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nando Valley that can speak to the worth of our individuals, but there's more that can be done.

What was the biggest challenge you faced at New Horizons?

The state funding. California law entitles those with developmental disabilities to lifelong access to government services, which includes funding for places like New Horizons. But for the last 25 years, that funding hasn't been based on any real formula. In the 1990s, the government would use cost statements to determine what rates we could charge for services. Now...we just get what we get. Rates can be frozen or cut back irrespective of what our costs are. The minimum wage is another factor – the state has funded some of the increase, but not all.

How does the minimum wage hike affect your operations?

When the minimum wage goes to \$12 an hour on July 1, McDonald's can raise their prices to cover the extra cost, but we can't do that. We don't get more revenue – we just get the expense. If you're an employee who has been making \$12.25 an hour for five years, it logically follows that on July 1 your organization should do something for you, maybe take you to \$13. But that "compression" isn't funded by the state. It affects nonprofits in general in a very dire way.

What is New Horizons' strategy for mitigating the impact of a higher minimum wage?

New Horizons will move individuals up the pay scale ladder because we want to keep our good people. This field deserves good people, but they don't stay. We have 26 to 32 percent turnover every year.

Why do you think that's the case?

The compensation isn't compelling to keep most people in the field. We have some very long-term employees, many of them who have been promoted. But there are some people who are just good at direct service, such as basic caregiving and job coaching support, and we can't afford to pay those positions more under the state reimbursement structure. Those are the people who are really the infrastructure of our program. They do the work. They're the ones who are with our people – and they're the ones who are hard to keep because the compensation is so poor.

For those who stay, what's their reasoning?

One is the same reason I'm here: We get so much back from working with our clients. Some rewards aren't monetary.

What is your favorite memory from your time at the organization?



PHOTOS BY THOMAS WASPER

Socially Conscious: Top, Sewell connects with a client and puts in desk time; above, in courtyard at New Horizons campus.

Our client Nancy is in our Sam's Cafe food service program. She and a job coach go to Pavilions in West Hills and give samples of our cookies to customers. Nancy told them why it's important to buy the cookies and how happy she was to be part of the whole cookie-making production. When she spoke about it at one of our board meetings, she turned around and asked the members why she never saw them shopping at Pavilions. So the memory of Nancy chastising our board is a good one.

What's the story behind those cookies, anyway?

Those legendary cookies started in 1982, baked in an old oven in a classroom. Now

we bake them in a convection oven in Sam's Cafe, and they're in Vons, Pavilions and Albertsons. Our clients are so proud to carry the word about our cookies.

What excites you most about the future of this field?

The idea that 40 years ago, people with intellectual disabilities were living in big institutions, away from their families and the community, unable to take advantage of the kind of life you and I enjoy. Now we've gone from a time of seclusion and segregation to a time where we're embracing that these individuals can fully be included. This is a very exciting time in our field.

What has you most concerned?

The concern is exactly the excitement: The full inclusion movement needs to be handled with care. Families need to be involved, employers need to be educated, but most of all our clients need to be handled still very gently. The fact that we already have people working in the community is a testament that we can do this.

What is your proudest moment from your career?

Witnessing the diversification of our services. When I started we only had boarded care services. Now we have health care homes, support for people that live in their own apartments, and next year we'll be opening a home for people with Down's Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease. I'm also very proud that during my tenure we've gone from having eight clients working in the community to 322 who have jobs. That's the most of any organization like ours in Los Angeles County.

What's next for you now that you've retired?

I've been working since I was 14 years old, so retirement will be a great time for me to explore exactly what I like to do. I know that on Jan. 2 I will probably be at my computer, waiting for an e-mail from New Horizons.

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CYNTHIA SEWELL, New Horizons