

Pathways Project Final Report

Overall Summary and Major Takeaways

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 - Did the workshop help you understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities?
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Big Takeaways From Quantitative:

- Trainings and events were well received
- Initiatives reach a broad and diverse group of participants
- Participants demonstrate a strong understanding of the importance of friendship
- Lived experience and firsthand perspectives are central to participant learning
- Participants report concrete strategies they can apply in their settings
- The data reflect motivation and a sense of shared responsibility

Qualitative Data Analysis: By Question

Qualitative Data Analysis: By Participant

Big Takeaways (Themes) From Qualitative Data Analysis

Future Directions for the Pathways to Friendship Project Based on Participant Feedback

Overall Summary and Major Takeaways

The purpose of this evaluation was to examine the impact of the Pathways to Friendship project and identify opportunities for its continued growth. Drawing on both quantitative evaluation data and qualitative interviews with participants, community partners, and grantees, the findings demonstrate that Pathways to Friendship is having a meaningful and measurable impact on individuals, organizations, and communities. Across all sources of data, participants described the project as helping shift the conversation from simply creating opportunities for inclusion to intentionally fostering authentic friendship, belonging, and community connection. The evaluation suggests that Pathways has emerged as a model for helping organizations and communities rethink what meaningful inclusion looks like in practice.

The evidence consistently points to both immediate and lasting impact. Participants rated trainings and events extremely positively, reporting high levels of satisfaction with the quality of instruction, the clarity of information, and the relevance of the content. More importantly, participants described leaving with a deeper understanding of the role friendship plays in creating inclusive communities, practical strategies they could immediately apply within their own organizations, and a renewed commitment to advancing this work. Hearing directly from people with disabilities and learning through lived experience emerged as one of the project's greatest strengths, helping participants move beyond abstract concepts to a more personal understanding of disability, belonging, and authentic relationships. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that Pathways is both increasing knowledge and influencing attitudes and practices to create environments where meaningful friendships can develop.

Beyond its impact on individual participants, the evaluation highlights the broader organizational and community-level influence of the project. Participants described Pathways as helping organizations create the conditions in which friendship can flourish by, among other things, removing barriers, building welcoming environments, and supporting relationships over time. Participants emphasized the importance of creating communities where people with and without disabilities are connected through genuine relationships. Additionally, the project serves as an important connector across organizations, bringing together educators, disability service providers, community organizations, advocates, family members, and self-advocates to share ideas, resources, and successful practices. In doing so, Pathways is helping build collective capacity for creating more inclusive communities while fostering a growing network of organizations committed to friendship and belonging.

Participants also identified several opportunities to build upon the project's success. Many encouraged Pathways to continue expanding its educational outreach, particularly within elementary and middle schools, where young people were described as receptive, and eager to learn about disability and friendship. Others emphasized the value of continuing to strengthen the project's growing community of practice by connecting organizations with shared missions and creating additional opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. Participants also suggested intentionally engaging broader audiences, including fathers, male caregivers, and

other community leaders whose voices are currently less represented in discussions about disability and inclusion. At the same time, the strongest message from participants was not that the project should change its approach, but that it should continue expanding the work it is already doing. Coaching, networking, storytelling, lived experience, and relationship-centered programming were identified as elements that make Pathways successful and should remain central as the project grows.

Overall, this evaluation demonstrates that the Pathways to Friendship project has established an effective and impactful model for promoting friendship, belonging, and inclusive communities. The project has influenced how individuals think about disability, strengthened organizational practices, fostered collaboration across communities, and provided practical tools for creating lasting relationships between people with and without disabilities. Perhaps most importantly, participants consistently described Pathways as creating lasting cultural change by helping organizations move beyond access alone toward authentic belonging. The findings suggest that continued investment in the project is well justified, with future efforts focused on broadening its reach while preserving the relationship-centered approach that participants overwhelmingly described as meaningful, effective, and transformative.

Trainings and Workshops Evaluation Analysis

Overview: This section presents an overview of evaluation [findings from the trainings and workshops](#), including both quantitative and qualitative results. For each evaluation question, frequency tables and corresponding graphs are provided, along with a brief summary interpreting the findings. Together, these data offer insight into who participated in the workshops, how the sessions were experienced, and which aspects were perceived as most useful or valuable.

Methods:

This analysis draws on evaluation data collected across multiple trainings and workshops conducted between 2023 and 2025. In total, 412 individual responses were included. All available evaluation data were compiled into a single raw data file and analyzed at the question level.

For the closed-ended questions, analysis focused on descriptive frequencies and percentages to understand who participated in the trainings and how participants rated their experiences. This included responses to questions about participant roles, overall workshop ratings, instructor performance, clarity of information, perceived understanding of the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities, and whether the workshops provided practical tools and strategies to support those relationships.

For the open-ended question asking participants to identify the most useful or valuable aspects of the workshops, a qualitative approach was used. Responses were reviewed using open coding to identify recurring ideas, which were then grouped into broader thematic categories. This thematic analysis allowed the findings to reflect patterns that emerged directly from participant responses, rather than being predetermined, and provided deeper insight into how participants experienced and interpreted the workshops.

Executive Summary:

Evaluation data from trainings and workshops conducted between 2023 and 2025 indicate strong participation, high satisfaction, and meaningful perceived impact. Across 412 individual responses, participants represented a wide range of roles, including students, family members of people with disabilities, educators, disability service providers, community organization staff, and individuals with disabilities. This diversity suggests that the workshops successfully engaged stakeholders across education, service, and community contexts.

Overall ratings of the workshops were overwhelmingly positive. The majority of respondents rated the workshops and instructors as very good or excellent and reported that the information was presented clearly. Participants also indicated that the workshops were effective in helping them understand the importance of relationships between people with and

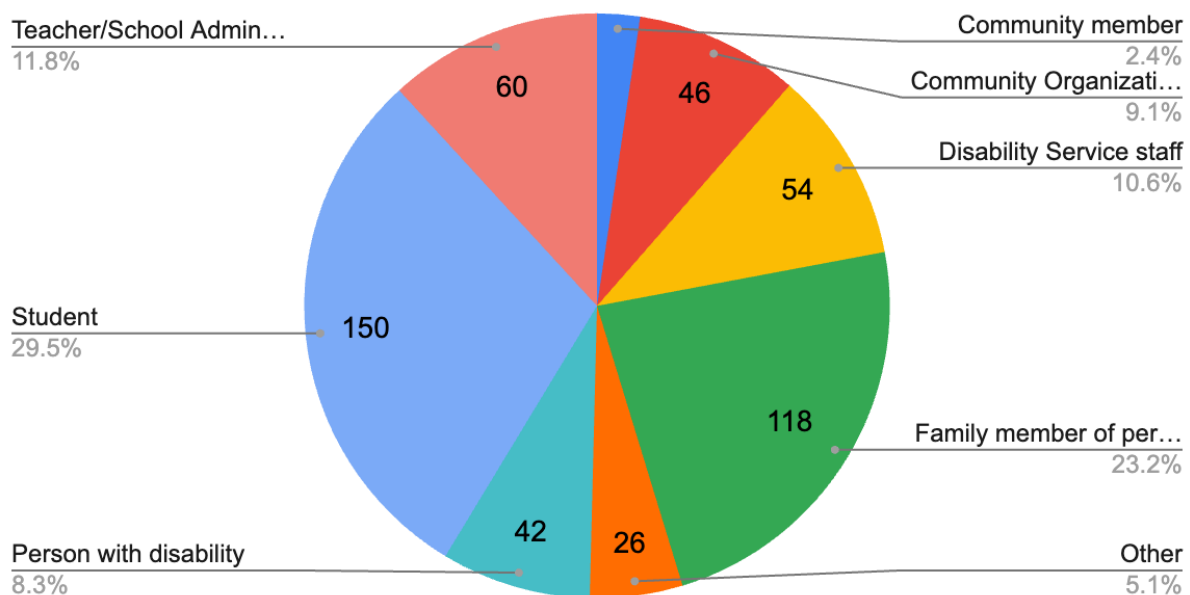
without disabilities and that they left with practical tools and strategies to support those relationships.

Open-ended responses further highlighted what participants found most valuable. Key themes included learning directly from people with disabilities, hearing lived experiences and personal stories, understanding the role of friendship and meaningful relationships, and gaining practical strategies that could be applied in schools, programs, and families. Together, these findings suggest that the workshops effectively combined values-based learning with actionable guidance, supporting both increased understanding and practical application of inclusive, relationship-centered practices.

How would you classify yourself? (Check all that apply)

Category	n	%
Teacher / School Administrator	60	11.8%
Community Member	12	2.4%
Community Organization Staff	46	9.1%
Disability Service Staff	54	10.6%
Family Member of Person with Disability	118	23.2%
Person with Disability	42	8.3%
Student	150	29.5%
Other	26	5.1%

Count of How would you classify yourself (please check all that apply)?



Explanation of Coding:

Responses to the question “How would you classify yourself? (Check all that apply)” were coded to reflect the multi-select nature of the item. Participants who selected more than one role were counted in each applicable category, such as individuals identifying as both Student and Person with Disability. Minor recoding decisions were made for clarity, including

categorizing responses referencing specific diagnoses (e.g., ADHD) under Person with Disability, and grouping responses such as “unsure” or “all” under Other. Teacher and School Administrator were collapsed into a single category, while Community Member and Community Organization Staff were kept separate to reflect distinct roles.

