



Dialogue

Volume 29 No. 4
Fall 2015



Consumer Spotlight

Tony Meagher

Doctors say that for many overweight people, losing even a few pounds can make a big difference in their overall health. But when RCOC consumer Tony Meagher began his weight loss journey, there was a lot more than just a few pounds standing between him and better health.



Tony Meagher (right) with his mother Kim Wiedeholt (left) at the Orange County Fair.

Standing five feet, six inches tall, Tony had grown to 326 pounds.

Standing five feet, six inches tall, Tony had grown to 326 pounds. His rapid and significant weight gain brought on cellulitis and edema in his legs. His skin was stretched so tight that it would erupt and bleed with

minor scratching. Unable to walk for any distance, or even stand for long without the support of a walker, he was often short of breath and largely housebound. He also had gout and was borderline diabetic.

A little more than two years later, Tony has reached his goal weight of 157 pounds – losing more than half

his former body weight. He’s never been healthier, and is much happier now that he has more energy and is able to be more active.

“I’m a lot more independent than before,” he said, noting that he’s now able to clean his own apartment and help his mom with her errands and carry things for her.

See **Tony Meagher** on page 5.

Spotlight Awards 2016: Call for Nominations

Be sure to mark your calendar and plan to attend the 2016 Spotlight Awards Ceremony and Gala! The event is scheduled for Friday, April 8, 2016 at 6 p.m. at the Embassy Suites in Garden Grove. Ticket information will be available soon on the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com).

It’s also time to submit your Spotlight Award nominations for the person, group or organization you think deserves recognition for their contributions to improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities in Orange County. You can submit your nominations online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/spotlightawards2016>, or download nomination forms from the RCOC website and submit them by mail, fax or email.

Don’t wait! The deadline for nominations is **Friday, February 5, 2016**.

Dialogue

Dialogue is published four times per year by the Regional Center of Orange County for people with developmental disabilities, their families and service providers. *Dialogue* can also be read online at RCOC's website: www.rcocdd.com.

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Upcoming 2016 Board Meetings

January 7 • March 3

The public is invited to attend RCOC board meetings. They begin at 6 p.m. and are held in the Regional Center Board Room at RCOC's headquarters in the Tustin Centre Tower complex, located at 1525 North Tustin Avenue in Santa Ana.

RCOC Administration

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Board Update

Consumer Joins RCOC Board

Stefanie Vitali, an RCOC consumer who has cerebral palsy, has joined the Board of Directors for a one-year term that began on September 3, 2015. A resident of Mission Viejo, Stefanie enjoys horseback riding, and socializing with friends through social media. She also has an interest in learning more about autism, since she interacts with consumers with autism at her day program.

In her personal statement describing why she wished to serve on the Board, Stefanie described the frustrations that people with disabilities sometimes experience with programs and services, and

expressed her desire to help create positive change and ensure that people get the services they need.

"I would like to give people without voices, a voice," she said.



Stefanie Vitali

In addition to serving on the Board, Stefanie also is on the Consumers' Advisory Committee.

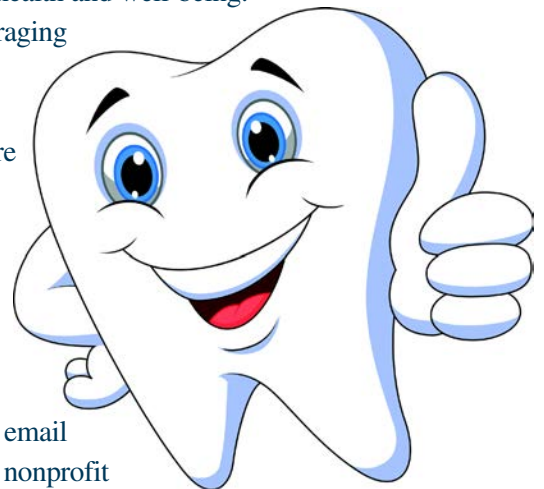
Dental Care Survey

At RCOC, we believe that dental health is an important aspect of overall health and well-being.

So, we are encouraging

consumers, parents and caregivers to share their experiences with dental care and services in Orange County. To participate in the online survey, go to www.rmorgancorp.org.

Survey responses are completely confidential. If you have questions, please email Rhys Burchill, chair of the nonprofit organization R. Morgan, Inc. which is conducting the survey, at rmorgancorp@yahoo.com.



Executive Director's Report

RCOC Launches Health, Wellness and Safety Initiative

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

For more than 15 years, RCOC has participated in the National Core Indicators (NCI) project, which surveys consumers and families on a broad range of issues, helping to measure quality of life as well as satisfaction with services and supports, and identify trends and evolving needs among those we serve.

