



Dialogue

Volume 21 No. 1
Winter 2007

Consumer Spotlight

Omar Muñoz

The distance between Omar Muñoz' old home and his new one in Huntington Beach is not all that far. But when it comes to 31-year-old Omar's quality of life, the two places could not be farther apart.

The old place – a tiny garage apartment – had no kitchen and only a fraction of the living space he now enjoys. The new place is a well organized and tastefully furnished studio apartment. It is compact, but features a small kitchen that is perfect for Omar. An avid cook who likes to create his own recipes, he is now able to cook meals with his good friend Jody, another RCOC consumer who, like Omar, is served by independent living service (ILS) provider Independent Endeavor.

Omar was able to move into the apartment this past September because of RCOC's rental assistance program.

Omar was able to move into the apartment this past September because of RCOC's rental assistance program. (See *Transitioning to Adulthood* story on Page 6.)



An employee of Vons in Huntington Beach, Omar is very popular with both customers and fellow workers.

He earns money from his job as a Courtesy Clerk at Vons, where he bags groceries, helps customers to their cars with their purchases and collects shopping carts. However, the wages he earns together with his federal SSI (Supplemental Security Income) are not enough for him to afford an apartment – even a small studio. Omar qualified for a housing subsidy (Section 8 voucher) through the federal Housing and Urban Development Agency, and has been on the Section 8 waiting list. When RCOC initiated the rental assistance program, Omar became one of the first participants.

In addition to providing space for Omar to cook, another advantage of the new apartment is that it is near where he works. He is a valued employee at Vons in Huntington Beach, where he is known for being courteous and conscientious.

A bullet intended for someone else traveled through his head and exited out the back.

“Omar is an excellent worker,” said Jeff Anderson, the store's assistant

See **Omar Muñoz** page 11

Dialogue

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Dialogue can also be read online at RCOC's Web site: www.rcocdd.com.

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2007 Board Meetings

March 1 • May 3 • July 5

September 6 • November 1

The public is invited to attend. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. and are held in the Regional Center Board Room at 801 Civic Center Drive West, Santa Ana.

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RCOC Legislative Update

State Offers Incentives for Community-Based Employment Programs

By Wendel Starkey,
RCOC Board of Directors

Many of you have grown accustomed to seeing Tresa Oliveri's name and

face on this column. So, before getting into my topic for this column,

I want to introduce myself as the new chair of

the RCOC Board's Legislative Committee. I have served on the Board for four years, and assumed leadership of the Legislative Committee this past June. Since I am a consumer of RCOC services, my perspective may occasionally be somewhat different from Tresa's. I can only hope, though, to approach the standard she set for providing useful information about legislative issues and the terrific job she did chairing the Legislative Committee.



The budget for fiscal year 2006-07 includes a \$19.1 million boost for supported employment.

With several stories in this issue of *Dialogue* revolving around the needs

of consumers transitioning from school to work, I thought I should report on some related news with the state budget. In addition to the more broad-based cost-of-living increase service providers are receiving, the budget for fiscal year 2006-07 includes a \$19.1 million boost for supported employment.

DDS is authorized to use these new dollars to increase wages for direct care staff who work in integrated community-based employment programs.

Specifically, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is authorized to use these new dollars to increase wages for direct care staff who work in integrated community-based employment programs. The increase is also available to day programs and sheltered workshops that are converting to integrated community settings. One of the goals of the Governor and Legislature in providing these targeted financial incentives is to save state taxpayers money. That is because community-based employment support is often less costly than a traditional day program.

While saving money is a laudable goal, the most important thing about this funding increase is that it shows that our elected officials are coming to recognize the important role that a job and earned income play in the lives of adults with developmental disabilities and that such opportunities should ideally be set in the community, also a priority for RCOC.

Innovations in the Transition to Adult Services

By Bill Bowman, Chief Executive Officer

The vision set forth in the Lanterman Act is full community participation

for adults and children with developmental disabilities.

