



Press Release

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Contact: Lauren Bailey
(213) 687-8577
grants@cciarts.org
www.cciarts.org

Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) Announces Recipients of the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Artist-Innovator Fund

Los Angeles – With support from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) today announced the *Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Artist-Innovator Fund's* 2021 grantees.

The *SCI Artist-Innovator Fund* is the first to offer artists, innovators, inventors, makers, and entrepreneurs with spinal cord injury financial capital for social-impact oriented creative entrepreneurship projects. The Fund provided \$75,000 in grants of up to \$7,500 each to ten individual artist-entrepreneurs with spinal cord injuries who are inspired to innovate by opportunity-based entrepreneurship. CCI recognizes that having an underserved perspective, living with challenging circumstances, and applying creative practice can yield important solutions for not only the innovator but for the benefit of society. This opportunity recognizes that the combination of SCI populations, craftsmanship and creative practice, and positive social impact can yield powerful results.

Out of 35 applicants from across the country, the ten selected are:

Molly Aubry (West Palm Beach, Florida) to set up an ergonomic and functional studio space to develop programming on human connection and social coordination for arts education programs in local schools in South Florida.

Emily Barker (Los Angeles, California) to complete construction of the first prototype of Moving Parts, a fully sustainable green energy wheelchair-accessible Tiny House that will serve as an artist residency and be used to sell units to artist residencies whose housing is inaccessible.

Tyree Brown (Capitol Heights, Maryland) to purchase vlogging equipment intended to enhance artistic content creation on YouTube that aims to instruct, encourage, and increase representation of quadriplegic, Black women artists.

Tameka Citchen-Spruce (Southfield, Michigan) to hire a social impact producer for her film *My Girl Story*, with the goal of supporting Black girls with disabilities to find power in their own stories through community screenings and conversations.

Dillon Connolly (Long Beach, California) to compensate fitness instructors of various levels of spinal cord injury and video editors who create content for Zuk Fitness, a virtual fitness platform tailored for people with SCI.

LOS ANGELES
244 S. San Pedro Street
Suite 401
Los Angeles, CA 90012
P: 213.687.8577

BAY AREA
1446 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
P: 415.288.0530

cciarts.org
ambitio-us.org

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Ryan Gebauer (Coral Springs, Florida) to create promotional materials and utilize software to host online training for CARES, a Certified Accessibility Real Estate Specialist course, educating real estate professionals on accessibility and ultimately helping people with disabilities find accessible housing.

Carina Ho (Oakland, California) to record and promote a full-length album in creative collaboration with other artists with disabilities, and engage audiences through live streams and conversations with artists during production.

Andre Johnson (Chicago, Illinois) to pilot test and build out a sales and marketing campaign for LiveEquipd, a web-based platform for organizations to streamline their equipment procurement process while creating a robust resource to promote healthy outcomes for their patients with paralysis-related disabilities.

David Platillero (Fullerton, California) to create and promote *Lionheart to Heart*, a video series and podcast exploring trauma and finding purpose. Each conversation will inspire a song that will be compiled into an album.

Rachel Short (Carmel, California) to complete and exhibit a project using iPhone photography and platinum printing, a technique picked up after her spinal cord injury, and open her gallery to exhibit local photographers.

This opportunity is unique because it helps artists and innovators with SCI think differently about what their injury and disability means and how it has impacted their lives. More often, this type of injury is viewed negatively with feelings of loss and helplessness when it could instead be perceived as offering unique opportunities for the person and society. CCI President and CEO Angie Kim said, "There are so many problems to solve, innovations to be made, and solutions to be generated, and not through homogenous or cookie-cutter approaches. Rather, we need diversity to be leading innovation. We need people who move through the world uniquely to be at the center of inventions, hacking, and fixing."

The SCI Artist-Innovator Fund celebrates the SCI experience as one that can impact one's life positively and helps cultivate creativity and problem-solving. The program's support is meant to boost confidence and nudge someone to move forward with an idea or project that can change their career and impact their communities.

A panel of distinguished experts assisted CCI in reviewing the *SCI Artist-Innovator Fund* applications, including:

Quemuel Arroyo is the first Chief Accessibility Officer at the NYS Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). In this capacity he leads the implementation of policies, initiatives, and programs that redefine and advance accessibility throughout the largest public transportation organization in North America. Prior to joining the MTA, he served as the Interim President and Global Head of Community at Charge, an e-scooter charging and docking company. His work on accessibility and universal design is recognized worldwide throughout governments, not-for-profits, and the private sector. Arroyo earned a Master in Public Administration from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service and a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Design and History of Architecture.

Wes Halloway sustained a spinal cord injury in a diving accident in his first year as an undergrad student at University of Texas. He returned to school and later completed both a BA and BFA in studio art. Currently, alongside his own studio practice, Wes teaches underserved groups in the Houston Area in hopes to use art as an expressive healing tool. Wes is part of the inaugural cohort of students pursuing an MFA in Social Practice with an emphasis in Public Policy at The Corcoran School of Arts and Design in Washington D.C.

Minna Hong is a mixed medium artist. She's a jewelry designer, a painter, ceramicist and a food artist. Since her recent retirement from Shepherd Center as the Manager of SCI peer support, she is giving back to the community that has been so generous to her in her life journey. She is committed to creating a community where ALL are welcome at the table.

Andrea Jennings, founder of Shifting Creative Paradigms Entertainment and Productions - Leveling the Playing Field™, envisions a world where underrepresented people in media, such as people with disabilities, will one day be depicted as leaders in substantial roles. The key focus of her production company is to promote an accurate portrayal of marginalized groups and produce inclusive and diverse content. Andrea is also an actress, keynote speaker, and the Vice-Chair of the City of Pasadena's Accessibility and Disability Commission.

Brook McCall is committed to creating and sharing opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be heard and valued as visionaries for change. Anthropological training and expertise in inclusionary public health pair for clarity of insight, and as creativity fuel to recognize, address, and close current gaps in accessibility and beyond. Her Tech Access Initiative brings tech industry stakeholders and thought leaders from the mobility disability community together for substantive conversation and collaboration, fostering reciprocal understanding and driving vital innovation.

For more information about the *SCI Artist-Innovator Fund*, please visit cciarts.org.

About Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI)

Center for Cultural Innovation was founded in 2001 as a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Its mission is to promote knowledge-sharing, networking, and financial independence for individual artists and creative entrepreneurs by providing business training, grants, and incubating innovative projects that create new program knowledge, tools, and practices for artists in the field. For more information, please visit cciarts.org.

About the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation

The Craig H. Neilsen Foundation's funding is dedicated to supporting both programs and scientific research to improve the quality of life for those affected by and living with spinal cord injury. For more information, please visit chnfoundation.org.

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