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## **Governor's Council on Disability Names Annual Award Winners**

*Winners exemplify standards of excellence in enhancing life for individuals living with disabilities*

JEFFERSON CITY, MO - The [Governor's Council on Disability](#) (GCD) has selected the award winner and honorable mention of the **25th Annual Inclusion Award**, the winner of the **4th Annual Youth Leadership Award**, and the **1st Annual Website/IT Award** winner.

The Inclusion Award and one Honorable Mention are presented annually to recognize private and public employers, individuals, and organizations that have successfully included people with disabilities in education, employment, housing, and leisure activities. Individuals are also encouraged to nominate state and local government divisions or employees they truly feel excel in inclusive practices.

The Youth Leadership Award is a program to recognize an outstanding Missouri youth (age 16-26) with a disability that has demonstrated exemplary leadership by making a difference in their community.

The Website/IT Award recognizes a Missouri-based organization that provides a user-friendly website that is accessible to all.

### **2016 Inclusion Award winner: UD for Yoga in Kirkwood**

Natasha Baebler is a yoga teacher and special educator successfully working and running her own yoga business, UD for Yoga, as a person with disabilities. Her innovative and accessible approach to yoga makes it accessible to people with all ability levels. Baebler has been specifically trained and built her business to teach yoga to children and adults with varying support needs, including visual impairments and children who use wheelchairs. Baebler is an excellent role model for inclusion and an example of living a full life despite her disabilities.

*Keeping the Promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act  
Affiliated with the Office of Disability Employment Policy*

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***Honorable Mention: Art Inspired Academy in Springfield***

Art Inspired Academy (AIA) provides inclusive creative arts opportunities to children and adults, both with and without disabilities in the community. Through partnerships with the Springfield Boys and Girls Clubs, AIA provides art and theater classes to children with and without disabilities. For many of the students, these classes have been the first time they have had interaction with someone with a disability or a different background. AIA has also formed a partnership with Pigtails and Crewcuts, a local children's salon that accommodates children who have trouble getting their hair cut due to sensory issues. AIA music and theater classes are held at Drury University, where students and volunteers work together to write and perform two productions a year, which are open to the public.

**4<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Leadership Award: David Vektor**

David Vektor serves as the Student Government Association president for the Florissant Valley campus of St. Louis Community College. He is very passionate about students with disabilities having the access they need to ensure academic and social success on campus. Vektor takes great pride in his academic excellence and encourages others to use the support services available to them. As a representative of the deaf community, Vektor volunteers with the Deaf Communication Studies Program. He created a community college recruitment video and acted in college theater productions. His most recent focus is working to make the college emergency alert system more accessible.

**1<sup>st</sup> Annual Website/IT Award: Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living, St. Joseph**

Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living (MERIL) is a center for independent living committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities and the aging in northwest Missouri, serving nine counties in the region and providing cross-disability services in areas such as advocacy, peer support, independent living, information and referral, and transition. MERIL's website is designed to be accessible to all, including people with visual impairments who are using a screen reader or other forms of assistive technology. It allows changes in font size, high contrast, and translation capabilities. Closed caption of videos and audio content make the website accessible to people who are deaf or hearing impaired. Overall, the website is user friendly and easy to navigate.

The awards will be presented to the winners on April 4, 2017 at the Power Up Assistive Technology conference in Columbia.

For more information on the Inclusion Award, go [here](#). For more information on the Youth Leadership Award, go [here](#). Information about the Website/IT Award can be found [here](#).

For additional information, please contact the GCD at 573-751-2600 or via e-mail at [gcd@oa.mo.gov](mailto:gcd@oa.mo.gov).

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