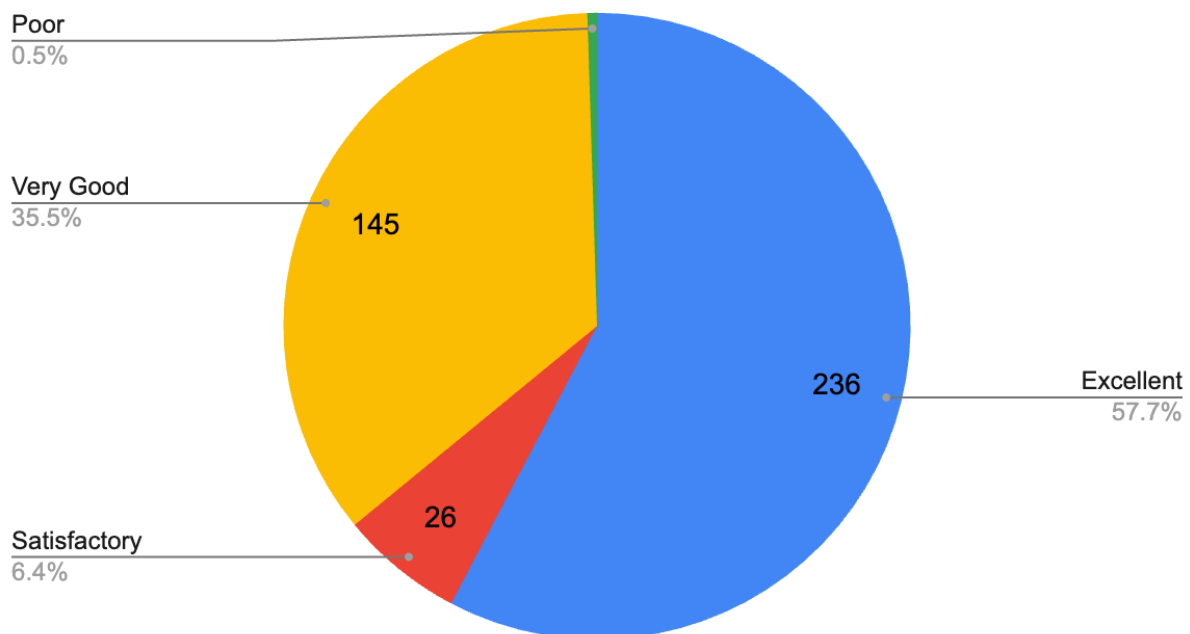
Summary:

Respondents represented a diverse range of roles and identities, reflecting the broad reach of the workshop. Students made up the largest proportion of respondents (29.5%), followed by family members of people with disabilities (n = 118). Substantial representation was also seen among teachers or school administrators (11.8%), disability service staff (10.6%), and community organization staff (9.1%), indicating strong engagement from both educational and service-based sectors. Individuals who identified as people with disabilities (8.83%) and community members (2.4%) further contributed to the range of perspectives present. Overall, the distribution suggests that the workshop attracted participants across multiple roles connected to disability, education, and community inclusion.

Please rate this workshop overall.

Rating	n	%
Poor	2	0.5%
Satisfactory	26	6.4%
Very Good	145	35.5%
Excellent	236	57.7%

Please rate this workshop overall



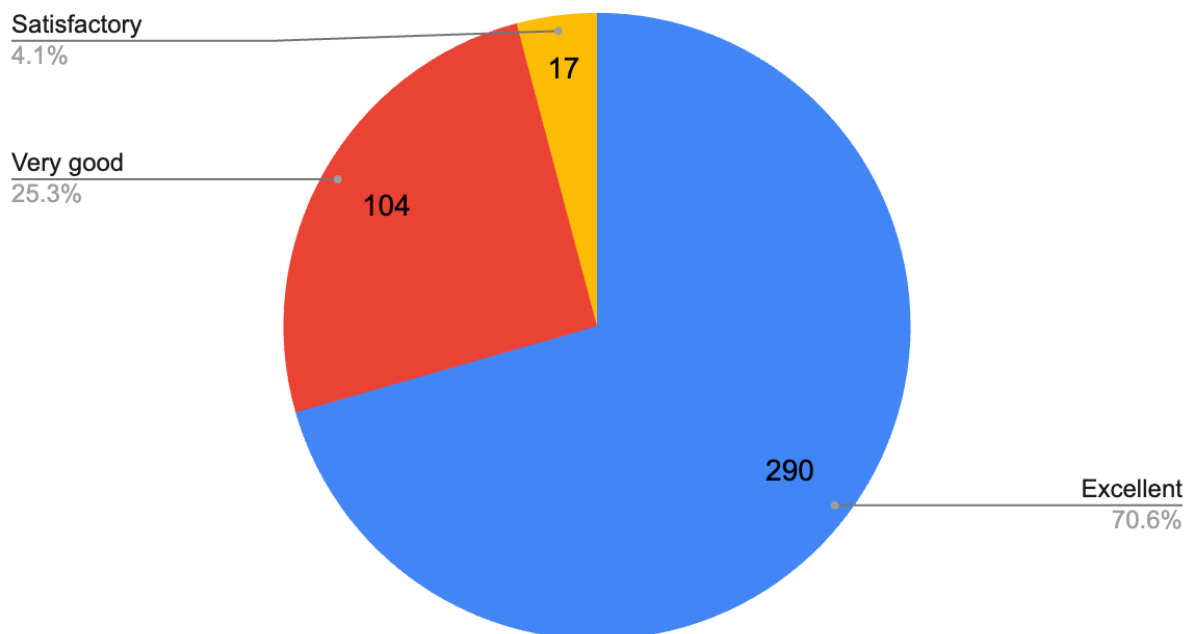
Summary:

Overall, participant feedback on the workshop was highly positive. A combined 93.2% of respondents rated the workshop as Very Good or Excellent, indicating strong satisfaction with the overall experience. Only 6.9% of participants rated the workshop as Satisfactory or Poor, suggesting that negative perceptions of the workshop were minimal.

Please rate the performance of the instructors.

Rating	n	%
Satisfactory	17	4.1%
Very Good	104	25.3%
Excellent	290	70.6%

Please rate the performance of the instructor (s)



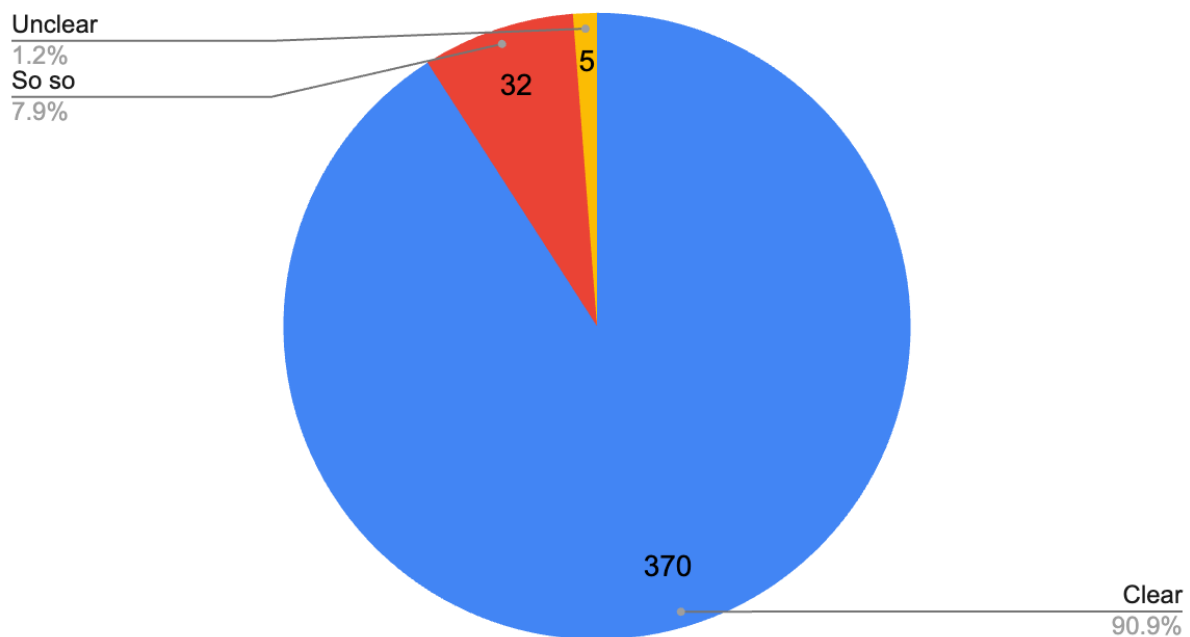
Summary:

Participant ratings of instructor performance were overwhelmingly positive. A combined 95.9% of respondents rated the instructor's performance as Very Good or Excellent, reflecting strong approval of instructional quality. Only 4.1% rated the performance as Satisfactory, with no respondents indicating a Poor rating, suggesting that negative perceptions of instructor performance were minimal.

The information presented was:

Response	n	%
Clear	370	90.9%
So-so	32	7.9%
Unclear	5	1.2%

The information presented was...



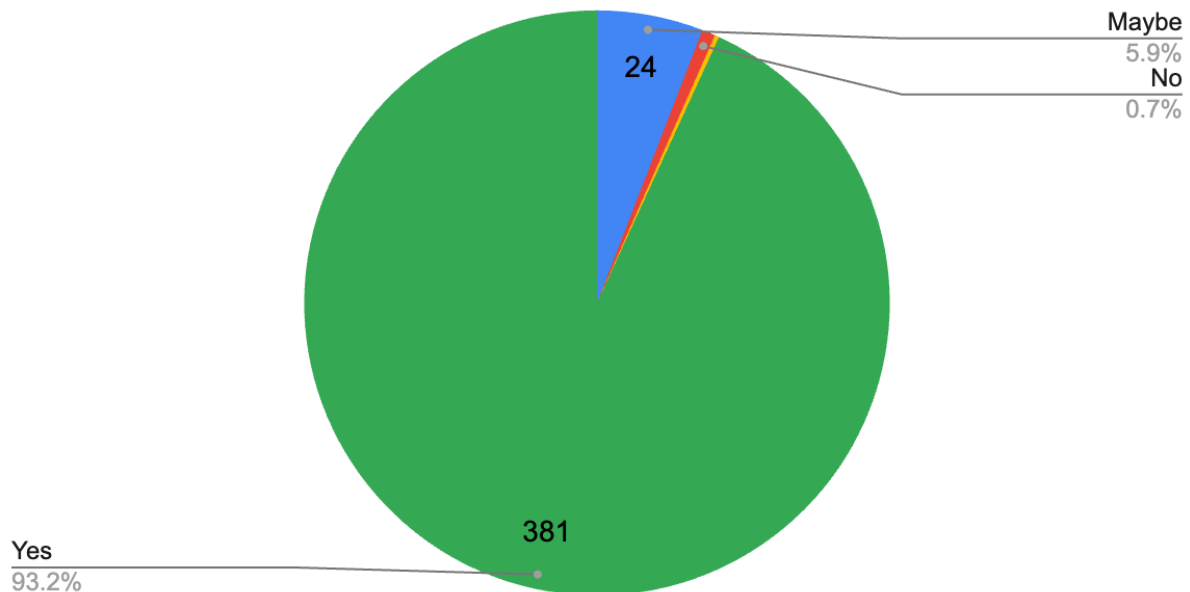
Summary:

Participants overwhelmingly perceived the information presented as clear. A total of 90.9% of respondents rated the information as Clear, indicating that the content was communicated effectively. Only 9.1% rated the information as So-so or Unclear, suggesting that confusion or lack of clarity was minimal.

Did the workshop help you understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities?

