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**DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION PARTNERS WITH ALI FORNEY CENTER TO
LAUNCH NATION'S LARGEST WORKFORCE PROGRAM FOR LGBTQI
RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH**

New program will connect LGBTQI youth to a full suite of services including basic and higher educational opportunities; paid internships and training, work credentials, and job placements; career coaching, and comprehensive, LGBTQI affirming case management that incorporates full wraparound supports and mental health counseling

NEW YORK—The de Blasio administration and the NYC Unity Project, the administration's citywide LGBTQI policy and programming initiative, today announced that the City has partnered with the Ali Forney Center, the nation's largest LGBTQI homeless youth service provider, to launch a new program, NYC Unity Works. The program will be the country's largest and most comprehensive workforce development program ever created for LGBTQI communities, and will specifically focus on supporting homeless and runaway LGBTQI youth.

"A recovery for all of us requires investing in communities too often left behind," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "I'm thrilled to announce the launch of Unity Works and partner with the Ali Forney Center. This program will bring employment and education opportunities to homeless and runaway LGBTQI youth, providing much needed resources after this difficult year."

"Unity Works demonstrates the deep commitment of local government to support and empower LGBTQI young people, and the power of partnership," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "This new program marks the first time that any city has taken this particular set of comprehensive steps to provide training, mental health services and social supports that are critical to long-term success and stability for LGBTQI youth."

"The creation and launch of Unity Works has been the epitome of a collaborative, community-driven effort, between our government partners, local and national social justice organizations, TGNCNB and LGBQ activists, and most importantly, homeless young people living in New York City," said **Ashe McGovern, Executive Director of the NYC Unity Project and Senior LGBTQ Policy Advisor in the Mayor's Office**. "This program is historic in its distinction as the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in the nation and unique in its flexibility to respond to each young persons' particular needs over an extended period of time, so that they are able to access the holistic support that they need, no matter their starting point. LGBTQI homeless young people, who are mostly young people of color, have been marginalized and rejected both interpersonally and institutionally for too long and this past year has only

exacerbated those experiences. We are eager to share lessons as we learn them with our colleagues nationwide and are hopeful that this is only the beginning of large-scale government investments in human-centered LGBTQI anti-poverty and economic justice programming. It's what our communities desperately need and deserve."

"The Unity Works program is the single most vital support network homeless LGBTQI youths will have available to rebuild their lives, pursue educational and careers opportunities, and be supported in culturally competent programs designed specifically to meet their needs, and The City's commitment to Unity Works under AFC's leadership is an enormous and most welcome step toward building an inclusive infrastructure for LGBTQI youths experiencing homelessness," said **Alexander Roque, President and Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center**.

"LGBTQI homeless youths have unique needs; this population experiences trauma, mental health crises, violence, HIV infection, and suicidal ideation at alarming rates. This undertaking marks the first time that any city, state, or federal agency has taken such care to strategically respond to and provide for their mental and emotional health, housing, career, and educational needs."

In New York City and nationwide, LGBTQI communities, particularly LGBTQI Black, brown and other LGBTQI communities of color, experience significant institutional and interpersonal barriers that prevent them from accessing sustainable employment opportunities. These communities also [report](#) disproportionately high rates of poverty, incarceration and homelessness. In New York, as in jurisdictions across the country, up to forty (40) percent of the entire homeless youth population identify as LGBTQ, despite making up a significantly smaller portion of young people overall.

Experiences of unemployment and poverty are particularly pronounced for LGBTQI communities of color, transgender and gender non-binary people, and youth and adults experiencing homelessness. Using evidence-based local and national data, NYC Unity Works will address these needs and bridge key gaps in existing services for these communities, using models and best practices that have been identified by local and national community and workforce experts.

Enduring harassment and mistreatment in school and family rejection, many LGBTQI young people are driven to leave school before completing their high school degree and find themselves without access to financial, familial or peer support, with homelessness the too-common result. As a result of these experiences, these same young people are less likely to access and trust services that are not specifically targeted towards them and focused on meeting their needs by ensuring LGBTQI cultural responsiveness and competency throughout each program element.

Starting in summer 2021, Unity Works will begin to enroll up to 90 young adults, who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness to facilitate their attainment of: basic work skills credentials, most importantly the High School Equivalency (HSE), advanced training opportunities during the program, social and emotional trauma-informed mental health support to ensure proper adjustment before entering the workforce, and meaningful connections to both short and long-term career opportunities, culminating in their enrollment in higher education

enrollment and/or advanced workforce training credentials with direct, facilitated connection to long term LGBTQI-affirming employment opportunities.

