

DIALOGUE

A Quarterly Publication of the Regional Center of Orange County

VOLUME 38 NO. 2 • SPRING 2024



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

2024 Spotlight Award Honorees

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY HOSTED ITS 27TH ANNUAL SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

celebration on April 18 at Garden Grove's Embassy Suites, with around 300 people attending. Special guest emcee Lesley Marin, on-air anchor and reporter for KCAL News and CBS Los Angeles, joined RCOC Board Chair Chip Wright and Executive Director Larry Landauer to present the awards. Here are snapshots about the honorees.

Self-Advocate: Nick Westphalen

A person-served by RCOC, Nick was honored for bringing greater awareness of and recognition to the abilities of people with developmental disabilities in Orange County. A role model for others, he successfully lives in his own apartment and is an active member of the community. A self-professed people person, he enjoys daily walks to Starbucks and the market and serves on the Project Independence volunteer board of directors, bringing his perspective and experiences and providing support to his peers.



(L-R): RCOC Executive Director Larry Landauer, Self-Advocate Honoree Nick Westphalen, KCAL News and CBS Los Angeles On-Air Anchor and Reporter Lesley Marin, RCOC Board Chair Chip Wright.

Direct Support Professional: Daisy Guy

Daisy was honored for providing compassionate care and support for the past 15 years, assisting the person she serves to grow, mature and overcome a number of challenges. With her support, the person she serves was able to attend numerous classes at Saddleback College, and engage in a wide range of enriching outings to the library, bookstore, the mall, movie theater, parties and more.

Service Provider: Dreams of America

Dreams of America Founder Tala Fazeli and her team create person-centered programs that go above and beyond to ensure participants are involved in planning their own programs and creating their own goals, with staff treating them not just as equals, but like family. When another large program in Orange County closed its doors, leaving hundreds of individuals with extremely limited options, Dreams of America stepped up to make space for many of them.

Cont. on Page 7

DIALOGUE

This newsletter can also be read online at RCOC's website:

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Clifford Amsden, Vice Chair
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Rick Perez

Please check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for the most up-to-date information regarding Board meeting dates and format.

RCOC Administration

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Marta Vasquez, Chief Financial Officer
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Arturo Cazares, Director of Community Services
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Carie Otto, West Area Manager
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Jack Stanton, Associate Director of Housing
Sean Watson, Associate Director, Risk Management

BUDGET UPDATE

Enormous State Budget Shortfall Could Impact Regional Center Services

AS HAS BEEN REPORTED IN THE NEWS, CALIFORNIA IS AGAIN FACING AN ENORMOUS STATE BUDGET SHORTFALL. In the proposed 2024-2025 budget he issued in January, Governor Newsom estimated the deficit at \$38 billion, while the non-partisan Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) has more recently estimated the deficit at \$53 billion and perhaps as high as \$73 billion.

Budget Process

State law requires the Governor to submit a revised budget in May (commonly referred to as the "May Revise") that takes into account the latest budget and revenue figures. The Legislature then deliberates on the budget and must pass a balanced budget bill by June 15. The final version of the budget bill goes into effect on July 1, the first day of the new fiscal year.

The non-partisan Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) has more recently estimated the deficit at \$53 billion and perhaps as high as \$73 billion.

Because the final budget bill is typically subject to negotiations with the Governor and often involves compromises, we don't yet know how services and supports for Californians with developmental disabilities might be affected.

Service Provider Rate Increases May be Delayed

In his January budget proposal, Governor Newsom called for delaying service provider rate increases that were expected to take effect July 1, 2024. These increased rates were originally recommended as baselines in the 2019 Department of Developmental Services Rate Study.

While RCOC and other regional centers have advocated strongly for full implementation of the rate study since it was released, as part of the current fiscal year's budget agreement, the Governor and Legislature decided to enact just half of the needed rate increases. The remaining rate increases were expected to go into effect at the start of the 2024-2025 fiscal year, but that is now uncertain.