Response	n	%
Yes	381	93.2%
Maybe	24	5.9%
No	3	0.7%

Did the workshop help you understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities?

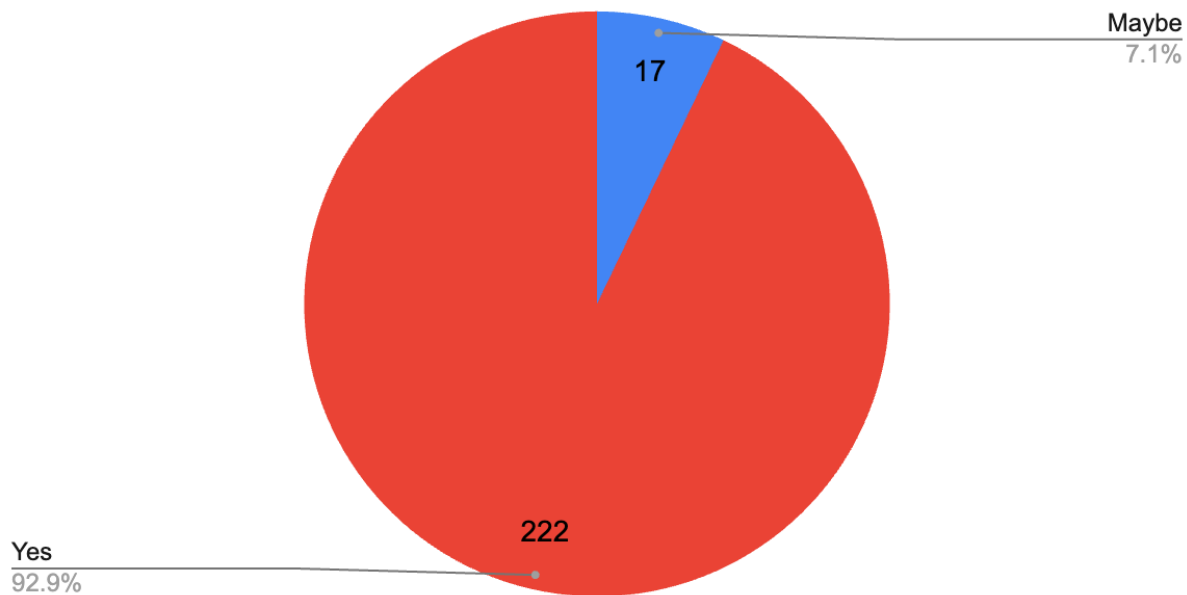


Summary:

The workshop was highly effective in helping participants understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities. A combined 93.2% of respondents answered Yes, indicating strong perceived impact. Only 6.6% selected Maybe or No, suggesting that uncertainty or lack of impact was minimal.

Did the workshop provide you with tools and strategies to help support relationships between people with and without disabilities?

Did the workshop provide you with tools and strategies to help support relationships between people with and without disabili...



Response	n	%
Yes	222	92.9%
Maybe	17	7.1%
No	0	0.0%

Summary:

Participants overwhelmingly reported that the workshop provided them with useful tools and strategies to support relationships between people with and without disabilities. A combined 92.9% of respondents answered Yes, indicating strong perceived practical value. Only 7.1% selected Maybe, and no participants selected No, suggesting that nearly all attendees felt the workshop offered applicable and meaningful strategies.

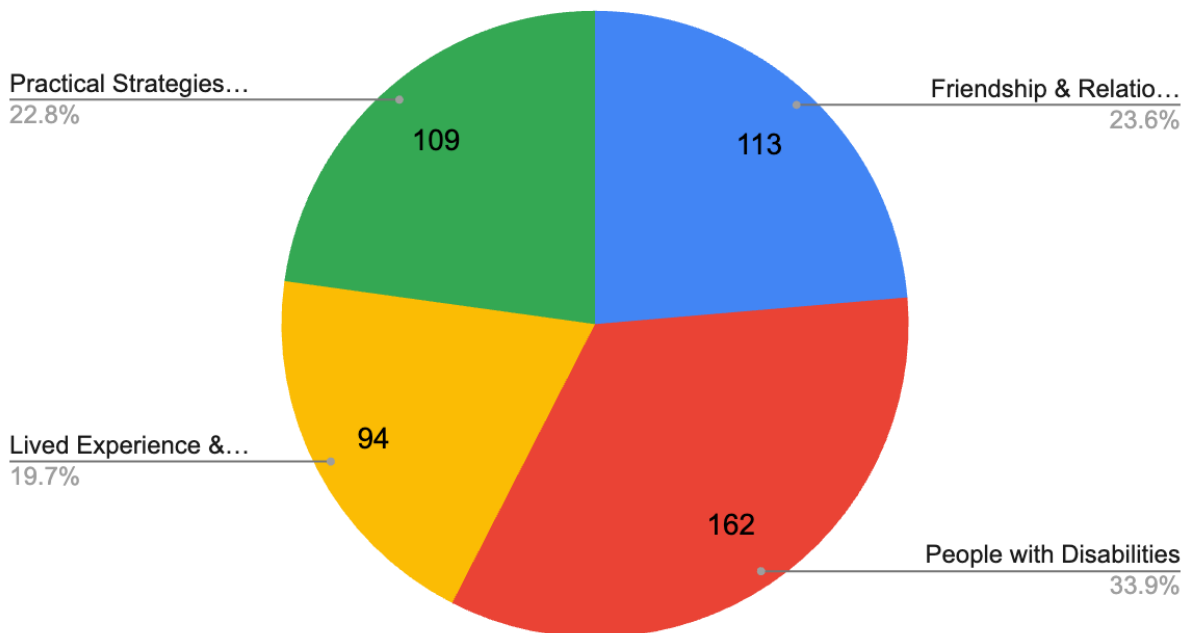
What aspects of this workshop were most useful or valuable?

Theme	Key Ideas	Representative Quotes (Verbatim)
Friendship & Relationships	Friendship is essential to well-being and belonging; participants emphasized learning how friendships form, deepen, and require intentional support across settings and ages.	“Understanding the importance of relationships.” “The importance of friendship.” “Learning about the benefits of friendships and how to build them.” “That somehow high fiving someone and everyone being friendly toward that person isn’t enough: deeper friendships are necessary.”
People with Disabilities	Participants valued learning directly about disability, emphasizing dignity, equality, and seeing people with disabilities as whole individuals with feelings, interests, and agency.	“Showing how people with disabilities are people and have feelings too.” “Treating people with disabilities the same as others.” “Great to hear from people with disabilities.” “People with disabilities are still human and want to be treated like everyone else.”
Lived Experiences	Firsthand accounts and personal stories were repeatedly identified as the most powerful and meaningful aspect of the workshop, increasing understanding, empathy, and connection.	“Hearing directly from individuals with disabilities was helpful and appreciated.” “Having actual people who had disabilities sharing out their own personal stories really helped me imagine how rough it must have been.” “The most useful was when they talked about their personal experiences.” “Hearing Warren and Jonathan share details about their multidimensional lives.”

Practical Strategies	Participants highlighted concrete, actionable guidance they could apply in schools, programs, and families, including communication strategies, tools, visuals, and step-by-step supports.	“Specific strategies we can use to support friendships.” “Concrete ways for teachers to encourage friendships between students with and without disabilities.” “Knowing what you should and shouldn’t say to someone with a disability.” “Ideas on how to use interests to make connections.”
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Theme	n	%
Friendship & Relationships	113	23.6%
People with Disabilities	162	33.9%
Lived Experiences & Personal Perspectives	94	19.7%
Practical Strategies & Usefulness	109	22.8%

Total Count



Explanation of Coding Process:

Responses to the open-ended question “What aspects of this workshop were most useful or valuable?” were analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach. All responses were reviewed in full and coded inductively to identify recurring ideas and patterns in participant feedback. These codes were then reviewed and consolidated into four overarching thematic categories: Friendship and Relationships, People with Disabilities, Lived Experiences and Personal Perspectives, and Practical Strategies and Usefulness.

Summary:

Responses to the question “What aspects of this workshop were most useful or valuable?” clustered around four primary themes. Together, these findings highlight the workshop’s impact in centering relationships, lived experience, and practical application.

The most frequently identified theme was People with Disabilities (33.9%). Participants emphasized the importance of learning directly about disability through the voices and perspectives of people with disabilities themselves, with many noting increased understanding, respect, and recognition of dignity and shared humanity. Closely related, Lived Experiences and Personal Perspectives (19.7%) reinforced the value of firsthand stories, which participants described as particularly meaningful in building empathy and deeper understanding.

Friendship and Relationships accounted for 23.6% of responses and reflected a strong focus on the role of friendship in well-being and belonging. Participants highlighted learning how

friendships form, deepen, and require intentional support beyond surface-level inclusion. Finally, Practical Strategies and Usefulness represented 22.8% of responses, indicating that participants valued concrete tools and strategies they could apply in schools, programs, and family settings to support inclusive relationships.

Overall, these findings suggest that the workshop effectively combined values-based learning with practical guidance, helping participants both understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities and feel prepared to support those relationships in meaningful ways.

Event Evaluations

Overview: This section presents evaluation findings from the [event evaluation data](#). For each question, results are summarized using frequency tables and visual representations, along with brief interpretive summaries. Together, these findings provide insight into how participants experienced the event and how they perceived its value for advancing inclusive practices within their organizations and communities.

Methods:

Evaluation data for this section were collected through post-event surveys that included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions assessed participant satisfaction with the event and session content, as well as perceived relevance and helpfulness for community and organizational inclusion efforts, using a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize these responses. The open-ended question regarding key takeaways was analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach, allowing responses to be coded into multiple themes when applicable. This combined quantitative and qualitative approach provided both an overall measure of participant experience and deeper insight into how participants interpreted and valued the event.

Executive Summary:

Evaluation data indicate that participants found the event to be highly satisfying, relevant, and meaningful for advancing inclusive practices within their communities and organizations. Overall satisfaction with both the event and the session content was strong, with the majority of respondents rating their experience at the highest levels. Very few participants selected neutral ratings, and no respondents indicated low satisfaction, suggesting that the event was well received across attendees.

Participants also perceived the event as highly relevant and helpful for their organization's inclusion efforts. Most respondents rated the event as very helpful, indicating that the content aligned well with their professional and organizational contexts. These findings suggest that the event successfully addressed real-world inclusion needs and offered guidance that participants felt could be applied within their own settings.