Unity Works will be overseen by the NYC Unity Project, the de Blasio administration's citywide LGBTQ policy and programming office, and managed by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in close partnership with the NYC Center for Youth Employment (CYE) and with generous support from the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. Key elements of the program include:

- **Access to two years of service delivery with one additional follow-up year.** This term of service acknowledges the significant barriers many LGBTQI young people have experienced in attaining necessary education opportunities, skills and job training, and work experiences.
- **Robust staffing to support participants' success.** Participants will work with job developers, case navigators, and support staff who will help youth develop career/education plans, make connections to jobs and postsecondary programs, master workforce skills and earn credentials that can lead to long-term employment and economic security. The program staff will holistically address needed resources to ensure stability and consistency in program participation, including gathering and changing identity documents, accessing public benefits, food, clothing, and other social supports needed for successful completion of the program and adjustment to enter the workforce successfully. Finally, the mental health support staff will ensure young people are able to address the social and emotional wellness needs that may be holding them back.
- **Opportunities to enroll in advanced training certification programs.** Programs will focus on education, training and job opportunities in high-growth industry areas that LGBTQI young people themselves have expressed interest in exploring, including media, the arts, and human and social services, in addition to more traditional pathways.

The program will provide up to three years of service, including two years of intensive direct services that include paid internships. All advanced training, program, and employment opportunities available to participants must demonstrate LGBTQI-affirming practices and must meet measurable job outcomes criteria, in order to ensure successful transition of participants into long-term career opportunities.

"LGBTQI+ youth who are experiencing homelessness, a majority of whom are Black and Brown, are stigmatized and pushed out of spaces that are meant to serve their needs with housing, education, and employment," said **J. Phillip Thompson, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives and co-chair of the Racial Equity and Inclusion Taskforce**. "Unity Works will be the most comprehensive training program for LGBTQI+ runaway and homeless youth available anywhere in the country, offering participants the training, social supports, and networks necessary for long-term success in a safe and affirming environment."

"Unity Works arrives during an ongoing pandemic that has only exacerbated the challenges LGBTQI young people face in connecting to educational opportunities, job training, meaningful work, housing, mental health counseling and other supports they need to survive—and thrive. DYCD looks forward to working with the Ali Forney Center and all of our City partners on this

exciting new venture to help LGBTQI youth find pathways to self-reliant lives and long-term career success,” said **DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong**.

"LGBTQI+ young people who are housing insecure or homeless have been especially impacted by COVID-19 and the economic crisis it triggered, with learning loss, unemployment, and reduced access to safe and affirming spaces among the consequences,” said **David Fischer, Executive Director of the NYC Center for Youth Employment**. "As part of the Center for Youth Employment's commitment to preparing every young New Yorker for long-term career success, we are proud to partner with the Unity Project and DYCD to launch Unity Works. This program offers much needed resources and wraparound supports to ensure that LGBTQI+ young people in New York are on the path to economic security."

“Unity Works will provide critical workforce development and mental health resources to LGBTQI young people, who have faced ever growing obstacles amid the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Daniele Baierlein and Jorge Luis Paniagua Valle, Co-Executive Directors of the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City**. “This new program demonstrates the power of partnership in helping to ensure that vulnerable communities are not left behind in the city’s recovery from the pandemic, and are given the tools to succeed in their professional endeavors.”

"The Unity Works program will be a transformative tool for uplifting and empowering LGBTQI runaway and homeless youth in our city, connecting them to vital resources and providing them with crucial education and employment opportunities in times of dire need. After a year of calling for its inclusion in the budget and implementation in the city alongside the SYEP, today's announcement is a welcome one. I hope we can go further to ensure that these services will provide stability for youth in need by ensuring the program itself is secure. The NYC Unity Project should be codified into city law to provide these consistent and critical services to LGBTQI youth for years to come," said **Public Advocate Jumaane Williams**.

"Homeless, runaway youth need our support, and have unique challenges that must be addressed to help them succeed. This has been an issue the Council has dedicated itself to address, including our landmark 2018 bill that spurred the creation of the first ever homeless shelter targeted to serve young people between the ages of 21 and 24. We look forward to seeing this new program address the needs of these young New Yorkers so they can thrive in the workplace and beyond," said **Council Speaker Corey Johnson**.

