Clarissa Kripke: Our next speaker panel is on serving immigrant clients, family perspectives on the challenges and the solutions. For this panel, I want to let you know that we're going to be utilizing a language interpreter. At the bottom of your Zoom bar, of the toolbar, you will need to select a language preference, either English or Korean and even if you want it in English, you need to select English in order to hear the panel in your preferred language. At the end of the session, we'll once again adjourn to breakout sessions, and this panel will be hosting a breakout room. If you'd like to continue your conversation with them or meet and greet any number of our other resource providers and participants for conversation about the conference and services and supports. This panel is going to be moderated by our previous Shriver Award winner, Judy Mark, the President of Disability Voices United, an organization directed by and for people with disabilities and their families. DVU advocates for choice and control over our lives, meaningful outcomes that matter to us and systems that are equitable and accountable to us. Judy's led efforts in California to enact disability rights laws, on issues ranging from probate, conservatorship reform, and supported decision making, self-determination, and systems accountability. She in her previous life spent over 30 years with national policy organizations most extensively focusing on immigrant and refugee rights. She's a great person to lead this panel, to moderate this panel, and I'll leave it to her.

Judy Mark: Thank you so much, Clarissa. It's so wonderful to be back here at the UCSF conference. I'm not going to speak a lot. I'm personally not an immigrant, and so this is a very critically important session today, and we're going to be hearing from parents who are immigrants who are going to tell you about how their culture interfaces with the different systems to help their children, and they're all parents of children with developmental disabilities. We're going to start with Elizabeth Gomez. Elizabeth is a parent of two children served by regional centers, and she'll tell you a little bit more herself. But she's also the director and co-founder of the Integrated Community Collaborative, which works primarily with Spanish-speaking families to help them navigate systems. Take it away, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Barrios Gomez: Hi, good morning, everyone. First, I'd like to say thank you to Judy Mark for inviting me to share my perspective as a parent here on this panel. I'm also very just overwhelmed by the amount of information that this conference has provided. It gives me the opportunity to share a little bit about myself. Thank you. I am a mother of two young adults served by the Regional Center system. My oldest son has Down's syndrome, and my youngest son is on the autism spectrum. I am also going to share my perspective not only as a parent, but also having had the opportunity to be the director of the Integrated Community Collaborative, and also consider myself an integrator also has given me the opportunity to not only share this morning on my personal experience, but also of many people that we help in supporting the community. The ICC is a parent-to-parent organization. It's a nonprofit that helps the Latino community navigate the complex systems of support. Specifically the regional center systems is where we spend a lot of our time, but we also support families in other meetings like in the school districts or even other systems that they are navigating. But what brings me to my conversation today is to share with you during these times that our community is going through this difficult situation, specifically the Latino community is impacted completely with a lot of the immigration situations currently affecting them. The tremendous amount of fear that is affecting the families is very concerning to us and mostly because what we're seeing is we're seeing that families are staying in home. They are not really allowing a lot of their children to be in the community. They are afraid of mostly being separated from them. Most of our families have children who are actually US citizens. Who should be able to and have the right to engage and have all these services that they're entitled to. But for the reasons that I'm discussing with you, what we're seeing today is actually something that is impacting them a lot. It is very heartbreaking because we know that they need the services. We know that they are in need of even more support now more than ever. But instead, what we see is that they're actually not accessing the services. I want to tell you a little bit more about what we do. At the Integrated Community Collaborative, we attend meetings with them. We go to their IPP meetings, like I said, and we also go to other things like HSS meetings or

even school meetings, the IEPs. When we do that, we are able to navigate with them and experience firsthand a lot of the challenges that they're facing. One of the things that is happening is that they're not having access to services as well, because there's a lot of system barriers that we have been navigating with them. As they take the courage to actually come to these meetings and ask for the supports, these families are faced with a lot of denials for the services, and they're actually even asked to go and look into all the generic resources and come back once you bring me some denials of services that they went and apply somewhere else. This makes it very difficult for our families because they are already experiencing all the stress, and then having to go through all these steps that they have to do before they can actually access services makes it that they actually decide and to just not continue with the process. Because of this, we are experiencing a magnitude of problems, but this is not new. Of course, we know that disparities have always existed, and we know that disparities exist for our families and disparities affect the minorities, but mostly the Latino communities. I apologize for that. I want to share with you that, in navigating the systems of support with them. I don't know if you can hear those. As we navigate the systems of support for them and we try to engage in conversation and helping them access the services, the part that I think is more difficult for us is how do we maintain the clients with all the services that they are entitled to receive, and at the same time, walk them through all the paperwork and all the process and the denials. This is one of the concerns that we have right now, Judy, and I just want to also say that in addition to that, when we've come to request also support for issues like the support that should be given to them for immigration and things like that, they also don't find any other supports. Again, I believe that the Latino community has, for many years, been asking for support and for help, but it's not really as easy for them to find the resources. As the Integradoras work with the families, one of the things that we have found is that the peer-to-peer model is really one of the possible supports and solutions, but it's not also available to many of them. We hope that in the future, we could see a little bit more of not just giving people information because information is good, but the families really need a lot more than just information. They need a system they can trust. Families need a person that they feel that relates to them culturally and even language issues. Because of that we believe this is the best way to support them. Thank you.

