



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**NORTH SUBURBAN
YMCA**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NSYMCA's Café Voca Receives Program Excellence Award from Y-USA

Café Voca a Coffee Bar honored for Vocational Training and Employment for Special Needs Community

Northbrook, IL: October, 2023 – The North Suburban YMCA's Café Voca opened in September of 2021 and has had tremendous success. Café Voca is a coffee bar that provides vocational training and employment experience for individuals with intellectual and developmental challenges. After two successful years of running the program, the NSYMCA was honored to receive a Program Excellence award from the Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs and the YMCA Professional Network last month. The Program Excellence Award celebrates Y programs that are innovative and make a difference in communities across the state of Illinois. This award was presented at the Illinois Fall Staff Rally held in September.

Café Voca's program participants are 16 years and older and are recruited throughout the community, Y programs, and the local school district transition program, TruNorth. The participants learn about job responsibilities, customer service, and resume building. At the end of the program, they also participate in mock interviews. Nationally, only 20% of individuals with special needs who want to work are employed. Over the last two years, 50% of the NSYMCA's Café Voca participants were offered permanent jobs at local businesses like McDonalds, Sunset Foods and Forever 21.

"Program families are finding that the Y is a place of acceptance and inclusion," states Kathy Fielding, NSYMCA CEO. "As a result, NSYMCA's young adults with disabilities are flourishing, making connections on a deeper level with our members and families at the Y."

One Café Voca participant plays guitar, and the Y invited her to do a "concert" in the lobby after shifts. "This training program has taught my daughter responsibility, patience, and team work," exclaims the girl's mother. "Café Voca taught my daughter many new skills for her future employment."

The Café Voca program was originated in partnership with the Rotary Club of Chicagoland Korean-Northbrook (RCCKN) and funded the first 2 years through a global grant from Rotary International. The Y worked with many partners to develop the program including Autism Workforce, Healthy Choice Vending and Wheat Mission. When the grant money was exhausted

the Y decided to continue the program and has had to absorb the costs ever since and is currently looking for businesses and donors who might consider supporting programs like Café Voca.

"The Y's ability to offer this training has enhanced the lives of many young people in our community to feel accomplished and a sense of belonging to a work environment as well as a social network," exclaims Ellen Mirochnik, NSYMCA's Special Services Coordinator.

About the North Suburban YMCA

The North Suburban YMCA services Northbrook and 14 surrounding communities with programs and tools that help its residents become healthier, more connected, and confident, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, income, or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. The NSYMCA focuses on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility and is a charitable organization, inclusive and welcoming to all in our community. Learn more at NSYMCA.org.



Caption: (Left to right) Kathy Fielding, CEO, Steven Weisbaum, Ellen Mirochnick, Debbie Madeley and Zahra Fazal with their award in front the Café Voca Display located at the NSYMCA in Northbrook.