

## ATTACHMENT 2

### 2024 Disability Awareness Month Commendation Nominees - Individual

#### NOMINEE #1

Donna Iarocci

Website: <https://www.jazzhandsforautism.org/our-story>

#### Why should the nominee receive the recognition?

Donna Pignatiello-Iarocci has demonstrated exceptional dedication and expertise in her role as a job coach for teachers-in-training at Jazz Hands For Autism. Her innovative approach and unwavering commitment to supporting individuals on the autism spectrum have significantly enhanced the quality of education and employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. Donna's efforts in nurturing and developing soft skills, alongside her comprehensive support in lesson plan development, have empowered teachers-in-training to excel in their roles. Her dedication goes beyond job coaching, as she actively accompanies these teachers to their onsite job at Kayne Eras Center, ensuring a seamless transition and providing continuous support. Donna's impactful contributions have not only transformed the lives of the teachers-in-training but have also enriched the educational experience for children with disabilities at Kayne Eras Center, making her a deserving candidate for recognition by the Culver City Disability Advisory Committee.

#### What is the nominee doing or have they done to benefit individuals with disabilities in the past year(s)?

In the past year, Donna Pignatiello-Iarocci has significantly benefited individuals with disabilities through her role at the Jazz Hands For Autism Music Teacher Training Program, an initiative of the Jazz Hands Musicians Academy. She has been instrumental in supporting adults on the autism spectrum by helping them develop essential soft skills and crafting effective lesson plans. Donna's hands-on approach includes accompanying teachers-in-training to their onsite job at Kayne Eras Center, a nonpublic school in Culver City, where her guidance ensures their success in a real-world teaching environment. Her impact extends beyond the adult teachers-in-training; Donna's support indirectly benefits the children with disabilities at Kayne Eras Center by providing them with high-quality music education and positive role models. Her work over the past year has been pivotal in creating inclusive educational opportunities and fostering a supportive learning environment for individuals with disabilities.

## **2024 Disability Awareness Month Commendation Nominees - Individual**

### **NOMINEE #2**

**Mike Odunze**

**Website:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mike-odunze-819a1b94>

### **Why should the nominee receive the recognition?**

Mike Odunze should receive commendation for Disability Awareness Month as a stellar employee for Culver City PRCS. As a Recreation Coordinator, he has displayed exceptional dedication and outstanding contributions to promoting disability awareness and providing exemplary support to disabled individuals at the Culver City Senior Center.

Mike's commitment to his work is evident in his passion for assisting disabled individuals, seniors, and volunteer services. He goes above and beyond to ensure that each person receives the care and attention they need, making them feel valued and respected. His empathetic nature and ability to connect with them has created a safe and inclusive environment. They all love Mike and it is evident in his daily interactions and events that are created at the center.

### **What is the nominee doing or have they done to benefit individuals with disabilities in the past year(s)?**

Mike offers services and resources that provide support to disabled individuals and their families that go beyond his job. He actively seeks out opportunities to enhance their quality of life, through organizing events, arranging accessible services, and ensuring equitable resources.

Mike Odunze's commitment, compassion, and expertise make him an invaluable asset to Culver City PRCS and a deserving recipient of commendation for Disability Awareness Month. His tireless efforts have made a significant impact on the lives of disabled individuals, promoting inclusivity, and creating a more accessible community for all.

## **2024 Disability Awareness Month Commendation Nominees - Business**

### **NOMINEE #1**

#### **No Limits for Deaf Children and Families**

**Founded:** 1996

**Years in service to those with disabilities:** 28

**Percentage of clients served in Culver City and/or are Culver City Residents:** 10%

**Website:** [www.nolimitsfordeafchildren.org](http://www.nolimitsfordeafchildren.org)

#### **Why should the nominee receive the recognition?**

In a world without language, a deaf child frequently experiences isolation and a sense of exclusion. No Limits stands as a beacon of empowerment, offering a distinctive program that equips deaf children with the tools to navigate the challenges of both school and life with unwavering confidence. No Limits is the only afterschool theater program and family-centered educational centers that provides these invaluable skills, all at NO-COST.

