

Unique Dining Experience at Atlanta History Center Serves Up Awareness for Disability Employment
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Individuals with disabilities prove they are ready, willing and able to work

The [National Down Syndrome Society](#) (NDSS), with support from [Voya Financial®](#) (Voya), are advocating for equal rights for all individuals with Down syndrome through a unique dining experience known as C21.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here:

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Voya President of Tax-Exempt Markets, Heather Lavallee, National Down Syndrome Society President and CEO, Sara Hart Weir, Self-Advocate, Quinera Cooper and Voya President of Corporate Markets for Retirement, Bill Harmon, together at the C21 event in Atlanta on Tuesday, October 9. (Photo Credit: Wendy Zook)

The latest dining experience took place at the Atlanta History Center on Tuesday, Oct. 9, where prior C21 events have popped up on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and at the New York Stock Exchange. The goal of C21, which is staffed entirely by self-advocates with Down syndrome and other disabilities, is to demonstrate to the world that these individuals are ready, willing and able to work.

“C21 is a once in a lifetime experience in which individuals with Down syndrome are given an opportunity

to demonstrate to business and community leaders, as well as employers, what the workforce should look like — a workforce that is integrated, diverse and inclusive,” NDSS President and CEO Sara Weir said. “As the leading human rights organization for all individuals with Down syndrome, we are working with partners, from Main Street to Wall Street, to ensure people with Down syndrome have a fair shot at the American dream.”

“We’re thrilled to be working together with NDSS for the C21 events. Its mission closely aligns with Voya’s broader focus to help all Americans achieve the future they envision,” said Heather Lavallee, president of Tax-Exempt Markets for Voya’s Retirement business. “At Voya, this includes building a secure financial future — especially for those with special needs and disabilities, who sometimes struggle to be welcomed into the workforce and earn equal wage for equal work.”

October is both National Disability Employment Awareness Month and Down Syndrome Awareness Month. With these initiatives as a backdrop, NDSS and Voya are promoting the need for fair and equal employment for all Americans. A primary objective of C21 is to call attention to a series of antiquated laws that hinders all individuals with disabilities from pursuing their career aspirations and living independently. This includes current employment legislation, specifically the passage of the bipartisan H.R.1377, Transitioning to Integrated, Meaningful Employment (TIME) Act. This legislation seeks to responsibly phase out an 80-year-old provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which, even in 2018, continues to allow certain employers to pay wages lower than the federal minimum wage to workers who have disabilities.

In addition to the C21 Atlanta dining experience, Voya will be hosting “Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage” at the New York Stock Exchange on Oct. 29. This event will convene top corporations, leading non-profits, and key influencers for a discussion on the future employment landscape for people with disabilities.

To learn more about NDSS and C21, visit ndss.org.

Voya is committed to supporting all Americans with holistic financial wellness, insurance and retirement planning solutions. This includes support for the special needs and caregiver community, where Voya offers a depth of resources focused on holistic education and planning through its Voya Cares® program. To learn more, visit Voya.com/voyacares.

About NDSS

The National Down Syndrome Society is the leading human rights organization for all individuals with Down syndrome. NDSS provides state-of-the-art, comprehensive programming to all individuals with Down syndrome and their families with four main areas of programming, which include the National Advocacy & Policy Center, the National Inclusive Health & Sports Program featuring our National Buddy Walk® Program, Community Outreach and Resources and Public Awareness. NDSS envisions a world in which all people with Down syndrome have the opportunity to enhance their quality of life, realize their life aspirations and become valued members of welcoming communities. For more information visit www.ndss.org.

About Voya Financial®

Voya Financial, Inc. (NYSE: VOYA), helps Americans plan, invest and protect their savings — to get ready to retire better. Serving the financial needs of approximately 14.3 million individual and institutional customers in the United States, Voya is a *Fortune 500* company that had \$8.6 billion in revenue in 2017. The company had \$528 billion in total assets under management and administration as of June 30, 2018. With a clear mission to make a secure financial future possible — one person, one family, one institution at a time — Voya's vision is to be America's Retirement Company®. Certified as a “Great Place to Work” by the Great Place to Work® Institute, Voya is equally committed to conducting business in a way that is socially, environmentally, economically and ethically responsible. Voya has been recognized as one of the 2018 World's Most Ethical Companies® by the Ethisphere Institute; one of the 2018 World's Most Admired Companies by *Fortune* magazine; as a member of the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index; and as a “Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion” on the Disability Equality Index by Disability:IN. For more information, visit voya.com. Follow Voya Financial on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Twitter [@Voya](#).

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