

# 2024 Justice Center Code of Conduct Recognition Award: Dedication, Respect and Protection from Harm

## Call for Nominations

Presented by the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

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Each year, the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) recognizes the dedicated staff who provide support to people with special needs throughout New York State with the Code of Conduct Recognition Award. The Justice Center is seeking nominations for the 2024 Awards. The Code of Conduct for Custodians of People with Special Needs provides a framework for assisting people with special needs “live self-directed, meaningful lives in their communities, free from abuse and neglect, and protected from harm.” This award recognizes people who demonstrate a strong commitment to the provisions of the Code of Conduct.

### Who can be nominated?

Anyone who signs the Code of Conduct is eligible. People who sign the Code of Conduct are individuals who are employed by, or volunteer at, state operated, licensed, or certified facilities or agencies under the Justice Center’s jurisdiction. Consultants, volunteers or contractors of organizations or companies that contract with facilities and agencies, under the Justice Center’s jurisdiction, sign the Code of Conduct if they have regular and substantial contact with people receiving services.

### Who can submit a nomination?

Anyone.

### How will award winners be selected?

Members of the Justice Center’s Advisory Council will review nominations and select award winners who have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the Code of Conduct throughout the year. The criteria used in the award process come directly from the ten provisions outlined in the Code of Conduct. Each nominee must have clear examples of the provisions to be considered for this award.

### What is the deadline for submitting a nomination?

The deadline for submission is Monday, July 1, 2024.

### How will the winners be announced?

Everyone who is nominated will receive some form of recognition. Award winners will be announced throughout the year on the Justice Center website and social media. Agency leadership will present the award to the winners in person at their place of employment.

### Where can I find the nomination form?

Please click [here](#) to submit a nomination form for the 2024 Justice Center Code of Conduct Recognition Award.

Questions about the award or completion of the application should be directed to [prevention@justicecenter.ny.gov](mailto:prevention@justicecenter.ny.gov).

## What are the Justice Center's Code of Conduct provisions?

### 1. Person-Centered Approach

My primary duty is to the people who receive supports and services from this organization. I acknowledge that each person of suitable age must have the opportunity to direct his or her own life, honoring, where consistent with agency policy, their right to assume risk in a safe manner, and recognizing each person's potential for lifelong learning and growth. I understand that my job will require flexibility, creativity and commitment. Whenever consistent with agency policy, I will work to support the individual's preferences and interests.

### 2. Physical, Emotional and Personal Well-being

I will promote the physical, emotional, and personal well-being of any person who receives services and supports from this organization, including their protection from abuse and neglect and reducing their risk of harm to others and themselves.

### 3. Respect, Dignity and Choice

I will respect the dignity and individuality of any person who receives services and supports from this organization and honor their choices and preferences whenever possible and consistent with agency policy. I will help people receiving supports and services use the opportunities and resources available to all in the community, whenever possible and consistent with agency policy.

### 4. Self-Determination

I will help people receiving supports and services realize their rights and responsibilities, and, as consistent with agency policy, make informed decisions and understand their options related to their physical health and emotional well-being.

### 5. Relationships

I will help people who receive services and supports from this organization maintain or develop healthy relationships with family and friends. I will support them in making informed choices about safely expressing their sexuality and other preferences, whenever possible and consistent with agency policy.

### 6. Advocacy

I will advocate for justice, inclusion, and community participation with, or on behalf of, any person who receives services and supports from this organization, as consistent with agency policy. I will promote justice, fairness, and equality, and respect their human, civil and legal rights.

### 7. Personal Health Information and Confidentiality

I understand that persons served by my organization have the right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to their personal health information and I will protect this information from unauthorized use or disclosure, except as required or permitted by law.

### 8. Non-Discrimination

I will not discriminate against people receiving services and supports or colleagues based on race, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic condition, disability, or any other protected class under the law.

### 9. Integrity, Responsibility and Professional Competency

I will reinforce the values of this organization when it does not compromise the well-being of any person who receives services and supports. I will maintain my skills and competency through continued learning, including all training provided by this organization. I will actively seek advice and guidance of others whenever I am uncertain about an appropriate course of action. I will not misrepresent my professional qualifications or affiliations. I will demonstrate model behavior to all, including persons receiving services and supports.

### 10. Reporting Requirements

As a mandated reporter, I acknowledge my legal obligation under Social Services Law § 491, as may be amended from time to time or superseded, to report all allegations of reportable incidents immediately upon discovery to the Justice Center's Vulnerable Persons' Central Register by calling 1-855-373-2122.

## 2023 Code of Conduct Winners

**Andrea Ocasio, Cazenovia Recovery Systems, Inc.** – Andrea Ocasio is the Director of Clinical Services for Cazenovia Recovery Systems, leading the charge in implementing ethical and investigative standards for various programs. Her commitment to a thorough, “roll-up-your-sleeves,” approach has created a work environment where staff are more comfortable and open discussing ethics and protections for individuals receiving services. Ultimately, Ocasio’s efforts have led to better outcomes and a higher ethical standard for those she serves.

**Christina Nier, The Adirondack Arc** – Christy Nier has worked for the Adirondack Arc for nearly 20 years and currently serves as a Behavior Specialist Assistant. Nier went to college online all while raising three children and maintaining full-time employment at the Arc. Over these years, Nier has been no stranger to hard work, leading numerous efforts to help further the agency’s mission. She facilitated the creation of the Adirondack Advocators Self-Advocacy group, organizes an annual safety forum, and manages the facility’s People Teaching People program. Her guidance, dedication, and leadership has been essential to the Adirondack Arc. According to her nominator, “this is not just a job to her, but a way of life.”

**Jimmy Brown, Pilgrim State Hospital** – Having worked for Pilgrim State Hospital for nearly 40 years, Jimmy Brown has won over hearts and minds with his dedication and overwhelming sense of compassion for those he serves. A firefighter by trade, Brown brings true emergency experience to his craft, helping to create a safer environment for individuals receiving services. He’s so loyal to his clients, he even comes in on his Sundays off to watch sports with those in care. Brown’s coworkers say he’s “kind from within.”

**Robert Venditti, Access: Supports for Living** – Robert Venditti has been with Access: Supports for Living for 6 years, starting as a DSP and working up to Day Services Supervisor. As he transitioned to his role as supervisor from Direct Support Professional, Venditti carried on with the same devotion and person-centered approach that made him such a successful DSP. He now molds staff to the aim for the same level of care he expects from himself. Venditti is the first person to arrive at the program every day and is always the last to leave, working long hours to ensure programming for individuals is of the highest quality.

**Sean Switzer, Access: Supports for Living** – A Training Director for Access: Supports for Living, Sean Switzer has been a passionate advocate for people with special needs for more than 20 years. Currently, Switzer manages new training systems to ensure that direct support professionals have comprehensive, experiential training. He was also instrumental in instituting a satisfaction survey that allows leadership to gain a better understanding of what individuals receiving services want and need from care staff.

**Danielle Dassance, Elmira Psychiatric Center** – Danielle Dassance’s nomination says it best, “the only thing that outweighs her expertise is her caring heart.” Currently a nurse on EPC’s Children and Families Unit, Dassance supports young people with mental illness and other special needs. When faced with a difficult task Dassance continues to give her all. On more than one occasion she has worked with especially challenging cases and always rises to the occasion. Dassance continues to show respect and treats her patients in a dignified manner and encourages them to achieve their goals.