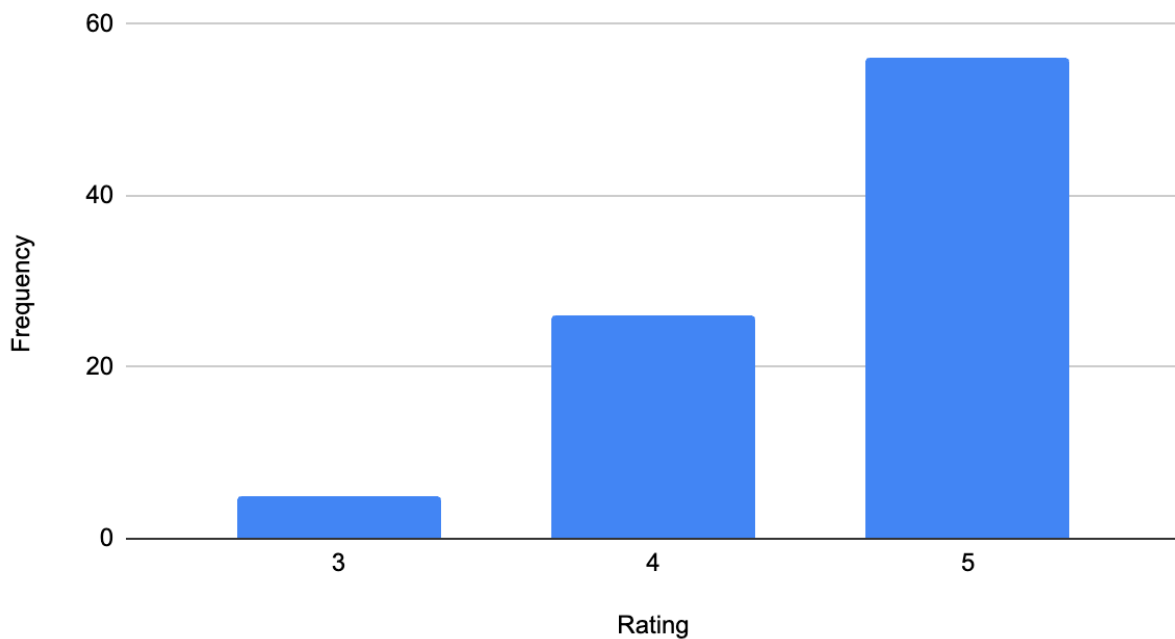
Analysis of open-ended responses regarding key takeaways provides deeper insight into what participants found most valuable. Common themes included understanding inclusion as an ongoing and intentional process, the importance of relationship-building and community connections, and access to practical strategies, tools, and resources. Participants also emphasized increased awareness and perspective-shifting, particularly around disability, language, and inclusive practices, alongside a strong sense of shared responsibility for inclusion across organizations.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the event was effective in combining strong content delivery with meaningful learning outcomes. Participants not only reported high satisfaction and relevance but also articulated clear conceptual shifts and practical takeaways, indicating that the event supported both reflection and action related to inclusive, relationship-centered work.

How satisfied were you with the event?

Rating	n	%
1	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%
3	3	3.5%
4	26	30.6%
5	56	65.9%
Total	85	100%

How satisfied were you with the event? (1-5)

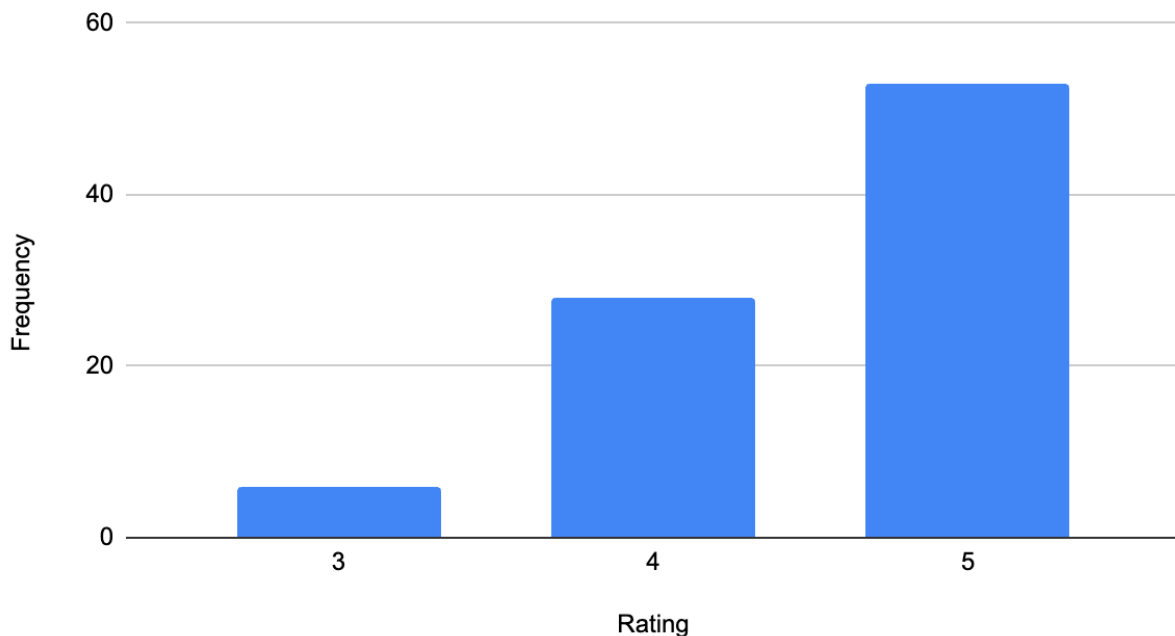


Summary: Overall satisfaction with the event was high. A combined 96.5% of respondents rated their satisfaction as a 4 or 5, with nearly two-thirds (65.9%) selecting the highest rating. Only 3.5% rated the event at a 3, and no respondents selected the lowest ratings, suggesting that overall satisfaction with the event was strong.

How satisfied were you with the session content?

Rating	n	%
1	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%
3	6	6.9%
4	28	32.2%
5	53	60.9%
Total	87	100%

How satisfied were you with the session content? (1-5)

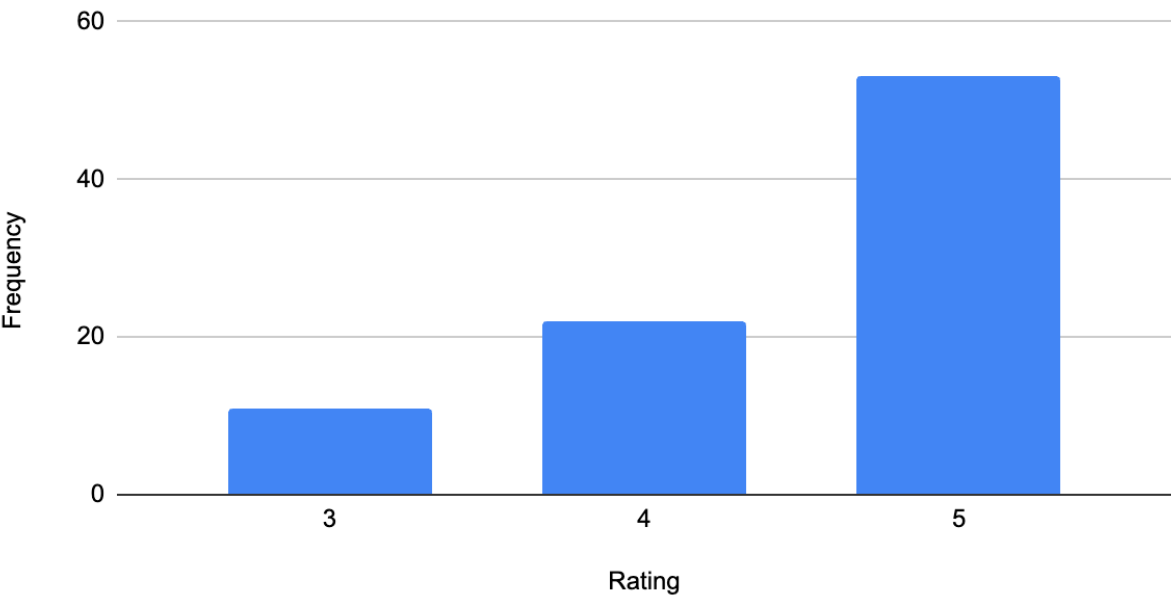


Summary: Participant satisfaction with the session content was very high. A combined 93.1% of respondents rated the content as a 4 or 5, with the majority (60.9%) selecting the highest rating. Only 6.9% rated the content at a 3, and no respondents selected ratings of 1 or 2, suggesting strong approval of the session content overall.

How relevant and helpful do you think it was for your community organization’s inclusion efforts?

Rating	n	%
1	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%
3	11	12.8%
4	22	25.6%
5	53	61.6%
Total	86	100%

How relevant and helpful do you think it was for your community organization's inclusion efforts?

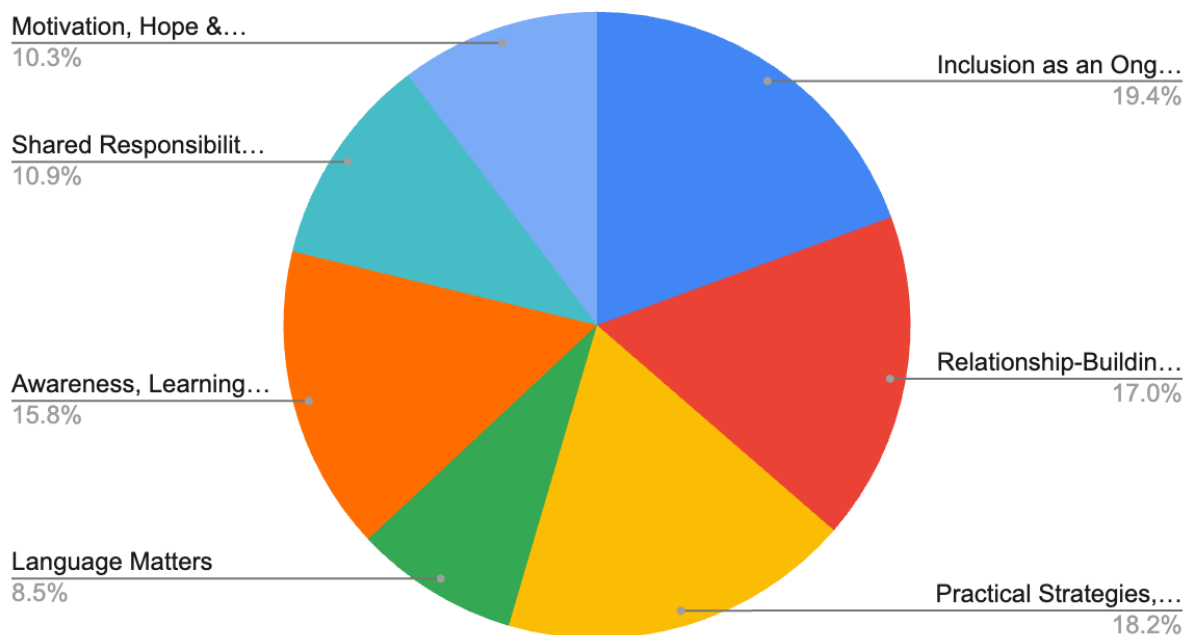


Summary: Participants largely viewed the event as relevant and helpful for their community organization’s inclusion efforts. A combined 87.2% of respondents rated relevance and helpfulness as a 4 or 5, with nearly two-thirds (61.6%) selecting the highest rating. Only 12.8% rated the relevance at a 3, and no respondents selected ratings of 1 or 2, suggesting the event was widely perceived as highly applicable to inclusion work.

