

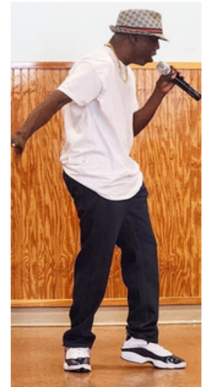


VOICES & VISIONS

Fall Edition

Special Citizens Futures Unlimited Newsletter

September 2025



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Message from the CEO



Dear SCFU Community,

Earlier this month (Sept. 7th – 13th) we celebrated Direct Support Professional (DSP) Appreciation Week, and I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on the impact our DSPs have far beyond this well deserved week of recognition.

Here at Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, we celebrated this truly remarkable team of superheroes in the ID/DD community by raffling prizes for all our current DSPs as well as spotlighting long-tenured staff members who have reached the commendable milestone of 10 or more years of service. Their commitment and dedication to the people we support is nothing short of extraordinary, deserving of our highest respect and recognition.

Honoring the many crucial roles that DSPs play in the lives of those we support is something that is deeply personal to me. As you may know, I began my career in this field as a DSP, and that experience continues to immeasurably impact and mold me into who I am today within my role as Special Citizens' CEO. The countless relationships I built still endure, and the lessons I learned about giving back, working side by side with others, and truly seeing each person as an equal continue to guide me. DSPs not only support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible, but they also embody the very values of compassion, respect, and person-centered care that define our mission.



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO (CONT)

Along that vein, I am equally proud to share in this issue of our newsletter the winners of our Employee of the Year Awards. These peer-nominated honors recognize staff whose colleagues see them as role models, and I could not imagine a more deserving group than those who have made up the 2025 class of honorees. More than excelling within their roles, they remind us of the difference one person can make in someone else's life, and they set high the bar of excellence across the whole of our agency.

Looking ahead, we are excited to continue building momentum with the development of our (2) new residential locations. Each new site will welcome young adults graduating from their residential schools into community-based settings, marking an important step in their journey toward independence and adulthood. We are actively working with the cities of Peekskill and Mount Vernon to move these projects forward, while also redoubling our efforts to recruit dedicated teams who will ensure each location is more than just a residence, but also a home.

Recruitment in this field, however, is not without its challenges. Ours is a very competitive industry, and it requires persistence, creativity, and collaboration to attract and retain the dedicated people who make our mission possible. We are working tirelessly to make sure we utilize the resources available to us at both the state and federal level, not only to strengthen our workforce, but also to ensure our staff feel supported, encouraged, and rewarded for their incredible contributions.

In addition, we are preparing for our Artful Autumn for Autism Acceptance annual fundraiser, one of the most inspiring events of our calendar year. We are thrilled to showcase the artwork of the people we support in this uniquely inspiring gallery exhibition and silent auction. A very special thanks indeed goes to the DSPs who have encouraged, guided, and assisted them in bringing their creative visions to life. And, make no mistake, your support (whether as a family member, advocate, donor, or supporter) not only makes the event possible, but also lifts the artists themselves in celebrating their creativity and their voice.

All these moments and aspects of our work remind us of its immense purpose and the substantial impact it has on shaping a kinder, more accepting, and overall brighter world. We are a community built on dedication, compassion, and respect, and I am deeply grateful to every DSP and Special Citizens staff member for the energy and heart they bring to work each day in furtherance of our shared mission. I am honored and humbled to be on this important journey with each of you.



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DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION WEEK

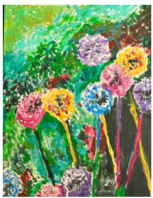
September 7th - 13th marked *Direct Support Professionals Appreciation & Recognition Week*. While one week out of the year is not nearly enough time to celebrate all the incredible work and dedication of our DSPs, taking this time to honor and observe the critical roles that they play in bettering the lives of the men, women, and children we support serves to remind us of what's at the heart of everything we do.