Innovations that we at RCOC and others are pioneering are helping to advance that vision. In this

issue of *Dialogue*, we focus

specifically on some of the new initiatives we have implemented to assist young men

and women who are graduating from public school programs and making the transition into RCOC's services and supports for adults (see *Transitioning to Adulthood* on Page 6).



Changing Dreams and Expectations

People transitioning out of public school programs into adult services have different dreams and expectations for their future than previous generations. Rather than traditional options, they desire and are preparing for an adult life that more closely mirrors that of their non-disabled peers. We are seeing many reject seclusion, instead choosing integration in all aspects of their lives.

This is not surprising, given the advances that have been made toward inclusive education for children with developmental disabilities. A child raised in a typical home, perhaps with siblings who do not have disabilities and whose school life has been spent predominantly in classrooms with typical peers, might naturally expect that inclusiveness to continue into adulthood.

People transitioning out of public school programs into adult services have different dreams and expectations for their future than previous generations.

Nowhere are the changing expectations more dramatic than in the areas of work and housing.

A Job with a Paycheck

Earlier generations of adults overwhelmingly chose conventional day programs or facility-based work, such as a sheltered workshop. Today's graduates show a strong inclination for competitive employment. They expect to work for a paycheck alongside co-workers who do not have disabilities.

Today's graduates show a strong inclination for competitive employment.

In response, RCOC's Board of Directors has made increasing the proportion of consumers who are employed, and facilitating their work choices, the focus of a major initiative. The Work Initiative team is partnering with service providers and businesses

to develop more and new work opportunities. They are also working to ensure that RCOC is proactive during the IPP process in helping consumers and families understand their choices in relation to work. Even if a person has attended a traditional day program for many years, and even if their disability is severe, integrated employment is still possible.

A Home of Their Own

The trend toward fully-integrated housing is just as clear. While group homes remain a popular and important living option, more young adults aspire to the maximum level of independence. For many, that means renting an apartment, with roommates of one's own choosing, in the mainstream community.

While group homes remain a popular and important living option, more young adults aspire to the maximum level of independence.

RCOC's rental assistance initiative is bridging the financial gap for consumers whose only barrier to independence is the lack of federal housing assistance. In the first three months of the program, we helped five adults with developmental disabilities realize their dreams of living on their own – a five-fold increase over the entire previous year.

These work and housing initiatives represent best practices in the school-to-work transition and in living options. Importantly, they represent a future in which life and expectations for people with developmental disabilities are not all that different from others in our community.

Consumer Advisory Team Update

Social Activities are Popular with CAT Members

By Jay Connor, CAT Chairman

The Consumer Advisory Team ended 2006 with meetings that focused on fun and social time together. In November, Janice Retz of Independent Endeavor presented a fashion show. Eight women and five

men who are CAT members had gone shopping with Independent Endeavor staff prior to the meeting, and then modeled their great clothing choices for the group. All of us enjoyed it, not just the models!

It is also a tradition that December's CAT meeting is a holiday party. We met for lunch at HomeTown Buffet, and you can see from the photos that we are a fun and diverse group!

Upcoming CAT Meeting Dates

February 21

March 21

April 18

May 16

June 20

CAT meetings are from 10 a.m. to noon at RCOC's Santa Ana office, 801 Civic Center Drive West. Call Betty Bath at (714) 796-5263 ahead of time to let her know you will be there.



Charles Quinones



Jay Hallett



(front left to right) Mariana Hatch, Mary Ayers, (back left to right) Celeste Whipple, John Helm



(front) Christopher Parker
(back left to right) Martha Woelfle, Thomasina Parker, Bob Woelfle



(left to right) Jay Connor, Robert Olea, Sam Durbin

The Consumer Advisory Team (CAT) is a group of consumers that meets once a month. The group discusses issues that are important to RCOC consumers, like advocacy and independence. The CAT chairman advises the RCOC board of directors about the group's concerns.