What were your key takeaways from this event?

Theme	n	% of Responses
Inclusion as an Ongoing, Intentional Process	32	37.6%
Relationship-Building & Community Connections	28	32.9%
Practical Strategies, Tools & Resources	30	35.3%
Language Matters	14	16.5%
Awareness, Learning & Perspective-Shifting	26	30.6%
Shared Responsibility & Organizational Buy-In	18	21.2%
Motivation, Hope & Validation	17	20.0%

What were your key take aways from this event?



Theme	Key Ideas	Representative Quotes (Verbatim)
Inclusion as an Ongoing, Intentional Process	Inclusion is not a checklist or one-time action; it requires reflection, responsiveness, and sustained effort that looks different across contexts.	"Inclusion is a continuous active effort on the part of the organization, and it looks different for everyone." "That inclusion isn't a thing that can be done with a quick answer." "Inclusion can mean many things."
Relationship-Building & Community Connections	Building relationships and networks is foundational to inclusive work; collaboration across organizations strengthens impact.	"Good networking connections." "Inclusion requires relationship building." "Connecting with community resources and building relationships within the community to support initiatives related to increasing inclusive opportunities."
Practical Strategies, Tools & Resources	Participants valued concrete tools and actionable strategies they could apply in their own settings and share with staff.	"Resources for adaptive toolkit and process." "Ideas to support youth including visual schedule and expectations sheet." "The tools that gives me a springboard on how to create real inclusion in my programs."
Language Matters	Inclusive language, wording, and terminology are critical for reducing barriers and supporting belonging.	"Language matters!" "Wording is so important, use language to make sure you are not limiting/creating barriers." "Lisa used a lot of different terminologies that sound so much better than what we have been saying in the past."
Awareness, Learning & Perspective-Shifting	Participants gained new understanding of disability, inclusion models, and diverse perspectives through shared learning and exposure.	"This taught me more about how to consider individuals with disabilities in my work." "Clarity on identifying different models of programs and how some models are less inclusive than others." "Awareness of different perspectives and ideas for training staff."
Shared Responsibility & Organizational Buy-In	Inclusion requires commitment from the entire organization, including leadership, staff training, and collective responsibility.	"That everyone is responsible for inclusion." "Advice on how to get the whole organization on board." "Developing inclusive practices take the whole team and are worth the time and effort to build better communities for all."

Motivation, Hope & Validation	The event inspired, affirmed, and energized participants, particularly those already engaged in inclusion work.	“Hope.” “It inspires me to continue my own work.” “I feel very confident in my personal alignment with inclusive practices, I am motivated to continue pushing forward towards more opportunities!”
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Explanation of Coding:

Responses to the open-ended question “What were your key takeaways from this event?” were analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach. All responses were reviewed in full and initially coded inductively to identify recurring ideas and patterns reflected in participants’ own language. During this open coding phase, multiple codes could be applied to a single response, as many participants identified more than one takeaway.

Following initial coding, related codes were reviewed and consolidated into broader thematic categories that captured the primary areas of emphasis across responses. This process allowed themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being predetermined. Frequencies and percentages were then calculated for each theme to provide a sense of how commonly each type of takeaway appeared across responses, while still preserving the qualitative meaning of participants’ feedback.

Summary:

Responses to the question “What were your key takeaways from this event?” highlighted several recurring themes related to how participants understood and experienced the event. Across responses, participants emphasized that inclusion is an ongoing and intentional process, noting that meaningful inclusion requires reflection, sustained effort, and responsiveness rather than quick or one-time solutions.

Another prominent theme was the importance of relationship-building and community connections. Participants described networking, collaboration, and learning from other organizations as central to advancing inclusive practices. Many also identified practical strategies, tools, and resources as key takeaways, emphasizing the value of concrete guidance that could be applied in their own programs and shared with staff.

Participants additionally noted increased awareness and perspective-taking, including greater attention to language and how wording can either create or reduce barriers. Overall, responses reflected a sense of motivation and validation, with many participants expressing renewed commitment to inclusion work and confidence in continuing to move their efforts forward.

Big Takeaways from Training and Event Evaluation Data

Overview:

Across the evaluation data, trainings and events were consistently well received by participants. Satisfaction ratings for both workshops and events were high, with most respondents rating their experiences as very good or excellent and reporting that information was presented clearly and effectively. Participants also expressed strong approval of presenters and session structure, suggesting that the trainings were engaging, well organized, and accessible to a wide audience.

The initiatives reached a broad and diverse group of participants, including students, educators, community organization staff, disability service providers, family members of people with disabilities, and individuals with disabilities themselves. This diversity was reflected not only in participant classifications but also in qualitative feedback that highlighted cross-disciplinary engagement and learning. Participants demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of friendship as distinct from general inclusion, emphasizing that meaningful relationships require intentionality, shared interests, and ongoing support rather than surface-level participation.

Participants also identified lived experience and firsthand perspectives as central to their learning, frequently noting the value of hearing directly from people with disabilities and learning through personal stories. In addition to conceptual learning, many participants reported concrete strategies they could apply in their own settings, such as planning tools, communication strategies, and approaches to program design. Finally, the data reflect a sense of motivation, validation, and shared responsibility, with participants expressing commitment to continuing inclusion and friendship-building work within their organizations and communities.

The Takeaways:

- Trainings and events were well received
- Initiatives reach a broad and diverse group of participants
- Participants demonstrate a strong understanding of the importance of friendship
- Lived experience and firsthand perspectives are central to participant learning
- Participants report concrete strategies they can apply in their settings
- The data reflect motivation and a sense of shared responsibility

1. Overall feedback indicates that the trainings and events were very well received

Overview: Across both training/workshop evaluations and event evaluations, participants consistently rated their experiences very positively. The majority of respondents rated sessions and events as very good or excellent, and satisfaction with session content was similarly high. Participants also overwhelmingly reported that information was presented clearly and that instructors were effective, indicating strong overall approval of both content and delivery.

Supporting data:

- 93.2% rated workshops very good or excellent
- 95.9% rated instructor performance very good or excellent
- 90.9% rated information as clear
- Over 96% rated overall event satisfaction as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale

Quotes:

Training and Workshops	Events
● “No suggestions. It was great!” ● “It’s already the best.” ● “Very meaningful work.” ● “This presentation should become mandatory for those entering human services.” ● “This workshop taught me more on how to better impact people that I support.” ● “Learning how a circle of support can be built was useful and valuable because it doesn’t happen naturally.” ● “The worksheets helped understand how to identify different people who could be in a circle of support.” ● “I really liked the videos and Jonathan sharing his personal experiences.” ● “The presentation was very informative.” ● “Excellent job and clear format for presenting the info.” ● “None, it was fantastic!” ● “I wouldn’t change anything; it was genuine and informational.”	● “Wonderful!” ● “It was awesome! Thank you!” ● “Excellent program.” ● “Very informative, interactive.” ● “Overall impressed and satisfied with the message behind today’s meeting.” ● “The structure of the event was great! I appreciated the length and the lunch offering. It’s a great way to ensure people are engaged without overwhelming.” ● “Excellent. Nathan and Jonathan were excellent. Kate was fabulous. Great networking across many disciplines.” ● “Wonderful panelists!” ● “This was excellent and I was so happy that the room included people for whom this is new stuff.” ● “Very informative. So glad I came!” ● “I really enjoyed the summit.” ● “Content was great and agenda moved well.” ● “Thanks for providing this opportunity!” ● “Inspiring.”

2. The initiatives are reaching a broad and diverse group of participants

Overview: Evaluation data show that Pathways to Friendship initiatives engaged participants across multiple roles and contexts, including students, educators, community organization staff, disability service providers, family members of people with disabilities, and individuals with disabilities themselves. This distribution suggests that the trainings and events reached stakeholders across education, service, and community sectors rather than a single audience.

Supporting data:

- Students represented the largest group of respondents (29.5%)
- Family members of people with disabilities were also highly represented
- Educators, disability service staff, and community organization staff each comprised meaningful portions of participants
- Individuals with disabilities participated directly in the trainings and events

Quotes:

- “Appreciative of the different backgrounds of presenters and panel members as well as those in attendance.”
- “Great networking across many disciplines.”
- “Overall impressed and satisfied with the message behind today’s meeting. Appreciative of the different backgrounds of presenters and panel members as well as those in attendance.”
- “This was excellent and I was so happy that the room included people for whom this is new stuff.”
- “All the amazing organizations who want to make community services more inclusive for the larger society.”

3. Participants demonstrate a strong understanding of the importance of friendships, not just general inclusion

Overview: A consistent finding across the data is that participants reported understanding friendship as distinct from general inclusion or participation. Participants frequently described friendship as requiring intentionality, shared interests, and ongoing support rather than surface-level welcoming or access.

Supporting data:

- 93.2% reported that the workshop helped them understand the importance of relationships between people with and without disabilities
- Friendship and relationships accounted for 23.6% of coded open-ended responses

Quotes:

- “That somehow high fiving someone and everyone being friendly toward that person isn’t enough: deeper friendships are necessary.”
- “That there is more than just one shared interest to creating friendships.”
- “Understanding the importance of relationships.”
- “The importance of friendship.”
- “Good ideas on setting up and implementing programs that would successfully create environments where friendships between disabled and non-disabled.”
- “Inclusion equals belonging.”
- “Finding what’s right for all abilities.”
- “Ask and loop family in. Don’t rely on the roster to include all the necessary info.”
- “Inclusion requires relationship building.”
- “That inclusion isn’t a thing that can be done with a quick answer. It’s an engagement with your community to see what they need and require from your institution.”
- “What is and isn’t inclusion.”
- “Full Inclusion vs Adaptive Options.”
- “Showing how people with disabilities are people and have feelings too.”
- “People with disabilities are still human and want to be treated like everyone else.”
- “This taught me more about how to consider individuals with disabilities in my work.”