No Limits isn't just a program; it's a transformative community where deaf children discover their voice, enabling them to effectively communicate, connect with others, and contribute as a member of society. No Limits breaks down barriers of inequities and fosters inclusion. No Limits has had its home in Culver City for over two decades and has been a leader in the field. A commendation during Disability Awareness Week will allow us to bring awareness of the achievements of people with hearing loss and bring joy to our No Limits team who works tirelessly for making the lives better for this vulnerable population that is often overlooked.

#### **What is the nominee doing or have they done to benefit individuals with disabilities in the past year(s)?**

For the past 28 years, NO LIMITS for deaf children and their families has been the only organization in the world to offer an afterschool program that teaches deaf children (birth to 21 years) and their families the skills to succeed in school and in life through its national theater programs, family-centered educational centers & pop-up sites; creating a community for the families, and giving deaf children a voice to communicate, connect and contribute to the world, all at NO-COST.

Established in 1996 in Los Angeles by Dr. Michelle Christie, recognized as a CNN Hero, No Limits for deaf children and families (No Limits) originated out of a one-bedroom apartment with the dream of launching the first language-enriched theater program. This initiative, spearheaded to enhance communication skills, broaden vocabulary and grammar, nurture creativity, and cultivate public speaking abilities, was dedicated to

empowering deaf children. The subsequent expansion in 2002 saw the creation of the Culver City Educational Center, providing year-round auditory, speech, and language training, literacy, academics, STEAM, teen program, and parent education, at no cost. Currently, No Limits has expanded with an Oxnard location and 52 satellite sites, but it is proudly headquartered in Culver City.

In 2014, No Limits launched the national theater production "Silent NO MORE" and a corresponding book, both aimed at advocating for changes in public policy by sharing the challenges and triumphs of individuals with hearing loss. As of 2023, No Limits has produced over 250 theater productions across the United States. This grassroots effort has resulted in successful performances across the country, including a memorable appearance at Carnegie Hall in 2016 and most recently, in November of 2023.

Dr. Michelle Christie is currently engaged in writing the final installment of her literary trilogy, *Silent NO MORE*, a compilation devoted to the personal narratives of deaf teenagers as they navigate the intricacies of their accomplishments and challenges. This forthcoming book serves as a valuable resource for educators, parents, and other family members, offering insight into the mental and educational struggles faced by deaf teenagers. Its purpose extends beyond comprehension and empowers advocates to champion more effectively for this age group. Furthermore, it provides invaluable guidance on nurturing self-confidence—an essential endeavor, especially considering that a staggering 93% of deaf children are born to hearing parent.

Significant Accomplishments and Milestones include:

No Limits has been featured on Hallmark, Telemundo, Univision, OPRAH, The Learning Channel, CNN, PBS, NBC CBS, and many more, included being featured in an episode of "The Simpsons" with our No Limits alumni, John Autry II, starring as the lead character along with younger No Limits deaf students. John was our founder's, Michelle Christie, first student, who performed in No Limits' first show in 1996 and all LA productions and remains actively involved being at No Limits. No Limits Theater Group (renamed Sky's the Limit for TV legal reasons) was featured on the episode as well. We couldn't be prouder, more excited, or humbled by this incredible shout-out from the longest running scripted television series in U.S. history. With over 600 news outlets talking about this landmark episode, children with hearing loss around the world were represented and one little girl at No Limits said to her mom, "This is the happiest day of my life!" after watching the character receive a cochlear implant like her. Newspapers and new stations, from Pakistan, India, Belfast, Today Show, ABC News, CNN, Fox, etc. have done interviews or shared about this historic moment.

No Limits for deaf children and families has gained widespread recognition through various avenues, showcasing its impactful work on multiple fronts, including:

- In 2024, No Limits celebrates 28 years with a proud 4 Star rating on Charity Navigator and awarded 2024 Top Rated Great nonprofits of the Year by Greatnonprofits.