Staying Safe at Work

Many of you are graduating from school and moving into the workforce. Congratulations! Here at Stu's Safety Corner, we have some suggestions for staying SAFE on the job.

GET PREPARED

You are heading off to a new place, so take some time to figure out how to get there safely. Take a close friend, parent, or other trusted person to find your new bus stop, practice riding the bus route, learn where to get off and where to walk from there. Also check out your new job site. Get familiar with the surroundings and the places where you can find help if you need it. By your first day on the job, you will know exactly

where to go and will arrive right on time!

GET TO KNOW PEOPLE.

With a new job, you will have a chance to meet all kinds of new people. It can be fun and exciting to make new friends, but remember to take your time. There's no rush! Get to know people very well before you go to their house, invite them over to yours, or go with them somewhere after work. Even then, use the *buddy system* – bring along someone you already know and trust. And remember the *safety*

check – tell a trusted person where you are going, who you are with, and when you will be back.

GET SAFE!

All of the safety strategies you have learned for using the computer and using the telephone are just as important for staying safe at work. Never give out personal information such as your address, telephone number, pictures, credit card numbers, or passwords. When you are on the job, it should be all about how well you are getting your work done. It should never be about your personal life, so if anyone asks you for personal information, be sure to tell your new safe person on the job: your boss, supervisor, or job coach.



*Until next time
Safety Friends,
Safety Stu, the GET SAFE™
team, and Beary Safe*

Transitioning to Adulthood: RCOC's Work Initiative and Housing Resources for Independence

“Students graduating now have benefited from the great strides that have been made in terms of early intervention, educational techniques and therapies for people with developmental disabilities,” said RCOC Chief Operating Officer Janis White, Ed.D. “As parents and school districts collaborate more effectively to help children become more independent than ever before, RCOC has responded with more choices to enable students to maximize their potential as they move out as adults into the community.”

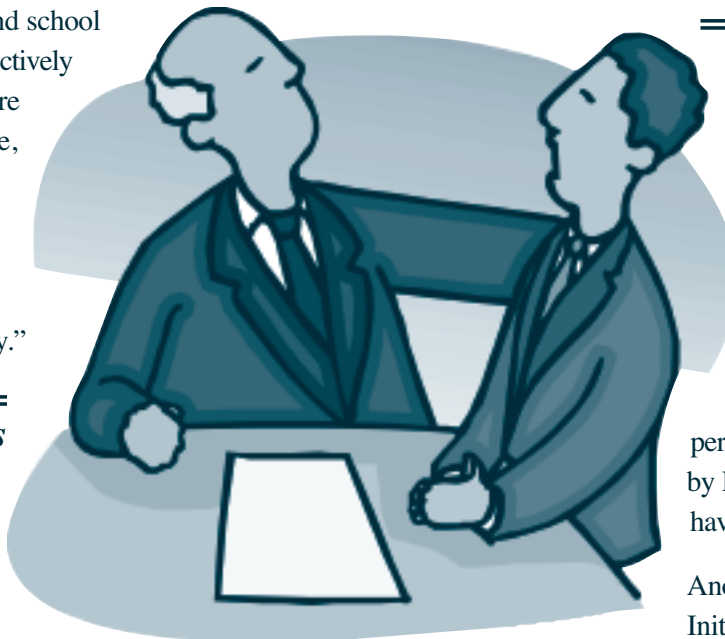
RCOC now authorizes service providers to begin working with the consumer before the actual transition takes place.

Here is a brief overview of some of the new and exciting supports that RCOC has initiated to help meet the needs of young men and women transitioning from school district programs into regional center adult services.

Integrated Employment

The last several years of a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) focus heavily on preparing him or her to leave school district

programs. Often, when a consumer wants to work, the IEP includes on-the-job training in the community. It works very similarly to supported employment services many adult consumers receive from Regional Center. To ensure a seamless transition from this on-the-job training program to supported employment, RCOC now authorizes service providers to begin working with the consumer before the actual transition takes place.