Among the areas covered by NCI surveys, and additional RCOC data, is consumer health and wellness. The good news is the data show that a lower percentage of the RCOC adult consumers who were interviewed are overweight or obese (having a Body Mass Index, or BMI, of 25 or higher) as compared to both the California and national average. A higher percentage of them are also engaging in moderate physical activity. However, neither figure reflects the high level of health and wellness we would like for those we serve.

In addition, almost one-third of the adults served by RCOC are prescribed psychotropic medications and nearly two-thirds of those individuals are overweight or obese. And a closer look at the data reveals that the percentage of adult consumers with a BMI of 25+ is highest among those in independent living and supported

living arrangements – 70 percent and 65 percent, respectively.

In response to this information, RCOC's Board of Directors adopted a Health, Wellness and Safety Initiative earlier this year. Its mission is to foster



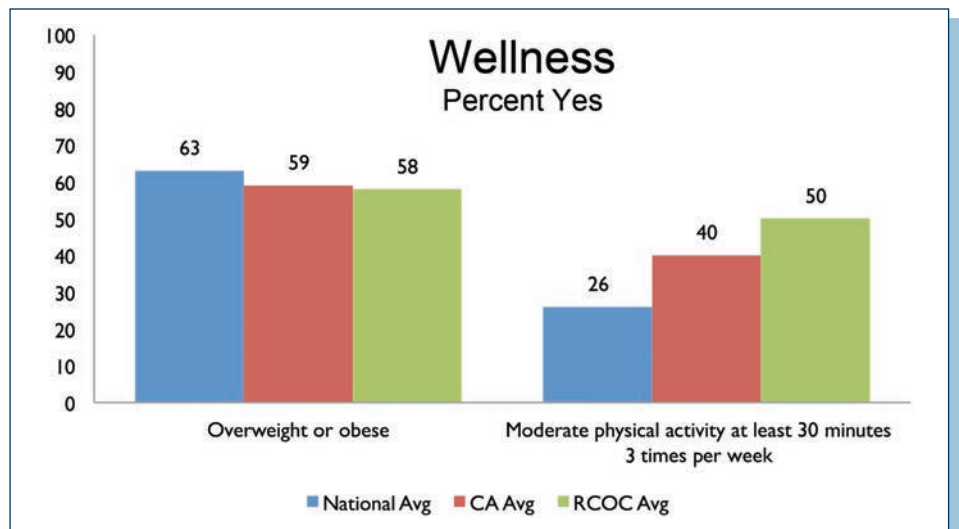
healthy lifestyle options to reduce health risk factors and improve the overall well-being of those we serve. The Board also created an ad hoc task force, chaired by RCOC's Chief

Clinical Officer LeeAnn Christian, to develop implementation details and evaluation criteria for the Initiative by year's end.

The task force had its first meeting in July and met again in September. Based on their review of the NCI survey results and other available data, the task force decided that adult consumers in independent and supported living arrangements would be the most appropriate group to target for the Initiative's first efforts. That's because these consumers have the highest prevalence of overweight

or obesity. They also have a lower usage of psychotropic medications, which would indicate their weight issues are not driven by medications, but other factors such as poor diet, lack of exercise and other unhealthy lifestyle choices. Additionally, the task force concluded that consumers in those living arrangements are typically more independent, in terms of daily life decisions, and may be more motivated to achieve a healthier lifestyle that facilitates greater independence. The task force is now working with RCOC's Policies and Outcomes Board Committee on the details of how to recruit consumers to participate in a pilot lifestyle change intervention.

While the focus now is on adult consumers, we're confident that the Initiative's many inter-related components will work together to help improve the health and wellness of all RCOC consumers. Our hope is that when the next NCI consumer survey is performed, these and other efforts and activities arising from RCOC's Health, Wellness and Safety Initiative will result in measurable improvement in the wellness and well-being of those we serve.



Consumer Corner

Living The Good Life IS Possible!

By Fernando Peña, Consumers' Advisory Committee Chair and Jess Corey, RCOC Consumer Advocate

Everyone had a great time at the Third Annual Self Determination Conference and a lot of information was shared to help people do things the way they want. If you've ever wondered what it might be like on your own or have wanted to share your story, this was the conference for you. With a focus on

self-advocacy, employment, independent living and health, there was something



Fernando Peña



Jess Corey

for everyone at the conference. Many of the people who attended the event shared their stories and motivated others to live the life they want. "You can do it" was a major theme of the day.