For the latest budget news, go to the Department of Finance's budget website at www.ebudget.ca.gov or the DDS website at www.dds.ca.gov/transparency/budget-information.

RCOC Opposes Plan to Delay Rate Increase for Service Providers

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director



AS SHARED IN THE STORY ON PAGE 2, BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE WERE ONGOING WHILE THIS NEWSLETTER WAS IN PRODUCTION.

However, RCOC is very concerned

about the Governor's proposal to delay the service provider rate increase expected to go into effect on July 1, 2024.

We and other regional centers are speaking forcefully and with one voice to express our firm belief that such a delay will have serious impacts on access, equity and quality of services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. In addition, our Board of Directors and individual Board members have communicated directly with our Orange County delegation and other legislators in key budget-related positions to convey our concerns.

RCOC is very concerned about the Governor's proposal to delay the service provider rate increase expected to go into effect on July 1, 2024.

We in Orange County have always supported responsible budgeting and recognize savings must be found that will balance the state budget. However, the focus should be on savings that would be least harmful to the 430,000 Californians with developmental disabilities who rely on us for life-critical services and supports.

Throughout my career, I've been proud to point to California's Lanterman Act which created an entitlement to services in the community. A unique and admirable commitment to the most vulnerable among us, it prevented Californians

from facing the years-long wait lists common for those with disabilities seeking help in other states. It is shameful that wait lists for vital services are tolerated. However, they are inevitable if our Legislature fails to appropriate the funds necessary to keep the Lanterman Promise.

Simply holding the line on funding is not a viable solution. In addition to growth of our population, we have all felt the pinch of inflation which makes even the expected rate increases insufficient to cover today's actual costs of doing business.

The focus should be on savings that would be least harmful to the 430,000 Californians with developmental disabilities who rely on us for life-critical services and supports.

Already, individuals and families are facing delays in getting services underway as service providers are not able to offer wages sufficient to attract enough direct care workers to properly staff day programs, supported and independent living, and more. We think it is not a coincidence that RCOC has seen an increase in families needing crisis supports over the last few years. At the same time, crisis service providers are among those struggling to retain and grow their staffs.

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Making good on the long-awaited service provider rate increase will go a long way toward stabilizing our system and preserving the entitlement to needed services and supports embodied in the Lanterman Act.

PERSON-TO-PERSON

What Person-Centered Thinking Means to Us

By Yvonne Kluttz, PAC Chair and Amy Jessee, PAC Co-Chair



A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, RCOC COMMITTED TO BECOMING A PERSON-CENTERED ORGANIZATION. As persons served, we wanted to share what person-centered thinking has meant in our day-to-day lives.

In the past, adults like us were often denied opportunities to, for example, live on our own in the community because others thought the risks were too great. However, the core concept of person-centered thinking is balance. We and our planning teams work to balance what's important for us (such as health and safety), with what's important to us (achieving our dreams for a meaningful and happy life).



Person-centered thinking has helped us find our own voices and learn to advocate for ourselves.

Having solid family support has been great, as person-centered thinking has helped us find our own voices and learn to advocate for ourselves. For both of us, that has led to more independent and self-directed lives, and the ability to give back and help others.

Amy is happy to live a very active and engaged life in the community, and wants other adults with disabilities to know that if she can do it, anyone can do it. Yvonne does, as well, and says that for her, person-centered thinking is mostly about understanding that people are more than their disabilities, and respecting their unique qualities, strengths and hopes.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

These workshops are free for parents, and offered via Zoom. They cover basic principles of positive behavior management, with a practical focus on helping parents change their own behavior and that of their children. Parents are actively involved, and invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. To gain the most value from the experience, parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in the series. Toilet training is the focus of the last session. Advance registration is required. Contact your Service Coordinator for additional information, and to register.



Presented in English by Advanced Behavioral

When: Thursday evenings – August 1, August 8, August 15, August 22 and August 29

Time: 5:30-8:00 p.m.



