

# AHRC New York City's MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Sharing News to Keep Our Membership Informed

October 2024

Newsletter

Issue 5



**A Message from Ray Ferrigno, President**

In September we celebrated DSP week, recognizing the work Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) do every day, all year long. For people supported, DSPs are often a counselor and a friend enabling the daily activities that give them meaning. They are advocates invested in the future and safety of those in their care.

DSPs represent a foundational tradition of AHRC NYC. Over 50 years ago, as institutions were closing and people with IDD began to be recognized as people with talents, AHRC NYC was a leader in the development of community-based residences. Those residences were designed to model homes and the bonds that often develop between the people who live there and DSPs who work there, resemble the dynamics seen in families. I have seen the joy that DSPs exhibit at the successes of the people they serve. I have also seen their sadness when a home suffers a loss. DSPs are the backbone of all we do and need to be celebrated, every day.



**A Message from Marco Damiani, CEO of AHRC New York City**

The dedication and commitment to the individuals our Direct Support Professionals support make them the true backbone of AHRC NYC's mission and vision. Every day, they embody the values of compassion, dignity, and respect, helping people with disabilities live fuller, more independent lives. Their work goes beyond care - it is advocacy in action.

As champions of disability rights and social justice, DSPs ensure that the people they support have their voices heard and their needs met, fostering inclusion and equality in every aspect of society. The vital role DSPs play in this movement cannot be overstated. Their tireless efforts pave the way for a more equitable future where every person, regardless of ability, can thrive. We honor and celebrate AHRC NYC DSP's courage, compassion, and commitment. They embody what AHRC NYC stands for - **Advocacy, Humanity, Reimagination, and Change**. Let us all express our gratitude for the profound difference they make in the lives of so many.



**September kicked off AHRC New York City's Family Education Workshops**

AHRC NYC developed the Family Education Series to empower families by sharing knowledge about specific programs, news from the field, and resources.

By fostering communication and collaboration between families and our program staff we are able to create a supportive network. Our goal is to equip families with the tools needed to advocate effectively while promoting a positive and informed approach to available services.

Visit [ahrcnyc.org/news](https://ahrcnyc.org/news) for up-to-date workshop schedules and registration links.



**What's the buzz about?**

We're thrilled to announce that we are continuing our 75th Anniversary celebration by participating in Charitybuzz and hope you will join us as we auction off amazing items and experiences, with all proceeds going directly to AHRC New York City. It's also a fantastic opportunity to support our work while snagging something special for yourself or a loved one.

What's up for grabs? You can bid on unique experiences, autographed memorabilia, gourmet dining packages, and more. We have auctioned signed items by Cold Play, Eric Clapton, and Slash. Look out for announcements from our email, [oncharitybuzz@ahrcnyc.org](mailto:oncharitybuzz@ahrcnyc.org), and support us.

**Membership really does matter to AHRC New York City**  
Encourage your family and friends to support us, [ahrcnyc.org/involved/membership](https://ahrcnyc.org/involved/membership)





**Staff Spotlight Fatimah Howard**

*Pictured: Fatimah and Edwin Rodriguez, AHRC NYC Employment & Business Services Program Director*  
Fatimah’s career as a Direct Support Professional has taken her from a classroom to being interviewed on PBS to a panel at the UN Headquarters.

Having proven herself to be a fierce advocate, Fatimah was invited to take part in sharing her story at the United Nation’s 60th anniversary celebration of community action.

Fatimah’s invitation to share her story at the UN’s celebration is a testament to her unwavering commitment, advocacy, and the powerful impact of her work.



**Finding ways to support staff...**

Supporting staff is a priority for us. Thanks to a grant from the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), AHRC NYC can offer development programs through the NADSP E-Badge Academy, featuring three levels of certification and bonuses staff can attain.

Cardell Sulker, an AHRC NYC E-Badge Academy graduate, credits the program with inspiring his college journey and his promotion to Community Support Supervisor of AHRC NYC’s Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program. Cardell exemplifies how the Academy can empower people to achieve their goals and make a meaningful impact.



**Autistic Adulthood Panel Features AHRC NYC Self-Advocate Michael Lettman**

Michael, a self-advocate supported by AHRC NYC programs, joined colleagues for an Autistic Adulthood Panel discussion hosted by Brooklyn Public Library’s Inclusive Services at the Central Library near Grand Army Plaza. The talk was designed to help young people imagine neurodivergent futures. Speakers discussed their experiences since leaving school-age programs, including work, independence, higher education, socializing, and more.

“I always feel sorry that we’re in need of help many times when we’re younger,” Michael said, explaining his increasing need for independence as he grows older. “The more independent you are, the more you can take care of things for yourself.”

The discussion was moderated by Carrie Banks of Brooklyn Public Library’s Inclusive Services. Michael, a graduate of the Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program at Kingsborough Community College and the host of his own YouTube channel, *Living with Autism with Michael Lettman*, was joined on the panel by Michael John Carley, advocate, author, and business consultant who runs the NYU Connections Program for Global Students with Autism and Nicole Russell, founder and Executive Director of Autistic Adults NYC, an autistic-run non-profit serving the autistic community of NYC.

The panel spoke powerfully about the importance of recognizing and accepting an autistic identity.



**AHRC NYC’s Residential News**  
We are proud to be one of 16 agencies awarded the Supportive Residential Habilitation Transformation (SRHT) Grant! The grant enables us to pilot initiatives aimed at providing Enhanced Supportive IRA (E-SIRA) supports, utilizing a number of enabling technologies, as well as innovative staffing HUB models. Our hubs serve as educational centers for people moving into our E-SIRA apartments, while also providing a centralized means of access to a range of supports for staff to explore and collaborate on.

Our goal through the SRHT Grant is to provide each of our residents with a continuum of care, to foster independence and promote a better quality of life for each person.

Access to additional technologies and staff support is particularly beneficial to our aging residents as it supports their ability to comfortably age in place.