The conference also included a health and information fair. RCOC's Consumer's Advisory Committee (CAC) had a booth at the fair and members

of the CAC were there to answer questions and provide support to conference attendees. We passed out CAC brochures to be sure that everyone knows they can contact us anytime. Our email address is CAC@rcocdd.com.

The CAC's focus on giving voice to the nearly 10,000 adults served by RCOC was a driving force in making sure this event was the best it could be. We want to be sure that adults in every living arrangement have a voice. After all, everyone deserves to live the good life!

From the Consumer Advocate...

Recently, Fernando Peña and I attended the Supported Life Conference in Sacramento. We spoke with fellow advocates, heard great presentations and connected with individuals who are strong advocates for people with disabilities.

We learned that many of the things we are concerned about at RCOC are also issues throughout California. The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, Competitive Integrated Employment and housing are on everyone's mind. Therefore, I am constantly gathering information about these things and sharing it with anyone who will listen!

In addition to serving on the Consumers' Advisory Committee, I also serve on the National Core Indicators Advisory Council and the Health, Wellness and Safety Initiative Task Force. These are great opportunities for me to advocate on your behalf.

As your Consumer Advocate, I encourage you to learn about these topics. And remember, there are no bad questions so call or email me anytime! You can reach me at (714) 796-5135 or at jcorey@rcocdd.com. I'm here to serve.

Tony Meagher continued from page 1.

These days, he also enjoys going to places like Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm, the Orange County Fair and baseball games – all things he wasn't able to do before because there was too much walking involved.

"I was always the one who had to sit," he said.

Brian Nesdale, Tony's RCOC service coordinator for the past 13 years, remembers Tony as someone who was always more or less heavysset. Like the typical American population, many adults with developmental disabilities struggle with their weight. However, at their quarterly meeting in 2013, Brian expressed his concerns about the effect of Tony's more recent weight gain, on both his health and his quality of life.

"It became extremely evident that something needed to be done," he said. "His legs did not look right."

A little more than two years later, Tony has reached his goal weight.

After that meeting, Brian requested a nursing assessment for Tony, which then led to an increase in service levels with Independent Endeavors, his supported living service provider.

Liz Turner, Tony's supported living coach, had been doing visits two times a week to help with basic household tasks. However, to meet his increased need for nutrition support and healthy meals, RCOC eventually increased Liz's visit schedule to twice a day. That's because, over time, it became clear that a very high level of support was needed to help Tony make significant progress improving his health and wellness.



Tony Meagher's "before" pictures, when he weighed more than 300 pounds.

Under the supervision of Tony's doctor, who checked on his progress every three months, the team came up with a moderate calorie meal plan. At first, Liz would leave a week's worth of food for Tony. However, since he also had a problem with binge eating, it was determined that daily visits were needed to support him in keeping to his meal plan and helping him to learn to make better food choices.

In fact, while he has learned a lot about making healthier choices in his life, Tony's challenges with food are not over. Liz continues to work with him on having a pantry or freezer of food and not binging.

And though Tony is now very active, it was only after he had lost about thirty pounds that he began exercising. He began slowly, with short walks around his apartment complex, gradually building up his strength and stamina.

"He had to lose weight before he was able to even walk," said Liz. However, once Tony was able to move more comfortably, there was no stopping him. His mother purchased a Nordic Trak machine for his home, and it's now Tony's favorite way to exercise. He's in such excellent physical shape now

that he runs on it every day for 20 minutes, at one of the highest speeds.

People who know how much weight he's lost often ask Tony how he did it. He always tells them it wasn't easy, and that the keys to his success have been portion control and exercise. He says he still enjoys a lot of the same foods he ate before, but in smaller portions. When he's out to dinner, he often chooses fish or chicken, which he's learned are often lower in calories. And while he still eats beef, he no longer eats the hamburgers that were a big contributor to his weight gain.

Brian sees Tony as a role model, both for others with developmental disabilities and the typical population.

"What he's accomplished is amazing for anybody," said Brian. "He has a lot to be proud of."

Meanwhile, Tony simply hopes that other consumers can benefit from reading his story, possibly preventing the sorts of health problems he experienced.

"Don't wait," he said. "Start [to lose weight] before you get sick."

“Living the Good Life” Third Annual Self-Determination Conference

This year’s Orange County Self-Determination Conference, themed “Living the Good Life,” was the biggest and best-attended in the event’s three-year history. More than 170 adult consumers, most of them in either supported living or independent living situations, gathered at the Elks Lodge in Santa Ana on Saturday, October 24 for an all-day conference organized by and for them.