EVERYDAY WELLNESS: How to Get Enough Vitamin D

VITAMIN D HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN FOR ITS ROLE IN MAINTAINING STRONG BONES. More recently we've learned it's also important for immune health, muscle function, heart health, and even brain health. The great news is that our bodies can make Vitamin D when exposed to direct sunlight.

As little as 10-30 minutes a day outdoors can be enough for most people, especially in sunny climates like Southern California. In addition to helping our bodies make Vitamin D, time we spend sitting out in our front or backyards, doing any exercise activity outdoors, or simply getting out and about in our neighborhood, can help reduce stress and encourage mindfulness.

Our bodies can make Vitamin D when exposed to direct sunlight.

Unfortunately, National Institutes of Health (NIH) studies indicate that large numbers of Americans don't get enough Vitamin D, with the highest rates of deficiency seen in Blacks and Hispanics. This is thought to be primarily because pigmentation reduces Vitamin D production in the skin. However, those with lighter skin tones may also not get enough Vitamin D, either due to the use of sunscreen or simply because they aren't able to be outdoors.

We can also get Vitamin D in many foods, such as egg yolks, fortified dairy products, and fatty fish like salmon and sardines. The combination of direct sunlight and Vitamin D-rich foods may be enough for some people, but often supplements are needed to ensure adequate Vitamin D levels.

When taken in appropriate doses, Vitamin D is generally considered safe, but too much of it can be harmful. It can also interact with certain medications, so always consult with your physician before taking Vitamin D or any other supplement.

Updated Recreation Resource Guide

Click on the QR code or go to www.rcocdd.com/community-support to download RCOC's updated Recreation Resource Guide in English, Spanish or Vietnamese.



ABC's of Special Education

Transitioning from Early Start to Special Education Preschool



IN OUR LAST ISSUE, WE SHARED TIPS FOR IEP (INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM) TRANSITION MEETINGS, GENERALLY. Beginning with this column, we're sharing some key points about the various types of transitions, starting with the first one young families experience: the transition from Early Start services from RCOC, to either school-based services when a child is eligible for special education, or to a community-based program when a child still needs support but is not eligible for special education.

How the Transition Begins

Since Early Start ends on a child's third birthday, a transition planning meeting takes place no later than three months before that birthday. Including the parent or caregiver, RCOC Service Coordinator and a school district representative, the purpose is to discuss the child's needs and the range of options (special education options, community programs, public and private preschool, etc.), along with timelines and next steps, in preparation for a special education assessment by the school district. Parents and/or caregivers have a crucial role, sharing important insights about the child for both the assessment and the development of the IEP which covers goals, placement, and/or necessary support services.

To help make this transition as seamless as possible, RCOC regularly hosts "Moving On at 3" virtual workshops to educate and support parents.

Early Start Transition Support from RCOC

To help make this transition as seamless as possible, RCOC regularly hosts "Moving On at 3" virtual workshops to educate and support parents before, during and after their child's third birthday. Topics include assessment and eligibility determination for school district services, the IEP meeting, and ongoing eligibility for Regional Center services, including Provisional Eligibility until age five. The next workshop takes place on **June 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m.** The workshop is offered in English, with Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean interpreters. Attend and receive free gifts! Parents can register online by visiting RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com) and locating the event on the Events Calendar.

While plenty of information is available online to help parents navigate this transition, it's important to remember you can always ask for help from your RCOC Service Coordinator.

2024 Spotlight Award Honorees, cont.

Parent/Family Member: Jinsook Baek



The mother of a son served by RCOC, Jinsook was honored for her efforts over the past two decades to help Korean-speaking families better understand developmental disabilities and the services available through the Regional Center. What began as just one parent support group has grown into a nonprofit organization, Being Built Together (BBT) to assist individuals without full access to obtain needed services.