This year, to show our deep appreciation for Special Citizens' amazing team of DSPs, in addition to raffling off prizes for randomly selected DSPs each day of the week, we also spotlighted different team members whose efforts go above and beyond the call of duty, as well as those DSPs who have been with us for 10 or more years. There truly isn't enough time, or sufficient words to convey how deeply we appreciate our talented and passionate staff of DSPs.



**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR
AMAZING DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS!**

7TH ANNUAL ARTFUL AUTUMN FOR AUTISM ACCEPTANCE



**ARTFUL
AUTUMN**
FOR AUTISM ACCEPTANCE



**Community
Care Rx**
A Long-Term Care Pharmacy

jetBlue

Gallagher

Insurance | Risk Management | Consulting

LAMB
Insurance Services

GRASSI

CBRE

USI

MAISON PICKLE
COCKTAILS & FRENCH DIP

T
TARALLUCCI
& VINO

JOHN MURPHY
& Associates

Teleky
Jeweler
EST. 1970

**Focused
Wealth
Management**
REGISTERED | INVESTMENT | ADVISOR

On Thursday, October 23rd (5:00 - 7:30PM) we will hold our 7th annual Artful Autumn for Autism Acceptance fundraising event. Every year this gallery exhibition, and silent auction event proves to be a joy-filled and inspiring night, all to benefit the men, women, and children we support. This year's event will once again be held at Goddard Riverside's Bernie Wohl Center (UWS). For tickets and more information, visit:

tinyurl.com/ArtfulAutumn2025



2025 SPECIAL CITIZENS ANNUAL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS



2025 Direct Support Professionals of the Year

(Pictured l-r: Sasha Hanchard; Samoya Wright; Gloria Soto; and Hailyn Gonzalez)

Each year, Special Citizens staff members nominate their peers for our *Employee of the Year Awards* with the deserving winners being honored near the close of summer, culminating with a celebratory lunch honoring the award recipients.

This year we are proud to honor: **DSP Professionals of the Year:** Sasha Hanchard; Samoya Wright; Gloria Soto; and Hailyn Gonzalez; **Emmons Hiller Award:** Kairon McFarlane; **Lee Pellegrino Award:** Meshel Ashayagori; and **CEO Award:** Natasha Smalls. Congratulations to all our 2025 award recipients!



Emmons Hiller Award
Kairon McFarlane



Lee Pellegrino Award
Meshel Ashayagori



CEO Award
Natasha Smalls

GOLF OUTING RAISES MORE THAN \$25,000 FOR SPECIAL CITIZENS

Special Citizens was honored to be chosen as this year's featured charity at the annual Pillinger, Miller & Tarallo (PMT) Golf Outing.

Every year PMT chooses a different charity or cause to spotlight at their annual event in order to raise critical funds for the important work that they do to fortify and strengthen the local community where we all live and work.

This year's event took place on June 12th at The New York Country Club in New Hempstead, NY. We are tremendously grateful to PMT, and to our board member, Michael Driscoll, who is a partner at the firm and always an unwavering force in furthering our mission to provide home, family, care, and love to everyone we support.



SPECIAL CITIZENS MADE ITS MARK OVER THE SUMMER WITH JAM-PACKED SCHEDULE OF EVENTS!

This past summer, Special Citizens residents and Day Program participants made their way around the (local) map. From our agency's annual luau cookout in Ardsley's V.E. Macy Park, to visiting Medieval Times in Lyndhurst New Jersey and many stops in between; our Day Program packed in loads of activities and created many new happy memories to stand the test of time. Check out some of our favorite moments captured in the photos below!

RSC Westchester Annual Prom Event at Ardsley House of Sports



Medieval Times (Lyndhurst, NJ)



Bronx Day-Hab Summer Concert



Annual Agency Luau End-of-Summer Cookout



Have Questions? Email us at info@specialcitizens.org - or call us at 212-643-2663, ext. 706
Want to Help? scan the QR code below, to rush a donation in support of all our vital work.

Our Mailing Address: 86 Main Street, 2nd Floor; Yonkers, NY 10701

www.specialcitizens.org - Find us on [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#), via @specialcitizens, and on [LinkedIn](#)

