

DIALOGUE

A Quarterly Publication of the Regional Center of Orange County

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Adult Family Home Agency Success: Sean Deffebach and the Popely Family

IN ORANGE COUNTY AND STATEWIDE, LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF ADULTS SERVED BY REGIONAL CENTERS LIVE IN ADULT FAMILY HOME AGENCY (AFHA) HOMES. AFHAs are residential options where one or two adults with developmental disabilities live in a family's personal home, much like biological family members would.

Not surprisingly, this is a very desirable option, both for individuals who desire to live permanently in a family setting and those who might wish to eventually live on their own but aren't ready for supported living or independent living.

The process for matching the family with Sean focused first on ensuring they could meet his needs, but also took into account personal compatibility and preferences.

In RCOC's experience, there is more interest in AFHAs than there are spaces available. Cheryl and Steve Popely, who have opened their Mission Viejo home to two young men served by RCOC, hope that sharing their story might encourage others to do the same. And, in doing so, experience the joy and fulfillment they have realized – first, decades ago, as adoptive parents, later as caregivers for seniors with Alzheimer's disease, and currently as AFHA caregivers for Sean Deffebach – a bright and outgoing 29-year-old with cerebral palsy – and one other young man served by RCOC.

The Popelys, who operate under the supervision of AFHA service provider Community Support Solutions (CSS), became familiar with the



Pictured (L-R): Steve Popely, Sean Deffebach, Cheryl Popely and RCOC Service Coordinator Deici Gonzalez-Tovar

Regional Center system because one of their eight adopted children has autism. Over the years, they became involved with others in the developmental disabilities community who

Cont. on Page 7

DIALOGUE

This newsletter can also be read online at RCOC's website: www.rcocdd.com.



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

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BUDGET UPDATE

Outlook for 2025 State Budget is Optimistic

EACH YEAR, THE NONPARTISAN LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE (LAO) PROVIDES TAX REVENUE ESTIMATES AND BUDGET ANALYSIS TO HELP THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE COMING YEAR'S BUDGET. For the current year, the LAO noted that tax revenues were actually running higher than many expected. This, combined with the January 1, 2025 implementation of the final phase of the long-awaited service provider rate increase, is good news for the people we serve.

We wanted to share this news because RCOC has heard from some who are concerned that potential cuts to social services at the federal level could impact local services.

While it is unknown what federal changes might take place, it's also important to remember that, unlike many other states, California's developmental services system does not rely solely on federal funding. In fact, only around one-third of our state's developmental services budget is funded by the federal government. Importantly, the LAO indicated that actions taken in fiscal year 2024-25 mean the budget appears roughly balanced for the coming 2025-26 fiscal year.



Holiday at the Capitol

Dean Becket (right), a person served by RCOC, and his mother Debby Becket (left) were invited to join Governor Gavin Newsom (center) for the annual lighting of the Capitol tree ceremony in Sacramento. Each year, the tree is decorated with ornaments hand made by children and adults with developmental disabilities.

RCOC Implements New IPP Template

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director



ON JANUARY 1, ALL OF CALIFORNIA'S 21 REGIONAL CENTERS BEGAN USING THE NEW STANDARDIZED INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM PLAN (IPP) TEMPLATE CREATED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES (DDS), which aims to improve services by making the planning process person-centered – no matter where you live in California. By ensuring consistency in the process, DDS also aims to enhance transparency and access to services and supports.

In my last column, I shared how RCOC would be using our Virtual Chart technology to make the process seamless for those we serve, while meeting state requirements. I am pleased to report that has gone very well. Your RCOC Service Coordinator has been trained in using the new IPP and you will continue to have the important, in-depth conversations with your Service Coordinator that ensure your IPP is person-centered and that your needs and

DDS also aims to enhance transparency and access to services and supports.

preferences drive the process. DDS has posted on its website a number of educational resources to help individuals and families better understand and be active and informed participants in their IPP meetings. For those wanting an in-depth understanding of the new IPP, I suggest viewing the recording of the online Community Training presented by DDS staff in December. The two-hour recording is posted on the DDS website and overviews the new IPP template, as well as the tools and resources the Department created to prepare people for what to expect.