“Having those few months of overlapping services results in better continuity for the consumer and the family,” said RCOC's Adult Resource Coordinator Lonny Keefover. “We are also seeing consumers doing better and feeling more comfortable in the workplace because they and everyone in their circle of support are better prepared when the transition takes place.”

In partnership with service providers, RCOC is also collecting research data on how many consumers are working,

the number of hours they work, how much money they make in terms of wages and benefits, and their work environment – for example, integrated employment in the community or facility-based work such as a sheltered workshop.

68 percent of adult consumers surveyed by RCOC said they would like to have a paid job and earn money.

“In addition to providing a tool to measure our effectiveness in helping people get paying jobs, the data will give consumers and families more information about which service providers are most focused on achieving the goals and outcomes they desire,” Lonny said, noting that 68 percent of adult consumers surveyed by RCOC said they would like to have a paid job and earn money.

Another component of RCOC's Work Initiative involves outreach to area businesses. RCOC Board Chairman Jud Robert and Grandparent Autism Network Founder Bonnie Gillman are among the team members who will be focused on generating interest in employing people with developmental disabilities.

Rental Assistance

“Independence where you work and independence where you live go hand-in-hand,” Janis said, expressing RCOC's position that the center's new rental assistance program for consumers receiving supported

living services (SLS) is key to full community participation for many adults.

To qualify for rental assistance, a consumer must participate in SLS and be on the waiting list for federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 vouchers. They must also use HUD-qualified housing. Generally, RCOC pays the portion of rent that the federal government would pay, for as long as the consumer remains on the HUD waiting list.

RCOC's Consumer/Community Resources Director Larry Landauer encourages any consumer, not just young adults, to speak with their service coordinator about supported living if they have an interest in moving out on their own.

“With the right supports, virtually any consumer can be served with SLS.”

“With the right supports, virtually any consumer can be served with SLS,” he said. “Finding an affordable apartment is always a challenge and can take some time, but the type or degree of a person’s disability is no barrier to living more independently.”

Surprising to some is also the cost-effectiveness of this living option. In some parts of California, SLS costs have skyrocketed. However, as Larry points out, when responsible stewardship principles are followed the combination of rental assistance and SLS supports can be less than or



cost-neutral when compared to other residential options such as a group home.

RCOC and many service providers have programs to help consumers link up with suitable, compatible roommates.

“Hardly anyone – whether or not they have a disability – can afford to live alone in Orange County, so our guidelines typically require roommates,” he said, while noting that there are cases when a studio apartment, sized to accommodate only one person, also may be HUD-qualified.

Even so, the lack of a roommate should not be barrier. RCOC and many service providers have programs to help consumers link up with suitable, compatible roommates. Families also can be helpful in identifying possible roommates through personal friendships and support group networks.

If you have questions, or want more information about RCOC's work or rental assistance initiatives, be sure to contact your service coordinator.

Furnishing Hope Decorates Homes and Lives

Finding affordable furniture to decorate their new homes is one of the many details that face individuals embarking on an independent or supported living situation. For a number of RCOC consumers, a non-profit organization called Furnishing Hope has stepped in to transform empty apartments into welcoming living spaces.

Furnishing Hope was founded by Beth Phillips, an Orange County interior designer. It provides all types of furniture, as well as accessories and other home items free of charge to people in need. Items are of good quality, but may simply be either lightly-used or have a minor manufacturer's defect, such as loose strings or a misplaced tag.

For more information, talk to your service coordinator who will contact Furnishing Hope and work with you to complete their furnishings request form.



Criminal Justice Collaboration Yields New Resources for Consumers

Did you know that, as a regional center consumer, help is available from RCOC if you are the victim of a crime or if you are arrested by the police?

Your Rights

RCOC's Criminal Justice Issues Committee – with members representing law enforcement and the legal community, parents and other family members, advocates, and service providers – has produced a new brochure called *Your Rights*. This brief brochure includes helpful, easy-to-understand guidance for consumers who might be stopped by the police or arrested. It also has tips for family members on what they can do to support their relative under those circumstances.

