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DAWN RUDOLPH:

Hello and welcome back to this years UCEDD TA Institute (indiscernible). I am Dawn Rudolph, (indiscernible) on University centers of disabilities or a UCD. The UCEDD resource Center is pleased to be hosting two of these events, that stands for days in over two weeks.

Earlier this week, we adjourned together to assess the needs of the disability community and how we might work together to address those needs at state, regional and national levels.

Today, we shift our focus to the topic of workforce challenges, experienced within the UCEDD. The topic of mine for most, if not for all of us, as we continue to attend the health and resilience of our colleagues and ourselves.

There are couple of resources highlighted on your screen. They were also linked in the end of the previous session. You might want to look at them later, or you might have already looked.

We want to jump right in today. We are pleased to kickoff today's session with a presentation by Dr. Mari Aceves, on the topic of organizational leadership to address trauma in the workforce and promote well-being. Dr. Mari Aceves is an integrated health consultant for the national Council of mental well-being. She has worked in the mental health field for over 20 years, with children, adolescents and adults. Dr. Mari Aceves is also a board certified behavior analyst with over 10 years expense in working with individuals with autism and other disabilities.

Dr. Mari Aceves, thank you for being with us today to share information, context and resources to help strengthen and support at places of work. We are grateful for you.

DR MARI ACEVES:

Thank you so much for having me. I am so pleased to be here. Please let me know if you can see my slides.

DAWN RUDOLPH:

We can.

DR MARI ACEVES:

You devil. Thank you so much to the Association of University center for disabilities. Don, Katie. I am really excited to be here. This is something that is imperative that we address. Not only in our field, but just in this new shift post COVID.

Before we get started, I want to go ahead and let us take a moment to arrive. Very often, we arrive somewhere physically, and mentally, cognitively, spiritually we are still elsewhere. I am going to invite you to just get heavy into your chairs. If you can, just roll the shoulders back, lifting the heart just slightly. Let the breath get a little bit deeper, coming into the small part of the belly.

We inhale, lifting the heart. Popping up the ribs and then coming down all the way down to the belly. As you exhale, allow the shoulders to fall away from the ears, just slightly allowing more space in the neck. Continue to breathe just like that. And it feels okay, try to bring the inhale to

the count of four. As you exhale, released to the count of four.

We are going to do a tiny little body scan. As you are breathing, if you can maybe soften the muscles around the eyes, the temple. Coming down to the jaw, may be released the tongue from the roof of the mouth. Maybe clicking the jaw left to right. Releasing the shoulders away from the ears. Letting the breath lift the heart. Releasing tension in the fingers. Just softening the arms. Coming down and get heavier into your seat. If, at any point during our time together, you need to come back to get settled, grounded, I invite you to revisit the way you are breathing. We tend to keep the breath in our chest. It is really important that we activate our parasympathetic nervous system, that tells us it is okay and you are safe, so that we can really be present and make the most out of our time together.

So, to get started, why are we here? It is really important to recognize the state, the environment that we are in and how it relates to the work that we do. So, currently we are experiencing high amounts of individuals looking to switch jobs and leak the workforce altogether. Just this January, the US Department of labor (indiscernible) report, released some numbers that in January, about 4.3 million people quit their jobs. That is near a record of November.

And so, some of the reasons why people are looking to make shifts, sure, have to do with money. About half, according to this report, said pay was too low. 37% said that that was the major reason. 26% said minor.

What about the other portion? Why are people making shifts. And there are many other factors, including that people are looking for that work/life balance. They are working -- looking for benefits for their mental wellness.

So, that is something that we really have to address. If we want to retain, and create a culture where people are feeling valued and respected, and we are incorporating all of the voices of lived experiences, we really have to take into consideration the reason why people are making shifts. So, when we are looking at all of the different things that are happening, and have happened, particularly in the last two years, we are looking at so many items and events that have increased isolation. That have really increased the experience of trauma in individuals. Right?

COVID being an obvious example, but all of the movements in our community as well, where we are experiencing not only political climate that is changing, but our environment is changing as well. This trauma really does end up costing us, not only in money, but in our mental wellness. So, it is really important that we address this in our workforce.

