to in the venues I used to, because I can't drive myself anymore, I can't, you know  so, Internet has been quite a gift, you know, in terms of finding other disabled artists and thinking outside of my box of my musical community that I had before. And, of course, the challenges of how to work with my previous musical community in order to make accessibility for me. And as I'm doing that, I'm realizing it's creating accessibility for all kinds of audience that I hadn't been reaching before. It's a really beautiful dance and a gift, I would say, in certain ways. But the Internet is a crucial piece of it, and it's important to not discount that. It's really not part of the musical culture that I'm used to.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Rebecca. Thank you.

**KAREN KROLAK:** This is karen. I would say one of the things is that support can be a really small "s" word. You know, some days it is just that somebody sends me a ridiculous picture of their cat. Something silly that a student made or said during a day. And those just coming in are enough to kind of like get me through really difficult times.

Sometimes it's just knowing that I can reach out to somebody at 3:00 in the morning because I'm not sleeping and say, hey, I'm up, are you up? And they'll respond back. I think we often think support has to be some kind of huge capital "S" every time I need you, you're there, rather than you have a hit or miss situation of when people can give, they do. And when you can, you give back. And I also think... and I don't recommend this for anybody, I don't recommend the crash that kills multiple family members a way, but the thing that was fascinating about it was in moments like that, people stop being afraid to say they love you. You know, when you're one of the two nuclear family members that are left, people are suddenly very eager to tell you how much they care about you. And it was a real interesting moment to recognize that's always there under the surface, but we often don't voice it. And once you break that seal, people are much more able to respond in kind. And it kind of goes back to the question Libby asked about vulnerability. When you put it out there yourself, other people are more willing to respond to that. Sometimes. I'm also aware there are awful people in the world and they see vulnerability and they attack. But for a lot of the people we care about. Now when I see somebody having a bad day, or when I start working with new students, I'll say to them, know you can reach out. It may be six months from now, may be from two years from now, but oftentimes people will send me, can I have a dog picture, and that makes you feel less alone with it.

And to Rebecca's comment about finding a new place on the Internet, absolutely. Like just knowing that's a starting point that's different, that even though you're losing a community that used to be there, there is a really strong and rich community there. And, you know, if it ever helps to have somebody to reach out to you, I'll put information in. Again, reach out to me. I'm happy to be able to chat that way with people.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, karen. And thank you for this conversation. Thanks to the audience. We're at the point where we're going to toss it around one more time for a final thought, reflection, for today. I hesitate sometimes to say final, because we're often like just because the Zoom meeting is over, doesn't mean we're gone. Just sort of a wrap up for today. Jeff, I'm going to invite you to start, please.

**JEFF KASPER:** You know, I want to try to keep it brief, but I want to say, like, you know, we're forming a, you know, a temporary or improvisational community right now. We're in charge of the future we build. And that can be scary, but that's also the most exciting thing ever. So, we get to determine what that feels like. And I'm happy to be in that space with you all right now.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, Jeff. Karen?

**KAREN KROLAK:** I want to say be  practice being messy, because the work that we have ahead of us is messy, and the more we get comfortable allowing ourselves to be messy and being in places that are messy, the less traumatic it is to be there. Also, I want to say thank you for all of you letting me be in a messy position right now and not making me feel strange, othered, or panicked. I really appreciate the space that's being created and held here.

**HEIDI SWEVENS**: Thanks, karen. Over to you, Aurora.

**AURORA BERGER:** I think I would echo both of those statements, and also just the disability art world is one of the most supportive groups of people that I've ever discovered, and I would say in contrast to what Jeff and I said about art schools earlier, they are much better than art school. So, if you ever went to art school and are like, oh, God, the art world is horrifying, I promise, the disability art world is much more chill. And through the disability art world, this is probably like three years running I've been working with Inclusive Arts Vermont closely. I've been  I sort of  Megan and I have done seven or eight different things together. We've never met in person, but we have been in shows, been on panels, did whole convenings, now she works for Inclusive Arts Vermont. Everybody that I meet in the disability art world is wonderful and supportive and is not judgmental about being a disaster. And it's great. So, just this is a great community of care. And it is virtual. And I cannot say enough for disabled artists being rad people.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thank you to you all. Thanks to the audience. We're going to take a ten-minute break, and the next workshop is about inclusive teaching methods. So, ten minutes, I think that means 2:40. I had to look at my clock to do the math. And then after that, there will be a group talking about considerations for accessible programming, and Jeff will return for that, so thanks for that. Thanks for being here, and we will reconvene in about ten minutes.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan, I wanted to share really quick before we step away, there are a lot of links in the chat, which are amazing, and I'm saving them all and will put them in a followup email, so if anyone... we won't lose those amazing resources for you and will share them all with you in a follow-up email. There are lots of heart emojis at the end of the session, too. So, thank you all.

**ALEXANDRA TURNER:** This is Alexandra, I wanted to say if you haven't yet, collect some art materials for the next session if you're a person that wants to make visual arts. We'll be doing some creating next. So, see you soon.

**HEIDI SWEVENS:** Thanks, all.