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SOUTH CAROLINA

**Cultivating Inclusion:
Planting the seeds
for our shared community**

2023 Event Program

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Welcome to FundAble: Cultivating Inclusion, an evening to celebrate champions of disability rights and inclusion and support Able South Carolina and our vision; a South Carolina that is a national model of equity and inclusion for all people with disabilities.

We hope you enjoy this evening of celebration and take part in our many opportunities to support Able SC.

Schedule of Events:

6:00 pm: Event Open

Guests invited to mingle and visit:

Magic Mirror Photobooth

Botanical Elixirs: Mystery Wine Wall Fundraiser

Purchase Raffle Tickets

7:00 pm: FundAble Awards Show

Able South Carolina Success Stories, Awardee Honors,
Make Your Pledge

8:00 pm: Musical Performance by 7Sunday

A Black-owned and veteran-led band featuring members of our disability community.

Dancing encouraged!

Stick around for Able SC's big reveal.

9:00 pm: Raffle Drawing

Last Call

9:30 pm: Event Close





Botanical Elixirs: Mystery Wine Wall

Visit our "Botanical Elixirs" wall to pick your mystery bottle of wine to enjoy at your table with others or take home after the party.

Bottles are wrapped and numbered to conceal what your drink may be. Simply tell the barkeep the bottle number you're interested in, make your purchase, and voila! Your mystery wine will be unwrapped to surprise you!

Price per bottle: \$20

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Raffle Items: \$10 tickets

Weekend at Myrtle Beach: Enjoy a weekend at Myrtle Beach in a stylish condo at Kingston Resorts. The private accommodations enjoy lakeside views and access to the nearby pool and of course sun and sand! The raffle winner receives a Kate Spade brand beach tote as well as a beach hat and towel with their prize.

Weekend at Myrtle Beach must be redeemed by August 31, 2024

Around Cola Town: Enjoy access to some of Columbia's best! The winner will receive four tickets to Riverbanks Zoo and Gardens as well as a Duo Membership to the Columbia Museum of Art and gift certificate to Tidal Wave Auto Spa! The museum membership grants you free unlimited admission for 2 adults and all children under 18 for one year, discounts on concert tickets, classes, and lectures, free admission to over 150 museums across the Southeast through a SERM Partnership, invitations to members-only events, and discounts on CMA merchandise, summer camps, and USC press purchases.





2023 Award Winners

Mia Van Benschoten Reliable Award

Mia was a dedicated volunteer and advocate for individuals with disabilities. During her time as a volunteer at Able South Carolina, she worked hard to provide individuals with assistive technology, helped with health and Community Leadership Academy classes, and provided input on interpersonal violence for individuals with disabilities as part of a grant from the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women. Mia always had a smile on her face and wanted to help wherever she could. Mia made it her mission to help individuals with psychiatric disabilities navigate community systems and entities for services.

She was posthumously awarded the Reliable Award in 2020 and since then the award has been named in her memory.

Mia Van Benschoten Reliable Awardee: Vertelle Pondexter-Jamison



Able South Carolina is honored to award Vertelle Pondexter-Jamison with the 2023 Mia Van Benschoten Reliable Award. This award is given to a supporter of Able South Carolina who we can rely on to assist us with the operations of our organization. Ms. Vertelle is one of Able SC's Disability Vaccine Access Leaders. She is an enthusiastic community leader and has helped us at two Barrier-free vaccine clinics in her hometown of St. Matthews, SC. At the events, Ms. Vertelle has reached out to those in attendance to encourage vaccination. She is personally responsible for approximately 90% of the vaccinations we've administered at those events due to her kind, comfortable, yet stern insistence to her friends and neighbors that they receive their COVID-19 vaccine. She has made a tremendous difference in her community and to the success of our vaccine efforts in rural South Carolina.

Taylor Burch Achievable Award

In 2019 Taylor Burch received the Commendable Award for his passionate advocacy for people with disabilities and their service animals. Taylor's journey to community inclusion started with a personal experience that garnered national media attention. After being denied access to a worship space because of his service dog, he spoke up, spoke out, and started an important national dialogue about accessibility. The worship space changed its policy to allow service dogs, but Taylor didn't stop advocating because he knew that his voice mattered. Taylor proved what it means to achieve real and personal goals for the benefit of the disability community.

