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Editor's Note – Photos Attached

Liberty ARC Staff Earn National Credentials

16 of the Agency's Direct Support Professionals Complete E-Badges Coursework in a Pilot Program with the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

Amsterdam, New York – Liberty ARC celebrated the graduation of 16 Direct Support Professionals, who achieved National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) credentials as the agency's first class as part of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) credentialing pilot program.

NADSP is one of the nation's leading DSP associations, promoting excellence in direct support work. Liberty ARC announced their membership in NADSP and inclusion in the statewide OPWDD Pilot Program this past winter.

Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, Amsterdam Mayor Michael Cinquanti, and Associate Commissioner for OPWDD Alison Pingelski, and Kathy Brown from NADSP were on hand to celebrate the program graduates at an event held at Liberty ARC on Wednesday, July 26th.

"The staff members we are recognizing have shown tremendous dedication to the field and the people they support by earning these credentials," said Liberty ARC CEO Jennifer Saunders. "We know that having the right training and tools makes a huge difference in the quality of supports we can offer, and we are proud to be at the forefront of our field in raising the standards of excellence. We all know that direct support work is multi-faceted and draws on knowledge and skills from many different disciplines, as well as interpersonal skills such as empathy, compassion, and communication."

"To the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who are graduating from this Academy, I commend you for your unwavering commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Your hard work, compassion, and empathy have made a tremendous difference, not only in the lives of those you support but also in the hearts of their families," said Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara,

Chair of the NYS Assembly Sub-Committee on Autism Spectrum Disorders. "Families of people with disabilities, like mine, understand the invaluable contributions of DSPs. My son, Michael, has autism, and he changed my life. He teaches me new things every day, and I entered public service to be a voice for kids like him. I know firsthand how important DSPs have been and still are in his life."

As a member of NADSP, Liberty ARC has the opportunity for our direct care staff to earn credentials through the NADSP E-Badges Academy. This is a nationally-recognized credential with three different levels (DSP-I, DSP-II, DSP-III). Each E-Badge earned challenges the DSP taking the module to expand their knowledge and apply it in situations with the people they support. The coursework included a rigorous 100 hours of online classwork as well as demonstrated application of the principles learned.

"The NADSP is proud to partner with New York's Office for People with Developmental Disabilities and Liberty ARC to help share incredible work of their direct support professionals. Furthermore, we congratulate those who've achieved our certifications, they are the best of the best and their work truly is professional," said Joe Macbeth, President and CEO of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals.

"Our hardworking DSPs deserve the recognition and professional development opportunities that come from training and credentialing programs like those offered through our partnership with NADSP," said Associate Commissioner of the Division of Administration for OPWDD Alison Pingelski. "We continue to see the growth of this exciting new program, and I am incredibly grateful for the dedication of the DSPs who work tirelessly to enhance the lives of people with disabilities and are equally dedicated to improving their knowledge and skills to better reach that goal."

Graduates are Melissa Ethan, Jessica Ferguson, Frankie Foti, Brittni Hardnett, Brianna Hoover, Alexandria Johnson, Kaitlin Kretser, Breanna Lapi, Cindy Reid, Daniel Rhodes, Lolalynn Robinson, RuthAnn Shanahan, Kelly Stafford, Paula Szabo, Ashley Wilson, and Julia Woodard.

"Our field is at the beginning of a major shift towards credentialing, which will help the people we work with get the best supports and demonstrate to the world the skills a DSP needs to perform the job well," said Liberty ARC Chief Operating Officer Candace Opalka. "What each one of you have done today is demonstrate the tenacity, heart, and knowledge needed to succeed in our field and provide the best services to the people you support. You are at the cutting edge of disabilities services, not only in our state, but throughout our country. When you give to others, you change people's lives. What you have learned will help you to be great leaders, great teachers and great friends. These gifts of the heart are the greatest gifts."

About Liberty ARC

Liberty ARC, the Montgomery County Chapter of The Arc New York, is a not-for-profit agency that provides top-quality supports and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are proud of our six decades of bringing these innovative and valuable programs to those most vulnerable in our community. While staying committed to our framework the agency has grown our

employment, residential, day supports, family support and health-related programming throughout the years. Our mission- *Together we support people with disabilities to achieve a quality of life each person values* - together with our *Values* make up the foundation on which our culture is framed. We are extremely proud to be a pioneering agency, which coupled with a dynamic workforce and our person-centered mission makes Liberty ARC a stand-out in our field.

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