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2015 Advocates in Disability Award Winner Announced

Social activist dedicated to advancing disability rights honored by national program

Washington, D.C. (June 11, 2015) – The HSC Foundation and Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation announce that Odunola Ojewumi is the 2015 recipient of the [Advocates in Disability Award](#). A native of Beltsville, Md., Odunola, 25, is a strong advocate for young people with disabilities, particularly on the importance of equal access to quality education and improved public policy to advance disability rights.

Diagnosed with mitochondrial disease and the recipient of both a heart and kidney transplant, Odunola's advocacy work began in high school when after writing to her school board about accessibility standards, she was asked to represent more than 150,000 students by serving on the Prince George's County Disabilities Advisory Board. She then moved on to effectively lobby the Maryland State Legislature to expand Medicaid to 800,000 uninsured residents. This was the start of a career in disability advocacy, and after graduating from the University of Maryland College Park, led her to work in the White House, serving on the White House Kitchen Cabinet on Disability and on Capitol Hill.

“Odunola's efforts to ensure that the next generation of young people with disabilities are given opportunities instead of obstacles is the definition of advocacy, and we are proud to honor her accomplishments” said Thomas W. Chapman, EdD, MPH, president and CEO of [The HSC Foundation](#).

The Advocates in Disability Award, co-presented by The HSC Foundation and Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, recognizes an individual between the ages of 14 and 26 who is dedicated to positively affecting the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. The award is open to applicants from across the United States.

Odunola will receive \$3,000 for her advocacy on behalf of individuals with disabilities, and an additional \$7,000 towards a project to benefit the disability community. As the founder and director of [Project ASCEND](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating avenues to higher education for young people in the Washington metropolitan area, she plans to use the award funds to create the Project ASCEND Scholars Program.

This initiative would serve as a two-tiered program to provide financial assistance to college students with disabilities and initiate lobbying efforts to improve the public education system for students with disabilities. The program will provide five \$1,000 scholarships to students with disabilities with an interest in the disabilities rights movement who are attending college in the Washington metropolitan area. Recipients will be required to participate in a lobby day

sponsored by Project ASCEND to support further investments in higher education for students with disabilities.

“We are proud to join The HSC Foundation in supporting the Advocates in Disability Awards program, which is designed to empower young self-advocates with disabilities like Odunola, and support her project to create channels for education and prepare young adults for successful careers,” said Kevin R. Webb, senior director, [Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation](#).

Past Advocates in Disability Award winners have achieved many accomplishments, from establishing a contest to commemorate the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, to eliminating outdated and stigmatizing language from Virginia state code and being appointed by President Barack Obama to serve as a member of the National Council on Disability.

“I want to be more than an activist; I desire to be a game changer for a community that has been silenced by decades of discrimination,” said Odunola Ojewumi, 2015 Advocates in Disability Award recipient. “This award is more than just an honor. It will serve as a gateway for fulfilling my dreams of etching a better society for people with disabilities.”

Odunola is currently a contract specialist with the federal government, and serves as a Youth Advisory Board Member for the Born This Way Foundation. She also shares her experiences through journalism, and has been published by the Huffington Post and Marie Claire magazine.

The Advocates in Disability Award is a project of the [National Youth Transitions Initiative](#), a signature program of The HSC Foundation. A major focus of the Initiative brings together the collective resources of multiple organizations, known as the [Youth Transitions Collaborative](#), to concentrate on transitions-related services, research, public policy and best practices. Along with The HSC Foundation and the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, its member organizations help young people with disabilities build paths to independence.

The Collaborative’s physical home, the [National Youth Transitions Center](#), also serves as a hub for regional and national disability organizations. Visit www.thenytc.org to learn more about its commitment to making a difference in the lives of young people with disabilities, or follow it on Twitter at [@The_NYTC](#) or Facebook at www.facebook.com/thenytc.

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About The HSC Foundation

The HSC Foundation is dedicated to improving access to services for individuals who face social and health care barriers due to disability, chronic illness or other circumstances that present unique needs. Along with supporting operating companies, it places a particular emphasis on transition-age youth and young veterans. For more information, visit www.hscfoundation.org.

About the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation

The Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, based in the Washington, D.C. area, was established in 1991 by Mitsubishi Electric Corporation and the Mitsubishi Electric U.S. companies, which produce, sell and distribute a wide range of consumer, industrial, commercial and professional electronics products. The Foundation has contributed more than \$13 million to organizations that are empowering young people with disabilities to lead more inclusive and productive lives. To learn more, visit www.meaf.org.