Community Partner: Studio D: Arts School for All Abilities

Segerstrom Center for the Arts' Studio D: Arts School for All Abilities was honored for creating an inclusive space for students of all abilities to explore and develop their creative potential through high quality, joyful instruction in musical theater, dance and music that focuses on capabilities and growth.

RCOC Achievement: Jennifer Castle

Employed by RCOC for 19 years and serving as Early Start Area Supervisor for ten years, Jennifer works with some of our youngest persons served, bringing reassurance, warmth, and calm expertise to families while ensuring that Early Start Service Coordinators are equipped with good information and the most current research to help youngsters thrive.



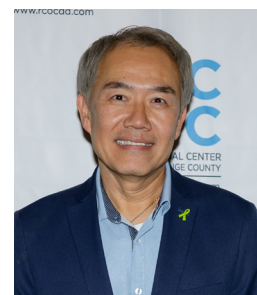
Employer: Gelson's Market

Employing individuals with disabilities in Dana Point and across all their stores, Gelson's was honored for accommodating and treating

everyone who works for them with respect. Leading by example, the company proves that a workforce that includes people with developmental disabilities can create a positive environment for both customers and employees.

Healthcare Professional: Clayton Chau, MD, PhD

Dr. Chau has held numerous leadership positions in healthcare organizations in Orange County and was honored for his consistent efforts to promote inclusivity for people with developmental disabilities.



As Medical Director for CalOptima Behavioral Health, for example, he worked to ensure that people with autism and other developmental disabilities received needed behavioral and mental health care.

Lifetime Achievement: Linda O'Neal



For more than four decades, Linda has dedicated her life to enhancing the lives of students with disabilities, touching countless lives through her work in a diverse range of high-impact roles with Irvine Valley College, Irvine Unified School District,

Orange County Local Partnership Agreement Committee, Project SEARCH, and many others. A true champion for ensuring that all individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to be a vital part of their communities through work and community integration, Linda has always been an advocate for those with the most severe challenges.

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INSIDE

In the Spotlight: 2024 Spotlight Award Honorees.....1

Enormous State Budget Shortfall Could Impact Regional Center Services2

Executive Director’s Report3

Person to Person.....4

Behavior Management Workshops.....4

Everyday Wellness.....5

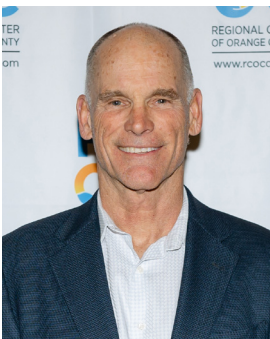
ABC’s of Special Education.....6

Regional Center of Orange County Locations

Santa Ana Office
1525 N. Tustin Avenue
24-hr Phone: 714.796.5100

Cypress Office
10803 Hope Street, Suite A
24-hr Phone: 714.796.2900

2024 Spotlight Award Honorees, cont.



E. Kurt Yeager Servant Leadership: Cliff Amsden

A departing RCOC board member and current Vice Chair, Cliff is the father of a daughter served by RCOC. He received the Servant Leadership award for his 14-year record of excellence in serving the organization and people with developmental disabilities. An honest, straight-forward person, his candor and ability to recognize challenges have made him an invaluable asset to the board and the Policies and Outcomes Committee he chaired for most of his term. His fellow board members and the entire RCOC community are grateful for his long-time advocacy, passion, and dedication to preserving our system of community-based support for those with developmental disabilities.

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY has prepared this insert especially for the individuals and families we serve who are most comfortable communicating in Spanish. These events, programs and activities are presented in Spanish and/or are geared specifically for those in Southern California's Hispanic community. However, some are not funded or endorsed by RCOC and this information is provided as a courtesy. If you know of other opportunities you would like to share with other Spanish speakers, please contact Comfort Connection Family Resource Center Parent Service Coordinator Giulia Rodriguez at 714.558.5402 or grodriguez@rcocdd.com.

Coffee Talk

Join other Spanish-speaking parents for informal conversation and education via Zoom. For information, contact Ingrid Jbeili at 714.558.5406 or ijbeili@rcocdd.com.

