

NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS
51st ANNUAL CONVENTION AWARD RECIPIENTS



Media Award

The Lucky Few. With over 850,000 total plays from 200 episodes over five years, The Lucky Few Podcast is a leader in the podcast world for organizations covering Down syndrome. Led by Heather Avis, Micha Boyett, and Mercedes Lara, this podcast shifts the narrative in the media and shouts the value of people with Down syndrome. The Lucky Few has had movie stars, Self Advocates, caregivers, parents, medical providers, and more join their podcast. This award recognizes their commitment to covering a variety of topics and creating an open culture in the media to change the way people perceive people with Down syndrome.

Exceptional Meritorious Service Award

Michelle Sie Whitten, GLOBAL Foundation. Michelle has been a longstanding member of the community, an advocate for inclusion, and a leader in medical funding and research in her role and the GLOBAL Foundation and beyond.

Sig Pueschel NDSC Service Award

Kristin Malek. Kristin serves as the Director of Business Diversity at CDW. She is the Vice Chair of the Chicago Minority Supplier Diversity Council and a member of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Disability IN, and National Veteran-Owned Business Association (NaVOBA). Kristin also serves as an executive board member of New York nonprofit SHE TEK, on Chicago Blend's Advisory Board, and on the Board of Directors of Illinois' Center for Enriched Living. Kristin was among 2021's Top 25 Women in Power Impacting Diversity and recently was named one of NYC Most Responsible 100 for her work in diversity and inclusion in New York City. She was recognized as New York City's 2021 Rising Star for her work in economic mobilization, equitable workforce, workplaces, and supply chains.

Employer of the Year

Publix. This Florida grocery chain has been recognized as a top 10 place for workplace diversity by Fortune Magazine. Publix has been a strong partner of many DSAs and other groups and has been recognized by multiple cities and business groups in Florida for their hiring practices. In addition, they have been a supporter through in-kind and monetary support to causes throughout Florida.

Christian Pueschel Memorial Citizen Award

Austin Davenport. A longstanding attendee of Convention, a leader in the Self Advocate community, and a leader at home, Austin Davenport was a beacon of joy in our community. He was part of the Best Buddies Program and the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas. Austin lived independently and was employed at Braum's and Baker Botts. In 2009 he married Christi Hockel, his best friend, and became known for speaking about the importance of marriage. Austin's service to our community as a leader and citizen represents what we all aspire to reach in our lives.

Education Award

Sean Smith. Sean's lifework to further inclusion and technology access, not just in education but also in daily life, for those with Down syndrome and other disabilities has enhanced forever the lives of both self advocates and the families who love them. His more than eight years of leadership on NDSC's Board have brought education training to the forefront of NDSC's work.

National Media Award

Gray Television-WGEM/Quincy, IL. For the production of the documentary *Down Country*, highlighting the NDSC affiliate by the same name, we are pleased to honor Gray Television/WGEM. This film by Shawn Dickerman and Carlos Fernandez, nominated in the Human Interest - Long Form category for a Mid-America Emmy, aimed to alter perceptions surrounding Down syndrome while celebrating the joy of those born with an extra chromosome.

DSA of the Year Award

DSA of Minnesota. This award recognizes the value of advocacy work done at a state level in a moment of crisis. When, in early 2021, the state of Minnesota's Covid-19 vaccine rollout plan put adults with Down syndrome in phase 1c, behind nearly two million Minnesotans, DSA of Minnesota (DSAMn) launched into action. DSAMn led the way at the state and national level advocating for the adoption of a risk-based rollout, launched a petition to the governor to change the rollout plan, and created an advocacy and public awareness campaign which garnered national media attention. These efforts led to a change not only in Minnesota's rollout plan but also in educating the population through webinars in multiple languages and in creating a vaccine clinic at the Mall of America which is still operating today.

Presidents Award

Carrie Bergeron

Carrie's lifeswork to further inclusion, educate and promote positive acceptance for individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities. Her work as a motivational speaker & presenter, community volunteer, teacher's aide and advocate has forever enhanced our community of people living with Down syndrome. Carrie's book, "Tommy: The Special Tomato" continues to bring positive light to changing the perception of people with down syndrome as we work to help others see people with down syndrome are "More Alike Than Different". Now as medical research had advanced and our community has the beauty & challenges of aging adults with down syndrome for the first time in history, Carrie continues her advocacy as she documents for us her journey with Alzheimer's so that we in turn may learn more about this condition.

Carrie's life goal and favorite part of her service on the NDSC's self advocate council was to "make difference for the world of human beings with Down syndrome!"

Presidents Award

Christine Maxwell

Christine's life of service to change the way those with Down syndrome and other disabilities are viewed has forever changed the lives of both self advocates and the families who love them. Christine's ability to connect people (truly bring them together) and build relationships has forever altered the course of the community of down syndrome's landscape through her relationship's with the National Down Syndrome Congress, Gigi's Playhouse, Down Country and other local DSA's & groups. Her work as presenter with Dr. Brian Chicoine to promote and educate others on the healthcare & medical needs of people with down syndrome has helped countless people with down syndrome, professionals and those who love our population. Christine has lived a life designed to promote independence, employment and possibilities. Following a full career, Christine is currently employed as an inclusion specialist for her church teaching others how to accommodate differing needs.