There is also an IPP guide called “Your Plan” which aims to help persons served identify their preferences, strengths and goals, and learn about Person-Centered Planning. There are also places to write down notes and answers to key questions which you can bring to your IPP meeting. As of this writing, English and Spanish versions are posted on the site; however, DDS indicated that the Your Plan guide will soon be available in 11 different languages.

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Where to Learn More

To access all of the DDS resources surrounding the new IPP template, simply scan the QR code on this page using your mobile phone's QR code reader, or visit the DDS website at www.dds.ca.gov/rc/ipp/



If you have any questions about the new IPP or anything related to your services and supports, always feel free to reach out directly to your RCOC Service Coordinator.

Submit Your Spotlight Award Nominations Now!

Mark your calendar to attend RCOC's Spotlight Awards Gala on Friday, April 25! Tickets go on sale soon. And don't wait to get your award nominations completed, since **the deadline for submitting nominations is February 7.**

Visit www.rcocdd.com/spotlightawards to submit nominations online and view or print out award categories and judging criteria.

PERSON-TO-PERSON

Reflecting on a Season of Gratitude, Connection and Service

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



BETWEEN THE WISH TREE PROGRAM (SEE BELOW) AND THE SENSORY-FRIENDLY HOLIDAY PERFORMANCE STAGED BY IRVINE BARCLAY THEATRE (SEE BACK COVER), MANY INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES SERVED BY RCOC ENJOYED A BRIGHT HOLIDAY SEASON. Looking back on this past holiday season, both of us are reminded of the importance of solid relationships, whether with family or friends, and traditions that bring us closer to loved ones.

Yvonne hopes people are able to set aside their differences, whenever possible, and come together – not just during the holidays, but throughout the year. When that's not possible, she encourages other adults with disabilities to recognize they can still have warm holidays and a good life by giving their time, attention and love to those who accept and appreciate them.



Amy has a similar perspective, emphasizing how serving others can make life more meaningful. She recalls her first experience, while in college, of purchasing and delivering holiday food items to three families in need. The gratitude of those families moved her emotionally, and gave her a sense of purpose she'd never experienced before.

Thank You Wish Tree Donors!

Our Orange County community helped brighten the holidays for families in need, fulfilling the gift wishes of 641 adults and children we serve through RCOC's long-standing Wish Tree program. Major supporters included: Edwards Lifesciences, Footprints Behavioral Interventions, CASTO State President, Tricon Residential Inc., Giovanniello Law Group, Care Partners at Home, Aveanna Healthcare, and OneWell Health Care, along with dozens of other organizations and individuals, including RCOC Board members and employees. In addition, ABC7's Spark of Love program, in partnership with KWVE radio, donated 182 toys.



EVERYDAY WELLNESS: Reading Food Labels



A LOT OF PACKAGED FOODS ARE HIGH IN SATURATED FAT, SUGAR AND SODIUM - ALL OF WHICH ARE BEST CONSUMED IN MODERATION. Reading food labels – also called Nutrition Facts – is the best way to determine whether any packaged food you’re considering is truly a healthy choice. Here are a few key items to watch:

- **Calories:** This is usually the most prominent number on a label, but it refers to calories per serving, not calories per package. Look carefully to see how many servings are contained in the package.
- **Serving Size:** Many food makers’ nutritional labels include information for a much smaller serving than the average person would likely consume. For example, a single package of microwave popcorn may contain two or more servings. That means if you eat the whole thing, you could be getting a lot more calories and sodium than you think.
- **% Daily Value:** Next to each nutrient listed on the label, you’ll see a percentage, which

indicates how much a serving of the product contributes to a daily diet of 2,000 calories. If, for example, your doctor recommends limiting your salt intake, you’ll want to be sure to look at the Sodium line on the label. You could be surprised to learn that while many experts recommend limiting total salt intake to less than 2,000 milligrams per day, a single can of soup may contain upwards of 1,500 milligrams of sodium.

Understanding food labels is very important for making healthy food choices, so look for us to share more information on this topic in future issues.

Person Centered Thinking Workshops

This free two-hour workshop is offered February 25, March 25 and April 29 at RCOC’s Santa Ana office to educate parents and other adult caregivers about person-centered thinking. You’ll learn how to craft a detailed one-page “at-a-glance” description for your family member, which can be an important tool to help them get more person-centered care and support. Contact your Service Coordinator or visit the Events Calendar on RCOC’s website (www.rcocdd.com/events) to register.

