

Charles: Good afternoon. Good morning, everyone. Welcome. Thank you for joining us today. We're very excited with today's program. As Megan said, my name is Charles de Vilmorin. I am the CEO and co-founder of Linked Senior. Today, we have a fantastic program. I'm really excited about the speaker, the topic, and what we're going to be talking about together. So our webinar today, just as a quick note, is an Activity Strong Executive Edition. So with that, I want to thank everyone that serves on some kind of executive leadership, an administrator, an executive director, of a corporate position. And you actually also use Jill for joining us today because I really truly reflect not only interest but respect and the fact that you use value activity in life enrichment professionals. This webinar today is done in partnership with our fantastic media partner Bridge The Gap, represented here by Josh. So with that, Josh, how are you doing today?

Josh: I'm doing awesome, Charles, and it's good to be with you again for the executive series.

Charles: Josh I know that your organization recently launched this Bridge The Gap ambassador. Do you want to give a quick word about it before we get started?

Josh: Thanks. Super excited. This is our fourth season of Bridge The Gap podcast. It's grown and grown. And this year we launched an ambassador program and we have 15 ambassadors representing multiple states, multiple communities, multiple different types of professions in senior care and housing and excited that they're carrying the torch to inform, educate, and influence the senior housing industry. And so if anyone is interested in learning more about those individuals, they can find out about that at btgvoice.com. And actually, I think it was just this week, an episode dropped that it has all of the ambassadors on that episode. And so we'd love for you to connect with them.

Charles: Thanks so much, Josh. And so to give a little bit of introduction, as I mentioned, I am the CEO and co-founder of Linked Senior. Linked Senior is the company behind these Activities Strong webinars. I like to introduce Linked Senior by sharing some of the values, some of the things that we feel strongly about. So five years ago, we started this campaign called Old People Are Cool. Obviously, we like to think that all people are cool, we believe that. And obviously, we don't really like the notion, the segregation based on age. So these are the primary reasons to start that conversation around this. And then last year, exactly well now it'll have been a little bit more than 12 months ago. We launched this Activity Strong platform, very important platform to not only acknowledge the fantastic work of activities and life enrichment professionals but also empower and educate these fantastic professionals.

Charles: So, again Linked Senior, we do provide a resident engagement platform for senior living. We serve today, we're very honored to serve 46,000 lives in 43 states and Canada and people often ask about Linked Senior. So in a nutshell, we provide again engagement, but in the form of technology education, such as these webinars today, and me as the founder, what I'm the most proud of is human touch. We believe that technology should augment and empower what we are trying to do in serving our elders. So on one hand, we have this, what we call 24 seven assistant that empowers any staff member, any team member. We have data in the form of a integration with EHR, such as Point Click Care. And we're also very proud of our customer success team. They've all worked in the industry for five years before joining Linked Senior and help our clients be successful.

We are a company that takes data and outcomes very seriously, where our work was actually published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2019. And we started these webinars three years ago. Very lucky to have

wonderful speakers come and come again to these educational sessions that we're now delivering twice a month. And a lot of them actually come from suggestions from you, the audience. So here's my invitation to actually influence the future of Activities Strong. Please let us know if there's a speaker or a topic that you would like us to involve. We love doing that and we will definitely take that into account. So let me introduce briefly our speaker today. And I thought a lot about how I would introduce you Jill, but I think that in the end, simplicity really is the best. And I think that for me, reminding ourselves, you staying true to something that we've been promoting with Activities Strong is the fact that every human being on planet earth has the opportunity and actually the basic human right of finding purpose every day.

And as I read your book, I was reminded often of who a true advocate you are for this basic human right for our elders. How much you and your organizations have been great at partnering with the elders and how much you've championed, actually the work in senior living. So you, the audience, it's a great pleasure to introduce you to Jill Vitale-Aussem, who's the president and CEO of Christian Living Communities. Very quickly, Jill started in this industry working in the dining services area and then grew within her organization. She then became the president CEO of a fantastic organization called the Eden Alternative before being called back at Christian Living Communities to serve as the current president CEO. And the last thing I'll say about this book is that I highly recommend Jill's book. It is available on Amazon, and it's just a fantastic book whether you are in the industry or not. But if you are in the industry, I would actually say that you have to read this, quickly. It's fantastic. So thank you so much for being with us and I'll let you take it from here.

Jill: Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here with all of you and seeing all of the, everybody joining from all over the country. This is really, really exciting. I'm really passionate about this topic. So why don't, I'll tell you a little bit about the organization, just so you have kinda know where I'm coming from and if we want to go to the next slide there. So Christian Living Communities and Cappella Living Solutions. So we are, next year will be 50 years old, based in the Denver area and we are a not-for-profit organization with a very strong focus on our mission, which you can see here on the screen. And I'm also really excited about our vision. And I think sometimes companies will put up a vision statement and a mission statement, and it's just something that you hang on the wall. We focus on it.