4. Lived experience and firsthand perspectives are central to participant learning

Overview: Participants repeatedly identified learning directly from people with disabilities and hearing lived experiences as key components of the trainings and events. These responses indicate that firsthand perspectives were a central source of meaning and understanding for participants.

Supporting data:

- People with disabilities was a frequently coded theme (33.9%)
- Lived experiences and personal perspectives accounted for 19.7% of coded responses

Quotes:

- “Great to hear from people with disabilities.”
- “Having actual people who had disabilities sharing out their own personal stories really helped me imagine how rough it must have been.”
- “The most useful was when they talked about their personal experiences.”
- “Hearing Warren and Jonathan share details about their multidimensional lives.”
- “Nathan’s experience was so valuable; I would have preferred to hear from him instead of the video of the educators.”
- “I really liked the videos and I liked Jonathan sharing his personal experiences.”
- “Lisa used a lot of different terminologies that sound so much better than what we have been saying in the past. As a parent of a young woman with special needs, I appreciate the more positive terminology.”
- “Having Omar on the panel was such a perfect example of inclusion and really helped drive the points home.”

5. Participants report concrete, practical strategies they can apply in their settings

Overview: In addition to conceptual understanding, participants reported taking away practical tools and strategies that they perceived as applicable in their own contexts. These included strategies related to planning, communication, accessibility, and program design.

Supporting data:

- 92.9% reported that the workshop provided tools and strategies to support relationships
- Practical strategies and usefulness accounted for 22.8% of coded responses

Quotes:

- “Make a new social story for new visitors.”
- “Ideas to support youth including visual schedule and expectations sheet.”
- “Resources for adaptive toolkit and process.”
- “Knowing what you should and shouldn’t say to someone with a disability.”
- “Ideas on how to use interests to make connections.”
- “Be intentional in your information sharing and create a schedule.”
- “Ask and loop family in. Don’t rely on the roster to include all the necessary info.”
- “Communicate with participants with disabilities and their families about meaningful participation, experiences and support strategies.”
- “The worksheets helped understand how to identify different people who could be in a circle of support.”
- “Learning how a circle of support can be built was useful and valuable because it doesn’t happen naturally.”

6. The data reflect motivation, validation, and a sense of shared responsibility

Overview: Many responses reflected feelings of motivation, validation, and renewed commitment to inclusion work. Participants also emphasized shared responsibility and organizational commitment as important components of sustaining inclusive practices.

Supporting data:

- Themes related to shared responsibility and organizational buy-in appeared across responses
- Motivation, hope, and validation emerged as a distinct theme in open-ended responses

Quotes:

- “I feel very confident in my personal alignment with inclusive practices, I am motivated to continue pushing forward towards more opportunities!”
- “That everyone is responsible for inclusion.”
- “Developing inclusive practices take the whole team and are worth the time and effort to build better communities for all.”
- “Make the ask. Making sure it’s genuine relationships.”
- “How many people are working hard to improve communities.”
- “Talking with the community and gaining feedback along the way. Any progress is good progress.”
- “Our org has a lot of work to do.”

Qualitative Data Analysis: By Question

Question 1: Describe your experience working with The Arc and the Pathways to Friendship project.

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 described their experience with Pathways to Friendship as overwhelmingly positive. They emphasized that the coaching and support provided through the grant process were highly organized, nurturing, and instrumental in helping them successfully implement an inclusive open mic program. They appreciated both the practical guidance and the ongoing support that helped them think intentionally about friendship and inclusion.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Amazing. Like 1000%."
 - "The coaching was extremely helpful in implementing Grant. It was very organized... very nurturing and supportive and really helped me to implement the program for the grant very effectively."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 described Pathways to Friendship as a natural extension of a long-standing commitment to community inclusion. They explained that the project helped their organization become more intentional about accessibility and inclusion within community programming. They highlighted the value of the trainings, community partnerships, networking opportunities, and grant funding, all of which helped expand their organization's capacity to create inclusive spaces.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's been a tremendous opportunity for our community."
 - "The Arc program has kind of allowed us to be intentional with it and think about it a little more."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 described a relationship with Pathways that was both professional and personal. Through their work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Best Buddies programs, and Special Olympics, they became deeply involved in conversations about friendship, community integration, and sustaining meaningful relationships. They viewed Pathways as both a professional resource and a personal network that has shaped their work and provided mentorship opportunities.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I met some really great people and I've stayed involved ever since."
- "My now involvement with Pathways is actually a little bit more personal than professional."

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4 described serving as a consultant with Pathways to Friendship since 2022. Their work focuses on presenting to schools, families, nonprofits, and community groups about friendship, disability, diversity, and inclusion. They emphasized teaching practical strategies for making friends and helping others understand that people with disabilities should be respected and valued rather than viewed as needing to be "fixed."
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I've been consultant with the Pathways to Friendship program since 2022."
 - "I talk at a variety of nonprofits to people with and to people without disabilities. I talk about the strategies on how to make friends."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5 described several years of involvement with Pathways, primarily through educational presentations focused on bridging the gap between disabled and non-disabled individuals. They viewed the work as both meaningful and rewarding and emphasized their willingness to support the project in any way needed. Their involvement included school presentations, staff trainings, and advocacy efforts aimed at fostering understanding and inclusion.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's been very refreshing and rewarding."
 - "Basically doing PowerPoint presentation, bridging the gap between the disabled and the non-disabled within the school systems."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 described becoming involved with Pathways through their work with Operation House Call and later branching into friendship-focused presentations. They viewed the project as an opportunity to educate a wide variety of audiences about the benefits of friendship and inclusion. Their role primarily involved speaking engagements and sharing experiences to help others better understand relationships between people with and without disabilities.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I've started to branch off with Pathways to Friendship for about this past year."

- "For Pathways, we basically go into wherever really would have us and talk about the benefits of Friendship."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7 described their connection to Pathways through their leadership role in a friendship-focused organization that matches adults with disabilities and volunteer friends. They viewed Pathways as a valuable networking and resource-sharing partner that connected them with other organizations committed to inclusion. Their experience centered on collaboration, exchanging ideas, and learning from similarly mission-driven groups.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I reached out to Rachel Hayward and she was so accommodating and so excited."
 - "It's nice to kind of hear about their experiences and then therefore take that resource and share that with our folks if need be when the moment arises."

Question 2: How has your involvement with Pathways shifted or affirmed how you think about friendship between people with and without disabilities?

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 explained that the project shifted their thinking by helping them realize that meaningful friendships between people with and without disabilities develop naturally when the right environment is created. Initially, they felt some anxiety about how the friendship component would work, but through the project they observed authentic relationships forming without direct intervention. A particularly meaningful friendship between a neurotypical student and a youth with disabilities reinforced the power and mutual benefit of these relationships.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's just a natural human thing and that it wasn't something that I had to control or create, I just had to provide the environment."
 - "That friendship between them really was very moving and just showed me the impact that this can have on people, both parts of the friendship."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 shared that Pathways largely affirmed their existing beliefs about inclusion while also deepening their understanding of what true belonging looks like. They contrasted older models of inclusion that emphasized access but maintained separation with the Pathways approach, which focuses on authentic relationships and

community membership. The project reinforced the importance of creating opportunities for people to build genuine connections rather than simply participate in parallel activities.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "It definitely affirmed it."
- "It's not providing you an equal opportunity, but it's separate... you're building relationships with our existing community, and then that existing community is welcoming you in and you're a part of that."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 described a significant shift in their understanding of friendship. Through Pathways, they came to recognize that friendships require active support, intentionality, and ongoing maintenance. They learned that simply introducing people is not enough and that successful friendships often require guidance, boundary-setting, and mutual investment. Their personal relationships with Pathways participants also demonstrated the long-term value of these connections.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "It's definitely shifted a lot in terms of what is needed to help maintain friendships and what that looks like."
- "People can be really idealistic being like, 'Oh, you just introduce two people.' And typically that's not really how friendship works."

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4's experiences reinforced the idea that people with disabilities should be viewed and treated as full members of the community. Their work emphasized dignity, respect, and understanding. Rather than focusing on differences, they encouraged others to recognize shared humanity and to approach friendships with people with disabilities in the same way they would approach any other relationship.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I always like to be treated like an adult, treated with respect, not talked down to."
- "I'm capable of doing many wonderful things and I don't want people to think of me as someone with disabilities that isn't capable of doing anything."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5's responses suggested that Pathways reinforced their belief that education and exposure can help reduce barriers between disabled and non-disabled individuals. Through presentations and discussions with students, they observed that

many young people are eager to learn about disability and inclusion when given the opportunity. Their experiences affirmed the importance of helping others understand that friendship across differences is both normal and valuable.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "It's okay to be friends with someone who's disabled, who's different from you."
- "The beautiful thing about teaching this younger generation, they're so eager to learn."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 reported that their personal beliefs about friendship did not change substantially because they had always viewed friendships as being based on connection rather than disability status. However, their work through Pathways reinforced that perspective and provided opportunities to help others understand that friendships between people with and without disabilities are fundamentally the same as any other friendship.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I've always just been like, if you are a friend with someone, it doesn't matter if there's a disability or not really, it's just about the connection that's there."
- "It's possible to just have a normal relationship with someone."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7 described how Pathways affirmed a philosophy that friendship should be viewed through a lens of equality rather than labels. They reflected on a conversation about language and appreciated the emphasis on referring to everyone simply as "friends" rather than separating people into categories. Their involvement reinforced the idea that friendship should be the primary identity, rather than disability status or volunteer status.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "When we're talking to a group of everyone, we're all friends with a capital F."
- "I didn't think much of it... but when she pointed it out, it really reflected the way we think about friendship."

Question 3: Were there any specific strategies, activities, or approaches that helped support friendships between people with and without disabilities?