ABC's of School Services

(formerly Special Education)

Transitioning from Elementary School to Middle School



IN THIS ISSUE, WE CONTINUE OUR SERIES ON SCHOOL TRANSITIONS FOR CHILDREN – THIS TIME, FOCUSING ON KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO MIDDLE SCHOOL.

Larger Campus with More Students

Middle school typically involves a larger campus and a larger student population. This can present social and navigational challenges. High-traffic areas like the cafeteria can sometimes become hotspots for social dynamics, including bullying. Open communication between parents, teachers, and school counselors is crucial for addressing bullying concerns effectively. Parents are encouraged to reach out to their child's teachers and the school counselor with any concerns or questions they may have.

Gym Class and Locker Use

Middle school students will typically be required to take physical education (gym) class, which often involves changes of clothing and the use of lockers. For students with fine motor skill deficits, parents may request a key-style lock instead of a combination lock. If you anticipate changing clothes in the locker room may be challenging for your child, ensure that necessary accommodations and supports are clearly outlined in the IEP.

Multiple Teachers

In middle school, students will have several different teachers. To foster a collaborative learning environment, consider emailing each of your child's teachers to introduce yourself and express your willingness to work together.

Visiting the campus prior to the start of school can help your child get familiar with the school's layout and locate their classrooms, reducing first-day anxiety.

The Transition Meeting

Early planning and collaboration are key to ensuring a smooth and successful transition to middle school. The middle school transition IEP meeting is a crucial opportunity to discuss and agree upon appropriate placement recommendations; conduct necessary school observations; and develop a comprehensive transition plan.

Requesting that a representative from the proposed middle school attend the IEP meeting is important, as they can provide valuable information about the school's programs, resources, and expectations.

Be sure to review the article on transition IEP meetings from the Winter 2024 issue of Dialogue, which is available on our website. And, remember, your RCOC Service Coordinator is available to answer your questions and provide support throughout the process. They can also attend the IEP transition meeting with you to offer insights and guidance.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Adult Family Home Agency Success: Sean Deffebach and the Popely Family, cont.

shared their passion for service and suggested they would be an ideal AFHA family.

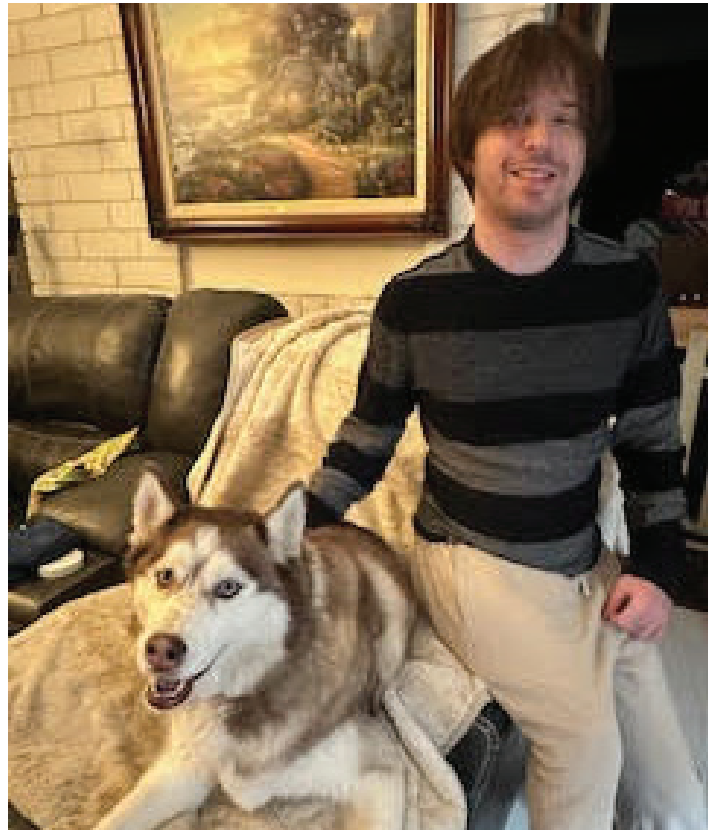
Cheryl noted that the process for matching the family with Sean focused first on ensuring they could meet his needs, but also took into account personal compatibility and preferences. After being matched “on paper” they met in person to get acquainted. That went well, so they proceeded with an initial stay that lasted a couple of weeks, to ensure it was a good fit for both Sean and the Popelys.