And it guides us in everything that we do. Every decision that we make. And our vision is creating communities where aging is honored and celebrated and a vision statement doesn't mean you're there yet, right? It's your goal for the future and really what we're going to be talking about today. It's a never-ending journey. You make progress and then you realize you have further to go. And that's one of the really exciting things about this work. But our organization, we have life plan communities or CCRC communities, assisted living, memory support, independent living, home care services, adult day services. We also do a lot of consulting work and we are part owners with a couple of other senior living organizations of a Medicare advantage plan called Perennial Advent Advantage, which is also a really exciting thing that we are working on. So if we want to go to the next slide, just to give you a really quick overview, we have 22 owned and managed communities. And we are in six different states right now and also doing consulting in some other states as well. So that's who we are. And as Charles said, I worked for the organization for almost nine years as an executive director, went to the Eden Alternative, and have just returned in this role. And couldn't be happier about being back.

Charles: Great. Well, thanks so much Jill. So as we were preparing for today's conversation, obviously one of the, and obviously I'll refer back to your book several times, just because one, I thought it was awesome, but two, it was a great way to prepare for today's discussion with you. You know, one of the key topics in our work, in all of our work, right? What is the most common denominator to all of us? Jill, you Megan, you Josh, and everyone in the audience is this kind of rampant segregation in our society. And believe it or not Jill, Josh, and I were on a panel, on a discussion thing a month ago with James Lee and we talked about this concept of forced retirement. And in your book, you take this approach of saying that as we do this and as people as communities are built the old way, we cannot remove agency and the ability for people to really value the old age. What are your quick thoughts on that and what are you looking at and improving on that topic?

Jill: Well, I think one of the disturbing things, but really eye-opening things for me to realize when I really started studying age-ism and age-related ableism, which is prejudice and its prejudice against people living with different abilities. And a lot of times that happens with people living with dementia or living with frailty. And one of the things that I realized is, really our communities really rooted in ageism and ageist beliefs. That's not because we're bad people. It's because we've spent all these years soaking in all these negative messages about what it means to grow older. We don't hear old people are cool anywhere else. And so we've created these communities that are very focused on older people, not having anything to give back. So come here and we'll do everything for you. And that is especially prevalent when people are living with any kind of time different challenges. Dementia, frailty. We assume people can no longer do anything. We also focus a lot, and I realized this in my own practice as an executive director, is that I would always be really focused on who somebody was in the past. Oh, well, Charles used to be the CEO of the company and never really focusing on with residents on what's next. We don't stop growing and learning just because we reach a certain age. And so really started looking at and seeing all those things in what I was doing that was rooted in ageism and perpetuating ageism. And the other really concerning thing that I think we have a lot of work to do on is you talk about older people being segregated in society, right. If you're older, you come live in this place. But even within our communities, a lot of times, we're making some progress, but we segregate people. If you have a campus with multiple levels of living, Oh, that's the nursing home. Oh, those people are living with dementia, they shouldn't be with other people. And it's damaging to us all. And it's really, again, it really represents what we have in our heads about what it means to be older. So there's a lot of work to be done, but I'm really excited about what we can accomplish.

Charles: Right. And just the, I mean, you've been in this industry, you have significant experience. I'm just curious from your vantage point, have you seen things improve in say the last five, 10 years?

Jill: I have. I think there's a lot of work that's been done and there's a lot left to be done. It's really hard to undo all the institutional frameworks that we have in our heads. And it's also really hard for residents too. They've been taught all these things all their lives. So when you say, "Hey, what do you want your purpose to be? What do you want to give back to this community?" At first, when we started having those conversations at my community, people were like, what are you talking about? Because it takes time to make this happen. So I do see progress happening. There's a lot more to go.

Charles: Yeah. And obviously one of the drivers for this movement or this change is actually the fact that there's a lot of benefits from respecting and seeing the value there. And I think for me the fact that a lot of people beyond our industry don't see that is they don't really know what aging is about. And actually, aging does a lot of really cool things. And I know you're familiar with this u-curve. I'd love you to just take a minute if you don't mind to describe it.

Jill: I love this because this is basically a graph of a study that was done that measured people's satisfaction with life and wellbeing throughout a lifespan. It's self-reported wellbeing. And so, we hear all the time in the news, and I mean, even from when we're little kids, we watch movies and cartoons that old people are grumpy or they're evil, right? There's all kinds of studies that show that from when we're children, we get these ageist messages. But what the reality is, what research shows, is this curve. And it's sometimes called the happiness curve where, when you're younger, in your teens, you're pretty happy. And then the well-being starts to drop. There's a pit right around 50, which is right where I am. And then gradually over time, your life satisfaction improves and improves and improves to the point where people are in their nineties self-report higher life satisfaction than people who are younger. We don't hear these messages that often. And it really can start to push back against that dread of growing older that we all have. So it's a really important thing. I'm glad you put this slide in there.