Judy Mark: Thank you so much, Elizabeth. Really important points that you make, and we're going to get some questions going after. I would now like to introduce Kyungshil Choi. Kyungshil is the founder of the Korean STP Network. STP stands for Self Determination Program. Kyungshil is going to be speaking in Korean, and a reminder to everyone to go down to the bottom of your screen. Click on the globe that says interpretation. You might have to click on more to find it. When you click on interpretation, if you are an English speaker, you'll need to click on English in order to hear the simultaneous interpretation for Kyungshil. Go ahead, Kyungshil.

Kyungshil Choi:

Judy Mark: Thank you so much. I noted so many similarities between the concerns that Kyungshil has and the concerns that Elizabeth has with two completely different immigrant communities. We're now going to hear from a third immigrant community from Mulugeta Tadele, who is also a parent of a child served by a regional center, and is a leader in the Ethiopian community, and has started so many programs I can't even list them all. Hopefully, you can explain some of it. Go ahead, Mulugeta.

Mulugeta Tadele: Good morning. I'm going to start reading my story, my autism story. My autism story begins on November 13, 2000, in Los Angeles, California. At around 2:00 P.M., my son, Emmanuel, entered the world at Good Samaritan Hospital in downtown Los Angeles. I stood by my wife's side the entire time, steady but nervous as her sisters encouraged me to watch the miracle unfold. Witnessing the births was overwhelming. Emmanuel arrived weighing a healthy 7 pounds, a perfect bundle of joy. In that moment, all was well. The love and connections we felt were immediate and profound, filling the room with a sense of hope and possibility. There's a well-known essay in the autism community called Welcome to Holland, which compares the experience of raising a child with

autism to landing in an unexpected country. But for me, those words didn't resonate at Emmanuel's birth. There wasn't any sense of having arrived somewhere unfamiliar or unplanned. Instead, there was only a pure happiness of meeting my son for the first time without any thought of what challenge the future might hold. In that moment, there was simply no space for worry or metaphors, just the reality and wonder of a new life. The exhaustion I felt after nine months of uncertainty and hardship engulfed me. The pregnancy had been a journey filled with worry, sleepless nights, and the weight of not knowing what each day will bring. As Emmanuel was placed in our arms, a wave of relief mingled with the pure fatigue, making the joy even more poignant. That day began with bright sunshine, but by the afternoon, light rain fell, and steady wind drifted in from the Santa Monica mountains. The shifting weather seemed to echo with my emotions, a blend of worms, relief, and vulnerability was changing the air. The gentle rain outside mirrored the tear of joy and exhaustion inside the delivery room as our lives quietly transformed with Emmanuel's arrival. Later, I slipped out of the hospital and onto Wilshire Boulevard, the big Wilshire Boulevard, my shoes splashing lightly on the rainwashed sidewalk. The city felt different, new, alive, full of possibility. Each drop of rain seemed to cleanse the last remnants of doubt. My friend, my hands still tingle with the memory of Imano's grip. I promised myself, when in the gray sky, to walk with him, wherever our path would lead, no matter how winding or unfamiliar. In that moment, I didn't know how far the journey would take us or the world or the words. Would eventually learn together, autism, acceptance, resilience. But the feelings that took root in me, love, awe, and unwavering commitment, became the compass that would guide me through every challenge for a lifetime and beyond. This is my life story. I want to bring you guys to this space where service providers, medical doctors, organization leaders, we have to be in one place so that we can talk about how to maximize resources, how to help each other, how to understand what autism is about, how any and every challenge to look alike. I'm inviting you to be in that space. And right now I'm trying to mention some of the challenges, what we have with the solutions. But first, I'm going to introduce to you. My name is Mulugeta, and I'm working with Father Shadow. We have a group called Father Shadow that is going to help us bring fathers to this mix, as you know, 90% of the time, mothers are the ones who are dealing with this. So we are trying to teach ourselves, help each other to become responsible partners. We have a support group also. I and some of the parents created this support group, and we're working for emotional support and resources. In church, we created a [inaudible 00:24:09] Sunday class with seven kids, and we're trying to integrate our kids to the congregation, and we are trying to be a big part of that church. And they allowed us to be a part of that. And also on the charity wing of the church, I'm dealing with I'm working around homelessness, mental health, and community health. Also, I'm a community organizer. Here are the challenge. Most of the time, you heard from group other representative. We have a problem with language, education, culture, overcoming stigma, and relationships with service providers. The challenge is we have Amharic language, that language is not developed. And whenever we are trying to translate, a lot of things will miss. At the same time, a lot of people doesn't speak English. So it's really hard for them to go to IEP meeting, IPP meeting, and understand every material we're sending towards them. The solution is, you know, try to find a community focus group where we can translate all those things that is acceptable for the community leaders and members. Education, we can try to create support groups also for people to be educated so that they can understand and bring their kids as early as possible. The challenge where people consider having an autistic son as a punishment from God. So people doesn't bring their kids to the forefront because that is like showing people that I'm sinned. I did something bad, and because of that, a lot of people are not coming to the service as early as possible, so we miss the early intervention. Solution is try to train the trainers, train the church elders, train the restaurant owners, train the group leaders, informal leaders so that people can understand what autism is all about. And the other thing is the relationship what we have with service providers. The law enforcement. Last time I remember on Black Lives matter, I was coming from the laundry and cops stopped me and my son was screaming and, almost I was sure that somebody is going to shoot me at that time. I was praying and hopefully the guy who come on my side, understand what's going on, and he told the other guy, so that saves our life. We have to have a relationship. We have to work

with other community members regarding that. We are trying to access resources with the community. That's pretty much it. Most probably I'm going to just talk to you during a question and answer session. Thank you so much.

Judy Mark: Thank you so much. I saw so many similarities between all three statements and very different immigrant communities.