



PRESS RELEASE

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DSS-AHRC INTERNSHIP PROGRAM TO CONNECT NEW YORKERS WITH DISABILITIES WITH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES PLACES 36 INTERNS IN FIRST SIX MONTHS

NEW YORK— In honor of October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), the City’s Department of Social Services today announced that an internship program launched this year to connect New Yorkers with disabilities with employment opportunities has exceeded its initial job placement targets, connecting 36 individuals with internship opportunities throughout the DSS system.

The program known as the Partnership for Inclusive Internships (PII) was co-launched this year by DSS and AHRC New York City (AHRC NYC) and has leveraged AHRC NYC’s expertise in preparing individuals with disabilities for the workforce, placing New Yorkers in internships across the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and Department of Homeless Services (DHS) that are tailored to the intern’s skillset and areas of interest. The program was made possible thanks to a generous three-year grant from the Taft Foundation.

At launch, PII was expected to place a minimum of 30 interns in its first year. In less than a year, the PII Program has connected 36 individuals with disabilities with employment opportunities throughout DSS, with 3 interns subsequently hired full-time. The PII program recently received the Outstanding Internship Partner Award from the Institute for Career Development (ICD), a nonprofit leader in the field of vocational rehabilitation, with HRA commended for its leadership in developing the program.

“Our mission is to provide New Yorkers with the support they need to live independent and productive lives,” said **Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**. “We are proud to be a part of this program, which will connect individuals with disabilities to quality public service opportunities within City government, while also providing valuable work experience and promoting a positive, inclusive and welcoming environment for people with disabilities throughout the Department of Social Services.”

“Only 20.7 percent of Americans over age 16 with a disability were employed as of April 2019. And this is 29 years after the signing of the ADA. We can do better,” said **Marco Damiani, CEO of AHRC NYC**. “We are proud to partner with NYC DSS, through the generosity of The Taft Foundation, to design, support and scale a unique internship program for people with disabilities. Hiring people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do. The Program for Inclusive Internships will pave the way for capable interns to become valued employees.”

“An internship is a critical starting point on the road to employment and financial independence” said **Victor Calise, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)**. “By simplifying this process, DSS and AHRC NYC have increased access and opportunity for many jobseekers with disabilities across NYC. When people with disabilities have a higher representation in the

workplace, perceptions are permanently changed. MOPD applauds the incredible work that DSS and AHRC NYC is doing and look forward to working together in the future."

Qualified candidates for each individualized internship opportunity will be identified by partner organizations that, through their own unique programs, have experience and relationships with these individuals. Partner organizations include the MOPD, AHRC NYC, Yachad/Jewish Union Foundation, and the CUNY: Linking Employment, Academics and Disability Services (LEADS) program. The Coordinator of the PII Program will screen the candidates to ensure that the placement is appropriate and will send the candidate(s) on to be interviewed by the host supervisor. Internship opportunities will include, but not be limited to, clerical, data entry, IT, accounting, and social service placements.

Generally, most positions in NYC government require passing a written, competitive civil service exam. However, Section 55-A of the New York Civil Service Law allows qualified persons with disabilities to be appointed to competitive civil service positions without taking the exam. PII will develop a unique approach to hiring through 55-A employment that can serve as a model for other City agencies, promoting more diverse hiring practices across City government.

"I loved working at HRA," said **Danielle Levine, an intern from AHRC NYC**. "It was a wonderful experience. I worked with a very nice boss and a supervisor who supported me and challenged my abilities."

"Successful internship programs lay the foundation for and foster the next generation of dedicated civil servants, and the PII program for people with disabilities is no exception," said **Allison Gill-Lambert, Executive Director, Office of Liens and Trusts**. "Having interns from the PII program has shifted my staff members' paradigm about people with disabilities and what they are capable of achieving. I am excited to see the PII program expanded so that my dedicated interns can become dedicated civil servants."

"Yachad/JUF is dedicated to helping individuals with disabilities obtain employment and be included in all aspects of the workforce," said **Todd Hausman, Job Developer at Yachad/JUF**. "We currently have a successful partnership with HRA which began a little over a year ago. Through this partnership, an individual who started off as a part-time intern has moved up into a full-time position at HRA. We are thrilled with the inclusive job opportunities that HRA has given to our Yachad/JUF individuals and look forward to expanding our partnership with HRA in the years to come."

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About the Department of Social Services (DSS)

The Department of Social Services, comprised of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), serves more than three million New Yorkers annually through a broad range of services that aim to address poverty, income inequality, and prevent homelessness. In April 2016, following a comprehensive review of the City's homelessness policies, Mayor de Blasio announced a major restructuring of homeless services in New York City and appointed Commissioner Steven Banks to lead the Department of Social Services, which integrated HRA and the Department of Homeless Services under a joint management structure. HRA serves over 3 million New Yorkers through the administration of more than 12 major public assistance programs with 15,000 employees. DHS oversees a broad network of shelters and services with 2,000 employees, and is dedicated to helping New Yorkers experiencing homelessness get back on their feet as quickly as possible. DSS is central in implementing Mayor de Blasio's agenda to expand opportunity for more New Yorkers, help homeless New Yorkers secure stable housing, address income inequality, and ensure that New Yorkers receive the benefits and assistance to which they are entitled.

About AHRC New York City

Celebrating 70 years of realizing potential, AHRC New York City is a family-governed organization supporting 15,000 children and adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (IDD) throughout the city. AHRC NYC is among the largest organizations supporting people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD) in the country. With a diverse and talented staff of 5,000, AHRC NYC offers an unsurpassed array of services and supports that annually touch the lives of more than 15,000 people and their families in the City's five boroughs. AHRC NYC is fully accredited by the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) and is a recognized leader in the field. The organization that created the first schools, day treatment programs and community residences, continues to meet the needs of individuals with I/DD.

About The Taft Foundation

The Taft Foundation was established by Don Taft, a businessman and philanthropic leader in Broward County Florida in 2004. The Taft Foundation seeks to continue Don Taft's legacy by helping to improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and children with serious medical conditions, primarily in New York and Florida. The Taft Foundation aspires to utilize a creative, strategic and disciplined grant-making approach and to invest in organizations that promote social innovation.