Charles: Yeah. Somebody in the chat, Debra Christian reminds us that it looks like a smile, which is cool. Yeah. Josh, any thoughts you have on this Old People Are Cool? Or I know that we've partnered on that as well. Yeah. I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Josh: Well, my first thought, as I'm looking at this age and life satisfaction curve is I've almost hit rock bottom. So the good news is it's all up here, all uphill from here, and my age in life satisfaction is only going to get better. So I've actually been encouraged already by this presentation. But you know, I love this topic. And by the way, if we didn't, we need to drop your book title in the chat again, because I've seen a couple of people asking for the name of that again, and the chat's moving so fast. I know people want to get their hands on that. But, Jill, forgive me, you'll probably get into this, or maybe you touch on this at some point, but what you mentioned about where we are, we've made some improvements and we've got so much further to go to kind of stop this age-ism.

And a lot of the things that we don't even have intentions of doing, they're just kind of inbred in us because they're so institutionalized. And it's what we grow up seeing and knowing, so my thoughts are like how for the people that are on here, which represent, you know, gosh, tons of life engagement, enrichment professionals and executives in the communities, and they're the spark that is change for their community and for their organization. What are some small tools that we could talk about them to start steps of culture change to kind of change this narrative a little bit? Could you give us some of that throughout this presentation?

Jill: Yeah, I'd be happy to. And that was of the things we were going to talk about a little bit later, but there's a saying that all change is linguistic. Meaning that all change starts with conversation. And one of the most important things, the most powerful things that we can do as leaders. And by the way, if you're on here and you're saying, I'm not a leader, you are a leader. You don't have to have manager or supervisor in your title. Everybody has the opportunity to drive positive change. But one of the most important things we can do as leaders is to not always focus on having the right answers but to focus on asking the right questions. So I'll give you a little example and there's something called a learning circle.

That's a really powerful way, you get people together in a circle, you ask a question and everybody gets a chance to talk. If you're interested in that pioneer network, go to their website, Eden Alternative, you can find some instructions on how to do that. But at Claremont park, for example, where I was the executive director with Christian Living Communities before, we started driving this cultural change. I would sit down with group residents in a circle and I remember talking about, we were really focused on

the segregation that was happening in our community and we were trying to move to a more inclusive environment. And so asking questions of the residents, have you ever had a time in your life when you felt excluded from something and how did that make you feel? And you get people talking and you get people making those connections with what might be happening with a neighbor who's living with dementia or someone who's living with frailty, and you get those conversations going. And that's how you start to drive change is by figuring out what's the right question here to get people moving. And I hate plugging my book. So this isn't a book plug, but at the end of each of the chapters, there are learning circle questions. So when you read a chapter on age-ism, it's like, Oh, here's the questions that I can sit down and talk to people about. So gathering people together, talking, asking questions is the very first thing.

Josh: So I love that. So let me ask you the learning circle sounds pretty awesome. Sounds pretty simple. Do you have rules for your learning circle? Do you have to like lay some ground rules for that?

Jill: You absolutely do. And you know, it's, it's starting out with, that when one person's talking, whoever's talking, no one else talks. And that's the major thing. And sometimes in the beginning of a learning circle, you'll say, "Hey, do we want this to be confidential? What we say here, doesn't leave here." Depending on the topic that might be the situation, but it's setting up those norms for the discussion. And that it usually works pretty well.

Charles: Yeah. You know Jill, your comment about everyone being a leader, there's this thing that we say is that, every activity director is actually a CEO. Is truly the chief engagement officer. Because when you think about an organization, there are the CEOs. And I think that even that empowers that individual, but beyond that, I love the framing of the fact that everyone has agency. Anyone can bring change and start with this conversation. I think that this discussion about ageism in our society, we also need to understand how much we sometimes don't get the opportunity to choose how we're portrayed. And I mean, I think we all know how the media has been on one hand kind of okay. But in many, many instances not fair at all to our industry.

So I just want to share here to everyone, on my screen right now, I'm sharing a McKnight article that was published actually 4 days ago by somebody fantastic by the name of Steven Liberalhill, who takes gripe over a New York times article. So, just as an FYI, please, everyone consider reading this article, it's four-minute read, five minutes top. It's just a great article in it by itself. But Jill, I'd love you to share with us, what's your view about these types of articles when they come out? I'm sure you have a lot to say.