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 highlighted the importance of creating structured opportunities for interaction while allowing relationships to develop naturally. Through an inclusive

open mic program, they found that simply bringing people together around a shared interest in music created conditions where friendships could emerge organically. They also benefited from coaching provided through Pathways, which helped them think intentionally about inclusion and participant engagement.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I just had to provide the environment."
- "We had a neurotypical high school student who was attending, and I think it was a suggestion from Pathways that we kind of identify a volunteer position..."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 emphasized community-based programming that integrates people with and without disabilities into existing social environments. Rather than creating separate programs, they described approaches that focus on shared participation, authentic community membership, and relationship-building. Their organization used recurring community events and intentionally designed opportunities for people to interact and connect over time.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "You're building relationships with our existing community, and then that existing community is welcoming you in."
 - "It's really about creating spaces where people can connect naturally."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 identified intentional support and ongoing relationship maintenance as essential strategies. They stressed that friendships do not simply happen because two people are introduced. Instead, successful friendships require support around communication, boundaries, navigating challenges, and maintaining connections over time. Programs that provide ongoing guidance were viewed as particularly effective.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Working on ways for people to stay connected, like appropriate boundaries around friendships, navigating tough times, things like that."
 - "There's a lot of things and factors that go into anybody, a friendship and work on both sides."

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4 focused on education and skill-building. Their presentations provided practical strategies for making friends and helped both disabled and non-disabled individuals learn how to build and maintain relationships. They emphasized

teaching social skills, communication strategies, and increasing awareness among community members.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I talk about the strategies on how to make friends."
- "I talk to people with and to people without disabilities."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5 described presentations, workshops, and educational outreach as effective approaches for fostering friendships. They believed that increasing awareness and creating opportunities for dialogue helped reduce misconceptions and encouraged young people to be more open to friendships with people who have disabilities. Schools were identified as particularly important settings for this work.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "Basically doing PowerPoint presentation, bridging the gap between the disabled and the non-disabled within the school systems."
- "The younger generation, they're so eager to learn."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 emphasized storytelling, public speaking, and direct engagement as effective approaches. By sharing personal experiences and discussing the benefits of friendship with diverse audiences, they helped people better understand disability and recognize common ground. Their presentations created opportunities for conversation and relationship-building.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "We basically go into wherever really would have us and talk about the benefits of Friendship."
- "It's about helping people understand that these friendships are possible."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7 described a structured friendship model that intentionally matches people based on common interests, geography, and compatibility. Their organization also provides ongoing support, resources, and facilitated group activities to help friendships develop and endure. They viewed regular contact and intentional matching as key ingredients for successful friendships.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "We match adults with disabilities to volunteer friends based on best fit, common interest, geography."
- "We support them every month with resources and match support."

Question 4: How has the project influenced how you think about building friendships or inclusive communities moving forward?

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 explained that the project reinforced the importance of creating environments where people can naturally connect rather than trying to manufacture friendships. Moving forward, they see inclusive community-building as less about controlling interactions and more about designing welcoming spaces where relationships can emerge organically. The experience also strengthened their belief that friendships between people with and without disabilities benefit everyone involved.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's just a natural human thing and that it wasn't something that I had to control or create, I just had to provide the environment."
 - "That friendship between them really was very moving and just showed me the impact that this can have on people, both parts of the friendship."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 described becoming increasingly intentional about designing community programs that foster authentic belonging rather than simply participation. Their experiences through Pathways reinforced that inclusive communities are built through ongoing relationships, shared experiences, and meaningful roles within existing communities. They emphasized that true inclusion requires people to feel like valued members of a community rather than guests within it.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "You're building relationships with our existing community, and then that existing community is welcoming you in."
 - "It's not just about being present, it's about being part of the community."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 explained that Pathways has shaped how they think about sustaining relationships over time. They now place greater emphasis on providing support, mentorship, and guidance to help friendships succeed. The project reinforced that inclusive communities require intentional infrastructure and ongoing investment rather than assuming relationships will naturally maintain themselves.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's definitely shifted a lot in terms of what is needed to help maintain friendships and what that looks like."

- "Helping people to achieve that rather than just letting them out and be like, 'Oh yeah, this friendship's going to work.'"

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4 described how their work with Pathways continues to reinforce the importance of education, awareness, and respect when building inclusive communities. They emphasized helping both disabled and non-disabled individuals understand one another and promoting the idea that people with disabilities should be viewed as capable individuals who contribute meaningfully to their communities.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I always like to be treated like an adult, treated with respect."
 - "I'm capable of doing many wonderful things."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5 reported that the project reinforced the value of continuing educational outreach, especially with younger generations. They expressed optimism that increased exposure and conversations about disability can create more inclusive communities over time. Their experiences strengthened their belief that schools are important spaces for building understanding and fostering future friendships.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "The beautiful thing about teaching this younger generation, they're so eager to learn."
 - "It's okay to be friends with someone who's disabled, who's different from you."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 indicated that the project reaffirmed their long-held belief that friendships should be based on connection rather than disability status. Going forward, they continue to focus on helping others recognize that meaningful relationships can develop when people move beyond assumptions and focus on common interests and shared experiences.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I've always just been like, if you are a friend with someone, it doesn't matter if there's a disability or not really."
 - "It's possible to just have a normal relationship with someone."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7 described how involvement with Pathways strengthened their commitment to building communities centered on friendship first. They emphasized the

importance of language, mindset, and organizational culture in shaping how people view one another. Moving forward, they continue to advocate for approaches that focus on common humanity and shared identities rather than labels or categories.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "We're all friends with a capital F."
- "It really reflected the way we think about friendship."

Question 5: Is there anything else you think is important for people to understand about supporting friendships between people with and without disabilities?

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 emphasized that friendships should not be forced or overly managed. Instead, organizations should focus on creating welcoming environments where people can connect naturally through shared interests and experiences. They stressed that authentic friendships develop when people are given opportunities to interact as equals.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I just had to provide the environment."
 - "It wasn't something that I had to control or create."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 emphasized that friendship support requires more than simply creating opportunities for people to meet. They highlighted the importance of ongoing support, community integration, and helping individuals navigate relationships over time. They encouraged people to think beyond inclusion as attendance or participation and instead focus on meaningful belonging.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "People can be really idealistic being like, 'Oh, you just introduce two people.'"
 - "There's a lot of things and factors that go into anybody, a friendship."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 stressed that friendships require intentional effort and support from both individuals involved. They highlighted the importance of teaching skills related to maintaining relationships, navigating challenges, and respecting boundaries. Their responses suggested that sustainable friendships often require guidance and community support structures.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Working on ways for people to stay connected."

- "Appropriate boundaries around friendships, navigating tough times, things like that."

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4 emphasized the importance of dignity, respect, and recognizing the capabilities of people with disabilities. They encouraged others to move beyond stereotypes and assumptions and instead focus on the strengths, talents, and contributions of individuals. Supporting friendships begins with treating people as equals and valuing them as whole people.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I always like to be treated like an adult, treated with respect."
 - "I'm capable of doing many wonderful things."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5 emphasized the importance of education and exposure. They believed that many barriers to friendship stem from a lack of understanding and familiarity. By helping people learn about disability and interact with individuals who have disabilities, communities can become more welcoming and open to friendship. They expressed particular optimism about educating younger generations.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It's okay to be friends with someone who's disabled, who's different from you."
 - "The younger generation, they're so eager to learn."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 stressed that people often overcomplicate disability-related friendships. They emphasized that friendships between people with and without disabilities are fundamentally similar to any other friendship and should be approached from a perspective of shared humanity. They encouraged people to focus on connection rather than difference.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "It doesn't matter if there's a disability or not really, it's just about the connection that's there."
 - "It's possible to just have a normal relationship with someone."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7 emphasized the importance of language and mindset when supporting friendships. They encouraged people to move away from labels that separate individuals into categories and instead focus on friendship as a shared identity. Their

comments reflected a belief that the way organizations talk about friendship influences how people perceive and experience inclusion.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "We're all friends with a capital F."
- "It really reflected the way we think about friendship."

Question 6: What, if anything, would you change or add to the project?

Participant 1

- **Summary:** Participant 1 was overwhelmingly positive about the project and did not identify major changes that were needed. Their comments suggested satisfaction with both the coaching model and the support provided. If anything, they appeared interested in seeing the work continue and expand so that more people could benefit from the opportunities being created.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Amazing. Like 1000%."
 - "The coaching was extremely helpful."

Participant 2

- **Summary:** Participant 2 expressed strong support for the project and focused less on changes and more on the importance of sustaining and growing the work. Their comments suggested that continued collaboration among organizations and additional opportunities for networking and resource-sharing would be beneficial. They viewed the project as filling an important need within the disability community.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Rachel was so accommodating and so excited."
 - "It's nice to kind of hear about their experiences and then therefore take that resource and share that with our folks."

Participant 3

- **Summary:** Participant 3 suggested that ongoing friendship support and maintenance should continue to be a central focus of the project. Their responses implied that friendship-building efforts are most successful when they include structures that help people navigate challenges and sustain relationships over time. Rather than proposing a major change, they emphasized strengthening and continuing these supports.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Working on ways for people to stay connected."

- "Helping people to achieve that rather than just letting them out and be like, 'Oh yeah, this friendship's going to work.'"

Participant 4

- **Summary:** Participant 4 did not identify significant shortcomings within the project. Instead, they emphasized the value of continuing outreach efforts and expanding opportunities to educate both disabled and non-disabled audiences about friendship, disability, and inclusion. Their comments reflected a desire to continue spreading the message to broader audiences.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "I talk at a variety of nonprofits to people with and to people without disabilities."
 - "I talk about the strategies on how to make friends."

Participant 5

- **Summary:** Participant 5 expressed enthusiasm for the project and did not offer major criticisms. They indicated a willingness to continue participating whenever needed and suggested that expanding presentations and outreach efforts would further strengthen the project's impact. Their comments reflected strong commitment to the mission and future growth of the initiative.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "Whatever you guys need and you don't have enough bodies, call me."
 - "I always tell Rachel... whatever you guys need."

Participant 6

- **Summary:** Participant 6 did not identify substantial changes they would make to the project. Their responses suggested that they viewed the project as effective and important. They appeared interested in seeing Pathways continue reaching new audiences and helping more people understand the value of friendship and inclusion.
- **Representative Quotes:**
 - "We basically go into wherever really would have us and talk about the benefits of Friendship."
 - "It's possible to just have a normal relationship with someone."

Participant 7

- **Summary:** Participant 7's comments suggested that they valued the project's collaborative structure and the opportunities it created for organizations to learn from one another. Rather than proposing major changes, they emphasized the importance of

maintaining and expanding the network of organizations focused on friendship and inclusion. Continued resource-sharing and partnership development appeared to be priorities.

- **Representative Quotes:**

- "I have been just consciously trying to network and figure out within the disability population of how I can connect with other organizations."
- "How I can be a resource to them, how they can be a resource to us."

