

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 13, 2021

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NYC UNITY WORKS LAUNCHES NATION'S FIRST WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY LGBTQI YOUTH

Young adults aged 16-24 will receive comprehensive training, internships, and mental health support

NEW YORK—NYC Unity Works, a partnership of the de Blasio Administration and the Ali Forney Center to provide the country's first and most comprehensive workforce development program for homeless and runaway LGBTQI youth, will welcome its first participants beginning this Monday, October 18. The launch of the initiative was celebrated today at The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (The Center), with First Lady Chirlane McCray, the Ali Forney Center, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), NYC Center for Youth Employment (CYE), the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, Unity Works partners, and youth and youth advocates in attendance.

“The administration is proud to support the launch of Unity Works, the nation's most comprehensive workforce development program designed to serve the LGBTQI+ community. We are excited to partner with the Ali Forney Center, an organization named for a black, gender non-conforming youth experiencing housing insecurity who was tragically murdered while working as a peer advocate. Youth at the intersection of these experiences and identities have been particularly vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. As the City's recovery continues, we are committed to ensuring LGBTQI+ youth are well positioned to take part in its success,” said **Phillip Thompson, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives**.

“The launch of this vital program signals the constantly growing commitment by our city to ensure our youths have the support and services they need to exit homelessness,” said **Alexander Roque, President and Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center**. “Above all, it demonstrates that in spite of what their homophobic and transphobic families believe, that New York City cares about them and believes that they are worthy of equal access to educational and career pathways.”

“For New York City to achieve a true recovery for all, it is critical that innovative programs like NYC Unity Works reach communities at the highest risk of being left behind. The challenges that LGBTQI+ young people face in finding jobs, career training, housing, and mental health supports are especially pronounced during the pandemic. DYCD is proud to team up with the Ali Forney Center and all of our City partners on this first-of-its-kind effort to help LGBTQI youth not only survive—but thrive,” said **DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong**.

“When the Center for Youth Employment was working with DYCD to create Unity Works, we designed it to address the needs of LGBTQI+ youth experiencing housing insecurity: flexible service delivery, lengthier program timelines, comprehensive wraparound supports, and key staff roles such as a mental health counselor and service navigators,” said **David Fischer, Executive Director of the Center for Youth Employment**. “These program elements are even more timely and necessary in light of COVID-19's ongoing economic impact, especially for LGBTQI+ young New Yorkers. With the Ali Forney Center's deep expertise, we are confident that Unity Works will support participants toward economic security.”

“The partnership behind the launch of NYC Unity Works helps ensure that young LGBTQI New Yorkers—who face tougher challenges finding employment, housing, and mental health support—will not be left behind in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Daniele Baierlein and JL Paniagua Valle, Co-Executive Directors of the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City**. “The Mayor’s Fund is thankful for the unwavering support from The City of New York and the Ali Forney Center in launching this ground-breaking program.”

“The NYC Department of Education and D79 are proud to partner with the Ali Forney Center in this vital initiative. At this moment in time, those in the LGBTQI community hardest hit by COVID-19 will benefit greatly from a program that combines workforce development and education,” said **Robert Zweig, Superintendent for NYC Department of Education District 79**. “This collaboration among City agencies ensures LGBTQI youth facing homelessness receive a robust set of services and are able to fully participate in the City’s recovery and ultimate success coming out of the pandemic. New York City is a model for all urban areas to follow in serving its residents most harshly impacted by COVID-19. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Ali Forney Center for many years to come.”

“Providing a pathway out of homelessness for LGBTQ youth requires addressing their varied and overlapping needs,” said **Glenda Testone, Executive Director of The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center**. “Unity Works is equipped to do that, as it provides mental health support, skill-building and education, job opportunities, and access to fundamentals such as food and housing.”

NYC Unity Works is a comprehensive services initiative administered by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development in close partnership with the NYC Center for Youth Employment and with generous support from the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City. The goal is to serve 90 young adults aged 16-24 who are currently homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness and help position them for educational and career success.

In New York City and nationwide, individuals who identify as LGBTQI experience significant barriers to accessing meaningful employment opportunities, reporting higher than average rates of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and homelessness. Challenges 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 those needs and bridge key gaps in existing services for these communities, using models and best practices that have been identified by local and national workforce experts.

Key elements of the program include:

- Up to three years of service, including two years of intensive direct services and paid internships. All advanced training, program, and employment opportunities available to participants must demonstrate LGBTQI-affirming practices and meet measurable job outcomes criteria, to ensure successful transition of participants into long-term career opportunities.
- Robust staffing to support participants’ success. Participants will work with job developers, case navigators, and support staff who will help youth earn a High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma, develop career/education plans, make connections to jobs and post-secondary programs, master workforce skills, and earn credentials that can lead to long-term employment and economic security.
- Program staff holistically addressing needed resources to ensure stability and consistency in program participation, including gathering and changing identity documents, and accessing public

benefits, food, clothing, and other social supports needed for successful completion of the program and adjustment to enter the workforce successfully.

- Mental health support staff to help facilitate young people 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 identified by LGBTQI young people, including media, the arts, and human and social services, in addition to more traditional pathways.
- Special events with community and corporate partners, including a Career Pathway event, a Fall Ball, and Holiday Carnival.

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 delivering and coordinating affirming services to LGBTQI communities across NYC. 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 (NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development).
- Development of LGBTQI-affirming trainings and certifications in partnership with NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) to more than 500 H+H medical providers and frontline 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.
- 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).

About the Ali Forney Center

The Ali Forney Center’s mission is to protect LGBTQI youth 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 LGBTQI 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 funds residential and crisis services for young people, drop-in centers that offer overnight services, and crisis services programs providing short-term housing and support services. DYCD also oversees New York City’s COMPASS afterschool initiative, anti-poverty programs such as adult literacy and immigrant services, and youth workforce development programs including the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the nation’s largest youth employment program, as well as opportunity youth workforce programs.

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.

About the 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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