



## **NEWS**

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### **Tallahassee employers, advocates honored for helping Floridians with disabilities join the workforce**

*The Able Trust announces 2015 Ability Awards winners*

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** – The annual Able Trust Ability Awards honors businesses, organizations and individuals for their employment, leadership and services that allow more Floridians with disabilities to enter the workforce. Top winners this year include the Department of Juvenile Justice and Jesse Panuccio, executive director of the State of Florida’s Department of Economic Opportunity.

The awards were presented by The Able Trust, a statewide nonprofit with a mission to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment.

Notable winners:

- **Public Organization of the Year** — The Department of Juvenile Justice was honored for providing career education and training services to incarcerated youth with disabilities, leading to more productive lives and community reintegration.
- **Public Employee of the Year** — Jesse Panuccio is the executive director of the State of Florida’s Department of Economic Opportunity. In 2014, Panuccio aided The Able Trust in expanding employment assistance programs through legislative appropriations.
- **Volunteer of the Year** — For seven years, Joe Mellichamp has coordinated year-round funding and logistics support on behalf of the Tallahassee Rotary for The Able Trust’s Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). The Florida YLF is a leadership-training event held each summer in Tallahassee for high school students with disabilities. YLF seeks to empower young adults, helping them realize their ability to pursue meaningful employment.

- **Young Adult Leadership Award** — Carly Fahey is a recent graduate of the University of Utah and a 2006 alum of the Florida YLF. Since her first experience as a YLF participant, Carly has returned as a support staff member and training facilitator.

“All of the winners have made great strides in ensuring Floridians with disabilities have an opportunity for success at work and at life,” said Dr. Susanne Homant, president and CEO of The Able Trust. “Their commitment to helping people with disabilities gain independence and experience makes a remarkable difference in the lives they touch.”

The Able Trust is celebrating 25 years of making a positive impact on the state of Florida. In that time, The Able Trust has awarded more than \$35 million in grants and has also developed the nationally recognized Florida High School High Tech (HSHT) program and Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) to help Florida’s teens learn self-advocacy and pursue post-secondary education and/or entry into the workforce.

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#### **About The Able Trust**

*The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, is a 501(c)(3) public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990. Its mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment. Since its establishment, The Able Trust has awarded more than \$35 million throughout Florida, enabling thousands of Floridians with disabilities to enter the workforce.*

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