- In 2024, Dr. Christie honored with the Culver City Equity and Human Relations Award.
- In 2024, No Limits is featured in Hallmark's upcoming "Hero Documentary Project", airing in October.
- In 2023, No Limits has achieved significant milestones being a winner of the LA2050 Grant Challenge, due to the innovative and transformative nature of our No Limits Pop-Up program.
- In 2023, our Founder, Dr. Michelle Christie, was honored with the Chick-Fil-A True Inspiration Award, being among 43 recipients of over 4600 candidates.
- In 2022, No Limits Theater Group and the first No Limits alum were featured on the Simpsons, an animated series, in which they included deaf casting for the first time.
- In 2022, Dr. Christie was honored with the Humanitarian Award by Echo Horizon School.
- In 2021, for the organization's 25th anniversary No Limits was honored with a national day called No Limits for Deaf Children Day (April 17th).
- In 2018, Dr. Michelle Christie received the UCLA Educational Leadership Hero Award for her outstanding work in deafness.
- In 2018, No Limits was featured on "Chicken Soup for the Soul's Hidden Heroes".
- In 2017, Dr. Michelle Christie was selected as a CNN Hero.
- In 2015, No Limits received the Starkey Hearing Foundation's "Hearing Angel Humanitarian Award" with past presidents in attendance.

## **2024 Disability Awareness Month Commendation Nominees - Business**

### **NOMINEE #2**

#### **Park Century School**

**Founded:** 1968

**Years in service to those with disabilities:** 56

**Percentage of clients served in Culver City and/or are Culver City Residents:**  
100%

**Website:** [www.parkcenturyschool.org](http://www.parkcenturyschool.org)

#### **Why should the nominee receive the recognition?**

Park Century School stands out as a beacon of inclusivity and educational excellence, providing a nurturing environment where neurodivergent students not only thrive but also achieve their full potential. The term “neurodivergent” describes people whose brain differences affect how their brain works. That means they have different strengths and challenges from people whose brains don't have those differences. The possible differences include everything from medical disorders to learning disabilities.

At a time when having a learning disability or being a different from their peers can have a profound negative impact on students, Park Century School's commitment to understanding and commitment to meet the unique needs of neurodivergent students is exemplary. Through personalized education plans, specialized teaching methods, and a supportive community, the school ensures that each student receives the tailored support they require. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among students who may face challenges in traditional educational settings.

One of the standout features of Park Century School is its holistic approach to education, addressing not only academic needs but also emotional, social, and developmental aspects crucial to the growth of neurodivergent students. The school's skilled educators and staff members are dedicated to creating a positive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued and understood.

Furthermore, Park Century School actively engages with families, fostering strong partnerships to ensure that support extends beyond the classroom. By involving families in the educational journey, the school strengthens its impact and reinforces a collaborative approach to student success.

#### **What is the nominee doing or have they done to benefit individuals with disabilities in the past year(s)?**

In addition to its outstanding educational programs, Park Century School has focused on the advocacy and awareness of neurodiversity within the broader community. By

sharing knowledge and best practices through workshops and events, the school has contributed to a more inclusive society where neurodivergent individuals are recognized for their unique strengths and contributions.

Beyond that, the school is committed to developing young adults who not only value themselves and celebrate their differences but also give back to the greater community. Students participate in a variety of community engagement and service endeavors throughout the year, building awareness and working together to achieve larger common goals. The school has also created "Panther Packs" – comprised of students from each grade level who meet monthly to focus on one of the six character traits of the Panther Way: Kindness, Respect, Responsibility, Cooperation, Honesty, and Resilience. A Panther trait is paired with a service learning or community building project like Earth Day activities on the theme "Responsibility." Students build a sense of school community and enhance character education and parents are encouraged to find ways to foster the Panther Way traits outside of school hours to create a common language and values system between home and school.