So, quick overview for you. What is trauma? Trauma has three different elements. It results from an event or series of events, or circumstances, and it is experienced by an individual as overwhelming or life-changing. And the effects are profound on that individuals psychological well-being. So, it can be physiological, social, spiritual. There is a long-term impact.

And so, it is really important that we look at how that is processed by the brain. Right? You know, when we are relaxed, when we are, you know, that parasympathetic nervous system is on, we are able to be higher performing. We are able to pick information in and process. We are

able to move things from short-term memory to long-term memory. And so, when we have high moments of stress, we are really functioning with the survival brain. The mammalian brain, if you will, we are looking to do through that stressful event and find a way to regulate our nervous system. And then from there, we can then get to our social or emotional safety. And later, we focus on cognition, on how to process information.

As you can see here, the peer amid is flipped. Most of our energy is going into, "How can I feel safe?" If we go back to that definition of trauma, it doesn't have to be something that everybody experiences as traumatic, or overwhelming, or anxiety inducing. It is a person's own experience, which is very important to highlight. We all experience stress differently, and events differently. If, at the end of this time together, we all were to write a summary of our experience, we would likely all have different facets, opinions, and things that we did or didn't notice.

And so, the impact of stress, our brain is really important. In the time of COVID and mental wellness being so important now, when we look at the way we are processing information, most of us have experienced what we are calling the, "Brain fog." We are focused so much on the stress and getting through the day.

So, in short, when we are looking at having a high stress events, high stress environments, the brain goes into that fight, flight or freeze. That survival mode, that basic response, the primal mechanisms that kick in. And so, we are reacting, right? We don't really have a great ability during high stress times to respond thoughtfully. We are unlikely to retain information, so process it into long-term memory. Learning is compromised. Processing can really be compromised as well.

When we are in a situation in the workforce with community members with colleagues in a high stress situation, we wanted to avoid trying to solve issues when we are in that high stress pattern. We want to first get to a place where everyone involved is feeling valued and safe. Because when we are experiencing that, you know, that threat, that fight, flight, or freeze, our brain is naturally wired to go away from it. And so, when we are feeling heightened, when we are feeling like we are in safe, our natural response is to look for safety. To look for something that helps us feel valued, safe, rewarded.

So, when we look at the workplace, this might look like... A workplace threat might be your boss only calls you when something is not going great. When a project is going badly or a delay. If you can relate, you know, pop a hand up. If you get a message only when your boss is like, "Hey, what is happening?" That then gets paired with, "Every time I hear from my boss, I am in trouble. I feel threatened, I am going to ignore the message, I need to take a breath first."

And so, it is truly important that we incorporate as leaders a different culture and a different lens and expanded lens, compassionate lens, trauma informed lens and how we show up in our every day. That is how we build culture. So, some of the challenges to the workplace. To creating resilience— Resilience is the ability to cope with a situation. You know in the last couple of years we have had a lot of challenges. Right?

COVID being the biggest one. Where we have really had to rethink physical safety, being in a space with someone else and literally breathing the same air, something that we may not have had a lot of thoughts about, really challenged our ideas around safety.

Pivoting to being onlineâ€¦ How do we figure that out? They stress that that causes on our body -- the stress. I know that when we went remote, my migraines were through the roof! Right?

Staff changes, all of these things. So, one of the things that is really challenging our ability to be resilient and to be effective in the workplace is vicarious trauma.

Vicarious trauma is also known as "Compassion fatigue". So this is really, you know, secondary trauma refers to the cumulative transformative effect on the people trying to help others. Right? The ones providing services.

And so we have a lot of research that has come up in the last couple of yearsâ€¦ We are experiencing a lot of difficulties because we are being exposed to a lot of other people trauma, so having difficulties expressing our emotions.

Identifying and acknowledging. For a lot of us, our environment has been so that we are seeing that "Expanding role" When someoneâ€¦ When a role is eliminated, someone has resigned or someone is out sick, other people taking on parts of the role.

And so instead of identifying "I feel stressed, I need to do XY or Z." We push through, and we have a hard time talking about feeling overwhelmed and feeling likely need help. There is a sense of guilt, and why am I not able to do it.

So we could have irritation, things may get at us in ways they did not before. You may experience changes in your unit habits as well as your sleeping pattern. -- Eating habits.

It is very common that we take work with us, in the sense that we are thinking about the individuals that we are helping. We are thinking about the challenges that they are dealing with, their advents, their lives -- and their events.

