

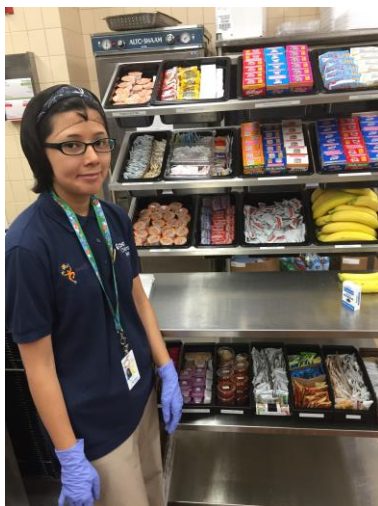


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National Disability Employment Awareness Month: Employers and Employees Benefit from Workforce Diversity

Santa Ana, CA (Oct. 2017) -- Before Michelle Katagiri-Mena moved to Orange County, most of the people who worked with her had no idea how much she could accomplish if she were simply given an opportunity. Working in a sheltered workshop, she performed piecework that was not challenging for her and earned around 90 cents an hour. Today, the vibrant 23-year-old is employed by [CHOC Children's](#), where she earns \$15 an hour and is a valued and respected member of the food services department on the main hospital campus in Orange.



The turning point for Michelle, who has autism, was her participation in the Gillman [Project SEARCH](#) internship program at CHOC, which gives young adults with developmental disabilities the opportunity to intern in various hospital departments to gain valuable work experience. Her [Regional Center of Orange County](#) service coordinator spotted her potential soon after she began receiving services through RCOC and suggested she apply. After the internship, Michelle was hired by CHOC, where she continues to receive RCOC-funded support from a job coach with [Integrated Resources Institute](#).

“In honor of October’s [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#), we want employers to know more about the benefits of hiring the people we serve,” said RCOC’s Executive Director Larry Landauer. “Michelle’s story illustrates how, with the right coaching, many people with developmental disabilities can work effectively side-by-side with typical employees, and truly enhance the workplace.”

Larry noted that people RCOC serves have been hired for a range of jobs, from accounting, data entry and food services, to landscaping, mail room services, web design, and more. In addition to promoting workforce diversity and a positive corporate image, he cited several good [reasons to consider hiring people with developmental disabilities](#):

1. Workers with developmental disabilities tend to be reliable, dedicated, and loyal employees with a positive attitude and work ethic.
2. Employees with developmental disabilities exhibit lower turnover and lower absenteeism.
3. There are federal tax incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities.
4. No-cost help is available to match employer needs with workers who have the right job skills, and to provide on-the-job training and ongoing support.

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 for more than 20,000 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.

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