



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northwest Center Employment Specialist Debra Tan Recognized as a National Leader in Supporting Individuals with Disabilities

Employment Specialist Honored for Decades of Service, Innovation during COVID-19

SEATTLE – Northwest Center is proud to announce Employment Specialist Debra Tan has been named the 2021 Innovation Direct Support Professional of the Year by the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), an organization representing more than 1,600 community providers of services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the United States.

Tan has devoted more than 25 years to supporting individuals with disabilities. Working with Seattle-based Northwest Center for the last 19 years, Tan helps people with disabilities enter the workforce while educating Washington employers on how disability inclusion benefits organizations. ANCOR selected Tan from more than 350 applicants due to her creativity in supporting clients whose employment was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Deb’s commitment to her clients and their families knows no bounds,” said Gene Boes, CEO of Northwest Center. “That was especially true over the last year. When some of her clients were forced to stay home, Deb went above and beyond to keep them engaged in their employment goals and worked very closely with their employers to understand how the pandemic was impacting the organization and what role her clients would play.”

According to colleagues, examples of Tan’s innovative work included creating dozens of videos for her clients showing them how to complete job tasks safely during COVID-19, delivering tools to her clients’ homes for them to practice job skills during COVID-19 shutdowns, and meeting with employers to discuss how a client’s job tasks could dramatically change upon their return.

“Deb has a unique ability to find each person’s strength and capitalize on them, even in the most challenging situations,” said Cody Ryckman, Southeast Employment Services Supervisor at Northwest Center. “She coaches clients to success and independence and converts employers into passionate advocates of inclusion. We are honored to work alongside her.”

Since 2007, ANCOR’s annual Direct Support Professional of the Year Awards program has recognized outstanding individuals who deliver long-term supports and services to people intellectual and developmental disabilities. The awards celebrate the important role those professionals play in ensuring people with disabilities are included in the community.



“Selecting the recipients of this year’s Direct Support Professionals of the Year Awards was an especially difficult task, in part because of the incredibly challenging year community providers have faced,” said Barbara Merrill, CEO for ANCOR. “We received a record-shattering 350 nominations, many of which spoke to the great lengths these professionals went to ensure the people they support were protected against the worst effects of COVID-19. The high volume of high-quality nominations illustrates just how important it is for our network of providers to recognize the outstanding professionals who comprise the 2021 class of honorees.”

The 2021 Direct Support Professionals of the Year awards were presented in a virtual ceremony on Monday, June 14th. In 2020, Tan was honored with the Washington Governor’s Employer Award for Direct Support Professionals from the Governor’s Committee on Disability Issues and Employment.

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About Northwest Center

Northwest Center is a nonprofit founded in 1965 by a group of mothers who later went on to write and pass historic civil rights legislation guaranteeing access to public education for disabled children.

Northwest Center is now a leading voice in advancing equal opportunities for children and adults with disabilities providing early learning and school age programs, employment and job placement services and vocational training.

About ANCOR

For more than 50 years, the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ancor.org) has been a leading advocate for the critical role service providers play in enriching the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a national nonprofit trade association, ANCOR represents 1,600+ organizations employing more than a half-million professionals who together serve more than a million individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our mission is to advance the ability of our members to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to fully participate in their communities.