



Immediate Release

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ANCOR Names Forrest Austin 2017 Direct Support Professional of the Year

Kansas DSP is honored for his work in support of community living for people with disabilities

Alexandria, VA. — The American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) announced today that Forrest Austin of [Johnson County Developmental Supports](#) in Kansas, is the recipient of the 2017 National Direct Support Professional Recognition Award.

ANCOR will present the award to Mr. Austin at a ceremony honoring Direct Support Professionals (DSP) from across the nation on May 3rd at ANCOR's 2017 Conference: *Taking the Helm!* in San Antonio, TX in front of an anticipated audience of over 400 attendees. [Relias Learning](#), an organization which offers online training to senior care, health and human services, public safety, and intellectual and developmental disabilities organizations, is an underwriter of the ANCOR DSP awards for the third year in a row.

Since 2007, ANCOR has honored exceptional Direct Support Professionals with the Direct Support Professional Recognition Award for exemplary work in furthering community inclusion and full participation for the many Americans living with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities. Forrest Austin was the standout of this year's field of 245 nominees. ANCOR also named state recipients of the DSP Recognition Award in 41 states, the District of Columbia and Moldova.

The 2017 National DSP of the Year Forrest Austin is a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and Community Employment Job Coach at Johnson County Developmental Supports (JCDS) in Lenexa, KS. His mantra is built around three traits – kindness, dignity, and respect.

Forrest has been a DSP for nine years – four years at JCDS. His seasoned approach and varied skillset may surprise some; he's only 29 years old. Yet as a job coach Forrest has enabled over a dozen individuals with intellectual disabilities to prepare for, find and keep full or part-time, well-paying jobs through Project Search, a program that provides real-life work experience to help youth with significant disabilities make successful transitions from school to adult life.

"We have people get full-time jobs for \$15 an hour who have an intellectual disability. You feel like you are breaking ground," noted Forrest. "I want that to become the rule and not the exception for our program."

"I've thought about this a lot and I know there are DSPs all across the country doing great things and it is all during a time of change for services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," Forrest added. "It is a great honor to be recognized in the midst of all this, and I see it as

recognition not only for my personal contributions, but to the quality services provided here in the state of Kansas and in Johnson County.”

“It is an enormous honor for Forrest and for our agency...Forrest...really does embody the team spirit that we look for here,” added Chad VonAhnen, Executive Director at JCDS. “We rely on DSPs and our staff to create solutions and figure out ways to provide opportunities for our people to be part of the community. Forrest does that every day. He’s a great thinker and a great doer. He keeps his focus on people’s abilities and providing them with choice-driven supports and advocating alongside of them to live and work in the community.”

“It is such a pleasure to read so many stories of exceptional DSPs and the work they are doing to support people with disabilities,” said Barbara Merrill, ANCOR CEO. “Our national and state award recipients truly are the cream of the crop, but we know that there are many like them across the country, working largely without recognition, who deserve our gratitude and appreciation for their hard work, dedication and compassion.”

“It is the mission of ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign to obtain the resources necessary to attract and retain professionals like Mr. Austin and this year’s state award recipients,” continued Merrill. “We must continue to remind our policy makers that quality services to support people with disabilities require a stable and qualified workforce who are valued for the work they do.”

ANCOR’s Direct Support Professional Recognition Award is given to those who personify the values of ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign. Nominees are judged on their success in helping people with disabilities build social networks and engage in substantive community participation and for advocating for the people they serve.

2017 State Direct Support Professional Award Recipients

State	DSP Name	Agency
Alabama	Vernita Manning	Resources for Independence
Alaska	Debbie Ogden	ResCare
Arizona	Ejay Bustamante	Mosaic in Arizona
Arkansas	Joseph Cuevas	Bost Inc
California	Amanda Meeks-Sinner	ResCare
Canada > Ontario	Adam Candeloro	ResCare
Colorado	Brodie Shultze	Imagine!
Connecticut	Angela Page	Mosaic
Delaware	Juslyne Fleurantus	Mosaic
District of Columbia	Michael Washington	RCM of Washington, Inc.
Florida	Debbie Cowan	Sunrise Community of Central Florida
Georgia	Tamika Norwood	ResCare
Illinois	Jason Pasley	Marcfirst
Indiana	Donna Kite	Cardinal Services, Inc. of Indiana
Iowa	Jeanne Baughman	Mainstream Living
Kansas	Adam Thomas Marchant	Mosaic
Kentucky	Betsy Byrnes	Kaleidoscope, Inc.
Louisiana	Rose Harrison	ResCare
Maine	Wende Tyler	OHI

Maryland	William Lewis	New Horizons Supported Services, Inc.
Massachusetts	Dawn Gardner	WCI
Minnesota	Thomas Housewright	Dungarvin
Mississippi	Tanya Croy	The MENTOR Network
Missouri	Rick Maclin	Easterseals Midwest
Montana	Nikki Koontz	Opportuzity Resources, Inc.
Nebraska	Andrew Landon	Mosaic
Nevada	Dawn Neddenriep	Dungarvin
New Jersey	Kofi Dom	Dungarvin
New Mexico	Guadalupe Leon	Dungarvin
New York	Wendy Herringshaw	ARC Herkimer
North Carolina	Ricky Hamm	ResCare
North Dakota	Cristina Gregoire	HitInc
Ohio	Pam Ngum	Dungarvin
Oklahoma	Carolyn Stanford	Dungarvin
Oregon	Nikiea Pankey	Dungarvin
Pennsylvania	Gerson Ortiz	Access Services
South Carolina	Vonda Dotson	ResCare
South Dakota	Molly Hammitt	SESDAC
Tennessee	Alyssa Shoun	Core Services of Northeast Tennessee
Texas	Chasidy Williams	ResCare
Vermont	Gina Brown	Green Mountain Support Services
Virginia	Christie Lacefield	Hope House Foundation
Washington	Wesley Jones	Skills'kin
West Virginia	Christopher Thompson	ResCare
Wisconsin	Xia Xiong	Innovative Services, Inc.
Republic of Moldova	Veronica Rotaru	Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association

Profiles of the recipients will soon be available on the National Advocacy Campaign website:
<http://www.nationaladvocacycampaign.org>.

About ANCOR. *The American Network of Community Options and Resources is a national trade association representing more than 1,200 private providers of community living and employment supports and services to more than 800,000 individuals with disabilities with a workforce that's over half a million strong. ANCOR advocates for the crucial role private providers play in enhancing and supporting the lives of people with disabilities and their families.*

Through its National Advocacy Campaign, ANCOR seeks to obtain the resources to recruit, train and retain a sustainable direct support workforce. ANCOR provides organization, professional, leadership development and networking opportunities and services and is continually working toward partnerships and collaborations that support our mission, which is to advance the ability of our members in supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to fully participate in their communities. www.ancor.org.