

# AHRC New York City's

# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Sharing News to Keep Our Membership Informed

February 2025

Newsletter

Issue 6



### A Message from Ray Ferrigno, President

Seventy-five years ago the parent founders of AHRC NYC decided they would change the world for their children. They faced challenges and obstacles that appeared daunting, but they persevered and gave voice to the voiceless. They stood strong against indifference and cruelty. As a result, today, children and adults have opportunities that allow them to lead lives with the dignity and respect every person deserves.

The current national leadership has made it clear that our services are not a priority. They have chosen to garner unprecedented cost savings from Medicaid which is under assault. Our task is clear, our role models are the parents who spoke truth to power and would not take no for an answer. Your advocacy is essential. Our elected officials serve us. If what they do harms us, we must remind them that we hold them responsible and will work tirelessly to elect representatives who understand what service and courage look like.



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

Many of you have shared concerns about recent federal actions and their impact on our services. We hear you and are closely monitoring the situation. Regardless of federal decisions, AHRC NYC remains committed to providing high-quality services. We are working with partner agencies and national advocacy groups to protect and strengthen Medicaid, which is vital to our work. **Medicaid is a lifeline for people with disabilities, ensuring access to essential healthcare, supports, and services that promote independence and quality of life. We are staunch advocates for its continuation as a vital national program.**

Last month's freeze on federal aid caused concern, but swift legal action has paused this decision for now. New York State remains committed to fighting for necessary funding and resources for individuals with disabilities and their families. We understand the uncertainty and cause for concern, and we will keep you informed of any updates. Please reach out via social media or our website with any comments or additional concerns. Thank you for your dedication to our Mission and Vision. Together, we will continue to advocate for the support our vast community needs.

STAFF  
RECOGNITION

Celebrating  
AHRC New York City's  
Amazing Staff

JANUARY 28TH

### AHRC New York City's Staff Recognition Event

Through the generous contributions received in honor of our 74th and 75th anniversaries, AHRC NYC was able to award over \$100,000.00 to our staff during our Staff Recognition Event!

Awards were given to staff celebrating milestone anniversaries, including one colleague marking an impressive 45-year career! We also gave scholarships to staff advancing their education and awarded those who go above in supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and one another. As Marco said, "Our staff embody what AHRC NYC stands for: Advocacy, Humanity, Reimagination, and Change, we celebrate this!" A special thanks to OPWDD Acting Commissioner Willow Baer for joining us for the event.



### Advocacy Matters for All of Us!

Lookout for our new digital newsletter **Advocacy Matters!**

We developed *Advocacy Matters* to keep you updated on advocacy matters and efforts affecting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to keep you in the loop about actions you can take to ensure they get the services they need. This is a nonpartisan effort, focused on the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We're also excited to welcome Christopher Treiber, former Chief of Children's Services at IAC, as our new Vice President of Advocacy. With over 30 years of experience advocating for children and adults, Chris brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to the role.

Encourage your family and friends to visit our website  
and become members - [ahrcnyc.org/involved/membership](https://ahrcnyc.org/involved/membership)





**Edith Niedert with her son, Paul, Jr.**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of AHRC NYC Board Member, Edith Niedert.

Edith, affectionately known as one of the ‘Queen’s Ladies,’ along with Gene O’Neil and Joan Raineri, lived in Queens. Together, they ran all of our Queens-based membership activities for many years. These ladies were the personification of the indomitable will of parents who lifted their voices to create today’s services and programs.

Edith served on many committees with AHRC NYC, NYSARC, Inc., and the Board of Governors. She was a mild-mannered woman who made everyone who knew her better advocates.



**Paint and Sip Fundraiser Benefiting AHRC NYC’s Middle/High School’s Music Program**

In November, families and friends gathered in Brooklyn for a Paint and Sip fundraiser supporting AHRC NYC’s Middle/High School music program.

Organized by John and Leslie Blackford, the event raised enough to cover the cost of a new PA System for the school.

Charlotte Blackford, pictured above with her Aunt Magda, is one of over 100 students in the school’s music program, which plays a key role in developing student’s cognitive, emotional, and social skills.



**Residential Care**

AHRC NYC recently hosted a workshop on *Individualized Pathways to Housing* that addressed questions about care, independence, and resource limits as well as funding, accessibility, and quality of care.

As parents, professionals, and concerned citizens, we continue to strive for inclusive, equitable communities, including housing. Below are resources to explore residential options:

Jennifer Teich, Associate Vice President of Individualized Supports for information on OPWDD’s Integrated Supportive Housing (ISH)  
[jennifer.teich@ahrcnyc.org](mailto:jennifer.teich@ahrcnyc.org)

Kevin Wilgus, Assistant Director of Residential Intake & Respite Services for information on the CRO - OPWDD’s Certified Residential Opportunities  
[kevin.wilgus@ahrcnyc.org](mailto:kevin.wilgus@ahrcnyc.org)



**AHRC NYC’s Partnership for Inclusive Internships (PII) Program is a Zero Project International Awardee**

We are honored to share that AHRC NYC’s Partnership for Inclusive Internships (PII) Program has been recognized as a Zero Project awardee. The Zero Project is a global, research driven initiative that awards exemplary solutions for innovation, impact, and scalability. Six hundred nominations were received from 90 nations. More than 350 experts, with and without disabilities, were involved in the extensive selection process, with this year’s research centered on Employment and ICT. The award will be presented at the UN European Headquarters in Vienna, Austria in early March.

**About AHRC NYC’s Partnership for Inclusive Internship (PII) Program**

In 2019, AHRC NYC partnered with the NYC Department of Social Services Office of Disability Affairs, with support from The Taft Foundation, to create the Partnership for Inclusive Internships to develop internship opportunities and a pathway to public sector employment for people with disabilities.

This internship program is open to people with all types of disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities, blindness/low vision, deafness/hard of hearing, health impairments, and social disabilities. Opportunities include internships in data entry/analysis, administrative support, IT, finance, and human services. The program has created over 200 inclusive internships in NYC, with over 40% of interns securing competitive employment afterward. In 2023, The City of New York and New York State selected the program as a key model in their plan to make NY a “Model Employer” for people with disabilities, collaborating with AHRC NYC to expand the program. Visit our website to learn more about the program: [ahrcnyc.org/services/work/preparing-for-work/partnership-for-inclusive-internships](https://ahrcnyc.org/services/work/preparing-for-work/partnership-for-inclusive-internships)