“The brochure can't replace the legal advice of an attorney, but it can help consumers and families to be better informed,” said RCOC Consumer/Community Resources Director Larry Landauer, who chairs the Committee. “We hope that it will also encourage people to call RCOC and get the help they need to navigate the law enforcement bureaucracy.”

Free copies can be picked up in the lobby of any RCOC office. You can also request a copy from your service coordinator, or download it from RCOC's Web site at www.rcocdd.com.

Assistance with the Justice System

Efforts by the Criminal Justice Issues Committee, which was formed in 1999, have also yielded new services for people with developmental disabilities. The Get Safe Consumer Advocate Team, initiated in November, complements existing personal safety training programs aimed at preventing crimes against people with developmental disabilities.

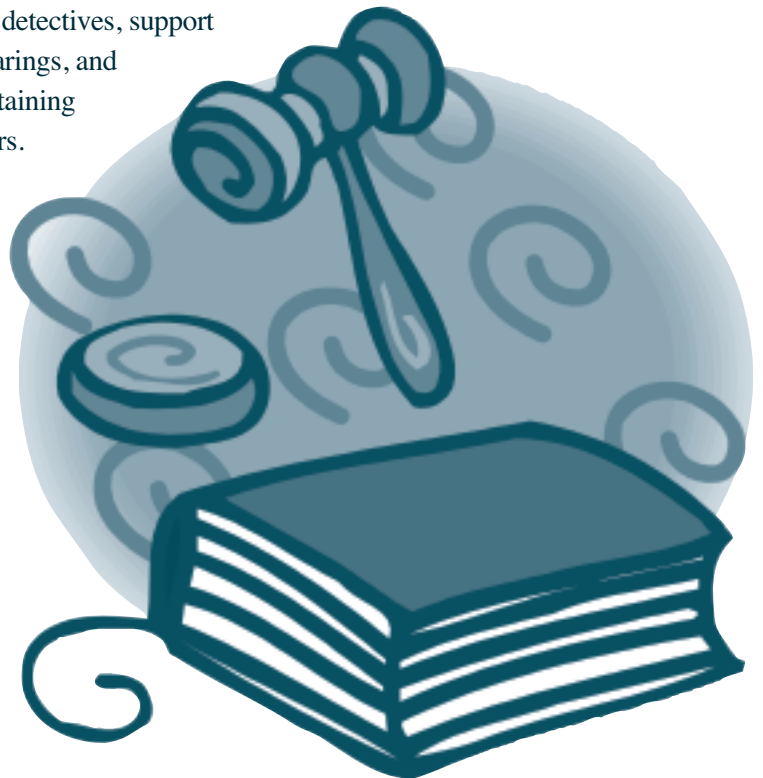
In addition to crisis intervention, the Team provides ongoing support to consumers who are victims of crime and to those alleged to have committed crimes. This can include, for example, help in communicating with investigators, transportation to interviews with detectives, support during court hearings, and assistance in obtaining restraining orders.

“When one of the people we serve is the victim of a crime, we want to make sure that proper procedures are followed to prosecute the offender and ensure justice,” said Larry. “And, if a regional center consumer is charged with a crime, we want to make sure that person's rights are protected within the court system.”

Consumers and families can get help from the Team by contacting their service coordinator. After hours, help is always available by calling **RCOC's Emergency Service hotline number: 714-796-5100**.

Emergency Alert Magnet

About a year ago, RCOC distributed a refrigerator magnet that had the emergency hotline number printed on it – a handy reminder for consumers, family members and service providers to contact RCOC if they have an encounter with law enforcement. If you did not receive a magnet or have misplaced yours and would like another, contact your service coordinator.



News from CalOptima

Get More Health Care Benefits with Free Medicare Part A

If you have Medi-Cal *and* Medicare Part B, you may also be able to get Medicare Part A benefits through the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program. When you have both Medicare Parts A and B, you can get more health care coverage and a greater choice of doctors, hospitals and other health care services.

