

For release December 2, 2009
Media Contact: Dawn Stranne, 415/893-1780
Web site: www.buckelew.org
or
Delyse Sylvester
Director of Community, Ashoka's Changemakers
Tel: 250-352-0616

**Online Votes Needed for Buckelew Programs'
Blue Skies Personnel Services
in International Mental Health Competition**

(SAN RAFAEL – December 2, 2009) Buckelew Programs' Blue Skies Personnel Services has been chosen as one of 12 finalists in the fifth worldwide "Rethinking Mental Health: Improving Community Wellbeing" competition organized by Ashoka's Changemakers and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide a platform to change society's narrow perceptions and improve the rights and resources for individuals living with serious mental illnesses. The three finalists to receive the most online votes by December 9 will receive a prize of \$5,000. To vote, go to www.changemakers.com/en-us/mentalhealth.

A panel of judges agreed that Buckelew's entry for its Blue Skies Personnel Services deserved special recognition from the 340 entries from 42 countries for its outstanding demonstration of innovation, social impact, and sustainability. Other finalists from America include the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare and the University of Washington School of Social Work, as well as hospitals and mental health organizations in Bhutan, South Africa, India and Zambia.

Blue Skies Personnel Services is a full-service, non-profit employee staffing service in the North Bay that helps people with psychiatric disabilities find a meaningful place within their communities through work. It was established as an innovative strategy for overcoming mental health stigma in the workplace so that more clients could obtain competitive employment.

Prior to starting Blue Skies Personnel Services in 2005, Buckelew Programs placed 17 people with mental illness into jobs in the community. Each year since then, between 75 and 93 people have been placed into jobs, and those workers have increased their income, on average, by at least 45%.

"Studies show that although 70% of people with mental illness want to work, only 15% are employed," said Buckelew Programs Executive Director Steve Ramsland. "A big hurdle to employment is the stigma associated with mental illness, and we saw how traditional mental health employment approaches failed to surmount those challenges, resulting in low rates of employment and income. We're very proud that Blue Skies Personnel has modeled how that can be changed."

-more-

Blue Skies Personnel Services "rethinks mental health" by operating as a professional HR staffing service, and not a traditional mental health program. Its outreach staff are marketing and sales people who have been trained in working with mental health clients, not traditional mental health professionals who may be comfortable working with clients but are not adept at working with businesses.

Professional job developers work with employers to identify their staffing needs, and then introduce qualified job candidates to the employer, assisting the client with the interview process. Once hired, job coaches provide a quality assurance role, working with the employer and client to ensure the success of the placement. HR specialists provide ongoing consultation and training to the employer.

Among the local employers are Staples, Home Depot and Safeway.

###

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

About Ashoka's Changemakers

Changemakers is an initiative of Ashoka, an organization with over three decades of finding, funding, and expanding the work of social entrepreneurs across the globe. It is a global online community of action that connects people to share ideas, inspire and mentor each other, and find and support the best ideas in social innovation. The Changemakers online community builds on this history and expands the Ashoka vision by creating an "Everyone a Changemaker" world through networking, relationship-building, and the sourcing of funding opportunities.

Through its collaborative competitions and open-source process, Changemakers' has created one of the world's most robust laboratories for launching, refining, and scaling ideas for solving the world's most pressing social problems.

About Buckelew Programs

Buckelew Programs is a non-profit organization that creates homes, jobs, and hope for transition-aged youth and adults with mental illness in Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties. Its mission is to assist individuals with mental illness to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. Established in 1970, Buckelew Programs had revenues of \$9.5 million in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009. There are 120 employees throughout the three counties. For more information, visit www.buckelew.org