Taylor died in 2021, but his legacy of achievement lives on. This award has been named in his memory.

Taylor Burch Achievable Awardee: Cody Smith



Able South Carolina is honored to award Cody Smith with the 2023 Taylor Burch Achievable Award. This award is given to an Able SC consumer who has worked extremely hard to meet and achieve their goals! Cody Smith is a consumer and tireless advocate for people with disabilities. He works hard to include everyone in the community in poignant discussions on topics involving disability advocacy and rights. Cody is a graduate of Able SC's Community Leadership Academy (CLA) who works to integrate leadership and advocacy in his community work and his role as a student at Winthrop University. Cody had goals of being a solid self-advocate, learning to communicate his ideas effectively, and being a strong peer mentor to other individuals with disabilities. He has achieved those goals and leads the Able SC Empower Hour program weekly, developing presentations, peer mentoring, and seeking out the input of his peers when problems and concerns arise. Cody exemplifies all that we look for in a consumer who is reliable, consistent, and available for others. He created a friendship group and co-created a writers' group with other members/consumers from Able SC that meet virtually weekly to support each other and uplift disability rights.



Commendable Award

Able South Carolina is honored to award both Meghan Bayer and Tyler Rex with the 2023 Commendable Award. This award is given to them for their commendable efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities!

Commendable Awardee: Meghan Bayer



Meghan, a person with type 1 diabetes, deafness, mobility, and a few other chronic conditions, is a graduate of Able SC's Equip and Community Leadership Academy (CLA) programs. She is currently a master's in social work student at Winthrop University. In 2020 Meghan founded a non-profit organization and continues to make sizable donations to the Johns Hopkins Stiff Person Syndrome Center. Meghan recently accepted the nomination to represent young adults with rare diseases from the State of SC on Capitol Hill during Rare Disease Week in 2023 from the Rare Disease Legislative Alliance (RDLA). She is currently going through educational webinars and seminars to prepare her to speak at the federal level. Meghan is very comfortable advocating and is learning all the policies that she needs to know to be a solid representative for our state! She has been working with legislators to address the significant barriers to Medicaid in SC. Since graduating from CLA, Meghan had a few individuals reach out to her about how they could get more involved with an organization or start a grassroots initiative. Meghan says, "It's been a pleasure to see them all learning and thriving on their own self-advocacy/advocacy journeys as well."



Commendable Awardee: Tyler Rex, Thrive Upstate

Tyler is the Executive Director of Thrive Upstate and has been a champion for people with disabilities for many years. He is visionary and understands the need to disrupt the status quo even under his many constraints working in our I/DD state system. Before S 533, the bill to phase out subminimum wage was passed, he led efforts to end this discriminatory practice at Thrive Upstate. He is a leader in our state for ensuring that individuals with disabilities, specifically individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, can experience a full, meaningful, productive life and are included in every aspect of our society. Under Tyler's leadership, Thrive Upstate has exceeded its community-based programs to include unique initiatives like Drumming Up Awareness, a yearly event in Downtown Greenville to showcase the musical talent of people with disabilities. Tyler is a leader in the SC developmental disabilities providers network, chairing statewide providers associations and mentoring other executive directors by showing them what true inclusion is. Able SC is proud to call Tyler a friend, supporting several of our initiatives and partnering with us on many projects.

**Respectable
Awardees:
Amy Hibbs &
Allison
Huffstutler,
BRIDGED**



Able South Carolina is honored to award Amy Hibbs & Allison Huffstutler with the Respectable Award. This award is given to those who are instrumental in creating change that promotes disability rights and inclusion.

Amy Hibbs is an Occupational Therapist with 22 years of experience. Amy has worked as a Director of Rehabilitation, served on the Board of Directors at the Meyer Center, and is a Council Member for the Developmental Disabilities Council for South Carolina. As a mother of two children with disabilities, Amy is passionate about the advocacy and inclusion of students with disabilities in school and community settings.