There are three parts to the Medicare program:

- Medicare Part A - covers hospital services
- Medicare Part B - covers medical services such as doctor visits, supplies and other services
- Medicare Part D - covers prescription drugs.



We recently sent QMB program applications to members who may qualify for Part A benefits. If you received this mailing, you will need

to complete the application and return it to CalOptima before **March 20, 2007**. If you need another form, call our Customer Service Department at **(714) 246-8500** or toll-free at **1-888-587-8088**.

If you qualify for the QMB Program, the State of California will pay for your Medicare Part A premiums starting July 1, 2007. You will get a new Medicare card that says you have both Medicare Parts A and B.

If you are not sure what Medicare benefits you have now, call the U.S. Social Security Administration Office at **1-800-772-1213**. They can also provide more information on what you need to do to get Medicare Part A.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

Free Behavior Management Workshops are offered by Regional Center of Orange County. These four- or five- session workshops cover basic principles of positive behavior management, with a practical focus on helping parents of children with developmental disabilities change their own behavior and that of their children. Parents will be actively involved, and will be invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. When a fifth session is offered, the focus of the fifth session is toilet training. Parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in a workshop series. Advance reservations are required and group size is typically limited to 40-45 families. Contact Thelma Day at (714) 796-5223 for additional information and to register. *NOTE: Child care is not provided, so please do not bring children to the workshops.*

Behavior Management Workshop for Parents (4 sessions)

Presented in Spanish by Jose Rios, MS, BCBA

When: Wednesday evenings – Feb. 14, Feb. 21, Feb. 28 and March 7

Time: 6:30 - 9 p.m.

Location: RCOC Orange Office
3111 N. Tustin Street, Suite 150, Orange

Behavior Management Workshop for Parents with Toilet Training (5 sessions)

Presented in English by Julia F. Shaull, LCSW, BCBA

When: Monday mornings – Feb. 26, March 5, March 12, March 19 and March 26

Time: 10 a.m. - Noon

Location: RCOC Westminster Office
13950 Milton Avenue, Suite 200,
Westminster

Behavior Management Workshop for Parents with Toilet Training (5 sessions)

Presented in English by Melissa Sweitzer, Ph.D.

When: Monday evenings – March 26, April 2, April 9, April 16 and April 23

Time: 6:30 - 9 p.m.

Location: RCOC Orange Office
3111 N. Tustin Street, Suite 150, Orange

Wish Tree Makes the Holidays More Festive

RCOC's Wish Tree program helped to brighten the holiday season for around 1,400 consumers this year. The Wish Tree begins when low-income individuals and families served by RCOC fill out cards that bear their names and holiday gift requests. Those cards then decorate the Wish Tree. Donors fulfill the wishes – ranging from children's toys and clothes to music CDs and store gift cards – by delivering gifts to RCOC or making financial contributions that are used by volunteers to fulfill specific wishes from the Tree.



RCOC staff were virtually buried in gifts from generous donors to needy consumers this past holiday season. Getting gifts ready for delivery are (left to right – rear) RCOC service coordinators Jeff Johnson and Scarlett vonThenen. In the foreground is Training and Standards Coordinator Susan Lavelle, who co-chaired the East/Central Area's Wish Tree activities.

Thank You Wish Tree Donors

The generosity of many Orange County individuals, businesses and community organizations is what makes the Wish Tree program such a success each year. We are grateful to everyone who participated, including those listed below that provided major support. And special thanks to the dozens of volunteers from every RCOC area office who fulfilled wishes, shopped, and wrapped gifts.