Jill: Well, it's so disconcerting to see articles that really bash our field in the work that we're doing. And there are always some bad apples, but for the most part, the vast majority of our communities are doing the best we can and doing a great job. And, I think that the conversation that I had that really made me think about this, I saw Ashton Applewhite was one of your guests. Ashton Applewhite, who wrote 'This Chair Rock, A Manifesto Against Ageism'. If you haven't read that book, that's a great one audience out there. But he talks about really we are a society that does not value older people, right? There are pockets where right here in this group, we do, but our society, in general, doesn't and what you see when a society doesn't honor older people is they also don't honor those that support them, which is our field, which is our care partners that are out there.

And we saw this, this has really been highlighted throughout the pandemic with hospital workers are heroes, which they are, but anytime there was a discussion about nursing homes, it was usually very negative. So it really comes down to, I believe, that ageist view that we have in the society. And if you start to pay attention just in the regular media, you start to see all the bad things about older people. You know, a while ago, it was, if older people would just move out of their homes, then younger people could afford to get a house. There's a lot of us and them. And it's just a very common narrative. And what I would say to everybody out there is it's hard to change the world. It's hard to change our whole country. We can start making changes in our own communities. There's plenty of work to be done right here in our own heads and in our own communities. And then also, I mean, there are opportunities to do letters to the editor, to correct people when they are saying things like that. And hey, I can't think of anybody who'd be better than than residents that live in communities. Let's get some campaigns going to start to shift perspectives, but it really starts with us first.

Charles: Yeah. And on that note, I think is a great segway to the second piece of a conversation today, which is us building, improving our communities, and the future of our industry. And actually the future of the experience of our elders. So with that, I'd love if you don't mind Jill, to just walk us through your framework. I thought, in a good way, completely disruptive and kind of, not necessarily against what we do, but a lot of the shortcuts that we do take as professionals today in our industry come from the old paradigm. So walk us through your thinking. Yeah, go ahead.

Jill: Sure. So I should start this out by saying so that people don't get mad at me is I've got my master's degree in hospitality. And I thought hospitality was the answer for everything. And that's how I ran my communities, is customer service and creating experiences for people. And I realized over time that that's not the answer. And I think it's becoming, I hear more and more people talking about this. At first there were people that would really push people's buttons because they're like, we just spent thousands of dollars on Disney training. What are you talking about? But here's what I learned is when you really study what we need to live a long and healthy life, it's not a life of leisure. It absolutely isn't. It's actually the opposite, right? We need to have meaningful purpose in our lives.

We need to belong. We to stay engaged with some of the activities of daily life that keep our body strong. And so I started looking at, okay, so if running a senior living community like a hotel isn't the answer, then what is? And I realized that really the answer has been in front of us all the time. And that is we should be communities. But communities don't just exist because the sign in front of your building says this is a community. There's actually a lot of study and work that's been done around this by community psychologists and these four components that are on the screen here come about from researchers, really looking at what does it take to create a sense of community? And you can see there, there's four different things. I see Amy says, I've been pushing back on hospitality focus for the same reason.

Alright, Amy, we'll get there. Eventually. Hospitality can play a role. So there's the first area on here is fulfillment of needs. And that it might be hospitality. It might be customer service, housekeeping, excellent dining services, all those things. But that's usually where we stop. That's where I used to stop. I'm doing my job if I'm doing that right. But there are three other things that we need in order to feel like we have a sense of community. So the second one is membership and belonging. So is this a place where I really feel well-known? Is this a place I really feel accepted? And just living amongst a bunch of other people doesn't mean that you feel welcomed and accepted. In fact, you can be even more lonely when

you're around a lot of other people that you don't feel, people care about you. There's influence, and this is where that purpose comes into play.

So what a sense of community requires that, if I'm part of a community, I have an influence on the future of that community. That I matter. That what comes in the future, I played a role perhaps in creating. It also means that the community that you're in influences you. And I'll give you a great example is my parents live in one of our communities, Christian Living Communities campuses, and they've had a big focus on fighting back, pushing back against age-ism enablism. And my dad said, "I'm a better person for living in this community. I have become a better person for living in this community and assumptions I used to make maybe about people who were much older than me or people who are living with frailty. This has caused me to think differently and about my own aging process." That is huge, right?

That people become better people from living in one of our communities. That's amazing! So influence, and it's not the same as I'm going to get new furniture and do a survey and see if people want gray chairs or brown chairs, that's input. That's a whole different thing than influence where people are actively engaged in coming up with solutions and being part of decisions. And then the last is shared emotional connection, which is really people, that live and work in the community, working through the hard things together. Figuring things out. I tell the story in my book about how residents always used to come to me to fix everything. And when I finally realized, Oh my gosh, I'm totally creating a situation where people are very competent in dealing with things with their neighbors, no longer do that.

