



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Honors Four Residents in Commemoration of Disability Pride

PETE HARCKHAM September 30, 2024

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New York State Sen. Pete Harckham with (l-r) Betty Williams, Susie Williams, Penny-Lynn Pagliaro, CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division Executive Director Penny-Lynn Pagliaro, Cristy Schull and Diego Ortiz

Patterson, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham honored four Hudson Valley residents on Friday, Sept. 27, in commemoration of Disability Pride at a special ceremony during a luncheon here at the Putnam Diner. The celebratory event was attended by over a dozen people with disabilities, some in wheelchairs, plus staff members and aides from

Constructive Partnerships (CP) Unlimited, an organization with a location in Brewster that promotes opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to achieve fulfilling lives.

Harckham recognized the four honorees—Cristy Schull, Susie Williams, Betty Williams (no relation to Susie) and Diego Ortiz—with Senate Proclamations for their efforts and advocacy in support of the disabled community, work that has included visits to Albany to push for legislation and more funding for programs and support staff.

“I am proud to honor these incredible individuals who are our neighbors and have differing abilities,” said Harckham. “They contribute unique perspectives and strengths to our communities and enrich the lives of people in the Hudson Valley. We will continue to recognize their contributions and promote inclusivity, ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. We will work hard to help create the unlimited possibilities that they rightly deserve.”

“Everyone at CP Unlimited is proud of the four self-advocates recognized today,” said Penny-Lynn Pagliaro, executive director of CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division. “Their impact extends beyond their local counties to all of New York State, and their words have created momentum, motivation, and movement around issues important to the wider disability community. Congratulations to Diego Ortiz, Cristy Shull, Betty Williams, and Susie Williams and thank you to our dear friend and true ally, Senator Pete Harckham.”

“To get a proclamation will make me feel like I did something for the community,” said Ortiz.

To see a video of the Disability Pride Month ceremony, click [here](#).

Disability Pride has been described as “accepting and honoring each person’s uniqueness and seeing it as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity.” Disability Pride celebrates

disabled persons embracing their disabilities as integral parts of who they are, reclaiming visibility in public and interacting fully with their disabilities out in the open, while rejecting shame and internalized ableism.

Cristy Schull was born on February 4, 1973. As a child, she was shy and reserved but broke out of her shell as she got older and blossomed into a passionate advocate for herself and others. Schull attended the BOCES program and graduated from Devereux New York. Over the years, she has become a strong voice for Direct Support Professionals, as well as her peers.

In her free time, Cristy enjoys working and spending time with animals. She also cherishes her self-care routines, particularly getting her nails and hair done. Cristy's strong will and caring nature make her a cherished presence in her community.

Susie Williams was born on April 19, 1958. She is a vibrant and independent individual who has always enjoyed living life to the fullest. For many years, Williams lived with her brother and managed day-to-day activities on her own. After becoming a wheelchair user, she moved into a group home to receive more specialized care tailored to her needs. Despite the challenges she has faced, Williams has remained passionate about staying active and loves participating in community activities and socializing with her peers.

Williams currently serves as the President of the CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division's Self Advocacy Group. Her sense of determination and positive outlook continue to inspire all those who meet her.

Betty Williams hails from New York City. She currently lives in her own apartment with 24-hour staff support through CP Unlimited. Williams enjoys going to Albany to participate in rallies advocating for staff wage increases. Her strong advocacy for Sen. Harckham's legislation known as the "Traveling With Dignity Act" has resulted in her participating in

press conferences to help spread the word about the importance of the legislation, which will allow disabled people to maintain their dignity and health as they travel and lead everyday lives.

A friendly, intelligent, and independent individual, Williams has channeled her straightforward nature into her advocacy. Her passion for advocacy was inspired by her father, she noted, who taught her the importance of helping others.

A long-time member of the CP Unlimited family, **Diego Ortiz** was born in Brooklyn and raised in Queens. In his free time, he enjoys listening to music, watching sports, going bowling and swimming, and spending time in his community. Ortiz's passion for music has him aiming to become a deejay and acquire his own sound equipment.

Ortiz is ambulatory with the assistance of a manual wheelchair that he manages on his own in most situations; he has a deep desire to travel and visit family members. Perhaps this is why he has become a strong advocate of the "Traveling with Dignity Act," attending and speaking at many numerous rallies and press conferences. He strongly believes in ensuring that frontline staff are able to experience a better quality of life, in addition to ensuring equity for individuals who experience physical disabilities. Ortiz's passion for advocacy stems from a love of communicating, and a desire to help others, especially those who cannot speak for themselves.

The staff of CP Unlimited provide a wide range of direct services and supports that address the needs of each individual. Their services include enhanced community living, day programs, vocational and employment programs, medical and clinical services, early intervention, educational, recreational and family support services.