

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Antoinette Morris Named 2019 Direct Support Professional of the Year

Illinois professional joins more than 50 others being honored for contributions enriching the lives of individuals with intellectual, developmental disabilities

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA – This morning, the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) announced that Antoinette Morris, direct support professional at Trinity Services in Des Plaines, Illinois, has been named the recipient of the association’s 2019 Direct Support Professional of the Year award. Morris joins more than four dozen other honorees who will be recognized at a ceremony next month in Portland, Oregon.

“I started my career in this field providing direct support, and so I know just how critical DSPs are to supporting individuals in their quest to live their best and most fulfilling lives,” said Robert Budd, president of ANCOR and chief executive officer at FREE, Inc., in Old Bethpage, New York. “DSPs rarely receive the recognition they deserve, and for that reason I’m proud of our association for recognizing Antoinette and all of her significant contributions to the lives of the individuals supported by Trinity Services.”

Morris, who has served as a DSP for more than two decades and has been with Trinity Services for more than 15 years, was selected as a participant in Trinity Services’ week-long In-Service Training Program, which is designed to hone DSPs’ leadership skills. Morris is also a six-time recipient of the agency’s own Outstanding DSP award and the 2014 recipient of the agency’s Positive Attitude award.

These accolades no doubt stem from Morris’ unwavering commitment to the individuals she supports through life’s ups and downs. Indeed, there have been some happy moments; Morris has coached athletes to compete successfully in Special Olympics, and she has facilitated individuals’ lifelong dreams of securing meaningful employment opportunities. In these moments, Morris has been an essential part of the ability of the individuals she supports to be included, supported and empowered in the community.

At the same time, this national honor is being bestowed upon Morris for her contributions to the quality of life and, in some cases, the sanctity of life for the individuals she supports. As ANCOR’s *Recognizing Excellence* publication noted in its profile of Morris, “When one individual under her care kept returning to unhealthy behaviors, including substance abuse and unprotected sex, Antoinette supported him to enter an outpatient treatment center and accompany him to his counseling sessions in downtown

Chicago each day.” The profile goes on to describe how another individual who found out he was diabetic relied on Antoinette to navigate the diagnosis and treatment plan. For these individuals, Morris has been, quite literally, a lifesaver.

Moreover, Morris’ nomination letter notes the ways in which she encourages those around her to provide the highest-quality supports possible. According to the letter, “[Antoinette] inspires her peers to be creative and dig deeper as they continue on their own journey,” and she has sounded her own voice as an advocate for other DSPs at the state level.

Awarded annually since 2007, ANCOR’s Direct Support Professional of the Year awards recognize outstanding professionals who provide long-term supports and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The awards and the accompanying presentation at ANCOR’s Annual Conference, which are underwritten by Relias, were created to celebrate the important role Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play in ensuring individuals with I/DD can be included and empowered in their communities, and to raise awareness about a direct support workforce in crisis. Nationally, turnover rates near 50 percent amount to a significant shortage of DSPs.

“ANCOR created the DSP of the Year awards precisely because the accomplishments of DSPs demand celebration,” said Barbara Merrill, ANCOR’s chief executive officer. “Though these awards represent only a small fraction of the praise DSPs deserve, we are thrilled to honor Antoinette Morris and dozens of other DSPs like her who really are making community inclusion possible for people of all abilities.”

The 2019 Direct Support Professional of the Year awards will be presented in a ceremony in Portland, Oregon, on May 8, 2019, at ANCOR’s Annual Conference, *Bridges to Better Outcomes*. The full list of honorees to be recognized at the ceremony is below. Members of the press interested in attending the awards presentation should contact Sean Luechtefeld, ANCOR’s Director of Communications, at sluechtefeld@ancor.org or 703.535.7850, ext. 100.

National Direct Support Professional of the Year

Antoinette Morris, Trinity Services, Des Plaines, Ill.