They have now been together for almost seven years, so it’s clearly a good situation for everyone involved. Sean is very independent, working at Farmer Boys restaurant as a cashier and enjoying an active social life with friends from work, friends from his church, and his own brother who lives in Dana Point.

A kind, optimistic and funny young man who easily makes friends, Sean is also a favorite of the Popely family dog, a husky named Mishka. “He walks in the door and the dog immediately wants his attention!” said Cheryl, laughing. The Popely’s relationship with the service provider, Community Support Solutions, offers a range of helpful and educational resources that simplify administrative requirements and enable Steve and Cheryl to focus on caregiving.

“They (CSS) operate monthly online training for families to make sure we’re up-to-date on safety and privacy issues, financial standards, administering medication, and also teach skills like communication and engagement, and how to foster cultural connections with people with different backgrounds,” said Cheryl.

When asked for her advice to others who might consider becoming AFHA caregivers, Cheryl sums it up by saying: “It’s all about family.”



Sean with Mishka, the Popely family dog.

“People are trying to achieve their best life, and you’re there to help them achieve it and to advocate for them,” she continued. “And it’s important to know that family extends in all different directions. Some biological families aren’t as close, while others are very involved. You just need to advocate for that person just as you would your own son or daughter.”

Interested in exploring the possibility of becoming an Adult Family Home Agency caregiver? Reach out to RCOC’s Community Resources team at resources@rcocdd.com for more information.



REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

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INSIDE

In the Spotlight: Adult Family Home Agency Success: Sean Deffebach and the Popely Family 1

Budget Update 2

Executive Director’s Report 3

Person-to-Person 4

Thank You Wish Tree Donors..... 4

Everyday Wellness..... 5

ABC’s of School Services 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

Irvine Barclay Theatre Hosts Holiday Event for RCOC Families

Nearly 700 individuals and families served by RCOC were treated to an abridged, sensory-friendly holiday performance of The Nutcracker ballet by Irvine Barclay Theatre. The event also included photos with the performers, therapy dogs, treats and holiday-themed crafts, and interactive musical activities with the Philharmonic Society of Orange County. Pictured are 15-year-old lifelong friends Cameron Withers (left) of Anaheim Hills and Joy Kim (right) of Irvine, both served by RCOC, who attended the performance.



REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY has prepared this insert especially for the individuals and families we serve who are most comfortable communicating in the Vietnamese language. These events, programs and activities are presented in Vietnamese and/or are geared specifically for those in Southern California's Vietnamese community. However, some are not funded or endorsed by RCOCC and this information is provided as a courtesy. If you know of other opportunities you would like to share with others in the Vietnamese community, please contact RCOCC's Derrick Nguyen at 714.558.5401 or dnguyen@rcocdd.com.

EGG Cellent Adventure

Ready for an "egg-stra" special day? Be sure to attend this egg-citing holiday attraction, right in the heart of Santa Ana. Bring the whole family over to Centennial Park to pick up colorful eggs, enjoy vendor giveaways and a pancake breakfast.

Saturday, April 19

9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Centennial Park

3000 W Edinger Avenue in Santa Ana



Garden Grove Strawberry Festival

Plan to attend the 65th Annual Garden Grove Strawberry Festival, which features rides and attractions, a parade, lots of contests for children, live music, games, vendor booths, and much more. Admission is free.

Friday, May 23

1 - 10 p.m.

Saturday, May 24 and Sunday May 25

10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Monday, May 26

10 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Village Green, located at Main and Euclid
12762 Main Street in Garden Grove



Living Options Outside the Family Home



ABOUT HALF OF THE PEOPLE RCOC SERVES ARE ADULTS, BUT THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THEM STILL LIVE IN THE FAMILY HOME. Living with parents can have advantages, especially when a young person isn't sure about what they want to do after graduating from high school. However, it's important for families to know that RCOC can help with a variety of services and supports that enable adults with developmental disabilities to live safely and independently in the community. And, the severity of a person's disabilities is never a barrier since RCOC can help find a suitable home where any individual's needs can be met.