But when people work through problems together or go through hard times together, that's where you get that shared emotional connection. And I talk in my book a little bit about the way we handle death is a big part of that. Everything isn't perfect in a community and we have to go through the hard times and acknowledge that as well as the good times together. So that's my vision for a new future is real communities where we have all of these different things, not just a place where you come and you put your feet up and people take care of you for the rest of your life.

Josh: So Jill, I have a couple of questions because this is, when I'm looking at this sense of community slide, the circle here, I'm thinking, this really involves like everyone. This isn't just for life engagement people, and this is not executives, but let's assume maybe there's some activity professionals or executives that are on the line and they're like, gosh, I'm going to start a listening circle. That's something I can tangibly do. But what are some maybe other recommendations to start to bake this into the culture of programming for lack of a better term into their communities that they could start? Like, for example, you mentioned, being very transparent, that you had kind of fostered this culture of fixing everything for everybody, and it's okay to create an environment where people can kind of work things out together. What would be some system that you've implemented or your communities have implemented to kind of foster that kind of culture?

Jill: Yeah. That's a great question. One of the things that you said in the very beginning, I think is really important. This isn't something that is delegated to a department, right? This is a shift in everything that we do. And the person that I worked most closely with driving this kind of change in my community was the director of community life. And by the way, I think activities needs a rebranding because what you all do, what you all do is life. You support life, you support wellbeing. And I think that old-school way of looking at activities and all you do is set up bingo and have entertainers come in. That's the past. And what you do is so much more than that, and so much more impactful on people's wellbeing and health.

So I think, hey, you all came up with Old People Are Cool. What's the new motto for activities? I know you'll come up with something. So some of the things that you can start to do when you look at this, this doesn't just belong to one department. So some of the things that we started to do were, even with marketing, so you have a tour come to your community and instead of just asking, tell me about your past, tell me about your history. They started talking more about, what do you want to do next? What do I want to do next? What are you talking about? Nobody ever asked me that I'm 90. And you start to shift those things. And instead of just talking about, here are all the things we'll do for you if you move in here.

What passions, what gifts do you have that you want to bring to this community? And again, it sets people back, but then it really sets a new expectation and it makes people start thinking. I always say, if someone comes to our community for a tour, they should leave having changed the way they view aging. Because we're talking about things in a different way. So those things are really important. I think the whatever the new name is for activities, it's really working with residents as much, and I know this is happening at a lot of places, but that we're there to support. And what are the gifts and passions of the people that live in your community? What do they want to give back so that it's not, we're doing everything. At my community, I remember when I started, we had a newsletter that we put together every month, and the resident part of it was folding it.

And over time it's now a completely resident-run newsletter. And they were like, Hey, we need to have a software so we can do the publishing. And we're like, cool. And they learned, and they did it and figured it all out. But we do a lot of things I don't think we need to do. And then the other really important thing is back to asking those questions is asking those questions that will help residents create new norms because that's really where community culture comes from. Is all of us, there are norms. We know how we have to behave in order to be accepted. And we don't very often focus on what do norms look like in a community. So a follow-up question to residents in a learning circle or team members might be how do we want a new resident to feel when they move in here? How do we want someone who's got a dementia diagnosis to feel and what behaviors are we going to do to support that? And it starts to take the ownership of everything off of paid leaders and really puts the responsibility and accountability with resident citizens.

Josh: Jill, I thought it was really interesting, and if you don't mind unpacking for me a little bit, cause I think there's something there to understand a little bit more. I think you said it was your dad and he made the comment that he was a better person for being in the community. What do you think was kind of the driving force that brought him to that moment? Like what was he seeing? What was he experiencing that brought him to that conclusion?

Jill: I think what he would say, so my dad, he and my mom moved to the community because my mom is blind now. And so my dad was like, well, we're going for your mother. And my dad, he goes out for 80-mile bike rides. I think when he came in, he was like, well, we're going to live here with all these older people. There's people who are a hundred years old here and, Oh my gosh. And it was my dad and my mom, and this just happens to us as people is when we get to know people as human beings, rather than looking at someone and making assumptions about someone based on, they have a walker or they're somebody who's living with dementia. You just learn and grow. And my dad said, "I have just had my life enriched by knowing these amazing people and getting to know others as human beings." I think that's

what you would say. It's pretty neat. That's what we all should strive for is a place that challenges us and makes us better.

Charles: Yeah. You know, Josh, what I find amazing with this paradigm-shifting, this changing things really is, you remember last month, I was sharing with you, the fact that I saw Lynne Katzman of Juniper Communities asking the origins at a conference, why is it that we get all excited when we move to a university or college, but why don't we get the same thing when we move to community? And what I find amazing with this kind of change is that we are re-enabling that, right? Wouldn't we be excited to move into a community where we're asked, not, what did you do 20 years ago, but actually, what do you want to continue? What do you want to contribute to that? And I think that's just an amazing framework.