The day began with a welcome from RCOC Executive Director Larry Landauer and Sam Durbin of Integrity House, which organized the event.

Since employment and a home are key components of “the good life” for most people, the conference devoted a significant amount of time to panel discussions on those topics. The employment panel, which took place in the morning, included Joseph Nacario, and Linda Seppala from Integrated Resources

Institute, and RCOC’s employment consultant Linda O’Neal, who spoke about the different types of employment available in Orange County. Monique Tapia, an RCOC consumer, shared her personal employment experiences and took questions from the audience.

The housing panel which took place in the afternoon, included Larry Landauer, Gary Frazier from Acacia Housing and Patricia Whitaker of Innovative Housing Opportunities, who shared new developments in the local housing environment and information on things for consumers to consider when evaluating their housing options.

Rhys Burchill, one of Orange County’s long-time parent-advocates, provided consumers with an update on California’s self-determination project.

Consumer advocates Sam Durbin and Sean Sullivan shared the stage and delivered presentations that were both inspiring and encouraging, as they told their personal stories of seeking and succeeding in making a good life for themselves



in the community, then invited consumers from the audience to share their own personal stories.

The RCOC Consumers’ Advisory Committee (CAC), which advises the Board on issues important to consumers, also addressed the conference. CAC members, all of whom are consumers, include chair Fernando Peña, Sylvia Delgado, Sam Durbin, Stephen Gersten, John Godlasky, Peter Kuo, Palak Shah, Sean Sullivan, Stefanie Vitali and RCOC Consumer Advocate Jyusse “Jess” Corey.

Among the many highlights was a consumer-produced video that addressed the process of locating a home. With consumers performing all the parts, the video covered things like who is involved in the process, the types of resources that are available, and the challenges a consumer might face in selecting the right place to live.

Many consumers have expressed interest in learning more about self-advocacy, so there was also a workshop where they were able to

See “Living the Good Life” on page 7.



“Living the Good Life” continued from page 6.

connect with like-minded peers as well as support professionals to help them coordinate a self-advocacy group in their area.

Following the day’s many informative and educational segments, consumers enjoyed the conclusion of the conference – a fun hour of dancing and socializing, with a photo booth, popcorn and snow cones.

Throughout the day and during breaks, consumers also had access to an information fair that featured booths and displays by Kaiser Permanente, Western University School of Pharmacy, American Heart Association, West Coast University Dental Hygiene, Orange County’s Clients’ Rights Advocate and RCOC’s Consumers’ Advisory Committee.



RCOC Families to Receive National Core Indicators Surveys

From mid-November through March 2016, parents and guardians of children ages 3 to 18 who receive services from RCOC and live at home should be on the look-out for National Core Indicators (NCI) surveys being distributed by the State Council on Developmental Disabilities. The survey takes just 15-20 minutes to complete, and families’ responses are taken very seriously by RCOC and its Board of Directors. It is a great opportunity to provide input on key areas like information and service planning, choice and control, access and support delivery, community inclusion, satisfaction, and outcomes. Everyone receiving the survey will also be provided with a phone number to call if they need an interpreter or other assistance to complete the survey.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

Due to the holiday season, there will be no Behavior Management Workshops in November or December. These workshops, which RCOC offers free to parents, will resume after the first of the year. A schedule of upcoming workshops will be printed in the next issue of *Dialogue* and will be posted on RCOC’s website (www.rcocdd.com). From the home page, click on Family Support, then on Parent Training.



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Orange Office

3111 N. Tustin, Suite 150
 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-3700

Westminster Office

5555 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite 100
 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-2900

Wellness Tips for Families

The weight loss journey of Tony Meagher, featured in this issue’s Consumer Spotlight, is amazing and remarkable. If his story inspires you to adopt a healthier lifestyle, here are some sensible tips to help you and your family achieve your wellness goals.

Check with Your Doctor: Especially if you have diabetes or other serious health issues, it’s important to get checked out before starting any new diet or exercise program.

Start Small: Gradual changes, like switching from donuts to granola and yogurt for breakfast, are easier to keep up over time than if you try to change everything at once. So start small and build on your successes.

Get a Wellness Buddy: Good habits are easier to stick with when others in the household are also following them. If you live alone, find a friend who shares your wellness goals and support each other.

Don’t Get Discouraged: Even if you overeat one day, forget to exercise, or regain some weight you’ve lost, don’t give up. Developing good eating and exercise habits takes time, and the important thing is to stay positive. See each new day as a new opportunity to be healthier!