Among those we serve who live outside the family home, the largest number reside in group homes that typically serve up to six adults with similar needs, while growing numbers receive supported living services (SLS) or independent living services (ILS), or live in Adult Family Home Agency (AFHA) homes like the one profiled in this issue's cover story. Though SLS, ILS and AFHAs are increasingly preferred, all of these living options nurture a person's life skills and independence.

This growing independence is a natural progression for adults with disabilities, and can be important for the person as his or her parents grow older and ultimately pass away. For example, when a person with disabilities chooses a supported living or independent living arrangement, their RCOC-funded service provider works one-on-one with them to help them perform, or learn to perform, important

daily life activities, such as grocery shopping, house cleaning, and meal preparation.

When the person with disabilities also has physical challenges, they may also qualify for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) which funds personal assistance for things like using the bathroom, bathing, and getting dressed. The specific services a person receives, regardless of where they reside, depends on the individual's needs. Since most adults with developmental disabilities have low incomes and usually can't afford the high cost of rent in Orange County, RCOC can also help them to access affordable housing or federal financial assistance for housing.

To learn more about the range of living options outside the family home, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.

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Red Carpet Ball

Be sure to register by March 1 to attend this gala dinner-dance for teens and adults with Down syndrome and their guests (age 15 and older). Hosted by the Down Syndrome Association of Orange County (DSAOC), the 1950's-themed event includes dinner, dancing to tunes spun by DJ Willpower, and group and individual photos. For information, call DSAOC at 714.540.5794.



Saturday, March 8
6-10 p.m. | Grand Theater in Anaheim

Cultivating Your Child's Speech and Language Skills

Attend this virtual presentation by RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center to gain valuable tips and information about activities you can do at home to increase your child's speech and language skills. For more information, contact Sandy Marquez-Gonzalez at 714.558.5404 or smarquezgonzalez@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, February 26
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Moving On at 3...Transition Workshop

This transition workshop takes place virtually, in English with Spanish interpretation. It 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. 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.

Thursday, March 20
6:30-8:30 p.m.

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Among those we serve who live outside the family home, the largest number reside in group homes that typically serve up to six adults with similar needs, while growing numbers receive supported living services (SLS) or independent living services (ILS), or live in Adult Family Home Agency (AFHA) homes like the one profiled in this issue's cover story. Though SLS, ILS and AFHAs are increasingly preferred, all of these living options nurture a person's life skills and independence.

This growing independence is a natural progression for adults with disabilities, and can be important for the person as his or her parents grow older and ultimately pass away. For example, when a person with disabilities chooses a supported living or independent living arrangement, their RCOC-funded service provider works one-on-one with them to help them perform, or learn to perform, important

daily life activities, such as grocery shopping, house cleaning, and meal preparation.

When the person with disabilities also has physical challenges, they may also qualify for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) which funds personal assistance for things like using the bathroom, bathing, and getting dressed. The specific services a person receives, regardless of where they reside, depends on the individual's needs. Since most adults with developmental disabilities have low incomes and usually can't afford the high cost of rent in Orange County, RCOC can also help them to access affordable housing or federal financial assistance for housing.

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Spring "Eggstravaganza"

Join the Easter Bunny for the City of Buena Park's annual Spring Eggstravaganza at Boisseranc Park. The free event features a petting zoo, bounce house, train rides, games, crafts, entertainment, photo opportunities, and more.

Saturday, April 19

8 a.m. to Noon

Boisseranc Park

7520 Dale Street in Buena Park



Fullerton Airport Day 2025

The City of Fullerton is proud of the rich history of the airport since its founding in 1928. Each year, the airport opens its doors to thousands of local visitors on Airport Day. The free event includes airplane and helicopter rides, interactive displays, model building, a kid's zone, food and lots of fun. Aircraft will be displayed in the "Transient" parking area inside the airport, just north of the terminal building and control tower.

Saturday, May 31

10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

4011 W Commonwealth Avenue

Fullerton



Living Options Outside the Family Home



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