Because the pandemic has been so extreme, we often worry that "I am one person, I'm not doing enough."

So it is really important that we identify the symptoms of compassion fatigue, because it has a lot of effect on our burnout rates. And so we want to make sure that we get to it before we hit that carpet. Right? -- Hit that curb.

When we hit burnout, every day is a bad day, we have reduced compassion for the individuals we serve as well as for our colleagues. We tend to have a little bit of an apathetic lens towards work and towards life.

We feel exhausted. And there is a sense that you know, nothing makes a difference. We want to make sure that we are really addressing all of the symptoms before we get to burnout, because from hereâ€¦ We have 60% of staff -- 68% of staff report compassion fatigue who are full-time employees.

We have reports that about 10% of individuals that took a sick day, was actually because they needed a mental health day. They were so fatigued that they needed to let their bodies rest.

We also have stats on gender differences, we have about 81% of individuals reporting compassion fatigue symptoms that are women, right? So we want to make sure that we are addressing this! Because it is going to show up and impact our organizations. -- Show up and impact our organizations.

A big one is staff engagement. A lot of the time we cannot move metrics when people are not actively engaged. You know? We talk about our brain not being able to really learn, and absorb short-term memory to long-term.

So it is going to impact the way that business as usual runs. Also, the individuals that are experiencing this compassion fatigue and burnout take it home, right?

So you are going to see these individuals also report emotional exhaustion in general. That their satisfaction is lowered in their home, and it affects their personal life as well. Which is where we see these resignation rates being higher.

Because their wellness is being affected overall.

When we talk about what this looks like in the workforce in our organizations, we really want to make sure we are outlining some things that we can do actively, visibly. Right?

We want to make sure that we are looking at all of the different factors. Are we doing assessments to check and where our staff is?

Are we looking to see if there are individual, more particular patterns that are happening -- or particular patterns that are happening in our organizations? -- In where.

Are we looking at our organization? And how information is being shared with them about wellness, compassion fatigue, all of this to work -- front work. Does the team, do the leaders engage in self care?

Do we promote worklife balance? Do we say "Hey Don, it has been a couple of years since you have taken a vacation. I would really love for you to enjoy some of that personal time."

Do we actively talk about how our staff is scheduling their time to allow for a little bit of breathing space in their weeks and in their days? So we really want to make sure we are promoting flexibility in our schedules, so that we can express a little bit of that worklife balance to provide our staff -- provide our staff, our colleagues time to focus on areas of interest.

When we fill our cups we are able to help and support our colleagues, and the communities that we serve much much better. This is going to increase our efficiency, it is going to increase our engagement, retention is going to go up.

And so again we want to make sure we are really providing the time and supporting self-care, individually and as a team.

Part of this is the ability, the idea being centred around: how do we create and -- retain a culture

that is compassionate? We have to make sure that we are checking in with our assumptions, our biases, when we are engaging with others.

So if we have a situation where someone is late to a meeting, or a project is slightly delayedâ€¦ Instead of looking at it through our lines of "Wellâ€¦ I have a part, and I care about this meeting, and I showed up on timeâ€¦" Maybe step out of your lived experience, and try to understand the culture and the expense of other individuals.

There is an increase this year in the numbers that came up, of more and more individuals being without a car -- that came out. Individuals choosing to not have a car and instead using public transportation.

So when we are experiencing challenging conversations with others, we want to make sure we are checking in with our --lens before engaging with the conversation.

This brings us to the term resiliencing. Here it is shown as a verb rather than a noun. What we are talking about here, is the idea of incorporating feedback loops. Anticipating problems, collaborating and improvising promptly to cope with challenging adverse events.

Here what is really important is that we are looking at this as a learning opportunity. So we are shifting the lens from "Oh, this is an absoluteâ€¦ You know? I failed, I did not do it right." We are seeing it as "How is this something I can learn from? How can I take a breath, and then be able to move forward with something that can help me in the future?"

So we want to make sure that we are engaging in different ways to build resilience.

Again, we want to start with a different mindset. We want to critically configure steps as to how we are going to practice resilience within our culture within our team. Creating and reinforcing mechanisms, workflows, when individuals are needing time and space to experience and to bolster their resilience.