Jill: Well, and you know, the research shows that people fear losing their independence more than they fear dying, as we get older. And I should say people, we, we fear losing our independence more than dying yet. What we sell it, a lot of times with our marketing is come here and come here and depend on other people to have all your needs met. And I have to wonder if we're not playing into those fears and really just creating more problems. Just because of the way we're putting ourselves out there. The vast majority of people don't want to move into communities. And a lot of it is they don't want to lose their independence and their autonomy and having their own life.

Charles: When you think about building these communities like we keep on talking about the differences between, consumer, customer, and citizens and I'd love, you know Jill, if you don't mind kind of walking us through this really the framework because I think that for the audience would be amazing to see the difference and what you actually you can do. Yeah.

Jill: Yeah. I would love to. And if any of you out there love to read or dig into things, Peter Block is an author and a speaker that focuses on community building. And he's got some Ted Talks out there. If you go to his website, you can read different blogs or you can read his books. But when I was reading and studying his work, it really hit me that when a lot of the things that he talked about when we frame people as customers or consumers, which is what we do in our field, we set people up for helplessness. Depending on others to have our needs met. And he's not talking about senior living, he's talking about this framework in general society. A citizen on the other hand, plays an active role in meeting the needs of myself and the people around me.

The other thing he talks about is there becomes this love of leadership. And I recognize this when I read this, that when you frame people as customers or consumers when anything goes wrong, Charles, if you're the leader, Charles, I'm coming in your office and you'd better fix this. Versus, hey, I can work with my neighbors and figure things out and we can be part of the solution together, or maybe Charles and I need to sit down and brainstorm some things in how we could address this. There's a study that looked at how people respond to statements that either framed them as consumers or as citizens. And the study had to do something with water quality, but when they framed people as customers, they only thought about themselves. I don't care about anybody else, but when they frame the question as a citizen, what do you think about this?

People were very focused on the whole and other people, which is one of the things we need to have more of in communities. You see a lot of times, there can be bullying and clicks and things like that. I

think a lot of that comes from that place of, just worry about yourself. Don't look out for other people. And we don't expect anything of customers. You pay your money, you don't expect anything from me, but as a citizen, you have expectations on you. Well, how are you going to be part of this community? How are you going to make this community stronger and better? What are the norms for living in this community? And, in the community where the residents were working on norms, it wasn't okay to be rude to somebody any more. Or to say something about somebody who's living with dementia and people corrected each other.

It stopped being about Jill has to police everything, which doesn't work anyway. And then the other thing is really people ended up being entitled. And I pay money here and you need to do for me versus true empowerment and engagement where yes, I pay money here. And I'm part of this community and we are all in this together and we want to make this a better place for everyone. So I think it's really powerful. There's a quote on here. Chuck Durrett is the architect that brought the concept of co-housing to the US and I love this quote from him that 20 seniors stranded on a desert island would be better at taking care of their most basic needs than the same 20 left isolated or in an institution. And what he's talking about is just really how we disabled people with our institutional structures.

Charles: Josh, you want to ask the question here? I do have one.

Josh: Jump in there. Jump in there.

Charles: Yeah. You know, Jill, like you mentioned to me, coming to my office, but you also shared a story of, I think it was the owner of a dog that kept on barking and you had to call in that resident. And when the resident walks into your office, you know, he shared this comment about, Oh, I feel like I'm being called to the principal's office. This must've been an amazing moment for you, aha, I'm taking away his agency here.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah. So that story was residents were complaining about their neighbor's dog barking. And yeah, when the resident, the owner of the dog came in and that to me, I feel like I'm being called into the principal's office. And here I am a 40 something-year-old person who for some reason, was given the opportunity to run the community. And he's twice my age. And I thought, well, this is really messed up. This is really messed up, that I hold the power here. And it made me realize that we needed to do things differently. And so I talk in the book about how a resident group was formed and they, from that point forward, handled everything policies, and everything to do with pets. So that's just an example really, of that. And sometimes you have to go through those painful awakenings in order to move forward. And that was one of those for me.

Charles: And how you decided to really empower your community to, yeah, go ahead Josh.

Josh: I just had a question because I'm curious. Obviously, we're talking a lot about what I would classify as the kind of the culture, the programmatic kind of the way you think about the community, it seems like in our industry, we kind of set ourselves up for failure by our outward messaging. Particularly on this slide, I think about the consumer and how we're real, like our marketing and our sales approach is really driven towards that customer versus citizen model. Has there been a dramatic culture change you all have had to make that kind of goes against what their traditional marketing messaging is for what your communities are and the experience that residents should expect?