“Our LGBTQ youth need help getting started in a job and the NYC Unity Project program in partnership with the Ali Forney Center will do just that,” said **NYC Council LGBTQ Caucus Chair Daniel Dromm**. “From my own personal experience, having a mentor who can steer you in the right direction is essential in job placement. This program will give some of our most needy LGBTQ young people the experiences necessary to build successful careers that they most likely wouldn’t have otherwise. I thank the Mayor, First Lady Chirlane McCray and the advocates for creating this important opportunity.”

“I want to thank the Mayor’s Office and the Ali Forney Center for launching Unity Works to provide workforce support for young adults in the LGBTQI community. An inclusive New York

City must include inclusive access to good-paying jobs, education, and a welcoming and supportive work place environment. Unity Works will help bring that future to some of our City's most vulnerable residents, and I can't wait to see the program expand in the future," said **Council Member Carlina Rivera**.

"Many voices in the LGBTQ+ community, notably transgender and gender non-conforming activists, have pointed to the deep need to just get community members into jobs. This has been the struggle before our current crisis, and remains so," said **Andrea Bowen, Principal of Bowen Public Affairs Consulting**, which helped design the program with City and community partners. "Unity Works is a bold step toward showing that government recognizes its obligation to support the LGBTQ+ community, and is powerfully responding to community feedback."

"After some uncertainty as to whether the Unity Works program would move forward at all, we are thrilled to hear that the City awarded the contract to our member the Ali Forney Center. Approximately 40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ, and many of them report barriers to being able to obtain equitable access to income," said **Jamie Powlovich, Executive Director of the Coalition for Homeless Youth**. "With targeted programs like the Unity Works program, we hope this will change."

About the NYC Unity Project

In September 2017, First Lady Chirlane McCray launched the [NYC Unity Project](#) – the City's first-ever, citywide initiative focused on developing and delivering LGBTQI policy and program solutions within the Mayor's Office. Recent Project commitments include:

- An expansion of 24-hour youth drop-in centers to every borough and funding for new shelter beds for young people age 21-24 (DYCD), to address the epidemic of LGBTQI youth homelessness; and permanent supportive housing for LGBTQ youth (HPD);
- Development of LGBTQI-affirming trainings and certifications in partnership with NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) to more than 500 H+H medical providers and front line health workers;
- The creation of LGBTQI-affirming mental health training programs to address LGBTQI youth family rejection, which is the leading cause of LGBTQI youth homelessness and;
- Citywide public awareness campaigns featuring LGBTQI youth to reduce anti-LGBTQI stigma and bias and connect LGBTQI youth to city services.
- A dynamic citywide LGBTQ COVID-19 resource guide, the most comprehensive of its kind in NYC (available at nyc.gov/lgbtqcovid)

The Ali Forney Center

[The Ali Forney Center](#)'s mission is to protect LGBTQ youths from the harms of homelessness and empower them with the tools needed to live independently. In 2002, Carl Siciliano founded the Ali Forney Center (AFC) in memory of, and after, a gender-nonconforming youth who was tragically murdered in 1997.

The organization has grown to become the largest agency dedicated to LGBTQ homeless youths in the country—assisting more than 2,000 youths per year through a 24-hour Drop-In Center, which provides over 70,000 meals annually, medical and mental health services through an on-site clinic, and a scattered-site housing program.

About the NYC Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD)

The NYC Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) funds residential and crisis services for young people. Drop-in centers offer overnight services; crisis services programs offer short-term housing and support services. DYCD also supports New York City's afterschool and youth workforce development programs throughout the five boroughs and oversees funding for anti-poverty programs such as adult literacy and immigrant services.

About the NYC Center for Youth Employment (CYE)

The NYC Center for Youth Employment (CYE) serves to expand, improve, and align publicly funded programs that help young New Yorkers build skills, gain experience, explore potential career paths, and prepare for success in the world of work. In partnership with stakeholders in City government, the private sector, philanthropy, and the provider community, CYE provides subject matter expertise and capacity and resource support within New York City's youth workforce ecosystem. CYE coordinates classroom education, career exploration, work readiness, and personal development to provide young New Yorkers with the tools they need to build the lives they want.

Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization working with 50 City agencies and offices, 300 institutional funders, and 100 community-based partners.

The Mayor's Fund and its partners advance initiatives that improve the lives of New Yorkers from all walks of life and across all five boroughs. In particular, the Mayor's Fund has made strategic investments to promote mental health services for all New Yorkers, increase workforce development opportunities for young New Yorkers, and meet the needs of New York City's diverse immigrant community. In building partnerships, the Mayor's Fund seeks to seed promising, evidence-based models; evaluate the efficacy of new programs and policies; bring innovative solutions to scale; and respond to the emerging needs of the city. [Join our network](#) to learn more about our work.

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