



Burton Blatt Institute
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

NEWS RELEASE

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Syracuse University's Unsung Hero Award recognizes advocate for people with disabilities

*Omolara Funmilola Akinpelu assists local women with disabilities
and Deaf women who are survivors of domestic violence*

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK – In recognition of her work as a passionate advocate for people with disabilities, Omolara Funmilola Akinpelu, Research Associate with the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, has been selected as a recipient of Syracuse University's 2011 Unsung Heroes Awards. Akinpelu, along with three other members of the Syracuse community, will be honored during SU's Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, "Heirs of a King: Remembering and Continuing the Work of Global Legacy," on Sunday, January 23, at 6:30 p.m. in the Carrier Dome.

"Akinpelu's unwavering determination to create a more inclusive community based on shared responsibility, compassion, and respect for all speaks to the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'beloved community,' said Peter Blanck, BBI Chair and University Professor. "She utilizes her scholarly insight and collaborative spirit in meaningful ways for the Central New York community."

Akinpelu has been instrumental in the creation of practical solutions to the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities and Deaf women: they not only experience domestic violence at vastly disproportionate numbers, but also encounter barriers to seeking assistance. A native of Nigeria, Akinpelu has helped to develop and implement a comprehensive and inclusive community prevention and response system to this problem.

She is currently involved in Project EMERGE, a BBI initiative in collaboration with two community agencies, ARISE and Vera House. As Project EMERGE Advocate at ARISE, she has worked to identify specific gaps in service, barriers to safety and accessible support, and system inadequacies for this population of women. "Her meaningful work in our community has made the hope of justice a reality for women with disabilities and Deaf women," noted Tom McKeown, ARISE Executive Director. "We are proud to be her colleagues."

Akinpelu's collaboration with ARISE and Vera House has led to a coordinated community response to fill a gap in service and promote awareness of women with disabilities and Deaf women. In addition, Akinpelu has helped to develop a comprehensive curriculum to train staff at both ARISE and Vera House to improve service delivery to women with disabilities and Deaf

women who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Her work could have implications beyond Central New York, as she collaborates with other community partners to replicate the program in their different organizations.

“Akinpelu’s insight and compassion combined with her dedication to an important issue have meant so very much for our community. It’s a well-deserved award for her,” said Randi Bregman, Vera House Executive Director.

For more information about SU’s Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, visit <http://hendricks.syr.edu>.

About the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University

BBI is dedicated to practical inclusive solutions for people with disabilities worldwide. With a staff of more than 60 and offices in Syracuse, NY, Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, New York, NY, Los Angeles, CA, and Tel Aviv, Israel, BBI engages in projects on civil rights, entrepreneurship, universal design, employment and economic advancement, technology innovation, and attitudes about disability in traditional and new media. For more information, visit <http://bbi.syr.edu>.

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