Jill: Yeah. So I can speak to and at Christian Living Communities, we're working on, now how do we now expand. Our organization's grown a lot, so how do we expand this culture throughout the whole organization? But you know, at Claremont Park, when people would come and tour and when we would talk to people in a different way, the other thing that we did that again, it's when people leave the community they should be forever changed, is we would say to them, Hey, when you go to another continuing care retirement community, you might not see the nursing home. And we're going to go to the nursing home. And here's why. We believe very strongly in honoring and valuing people, no matter what their abilities. So it was that conversation. It was, who do you want to become?

What's your next growth opportunity? What do you want to bring to the community? And I'll tell you, we filled up, we have new life plan apartment homes, and they were 99% occupied in 12 months. Way ahead of schedule with a waitlist. And people want that. Not everybody, right. There are some people that are like, I do want to sit and put my feet up and never do anything again. And that's fine. There are plenty of places where people can go do that. But what our experience has been is that is very appealing to people and people want to be part of something. So yeah, you do have to change things in the way you talk about things.

Josh: I love that.

Charles: Yeah. Yeah. Which is how you get to build your community communities, Jill, right?

Jill: Yeah. It's exciting.

Charles: Do you want to share with us these thoughts that you had about how you actually start from the beginning and build your communities here?

Jill: Yeah. And I've talked a little bit about some of this, but I would encourage anybody who's out there with a formal leadership role is to really look at what is your role as a community builder because that's really what we should be. And a leader's role, a community builder role has two responsibilities. Okay. It's like being the mayor of a town. One is to provide for infrastructure, which has all the systems and things that keep the community going. And the second is to build the social fabric and bring out the best in everyone. And that's a huge shift and it's a little scary sometimes to grow other people and empower other people. But if we really want to start being communities, we have to start thinking more like community builders. Also, you can think of yourself as a social architect.

I would remind people that community is not perfect. And that was one of the things that there's a big difference between that and the hospitality model, right? The Disney model of come here and everything's perfect and pristine. We are not Disney. We are communities where real things happen. And when you have a bunch of people working together, there's going to be messy situations and you work through it and you figure it out. And again, I think I already talked about those things here. I wanted to do I have a minute to share just a little story about purpose?

Charles: Absolutely. Actually, this is a great segway to this. Yeah, go ahead, please do. Yeah, absolutely.

Jill: All right. So I wanted to share and I didn't get to write about this in the book because it happened after I wrote the book, but just how important it is for all of us to never stop growing and never stop being open to things that challenge the way we think about things. So I thought I really understood kind of what purpose meant. And when I was with the Eden Alternative, I went to Australia and I went to an Eden Alternative home there. It was called Anam Cara and the building, the community that I was in was a memory support neighborhood, kind in a household model, which you sometimes see here in the US and so are the people living there living with dementia. And I go into the household and I was talking to people and it had one of those open kitchens, which we see so often being built here.

And so I said to the team member, I said, "Oh, do the residents help bake cookies sometimes, you know, do you do that once a week or something?" And she looked at me like I was crazy. And she said, "The residents are part of every meal. I'm one person. If we didn't all work together to make breakfast, lunch, and dinner, no one would eat." And I was like, Whoa, okay. So this is a whole different paradigm than I'm used to. And she went on and said, "And by the way, you know, Bob over here uses his power tools and goes and fixes things that are broken around the community. This woman, you know, every day she's with a real-life, hot iron and is ironing clothes." And it really hit me that that is meaningful purpose of people working together to keep a household running, versus what I used to think of, which is manufactured opportunities for a sense of purpose, right?

Here's a bunch of towels. Can you fold them for me? And then when you turn around, I'm going to go mess them all up and bring them back to you. There are so many opportunities for the people that live in our communities to have real and meaningful purpose in day-to-day life. Everything doesn't have to be a program. And I know we have regulations to deal with and things like that, but how can we do that? How can we support people in doing things that matter to them? And so that they feel like they're contributing part of the community no matter what their challenge they're living with. So that was just a huge oh my for me.

Charles: Yeah. Jill, obviously this idea of collaborating with the older adult is just kind of very much needed, you know, Dr. Ann Powers talks really well of that aspect. We have a lot of people asking about what is the name of this home in Australia that you visited?

Jill: It's called Anam Cara and it's part of Wesley Mission. And Anam Cara is in Queensland, Australia.

Charles: So yeah, like you just said, obviously regulations is probably sometimes stopping us from all of our residents walking around with the power tools and not commuting in our corridors. But besides that, what's the biggest hurdle you see from these models being implemented?