American Suzuki
Ameritrust Mortgage Company
Brea Senior Center
Brea United Methodist Church
California Edison
Cambrian Homecare
The Carden Academy
Casto Transportation/Orange Unified School District
Christ Prebyterian Church in Huntington Beach
Circle City Cabinets
City of Brea Community Services
City of Brea Disposal Company
City of Brea "Om for the Holidays" Yoga Class benefit
Costco Wholesale
DMJMH&N
Girl Scout Saddleback Service Unit 1
Girl Scout Troop 437 – Kathy Lauderdale, troop leader
Law Office of Ross, Dixon, Bell LLP
The Lawing Family
Bill and Sharen Leahy
The Learning Experience
Let It Rain Roofing
Lion's Club, Anaheim Chapter
Mattel
Micro Specialties
NPL/Southwest Administrators
Pacific Life Good Guys
Rudy's Pub & Grill, Newport Beach
Soroptimists
Toys for Tots U.S. Marine Corp at Los Alamitos
UCI Pediatrics
Wildermuth Environmental, Inc.
Winways
7-Eleven

Omar Muñoz (continued from page 1)

manager. “We know we can count on him to do his job well, and his attention to detail helps keep our store and parking lot in shipshape.”



Omar enjoys cooking for himself and friends in his apartment kitchen.

Omar has held other interesting jobs over the years. He has loaded packages for UPS, been employed at a 24 Hour Fitness gym, and even worked at a pet store. His favorite, though, was what he called “a real man-job” that he did alongside his father. Preparing locations to become landfill sites, he filled and loaded sand bags. It was hard work, but he liked being outdoors and working with his dad. Omar currently receives individual supported employment assistance from Goodwill Industries of Orange County.

Among his most prized possessions is a set of meticulously maintained Callaway golf clubs.

Fourteen years ago, it is likely that no one other than Fidel and Guillermina

Muñoz, Omar’s father and mother, would have predicted that he would be capable of doing that type of work and living independently as he does.

At the age of 17, then a typical high school student in Garden Grove, Omar was shot in the face. A bullet intended for someone else traveled through his head and exited out the back. Clinically dead for three minutes, he was not expected to survive. If he did make it, it was expected that he would be unable to ever walk, speak or do anything on his own. Still, the family stayed strong in their faith, and Omar defied the odds. After many long months of therapy, hard work and determination, he regained many of his capacities.

Mild mental retardation and cerebral palsy, both resulting from the accident, qualify him to receive Regional Center services and supports.



Omar (right) plays golf regularly with his friend Jim Wakefield (left).

Fidel and Guillermina Muñoz now live in Phoenix, Arizona. Though Omar briefly moved to Phoenix to be

with them, he missed his life here and soon moved back.

Omar likes to hang out with friends after work. They go out to dinner or sometimes play pool at a local bar. But his real passion is golf. Among his most prized possessions is a set of meticulously maintained Callaway golf clubs – the most prized of which is his *Big Bertha* driver. On Sundays, Omar generally can be found on the Navy Golf Course in Cypress playing golf with longtime friend Jim.

“He has always had a lot of friends, some he has stayed close to since childhood.”

“Omar has always liked to participate in sports,” said Guillermina, noting that Omar often starts his day with a workout at 24 Hour Fitness. He also likes to play basketball at the gym with his friend Jason.

“Omar is a good friend – thoughtful and generous,” Guillermina said proudly of her son. “He has always had a lot of friends, some he has stayed close to since childhood.” She told of one friend of Omar’s who was hospitalized. Omar insisted on staying at the hospital day after day until his friend was well and released.

A symbol of Omar’s dedication to his friends is displayed in his new apartment. A beautiful wall hanging in an Aztec design was a gift from a close friend when Omar was a teenager. Like he has his friends, Omar has kept the gift in a place of honor ever since.

RCOC Thanks the 2006 Spotlight Award Sponsors For Their Generosity

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Thank you

Regional Center of Orange County Locations

Santa Ana Office	Orange Office	San Juan Capistrano Office	Westminster Office
801 Civic Center Dr. West 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-5100	3111 N. Tustin, Suite 150 24-hr Phone: (714) 685-5555	26311 Junipero Serra Rd., Ste. 180 24-hr Phone: (949) 234-8800	13950 Milton Ave., Suite 200 24-hr Phone: (714) 889-7200

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Dialogue Newsletter

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