Tuesday, June 25

6-8 p.m.

Topic: Alternatives to Conservatorship

Presenter: Maria Rojas,

Office of Clients Rights Advocacy



TASK Webinar: Navigating Special Education

Team of Advocates for Special Kids (TASK) is offering this free, Spanish-language Zoom webinar to help parents learn about special education, the terminology used in meetings and in IEP documents, and tips for successfully navigating the special education system. To register and receive an invitation to join the Zoom meeting, go to the TASK website (www.taskca.org) and locate the event on the Calendar that appears under the Services tab.



Tuesday, June 18

10 a.m. to Noon

Moving On at 3...Transition Workshop

This transition workshop takes place virtually and aims to educate and support parents before, during and after their child's third birthday. Topics include assessment and eligibility determination for school district services, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, and ongoing eligibility for Regional Center services. Presented in English, Spanish translation may be provided when requested in advance. Register online via the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com). For information and for help with online registration, contact Patricia Garcia at 714.558.5400 or pgarcia@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, June 5

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Introduction to Social Recreation Activities



WITH SUMMER JUST AROUND THE CORNER, many families are beginning to look into summer programs and activities that can be fun, engaging and educational for their family members with special needs. RCOC's Recreation Resource Guide is available online (www.rcocdd.com/community-support) in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, and shares details about hundreds of social recreation activities throughout Orange County that may be funded by RCOC as part of an individual's IPP (Individual Program Plan). It also includes listings for programs that serve only those with disabilities; however, those non-integrated programs may not be paid for with Regional Center funds.

Programs Must be Inclusive to be Funded

A large share of California's developmental services budget comes from the federal government. Recently, the federal government instituted new rules that require federal funds only be spent on integrated programs (referred to as The Final Rule for Home & Community-Based Service [HCBS] compliance). That means programs, camps and sports leagues that are integrated and provide full access to the greater community can receive federal funds.

For that reason, it's important that families seeking to have social recreation activities funded by RCOC explore options where their child or adult family member can be included with typical individuals. Examples might include gyms, sports or arts programs that are open to the general public but also make accommodations for people with disabilities or offer classes or activities tailored to those with special needs.

Reimbursement vs. Direct Payment for Social Recreation

When a social recreation program is eligible for RCOC funding, there are currently two payment options. Many families prefer programs that have been pre-determined to comply with federal requirements and are vendored by RCOC, because they can be paid directly by RCOC. However, for other programs that comply with federal rules but are not yet vendored by RCOC, a family can consult their RCOC Service Coordinator about other payment methods, including the new participant-directed service option.

Programs, camps and sports leagues that are integrated and provide full access to the greater community can receive federal funds.

If you'd like to learn more about social recreation activities or would like help locating appropriate social recreation activities, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.

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Wednesday, June 5

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Thursday, September 26

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Communities Come Together Garden Grove

Enjoy an evening of family fun, safety education, resource information, and engagement with the Garden Grove Police Department and Orange County Fire Authority.

Wednesday, June 12 5-7 p.m.

Community Meeting Center
11300 Stanford Avenue in Garden Grove

City of Westminster Summer Activities

For information on these events, contact the Community Services & Recreation Department at 714.895.2860 or csronline@westminster-ca.gov.



Thursday Movie Nights take place July 11, July 18 and July 25 at the Civic Center Sunken Gardens, with free activities, crafts, contests and giveaways. Free movie showings begin at dusk. Food, drinks and desserts will be available for purchase.

Thursday Concerts take place August 1, August 8 and August 15 at the Civic Center Sunken Gardens. The evening concerts are free. Food, drinks and desserts will be available for purchase.

Safety Day on Wednesday, July 17 takes place at Sigler Park, 7200 Plaza Street. The event provides children and their families an opportunity to become familiar with the City's safety staff and services, and features demonstrations by the Westminster Police Department and Orange County Fire Authority.

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