Jill: I think it's our own barriers that we put up and all the things that we've been taught and really undoing that. And the other thing that I learned with my time at the Eden Alternative and in driving change myself, is human beings want quick fixes, right? Check the box. I did this. La, la la, now I'm done. This kind of work takes a lot of time. It's called adaptive work. And it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of mistakes. It takes a lot of people working together and changing the way we think about things and the way we behave. I see a lot of organizations fail because they try to implement just one thing or they try to use it as a programmatic approach and it doesn't work. So I would suggest anybody out there Eden Alternative, Pioneer Network, get involved with those organizations if you want to drive change.

Charles: Thanks so much Jill. As we kind of approach the hour and I just didn't see time flying by so quickly, I guess we're having fun. Josh, do you have any last-minute question or thoughts for Jill?

Josh: Well, I've got a million questions that I will have to connect with her after this. But this has been such a fantastic time and I know all the listeners and those that are viewing are enjoying it. You know, I love the idea of collaborating with elders on purpose. And one of the things that I've also noticed through the years is as I've started collaborating, as I've started talking more and listening to residents, not that necessarily we want to dwell on their past and talk about all that they used to do, but I've really learned and Jill, I'd love to know if you've had a similar experience that a lot of times as you're getting to know residents, they've lived a long time. Longer than I have at this point.

And these experiences in their life, both good and bad sometimes. It's amazing the lessons, and I'm similar, I learn a lot of my lessons through pain and traumatic times. And I've been interested to see a couple of key staff members through the years that have turned what we might classify as a traumatic experience or something that they viewed as a hardship or a tough low moment in their life. They used that to encourage others in the community that have been through that. And I saw that one with a lady, an elder that had lost a child. And we knew that about her. And then one of our team members went through that experience and I saw the purpose ignite with that resident when we allowed them to share that information. And that purpose be just brought out of her to nurture that younger team member. So I think sometimes even understanding these traumatic experiences and letting the residents know that that's part of life and you can use that for good. Right?

Jill: Absolutely. And you know, when I was with the Eden Alternative during the beginning of this pandemic, and one of the communities we worked with talked about how the residents and that, and I want to be clear, who we were does matter. And those past experiences make us who we are. But the residents at the community, we're helping the team members deal with what was going on. And a resident saying, "gosh, you know, I lived through this horrible time when we had one potato to feed my whole family," and somebody else saying, "I remember when all of this was happening with polio and it felt like society was crashing down around us, but it's going to be okay. I've lived through times like this and that experience." It really helped calm the team members down and help them to feel okay because the younger people, we haven't been through anything like this before, but older people have, and they, we need them to help us through this. So that's a great point, Josh.

Josh: Absolutely. Well, this has been so much fun Charles. This hour has gone by so fast.

Charles: Yes. Actually, last thing, in her book Jill talks about it because she talks about where did the time go and the fact that the more we build experiences with our residents, the more we can, I mean, not extend life, but actually have this broader feeling. So you know with that, it's been like this for myself as well. So Josh, thank you very much for joining us. Megan, thank you so much for helping us run these fantastic webinars. And obviously Jill, thank you so much for not only being with us today, preparing for this presentation, but I think that from me, Josh and the rest of our team and probably the whole audience, thank you for the work that you do, both in terms of leading change, but also the work that you and your team members do every single day in showing up at work for the elders that you serve and providing them with opportunities to live with purpose.

Thank you so much for everyone, as you probably realize, conversation has been one of the biggest words today. So feel free to continue the discussion both with Josh and Jill, their contacts are up. And with us at Activities Strong, as you probably realize, we've been very busy with upcoming programs. So I just want to briefly as we're overtime now talk about a little bit about our next program. A true leader and passionate person, Kay Van Norman, President of Brilliant Aging is going to lead us through a session about purpose, actually continue the discussion.

We have two amazing executive edition talks about leadership staff turnover on May 4th and June 1st. And I want to especially call your attention to a program that we just put out yesterday on May 18th. This is going to be led by David Troxel. And he's an amazing speaker, author, leader, in the field of dementia. He's going to lead a panel discussion between Melissa Dillon, who is returning to our webinars and also Diane Byrne with Juniper Communities. Last, but certainly not least, a reminder that we have our amazing June 22nd Virtual Summit Activities Strong Summit, where we're going to have a full day with fantastic programs. You know, you have the speakers here on the slide. I'm not going to list them. I can tell you that personally, the one thing that I feel so strongly about is that if a third of these sessions are either going to be with people, living with dementia, with Karen Love the dementia action Alliance. And another program is going to be actually with residents of senior living communities. So if a third of that specific program truly respects and values and puts forth something that we really care about is nothing about us without us. And that's important. And I love to leave you with that final thought. Jill, thank you so much for being here with us today. Josh, nice seeing you again. Take care everyone. Have a wonderful day and afternoon and week bye-bye.