So if someone is taking time off, we support that. When an individualâ€¦ Maybe we ask our team members to schedule self-care time? 10 minutes.

Maybe as an organization we are hiring movement instructors, such as yoga or breath were constrictors to come in and do sessions once a week, or once a month.

Another thing that is really important -- is we want to increase cultural humility, we want to engage in cultural humility in order to increase that resilience.

Cultural humility is so important because weâ€¦ -- Cultural humility is the idea that we do not know it all, right? So it normalizes the fact that you do not know you are looking for information.

It helps us identify with our colleagues. It helps us identify the needs of our clients when we are actively looking for more information.

So cultural humility acknowledges "I do not know everything", And "I'm committed to learning. I want to learn more so I can best help you." And number three "I am committed to keeping this

mindset, and keeping this growth mindset ongoing. I'm never going to know all the things, and so I'm always going to be a student, I'm actively a student."

It really creates a culture of understanding that goes beyond that one meeting. It becomes embedded in our culture.

So, when we talk about resilience amongst employees or staff members, we want to make sure that we are checking in to see how valued our staff, colleagues are feeling. So, we want to make sure that we are hearing what is being shared with us, that we are actively seeking that information, and that we are really listening, incorporating it into our workflow so that people can see that their voice matters and they are being supported in their work. And so, we want to make sure that we are looking at that, right? These are the factors that are going to encourage resilience, when individuals feel valued and supported, have opinions that are heard, and are then showing up in resources that become available to help them do their jobs with more ease.

We have talked about, you know, feeling safe. So, it is really important that we create safe and secure environment for all individuals. And so, we definitely talk about, you know, physically. Right? People need to feel safe physically. So this might be something so, so salient as the temperature. If you think about your office, is it supercold? Is it super warm? What is that like for other individuals in the room? I am from California, so I love the heat. Sometimes I work in organizations where, you know, the temperature is quite low. And so that affects my ability to feel comfortable, to feel safe. In turn, that affects my ability to stay focused.

So when we are in environments with many different people, we might have things in our background that we might not notice, that can feel invasive and threatening to others. So creating surveys, gathering information quarterly as to the physical environment of your organization, is a good idea. Do they feel heard? Do you feel like this is an open door policy that shows up every day? Are you able to share your opinions and questions without fear of retaliation? Don't assume that the answer is, "Yes." Seek that information, and gather that so that you can then look for ways that it can be rated into your culture. -- braided

We want to make sure that we are sharing, modeling different tools that help our whole staff, our whole organization feel empowered. This can be, again, emotional regulation techniques. So breath work. Maybe at the beginning of every meeting, you take two minutes to sink heavy into your chair. Maybe we bring attention to the breath. Maybe you have a, you know, monthly newsletter that goes out through your work and organization. And you give a little tip on how to improve sleeping patterns. You know, nutrition information. Maybe you provide at your organization movement opportunities.

Some really nice ways to do this is to give your staff access to different apps. Whether it is at a discount, or just say, "Hey, there's this app. Do you know about it?" Creating a quiet and safe and comfortable space. That is something that we do not get a lot of. So, encouraging our colleagues and ourselves to engage in these things. When we are in a group setting, do we talk about, "Hey, how do you cope? How do you come down? How do you take care of yourself?"

In our organizations, do we only participate in work related activities that are stressful? Is it just talking about business? Or do you participate in teambuilding activities regularly. Those are things that can be easily scheduled, easily modeled and embedded into your culture.

So, when we talk about the trauma informed organization, it really talks about encouraging individuals and assisting with practical ways for individuals to cope with stressful events. So, can you put yourself on the calendar? Can you block out time for yourself as a way of modeling this behavior? So that it becomes not just this theoretical, "We are talking about it all the time," but it is being modeled. You have boundaries surrounding when you respond to emails and the meat -- evening. When you take time to eat lunch and only eat lunch. When you model these behaviors, it encourages others to follow suit. It helps it feel safe for individuals to engage in self-care.

We talk about physical self-care. Is there a group at your organization that goes for a walk during lunch? That is something that is enjoyable that gets physical movement, allows for some of the stress to melt away so that you can come back into the workplace feeling refreshed.

