“Motivational Hip Hop” is what 4 Wheel City brought to Pittsburgh on September 27th through their “Welcome to Reality” tour. Ricardo “Rick Fire” Velasquez and Namel “Tap Waterz” Norris, both left paraplegic by gun violence, performed in Pittsburgh to a sold-out crowd at the August Wilson Center.

Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of Health Sciences Diversity and School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, the event aimed to highlight disability issues in the African American community, to connect underserved men and women who use wheelchairs to support resources in the community and to bring a message of violence prevention to the local youth community through hip hop.

The National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center in Birmingham, Ala.¹, estimates there are 12,000 new cases of spinal-cord injuries each year and that there are between 270,000 and 327,000 people nationally with such injuries. While motor-vehicle crashes and falls are the most-common causes of spinal-cord injuries, acts of violence rank account for roughly 13 percent of all such injuries. Prevalence of spinal-cord injuries among blacks and Hispanics has increased each decade since the 1970s.

Norris and Velasquez serve as role models for motivation and perseverance. “People out there may not know there’s people like us with disabilities doing amazing things. They ... just need to believe in themselves,” Norris says. “With motivation ... they can pursue anything they want to in life.”

¹ [https://www.nscisc.uab.edu/](https://www.nscisc.uab.edu/)