



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 19, 2015

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HOSTS 25TH ANNUAL NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH AWARDS, ACTIVATES LOCAL BUSINESSES, NONPROFITS, CITY AGENCIES TO ADDRESS DISABILITY UNEMPLOYMENT

2015 "Champions of Change" Award Winners Include "Spring Awakening" Team and Deaf West Theatre, LinkedIn, Montefiore Medical Center, JCPenny, Alpha Workshops

MOPD Hosts Month-Long Programming for Businesses and People with Disabilities to Further Engage New Yorkers with Disabilities in the Workforce

NEW YORK—In honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) and ACCES-VR today hosted a celebration at Tweed Courthouse honoring New York City businesses that recruit, train, hire and promote individuals with disabilities.

2015 is both the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the landmark civil rights legislation for people with disabilities in the United States, and the 25th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month in New York City. To mark these milestones, MOPD Commissioner Victor Calise is presenting the Champion of Change Awards to five organizations who – through their innovation, vision, design, development and implementation – change the status quo for employment and career opportunities for people with disabilities.

"Every individual, regardless of age, disability, race or gender, has the right to pursue a life and career that brings them satisfaction and meaning," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we shine a light on employers who recognize the strengths and abilities of all New Yorkers. In October and every month of the year, we will keep working to ensure every person with disabilities has the opportunity to pursue a career."

"Our theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month is 'At work, it is what I CAN do that matters,'" said **Victor Calise, Commissioner of Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**. "We know there is much work to be done so that New Yorkers with disabilities find meaningful employment that is based on what they can do. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities is dedicated to collaborating with our partners in the public, non-profit, and private sectors to create career pathways for a diverse workforce, highlighting the abilities of all New Yorkers, so that where we work reflects the diversity of this great city."

"Deaf West's captivating production of 'Spring Awakening' shows what's possible in theatre if you open it up to the world as it really is, embodied by a full spectrum of people and experiences," said **Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Commissioner Cynthia Lopez**. "What we witnessed onstage was nothing short of brilliant and brave, and I applaud the producers for their creativity for proving that talent comes without limit."

"This is a wonderful opportunity to shine a light on the many contributions made every day by New Yorkers with disabilities," said **Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair of the Committee on Health**. "With today's celebration and awards ceremony, we reflect on how far we have come since the passage of the Americans with

Disabilities Act, and how far we have left to go in terms of making our city inclusive and accessible, with equal opportunity for all. I thank the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities for the work it does every day on behalf of New Yorkers, and for organizing this very special event."

This year's Champion of Change award recipients include:

Ken Davenport, Deaf West Theatre, Cody Lassen, and Hunter Arnold, who will receive the Champion of Change award for their commitment to bringing "Spring Awakening" to Broadway for all New Yorkers and for shining the light on actors of all abilities. Presenting the award is Carla Hoke-Miller, Director of Theatrical Partnerships for the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment.

Additional recipients of the Champions of Change Awards are LinkedIn, Montefiore Medical Center, JCPenney, and Alpha Workshops. Chris Neale of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and the Director of NYC Workforce Development Board will serve as master of ceremonies.

Throughout the month of October, MOPD is hosting a series of discussions, community events and workshops designed to understand the hiring needs of local businesses and connect employers to a talent pool of New Yorkers with disabilities seeking increased employment, including the first convening of a Business Development Council. MOPD is also meeting with human resources professionals to discuss ways to recruit talent and establish talent pipelines, as well as colleges and universities to better understand the needs and employment goals of students and alums. MOPD has created a series of videos featuring New Yorkers with disabilities in the workplace, titled "At work, it's what I CAN do that matters." The videos are available on the MOPD website, social media, and soon in taxis and on NYC TV.

Unemployment and under-employment rates for people with disabilities far exceed rates for able-bodied workers. For disabled graduates of four-year colleges in the United States, the employment rate for both men and women is 50.6 percent, as compared to an employment rate of approximately 90 percent for able-bodied Americans. When people with disabilities are employed, they are far more likely than their non-disabled peers to be employed part-time, and their median income is less than two-thirds the median wage for workers without disabilities for the same job. As a result of the 2008 recession, people with disabilities left the labor force five times faster than workers with disabilities, and employment for people with disabilities has not bounced back to its pre-recession count.

To further increase opportunity for New Yorkers with disabilities in the workforce, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities will continue to engage leaders in the business community in the recruiting, retention and promotion of employees with disabilities; introduce the concept of careers and employment to young people with disabilities and provide introductions to internships, mentoring, career exploration, and summer employment; create apprenticeship programs in growth industries; ensure that training curriculum, learning tools and technologies are accessible to all; educate individuals with disabilities and their families of the benefits of work and career; educate employers on the benefits of hiring this untapped talent pool; and make employment for people with disabilities a priority and include people with disabilities in the solutions.

Through this work, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities is raising awareness among New York businesses and employers on issues related to disability employment, as well as celebrating the contributions of New Yorkers with disabilities as an integral part of the city's workforce.

For more information on disability employment, please visit the "Employment" tab on MOPD's website: www.nyc.gov/mopd

About the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD), in operation since 1972, works to ensure that New Yorkers with disabilities can lead happy, healthy and productive lives. The MOPD staff work hand-in-hand with other City offices and over 50 agencies to ensure that the voice of the disabled community is represented

and that City programs and policies address the needs of people with disabilities. The Office provides information on accessible programs, accessible transportation, employment, health services, activities and other resources to the over 800,000 New Yorkers with disabilities and the millions of people with disabilities visiting New York City every year. In addition, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities works with organizations on specific issues affecting people with disabilities, and aims to bring about dialogue that leads to meaningful outcomes for those living with disabilities. The dedicated staff of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities works hard every day to make New York City the most accessible city in the world. For more information of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, visit <http://www.nyc.gov/mopd>.

###