When we are experiencing tough situations that are anxiety inducing, we want to make sure that we are practicing challenging conversations, that we are receptive to the challenging conversations, instead of avoiding them. So, we want to increase these challenging conversations so that we can hear the voices, the opinions of everyone so that we can increase equity. When an opinion or conversation is had, or an opinion is shared that opposes that of others, being welcoming to that instead of dismissing, or, "This is why we don't..." Really welcoming and protecting that individuals voice, because they are giving you a chance to look at an opinion or lens that maybe you did not have before.

To do all of these things, we want to make sure that we are providing access to information that increases our awareness of others lived experiences. Of other people's, you know, experience in our workforce and opinions about how their job is perceived. We want to provide information that increases that cultural humility of always learning. Giving access to wellness programs is a wonderful way to let people know, "Hey, this is available for you whenever you need it."

So, my friends, all of these findings -- things are things that we can do every day in our organizations to increase the engagement. To reduce attrition, but really to keep focus on that wellness at work. I would like to take just the next couple of minutes to give us an opportunity to think. How do you build self-care into your day? Here are some prompts that might help you. "When do you feel most alive? What things do you do that help you feel refreshed?"

If you feel called, please pop it into the chat. Music! I love it. Absolutely. I will share one. Yes, gardening! It is medicine. When I was a therapist, a traveling therapist, I would listen to comedy, like a five minute comedy before I would walk into a different home. Walking, running, cooking for friends and family. Beautiful.

These are all things... A lot of these things we can incorporate into our organizations. Maybe you have a cookoff once a month, or at your team outing. Maybe you have a walking club where you go out during lunch, and whoever wants to come, comes. You can play some music while you are walking. These are all things that are really important. Again, modeling is really going to be what drives the change. We provide the tool, the access, the challenging conversations, and when we live it and walk the walk, it really allows for that safety for others to do the same.

Ice cream! Dina, you are speaking my language. Absolutely. Are you allowing yourself a treat

without feeling guilty or feeling rushed? Are you enjoying your food? (Laughs) Sounds like we are starting and as cream -- ice cream club.

Are you taking the time to sit, to breathe, to enjoy your lunch, right? These are all of the things that you can do to really increase that wellness being braided into your community and your culture. Again, it is really important that the needs of the wellness be addressed in our workforce, and that it shows up as trauma informed. That it is communicated in a way that is compassionate.

With that, I have two minutes left. If anybody has any questions I will hang out for a few minutes before we head off into a break. Any comments or questions? Any other shares?

Coconut and almond milk, yes.

SPEAKER:

Hi, this is Karen in Alaska. Thank you, this was a great presentation.

DR MARI ACEVES:

Thank you Karen. Karen mac I think we are struggling a bit with us being in a hybrid environment. Two things, I was curious about your survey and if you had any templates. I think the survey to staff is a great idea. We did it early on in the pandemic to understand where people were coming from in terms of their comfort returning it to the office. But I really liked your other ideas. I wrote some of them down. Can you share your ideas freely? Like those things. I would really like to know how people are feeling.

My other question is what other ideas do you have that could be used in a virtual environment?

DR MARI ACEVES:

I love that. Thank you so much for that. I have some resources, and I believe that this presentation and the slides are going to be shared with everyone. So, you will have access to the resources. I am just going to pop over so you can see. There are tons of resources here for you. Also, a really easy way is just sending out a quick and anonymous survey monkey of a topic you are interested in.

For the upcoming social, what are some ideas? Literally you guys type it in. Instead of doing like a forced choice, where it is like, "Would you like to go bowling, or do this?" Have people do a free text of what they would like. Something I have a lot of success with -- Yeah coffee breaks! Or we will take a lunch once a month with each other, and people hang out and talk about life as if you were in the office.

Virtual happy hours, absolutely. Something you may want to do as an organization is sending -- sending out -- Maybe you send out a gift basket or an activity packet that you send to everyone. And you say "Alright everyone, let's meet up on -- on zoom." No meetings on Friday, Celeste say a meeting on Thursday. Two guest there.

Something that I did recently was to find what people are interested in. In my organization, there is a group of us that are into real crime podcasts, so we meet and we talk about a particular podcast.

Another thing you may want to do is to again, send out an anonymous survey sang "How comfortable would you be for an in person lunch? How comfortable would you be for an in person teambuilding activity?" There are a lot of things that you can do online, as Karen says a lot of people are getting zoomed out, so you can do events where you are hosting something in an outdoor space.