Allison Huffstutler has an undergraduate degree in Math Education and a Masters in Counseling. Her middle child was born with Rett Syndrome and was diagnosed with Autism. She serves on the South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities, where she is the co-chair of the Professional Development Committee. The committee advises the Governor and the state Superintendent of Education on policy changes and improvements. Previously, she served on the Board of Directors at the Meyer Center and actively participated in the Music Therapy task force supporting the certification of Music Therapists in South Carolina.



Respectable Awardees: Amy Hibbs & Allison HuFFstutler, BRIDGED

Continued

After taking part in Community Leadership Academy (CLA) and the Developmental Disabilities Council's Partners in Policymaking course in 2021, Amy and Allison merged their passions. They co-founded BRIDGED to address the following needs in schools and communities: (1) active participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in their schools and communities, (2) awareness and education about disability for adults and students without disabilities, (3) opportunities for disabled children to develop relationships with non-disabled peers, (4) social studies curriculum to include disability history and the Disabilities Right Movement and (5) literature representing disabled people and their stories.

Through their nonprofit organization, many programs have been developed. Students are introduced to empathy, disability awareness, and disability history through lessons, flexible activities, and a meaningful school-wide project. Able SC has had the opportunity to collaborate on these school-wide disability history lessons and programs. BRIDGED also hosts leadership development programs and programs to support students with disabilities and their families during the summer months by providing activities to maintain academic, social, behavioral, and therapeutic gains made during the prior school year. BRIDGED helps youth and young adults with disabilities to find their voice and sense of disability pride and integrate with nondisabled peers.



Adaptable Awardee: Michael Leach, Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services



Able South Carolina is honored to award Michael Leach, Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS), with the 2023 Adaptable Award. This award is given to those who have shown great progress in adapting programs and philosophies to demonstrate disability rights and inclusion.

“Mike” has earned this recognition for his ongoing efforts to strengthen child welfare and adult protective services to support the rights of adults, children, and parents with disabilities. SCDSS was not always in alignment with disability rights or providing equitable services. Mike steps up every time an issue is brought to his attention ranging from child welfare matters to employment for people with disabilities. SCDSS is also the first child welfare agency in the country to adopt a program to ensure their staff are trained in serving people with sensory disabilities and each SCDSS office is equipped with sensory tools. Additionally, since Mike stepped into his role, he has revised policies to align with disability rights, ensured all staff receives disability culture and ADA training and all child welfare staff are trained in protecting the rights and providing proper supports to disabled parents. Mike is a significant partner to Able SC, responds within hours to complaints with positive resolutions, and is the only state agency director to attend Advocacy Day for Access and Independence all day, focusing on the voices of each speaker. He is a true asset to South Carolina.



Reportable Awardee: Kayland Hagwood, WNCW

Able South Carolina is honored to award Kayland Hagwood with WNCW with the 2023 Reportable Award. This award is given to journalists who accurately and justly cover topics related to the disability community.

Kayland Hagwood has been a partner in reporting on disability rights issues, advocacy opportunities, and disability culture education with Able SC over the past year. She has consistently reached out to Able SC as a resource for disability community representation, including when transitioning from her former employer, WLTX, to WCNC. Kayland has consistently taken the advice and education provided by Able SC when reporting on stories about our community. Because of this Kayland's reporting on disability has continually improved. She has used the disability community's preferred language and has made an effort to understand the independent living philosophy. She regularly seeks the voices and opinions of disabled individuals over non-disabled peers when reporting on disability issues. Kayland has been a reliable reporting partner, and we appreciate her remaining connected with Able SC and continuing to report on disability issues with a firm understanding of disability rights and inclusion.

Legislative Awardee: Senator Katrina Shealy



Able South Carolina is honored to award South Carolina Senator Katrina Shealy, once again, with the Legislative Award. This award honors legislators who have been key in the fight for disability rights and disability justice.

Senator Katrina Shealy is a fierce ally and champion of the disability community. She not only has sponsored every bill Able SC has put forth, but she also fights for them to be passed and confronts any disability discrimination she experiences among her fellow legislators. Senator Shealy was key in the passing of S 533, the bill to phase out subminimum wage in South Carolina and implement Employment First.

She has gone to bat for the disability community many times, and she is the reason for significant progress within the SC General Assembly. She is a true force of nature for the disability community.





**Thank you to our 2023 FundAble,
Cultivating Inclusion Sponsors:**

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Robert Kopp- Thrivent

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