Special Category Award Recipients

Hayley Arnold, Penn-Mar Human Services, Glen Rock, Pa. (category: Leadership)

Jacqueline Barnes, RISE Services, Eugene, Ore. (category: NADSP Tenets)

Thomas Carter, RHA Health Services, LLC, Augusta, Ga. (category: Relationships)

Samantha Glover, Aspire, Inc., Aberdeen, S.D. (category: Innovation)

Danielle Hay, BrightSpring Ontario, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont. (category: International)

Jesse Knickmeyer, St. Louis Arc, St. Charles, Mo. (category: Supporting Person-Centered Plans)

Marquavius Moore, Sunrise Communities, Miami, Fla. (category: NADSP Tenets)

Sue Smith, Valley Residential Services, Walla Walla, Wash. (category: Supporting Person-Centered Plans)

Allan Thibodeau, OHI, Hermon, Maine (category: Leadership)

State Direct Support Professional of the Year Award Recipients

Alaska: Jacquelyn Evans, BrightSpring Alaska, Fairbanks
Arizona: Tommie Gross, RISE, Inc., Mesa
Arkansas: Rebecca Hansel, Bost, Inc., Fort Smith
California: Hope Gutierrez, Bayberry, Inc., Napa
Colorado: Jennifer Acree, Dungarvin, Palmer Lake
Connecticut: Debra Main, Mosaic, Cromwell
Delaware: David Oruko, Mosaic, Elkton
District of Columbia: Linda Ballard, RCM of Washington
Florida: Phillip Kibbat: BrightSpring Florida, Clearwater
Georgia: Rose Mary Bradley, Lynndale, Inc., Augusta
Idaho: Macy Henze, Consumer Direct Care Network, Meridian
Illinois: Gary Ferguson, Marcfirst, Normal
Indiana: Johneka Jewell, Dungarvin, Indianapolis
Iowa: Linda Renn, The MENTOR Network, Vinton
Kansas: JoDee Bryant, Mosaic, Pittsburg
Kentucky: John Mattingly, Tri-Generations Louisville
Louisiana: Marvette Harris, Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana, Metairie
Maine: Kim Redmun, John F. Murphy Homes, Auburn
Maryland: Marian Mulbah-Poquee, Mid-Atlantic Human Service Corporation, Bel Air
Massachusetts: Christopher Amado, Delta Projects, Dedham
Michigan: Tanya Scherer, BrightSpring Michigan, Saginaw
Minnesota: Lisa Riley, MSS, Eagan
Mississippi: Aleia Dye, The MENTOR Network, Oxford
Missouri: Mona Mergenthal, Emmaus Homes, St. Charles
Nebraska: Lisa Behrens, Mosaic, Beatrice
Nevada: Linda Brown, Dungarvin, Silver Springs
New Hampshire: Nicole Dufour, The Institute of Professional Practice, Inc., Concord
New Jersey: Dausy Wurie, Dungarvin, Somerset
New Mexico: Brenda Vasquez, ARCA, Albuquerque
New York: Marc O'Mara, Heritage Christian Services, North Tonawanda
North Carolina: Shane Whitaker, BrightSpring North Carolina, Kings Mountain
Ohio: Amber Estergall, Welcome House, Westlake
Oklahoma: Travis Dottrich, Home of Hope, Vinita
Oregon: Maria Morales, Community Support Services, Inc., Salem
Pennsylvania: Gayle Feron, Keystone Human Services, Harrisburg
Rhode Island: Josiah Olowoporoku, Community Living of Rhode Island, Warwick
South Carolina: Crystal Campbell, Charles Lea Center, Spartanburg
South Dakota: Samantha Glover, Aspire, Inc., Aberdeen
Tennessee: Allen Selby, Core Services of Northeast Tennessee, Johnson City
Texas: Lafawndra Allen, BrightSpring Texas, Austin
Vermont: Kevin Hadsel, Families First, Wilmington
Virginia: Skyler Ross, Resources for Independence of Virginia, Fairfax
Washington: Cindy Ply, Bethesda Lutheran Communities, Renton

West Virginia: Gabriel McEskew, BrightSpring West Virginia, Buckhannon
Wisconsin: Dee Otte, BrightSpring Wisconsin, Jefferson

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About ANCOR

For nearly 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 (I/DD). 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 I/DD. Our mission is to advance the ability of our members to support people with I/DD to fully participate in their communities.

About Relias

Relias (relias.com) is passionate about helping health care organizations get better at identifying problems, addressing them with knowledge and skills, and driving positive outcomes for all. For the past five years, Relias has proudly underwritten ANCOR's Direct Support Professional of the Year awards.