

SHOWAbility's Accessibility Awareness Campaign Redefining Possibilities for Performing Artists with Disabilities

Successful Program Changing Lives and Culture, Opening Doors

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Last July, during Disability Pride Month and the 35th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Atlanta-based nonprofit [SHOWAbility](#) embarked on an ambitious endeavor. That was not simply to raise awareness by creating another disability initiative, but to change lives by transforming disability [accessibility](#) and inclusion through the performing arts, advocacy, education and strategic partnerships. To that end, SHOWAbility committed itself to changing the way America sees disability by increasing visibility, relatability, and accessibility and one year later, has seen results that speak for themselves. Dreams once considered impossible are becoming reality and performing artists with disabilities around the world, who had never imagined standing on major stages, are now performing before thousands.

"We never set out to simply talk about accessibility," said Founder Myrna Clayton, an internationally acclaimed jazz artist and U.S. Cultural Ambassador. "We set out to demonstrate it and communities are beginning to recognize that accessibility isn't charity—it is opportunity, she continued. "Our goal has never been just to advocate for accessibility, but to produce it by demanding it and bringing awareness to the necessity of it. As a result, SHOWAbility is proving that when people with disabilities are seen, valued and included, everyone wins across the nation and across the world."

SHOWAbility realized they couldn't wait for change but had to become the change. So, over the past year, the organization has emerged as one of the nation's most innovative disability organizations by using the universal language of the arts to accomplish what policy alone



Results from SHOWAbility's Year-Long Accessibility Awareness Efforts

cannot—changing hearts, changing minds and changing expectations.

And they are doing this through every performance, every partnership, every consultation and every conversation. By challenging society to stop asking people with disabilities to fit into existing systems, the organization instead began working to create spaces where they can truly belong.

One of the past year's defining moments came when SHOWAbility's Inclusive Chorus performed before more than 10,000 people inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium, just months before Atlanta welcomed the FIFA World Cup.

Think about that! Thousands of people witnessed performers with and without disabilities sharing one stage, not as special accommodation, but as exceptional artists, which for many chorus members, was more than a performance, it was validation and another example that talent was not the barrier, opportunity was.



Myrna Clayton, founder/executive director of SHOWAbility, is also an international jazz singer.

Building upon opportunities and a movement that knows no borders is what SHOWAbility' wants to continue to do. Its groundbreaking STAR Collective has become a magnet for artists with disabilities seeking something they've struggled to find anywhere else—a community that sees their talent before their disability.

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Interest is now coming from across the United States, including California, Montana and New York, while international artists from Canada and Uganda have also expressed interest in becoming part of this growing creative movement.

“This movement has an unmistakable message..artists with disabilities have been waiting for someone to believe in them and SHOWAbility is showing that it does,” says

Clayton. “But what we’re also bringing to light in a way that others haven’t is that Accessibility is a \$1.3 Trillion Opportunity and America’s untapped market, which we outline in the white paper released late last year,” Clayton said.

Entitled "Beyond Compliance: The \$1.3 Trillion Opportunity: Why Accessibility Is America's Untapped Market." The paper challenged businesses, government leaders and cultural institutions to stop viewing accessibility as a legal obligation and begin recognizing it as one of

America's greatest untapped opportunities for innovation, economic growth and human potential."

"It also reinforced a simple but profound truth: People with disabilities are not asking to be accommodated into society. They are asking to fully participate in the American promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," she said.

SHOWAbility is diligently working to influence culture where it matters most and over the past year, SHOWAbility's leadership was invited into conversations that shape culture itself. The organization served during the development and pre-production of the award-winning film Color Book as a Disability Consultant, helping ensure authentic disability representation from the very beginning. The film has since earned recognition from the Sundance Film Festival, the Atlanta Film Festival, Disability Belongs and numerous other respected organizations, demonstrating the value of including disability expertise long before cameras begin rolling. SHOWAbility also became a respected public voice on accessibility in entertainment after issuing its widely recognized response to the BAFTA Awards accessibility controversy, reinforcing the importance of authentic inclusion rather than performative representation.

Recognizing that real inclusion doesn't happen in isolation. It happens through relationships. SHOWAbility has worked to develop relationships that create change. During the past year, the progressive organization expanded partnerships with organizations that share a commitment to building a more inclusive future, including the Atlanta's Alliance Theatre, while continuing important conversations with Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) Mobility Paratransit services, after helping shine a public spotlight on transportation challenges affecting people with disabilities throughout Metro Atlanta.

These conversations weren't about complaints. They were about solutions, because accessibility changes everything and it takes strategic partnerships aligned with the same purpose, to make those changes happen. Support from corporate, organizational and government supporters like LuluMa Foundation, Georgia Council for the Arts, Fulton County Arts & Culture, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Amazon, and the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, has helped transform bold ideas into life-changing opportunities for artists and families who too often have been overlooked.

"None of this could happen with us alone. SHOWAbility gratefully acknowledges the visionary support of organizations that continue investing in this work and believing in a future where disability is recognized as an essential part of human diversity and possibility," Clayton said.

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