If you have an outdoor area in your office, or in a nearby park, where everyone can have a little bit more space and social distance if that is what fills control. -- Feels comfortable. Right?

So those are some things that I've been trying out. And I think modelling is a big one. Right? You showing up for the things. I know I love the times we can be busy, we can schedule a time for yoga, or for whatever and it is like "All I really have to get to best." When we as leaders of an organization do not prioritize self-care, we communicate to others that it is not OK for them to do that, that you know everyone should prioritize work items first.

It is important that we live! We have to fill our own cups before we can fill anyone else's. I hope that was helpful Karen? Thank you so much for being here and for the work that you do.

Are there any other questions?

Yes! Katie is saying how do we balance empathy towards employees while balancing accountability to our work plans. I think we are at a point in the workforce in general, where we are all! I think the new research, the word is "Crisis fatigue", No longer compassion fatigue.

So what we want to do is definitely have conversations when you are work plans are not being met, when metrics are falling behind. We want to have the conversations remain lines of compassion -- from a lens of compassion.

So instead of being like "Hey Karen, you did not meet your requirements or submit this, what is going on?" We will check-in ahead of time, we will check for those burnout symptoms, right? "Hey Karen, you have been quiet lately."

Or noticing that she has not really been coming in, so I'm going to check in with you to see how everything is going. Can you talk to me about these kinds of things? Can you tell me about your workload? Being proactive about these things.

Course we have to keep the doors open to our businesses so metrics are important, and being transparent with our staff about it is hard. You know?

Karen I value you, and I understand that life has been challenging in the last couple of years. Is there something I can do to support you?

Are there resources you need that you do not have access to right now in order to do X, Y or Z? Right? Having those conversations of a supportive stance by asking what it is you can do, because sometimes we do not ask, we just assume that they have all of the resources and material, and that is not always the case right?

When someone is experiencing hardship, it is important to also connect them to HR. Are there resources in your organization? Employee packages that you may be able to offer to your staff, right? Is set up being a performance improvement plan, we are now engaging in a supportive plan to get this person to feel valued and like they have the resources.

Yeah. Thank you so much. You guys are on break, so feel free to go.

This was amazing. I can talk about it for years to come. So thank you for helping me keep it short! -- I could talk.

Thank you everyone for the work that you do. Thank you -- thank you to the Association of University Centers on Disabilities.

They cue Karen and Jamie for your help. And until we meet again, goodbye friends! Take care of yourselves.

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DAWN RUDOLPH:

Thank you so much Doctor SA best! That was really timely. -- Dr Aceves.

We appreciate you taking the time, and your, and soft tone used in bringing this to us.

DR MARI ACEVES:

Thank you everyone! Have a great day.

DAWN RUDOLPH:

We are heading off to break. So take a breath, some self-care, and we will see you back at 4 PM.

(Break)

DAWN RUDOLPH:

It's 4 o'clock Eastern time. I hope you had a good break. I am going to give folks a moment or two to return from break. I see lots of faces now. We are gonna move into breakout sections next. We are going to shift to some roundtable discussions. We have seven topics. Thank you in advance to the colleagues who are facilitating.

In the breakout rooms, they are going to be self select. You can select whichever one you would like to jump to. You can also jump around as he would like to. There will be someone staying in the main room if you need assistance.

The topic in room one is Recruitment and Retention capturing the Great Resignation. Group 2 is Setting Telework and flexible Work Policy....(Lists breakout rooms). I believe I had an email about this this week, you know who you are. Number six is supporting health and well-being of the workforce. Number seven is hybrid work environments in hiring and supporting disabled employees.

The questions that you can refer to as guiding questions for your groups are in the agenda.



Again, we know you well. You may choose to go in a different direction than those questions if it is meaningful for you.

Anna, do you mind launching the breakouts? You may need to scroll down to find the room. The room that you want. You have to scroll down below other people. As people are joining rooms, the button that you click may be moving around. If you end up at the wrong room, it may not be your fault.

There's a question from the captioner in the chapbook if captions are needed in the breakouts. If they are needed, please send a message to Katie Johnson, and they can ensure to help that the captioners are in the correct rooms. Otherwise, the captioners will likely stay in the main room.

Enjoy your chat.