



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND THE MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES CUT THE RIBBON ON CAREER CENTER, UNVEILING NEW MURAL,
AND ANNOUNCED ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE**

The MOPD Career Center at the Central West Community Center will serve Chicago Residents with Disabilities Seeking Employment and Career Readiness Assistance

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) today announced the opening of the MOPD Career Center, dedicated to serving job seekers with disabilities and providing career readiness. The Career Center is located at the Central West Community Center, located at 2102 W. Ogden in the Tri-Taylor neighborhood. The Center is staffed by Career Placement Counselors who specialize in assisting job seekers with disabilities to access employment and accessibility, including an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter on staff along with computer stations equipped with adaptive technology to reduce barriers to digital access.

Under Mayor Lightfoot's leadership, the City of Chicago is making a \$1.2 million investment toward increasing disability employment, an important contribution to making the City of Chicago one of the most accessible cities in the nation. Mayor Lightfoot also unveiled a mural by Sam Kirk displaying a contemporary narrative on lived experiences of people with disabilities and senior citizens, along with announcing an Artist in Residence who will be based at the Central West Community Center.

"This month, as we mark National Disability Employment Awareness Month, I am thrilled to open the MOPD Career Center, which will increase access to employment and opportunities for people with disabilities, who are an untapped portion of our workforce," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Our Career Center marks an important step in our work to be the most accessible city in the nation, by ensuring that anyone who lives in our city has access to employment and career opportunities, which also increases economic mobility and the ability to support our individuals and families."

The career center not only leverages the pandemic, which created a surplus of job opportunities available along with a labor shortage but also provides much-needed



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services to support people with disabilities seeking employment opportunities. Career Placement Counselors provide counseling on reasonable accommodations, disability disclosure strategies, and career readiness services including resume review, practice interviews, and identifying pathways for good job opportunities. The career center also serves businesses and potential employers by matching applicants with available job opportunities, while providing technical assistance on inclusive hiring practices.

“Our services are life-changing in helping people with disabilities gain increased access to employment opportunities. This landmark investment is an important step toward working to reduce unemployment among people with disabilities and creating meaningful job and career opportunities,” said Rachel Arfa, Commissioner for the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities.

“The new MOPD career center is an ongoing effort to make sure that people who live with a disability have a fair shot at finding good jobs to support themselves and their families,” said Alderman Jason C. Ervin, 28th Ward. “Many times, all people need is the ability to build and grow a network that will help them improve their skills, but most importantly, be there when they need help. I’m proud of the collaborative work that our communities, along with Mayor Lightfoot and the various City departments, are doing to make finding a job an unencumbered task. This new career center will make finding a job a reality for many of our residents who live with a disability.”

Today’s event also celebrates the unveiling of a new mural at the Central West Community Center, created by local and internationally renowned artist Sam Kirk. The mural was a collaborative initiative by MOPD, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS). Sam Kirk held several community engagement sessions, and as a result of these sessions, he incorporated insights and lived experiences of people with disabilities and senior citizens into the mural. The mural creates a contemporary narrative of what it means to be a person with a disability and/or a senior citizen and establishes a visual identity for the Central West Community Center. The mural includes poetry written by Lily Diego-Johnson, a poet and social worker with a disability who communicates powerful words about disability identity. The mural also includes innovative sensory aspects, including lenticular images, giving the illusion of depth and movement, along with raised elements encouraging tactile interaction.

MOPD, DFSS, DCASE, and Mayor Lightfoot also announced the selection of an inaugural Artist-in-Residence at the Central West Community Center, Ariella Granados. The Artist-in-Residence is funded through the National Endowment for



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the Arts (NEA) along with city funding which brings an opportunity to engage with Chicago residents. Ms. Granados is an interdisciplinary artist with a disability, who uses multimedia including visual images, sound, and special effects to depict lived experiences as a bicultural and disabled body.

"We are grateful to artist Sam Kirk, poet Lily Diego-Johnson, and Artist-in-Residence Ariella Granados for bringing their immense talents to the Central West Community Center — to help rewrite the narrative of what it means to be a person with a disability in Chicago," said DCASE Commissioner Erin Harkey. "This collaboration with MOPD and DFSS is just one example of our expanded partnerships with other City agencies — to embed the arts in initiatives and strategies across City government."

Services at the Central West Community Center are available to people with disabilities who reside in the City of Chicago, are at least age 16, identify as a person with a disability, and want to get a job. City Colleges of Chicago students with disabilities are also eligible for services. This career center is one of the many investments Mayor Lightfoot has created to ensure job seekers have the resources and opportunities to access good-quality and sustainable jobs.

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