Qualitative Data Analysis: By Participant

Participant 1

Participant 1 described the Pathways to Friendship project as an important source of both practical guidance and professional support. Although her organization had long embraced inclusion through its music programming, she explained that the project helped her think more intentionally about friendship as a distinct outcome rather than an assumed byproduct of inclusive environments. She highlighted the value of coaching, ongoing reflection, and participation in broader learning networks, emphasizing that the project helped embed friendship-building into the organization's everyday culture.

Throughout the interview, she consistently returned to the idea that meaningful friendships cannot be manufactured but can flourish when organizations intentionally create welcoming environments. Rather than controlling interactions, she now sees her role as establishing the conditions where authentic relationships can develop naturally. She reflected on specific examples of friendships that emerged through programming and described these experiences as affirming the power of inclusion, kindness, and shared humanity.

Participant 2

Participant 2 framed the Pathways project as an opportunity to shift his community from valuing inclusion in principle to implementing it intentionally in practice. Drawing on decades of experience in recreation and community programming, he explained that the project challenged him to reconsider how programs are planned, marketed, and evaluated to ensure that accessibility and belonging are considered from the outset. Rather than viewing inclusion as a separate initiative, he described it as becoming an expected part of every planning conversation.

A recurring theme throughout his interview was that community change happens gradually and requires sustained commitment. Participant 2 acknowledged that friendships develop over time and emphasized that organizations should celebrate incremental progress rather than expect immediate outcomes. He viewed the project as both a catalyst for organizational learning and a reminder that lasting inclusive communities are built through consistent attention, ongoing partnerships, and repeated opportunities for people to connect.

Participant 3

Participant 3 discussed friendship as a process that requires active support, mutual investment, and continued cultivation rather than simple introductions between people. Her experiences across Best Buddies, community recreation, and disability services have reinforced the complexity of sustaining authentic relationships, and she described Pathways as helping her develop a more realistic and nuanced understanding of what friendship maintenance actually

involves. She emphasized that meaningful relationships require reciprocity, appropriate boundaries, and support through both successes and disappointments.

Much of Participant 3's interview focused on how these ideas have influenced her professional practice. She described efforts to help friendships continue beyond formal programs, particularly after college students graduate, and emphasized that long-term relationship building should be considered an essential component of community inclusion. Overall, she viewed the Pathways project as strengthening both her own professional development and her organization's ability to think intentionally about supporting lasting relationships.

Participant 4

Participant 4 spoke about friendship through the lens of lived experience, emphasizing dignity, respect, and authentic human connection. Through his presentations to schools, nonprofit organizations, and families, he encourages others to see disability as one aspect of identity rather than something that defines a person. He consistently emphasized that people with disabilities should be treated as equals, spoken to respectfully, and recognized for their strengths rather than their limitations.

His interview reflected a strong belief that friendships develop gradually and require patience and persistence. Participant 4 highlighted practical strategies for building relationships within local communities and encouraged others to create opportunities for repeated interactions that naturally lead to friendship over time. More broadly, he viewed the Pathways project as an important platform for educating communities, reducing misconceptions, and reinforcing that everyone deserves meaningful, lasting friendships.

Participant 5

Participant 5 described his involvement with Pathways primarily through educational presentations aimed at helping bridge the gap between people with and without disabilities. Drawing from his own experiences of disability and discrimination, he spoke passionately about the importance of challenging misconceptions early, particularly by working with children and adolescents. He viewed education as one of the most effective ways to promote understanding and create future communities where inclusion is normalized.

Throughout the interview, Participant 5 repeatedly emphasized the importance of keeping messages straightforward and relatable. He praised the current approach used by the project, believing that its strength lies in helping young people recognize common humanity and understand that disability should never be a barrier to friendship. His overall perspective centered on encouraging openness, reducing judgment, and continuing the work without fundamentally changing the project's existing direction.

Participant 6

Participant 6 approached friendship as something fundamentally rooted in shared interests and human connection rather than disability status. He explained that his own beliefs about friendship have remained largely unchanged because he has always viewed relationships as based on common experiences rather than differences. Through presentations and storytelling, however, he has found opportunities to help others recognize that friendships between people with and without disabilities are both ordinary and achievable.

His reflections emphasized the value of personal narratives in helping audiences connect with the project's message. Rather than focusing on abstract concepts, Participant 6 believes that relatable stories demonstrate how friendships naturally develop through everyday experiences. He also expressed strong confidence in the Pathways project and its leadership, describing it as an organization that is effectively promoting understanding while creating opportunities for meaningful social connection.

Participant 7

Participant 7 described the Pathways to Friendship project primarily as a collaborative resource that complements and strengthens the work already being done within her own organization. As the Vice President of Adult Programming at Friend to Friend, she explained that her organization focuses on facilitating individualized, one-to-one friendships, while Pathways serves as a broader connector across organizations working toward similar goals. She valued the opportunity to build professional relationships, exchange ideas, and access networks of organizations committed to fostering inclusion and meaningful social connection.

Throughout the interview, Participant 7 emphasized that the project reinforced rather than changed her philosophy of friendship. She was particularly struck by the intentional use of inclusive language, describing how referring to everyone simply as "friends" reflected a culture that prioritizes equality and belonging over labels. More broadly, she highlighted that authentic friendship requires vulnerability, reciprocity, and genuine human connection—not simply organizational support or program structures. In her view, professionals who facilitate friendships must model openness and relationship-building themselves, helping create environments where barriers are reduced and meaningful connections can naturally develop.

Big Takeaways (Themes) From Qualitative Data Analysis

Theme 1: Creating the Conditions for Friendship

Participants consistently described Pathways to Friendship as helping organizations and communities create environments where authentic friendships could develop naturally. Participants emphasized the importance of providing welcoming spaces, shared experiences, and opportunities for meaningful interaction. Many reflected on the idea that friendships between people with and without disabilities often emerge when barriers are removed and individuals are given opportunities to connect around common interests. Through activities, coaching, and community-based programming, participants observed relationships forming in ways that felt genuine and mutually beneficial. This suggests that one of the project's most significant impacts has been helping organizations intentionally create the conditions that allow friendship to flourish.

Theme 2: From Inclusion to Belonging

Across interviews, participants described friendship as one of the most powerful indicators of true inclusion. While many communities have made progress in increasing access and participation for people with disabilities, participants emphasized that presence alone does not necessarily result in meaningful connection. Instead, they spoke about the importance of being known, valued, and welcomed as a member of a community. Through Pathways, friendship was consistently framed as an essential component of belonging. These findings suggest that the project's impact extends beyond creating opportunities for interaction and into fostering communities where people with and without disabilities develop meaningful relationships.

Theme 3: Supporting Friendship Beyond the First Connection

Participants repeatedly emphasized that friendship requires more than an initial introduction. Through their involvement with Pathways, many came to recognize the importance of ongoing support, guidance, and intentional relationship-building. Participants discussed the value of helping individuals navigate communication, boundaries, shared expectations, and the natural challenges that arise within friendships. Several noted that their understanding of friendship evolved from seeing it as something that simply happens to recognizing it as a relationship that benefits from continued support and investment. These findings suggest that Pathways plays an important role in creating opportunities for connection, and in providing the tools and support necessary for friendships to grow and endure over time.

Theme 4: Challenging Assumptions and Expanding Perspectives

Participants described Pathways as an important resource for increasing understanding of disability and challenging common misconceptions. Through presentations, trainings, storytelling, and direct interaction, participants reported greater awareness of the strengths, capabilities, and lived experiences of people with disabilities. Many emphasized that the project helped shift conversations away from disability as a defining characteristic and toward shared

interests, common experiences, and individual strengths. Participants also observed that exposure and education often reduced uncertainty and increased openness among people without disabilities. Collectively, these experiences suggest that Pathways contributes to broader cultural change by promoting understanding, reducing stigma, and fostering more positive attitudes toward disability and friendship.

Theme 5: Building a Network for Inclusive Communities

Beyond its impact on individual friendships, participants described Pathways as strengthening connections among organizations, advocates, and community leaders committed to inclusion. Many highlighted the value of coaching, networking opportunities, resource-sharing, and collaboration with other organizations engaged in similar work. Participants discussed learning from one another, exchanging ideas, and bringing new strategies back to their own programs and communities. This collaborative approach expanded the project's impact and helped build collective capacity for fostering friendship and inclusion. The findings suggest that Pathways has also contributed to a growing network of organizations working together to create more inclusive communities.

Future Directions for the Pathways to Friendship Project Based on Participant Feedback

One of the strongest findings across interviews was a desire to deepen and expand the reach of Pathways. Participants consistently described the current approach as effective, emphasizing that the project should continue investing in education, relationship-building, and community engagement while bringing these efforts to new audiences. Several participants highlighted schools, particularly elementary and middle schools, as especially valuable settings for this work. Presenters who regularly visit classrooms described young people as eager to learn, curious, and remarkably open to conversations about disability and friendship. As Participant 5 reflected, "Keep an open mind and don't be judgmental," while Participant 6 noted that students "always want to learn." Participants suggested that continuing to engage children and adolescents early has the potential to shape more inclusive attitudes long before misconceptions become deeply ingrained.

Another important future direction centered on strengthening collaboration across organizations that share a common mission. Rather than viewing Pathways solely as a program, several participants described it as a hub that connects organizations working toward the shared goal of authentic inclusion. Participant 7, for example, viewed Pathways as an "overarching" resource that complements the more individualized work of her own organization, while Participant 1 and Participant 2 both described the value of ongoing learning communities and peer networks that allow organizations to exchange ideas, resources, and successful practices. This emphasis points toward the continued development of a broader community of practice, a network of organizations committed to learning from one another, sharing strategies, and collectively advancing opportunities for friendship and belonging throughout Massachusetts.

Participants also identified opportunities to broaden the voices included in Pathways' work. Participant 4 observed that family leadership events were attended primarily by mothers, with relatively few fathers participating in discussions. While participation should always remain voluntary, future outreach efforts may benefit from intentionally engaging fathers, male caregivers, and other male role models in conversations about friendship, disability, and inclusion. More broadly, participants emphasized that friendship should continue to be understood as a long-term process rather than a one-time outcome. Participant 2 encouraged organizations to "start somewhere and don't quit," reminding future grantees that authentic relationships develop gradually through repeated opportunities for connection. Taken together, the interviews suggest that the future of Pathways lies not in fundamentally changing its approach, but in continuing to expand its educational efforts, strengthen partnerships across organizations, engage increasingly diverse audiences, and sustain the intentional, relationship-centered work that participants consistently described as transformative.