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**A Heart for Service: Sue Hewitt Helps Orange County
Adults with Disabilities Live Independently**

National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week, September 11-17, 2016

Los Alamitos and Costa Mesa, CA (Sept. 2016) – Sue Hewitt has all she needs for a rewarding career as a direct support professional who helps adults with developmental disabilities to live independently.

“I absolutely love my job!” says Sue, the 2016 recipient of Regional Center of Orange County’s (RCOC) Direct Support Professional Spotlight Award. Celebrating ten years with Costa Mesa-based Project Independence’s Independent Living Services program, the Los Alamitos resident works with about a dozen people with developmental disabilities. She received the award for extraordinary dedication to those she serves, including one woman with disabilities who was homeless and without any family involvement when she first started receiving RCOC services.

With effective advocacy, Sue helped the woman to find a home and establish friendships and other relationships within her local community. Sue also helped her achieve a lifelong dream of enrolling in community college, to find employment with Project Independence, and participate in family-style activities. Most importantly, Sue helped foster her confidence and security, knowing that she can be successful and that she does not have to live on the streets.

“National Direct Support Professional Recognition Week is a great opportunity to honor the service of people like Sue Hewitt who work so hard to help people with disabilities live independent, fulfilling lives in the community,” says Larry Landauer, RCOC’s Executive Director. “California’s regional center system of community care is a model for the nation, and it relies on people like Sue who have a heart for service.”

A Professional with a Heart for Service

Hewitt credits being the mother of six children (as well as grandmother of 12 and great-grandmother of five) for equipping her with the skills to succeed in this job, and believes it was a role she was meant to have: she tells the story of opening the newspaper one day and seeing an ad for a job coach position. That same day, she heard TV's "Judge Judy" commending one of her show guests as a job coach, noting it as admirable work. Soon thereafter, she joined the team at Project Independence, a leading provider of independent and supporting living, supported employment, and other services – most of which are funded by Regional Center of Orange County.

A decade later, she still works with eight of the same people with disabilities, two of whom are married, in a variety of independent living skills, including grocery shopping, laundry, housekeeping, dealing with medical and financial issues, dealing with friends, living in a community, and stress management. Having worked with people ranging in age from 30 to 75, Sue has a philosophy and approach that works: "I just respect them as I would respect myself," she says.

She focuses on listening and encouraging those she serves to express their feelings and views. Fostering that dynamic, Sue knows the moments when they are open to hearing new approaches to solving day-to-day challenges and becoming more independent.

"I don't expect them to always adhere to what I say," she adds. "Part of being independent is making choices and experiencing consequences."

Debra Marsteller, President and Chief Executive of Project Independence, appreciates the attention that Direct Support Professional Recognition Week brings to those who work for her agency and the 1,600 or so other service providers that receive funding from RCOC: "Like teachers and nurses, our people do incredibly rewarding and important work that merits our respect and this week gives them some well-deserved recognition."



Sue Hewitt

About Regional Center of Orange County

Regional Center of Orange County is the private, nonprofit organization contracted by the State of California to coordinate life-long services and supports to more than 19,000 Orange County residents with developmental disabilities and their families. Developmental disabilities include intellectual disabilities, autism, epilepsy and cerebral palsy. Learn more at www.rcocdd.com.

About Direct Support Professional Recognition Week

Direct Support Professional Recognition Week is part of an American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) national advocacy campaign. Celebrated annually across the country, it honors the tens of thousands of workers who enable people with developmental and other significant disabilities and their families to live healthy lives in their communities.

About Project Independence

Project Independence is an award-winning one-stop provider of programs offering independent living services, supported employment services and behavioral support programs for people with developmental disabilities. Today, the organization provides assistance to more than 700 adults who live in their own homes, work regular jobs and participate in community life. Project Independence also provides its clients with counseling services for Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA), a grant awarded by The Social Security Administration. For more information, visit www.proindependence.org or call 714-549-3464 or 877-444-0144.

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