



# Dialogue

Volume 26 No. 1  
Winter 2012

## Consumer Spotlight

### Sarah Obie

In her white evening gown, sparkling tiara, and pageant sash, Sarah Obie smiled and waved to the crowd as she carried her bouquet of red roses down the runway. Just crowned Miss Huntington Beach Special Needs, the Edison High School student had been selected from about a dozen contestants who competed for the honor.

Sarah said that modeling was her favorite part of the pageant, which included each girl wearing her favorite casual outfit, then eveningwear, but also a one-on-one interview that allowed each contestant to showcase her personality for the judges. Judges included an actual beauty pageant winner, a children's book author, and Edison High School's principal. Since she won this year's competition, Sarah is excited that she will get to help crown next year's winner.

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*Sarah said that modeling was her favorite part of the pageant.*

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The event this past November was the second year for the pageant – the brainchild of another remarkable



Sarah Obie and her mother Flora Obie.

young Orange County woman: Katelyn Gutierrez. Katelyn had become friends with some of her school's students with special needs through cheerleading, and created the event as part of a senior project at Edison. Enlisting friends as volunteers to set-up, help the girls get ready, and escort the contestants on stage, she also approached local

businesses to underwrite event costs. Even Katelyn's mother, Denise, got involved. On pageant day, Denise, who owns D G Salon in Huntington Beach, closed her shop so that she and other volunteer stylists and makeup artists could help the pageant contestants get ready to look their best.

What started as a school project has become something much bigger, both for Katelyn and for the girls with disabilities who participate. While Katelyn has graduated and now attends Orange Coast College, she plans to continue organizing the pageant and hopes it will grow. Someday, she hopes to crown a Miss California Special Needs.

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*Sarah is also an avid cheerleader for her older brother.*

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The money the event raises, mostly through ticket sales, is donated to Edison's special needs cheer squad,

See **Sarah Obie** page 7

## Spotlight Tickets on Sale Now

Don't miss the Spotlight Awards Dinner Dance on **Friday, March 16** at the Crowne Plaza Anaheim Resort! Ticket prices are \$45 per person. The event usually sells out, so don't wait to buy your ticket. Go to [www.rcoodd.com](http://www.rcoodd.com) and click on "Spotlight Awards Tickets" to print out a reservation form. For more information, call Integrity House at (714) 542-1964.

## 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 Web site: [www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com).

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### 2012 Board Meetings

March 1 • April 5 • May 3

There is no board meeting in June

The public is invited to attend RCOC board meetings. They begin at 6 p.m. and take place in the first floor 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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## Budget Update

### Governor Unveils Budget Proposal for FY2012-13

Governor Jerry Brown released his budget proposal for fiscal 2012-2013 in early January. His plan increases the developmental services budget to cover new consumers who are expected to become eligible for regional center services, and allows the 4.25% cut in payments to service providers to expire on June 30, 2012. These are encouraging developments. However, this is just the beginning of the budget process.

As expected, the \$100 million mid-year budget cut that took effect on January 1 will be carried over into the coming budget year – amounting to \$200 million for the full 2012-2013 fiscal year. The savings the system has achieved this year from, for example, new rules and reforms, has been higher than expected; however, since some of the current year's reductions were achieved with "one time" savings, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) will need to come up with new

ideas for ensuring that the \$200 million cost reduction is achieved. It is expected that DDS will share its plan soon, perhaps as early as April.

### Other Issues Affecting the Budget

It is also important to note that while the Governor's plan is "balanced" – meaning that the amount he intends to spend equals the amount of money he expects the state to receive – it does depend on the voters agreeing to around \$7 billion in new taxes. This would include raising taxes on high-income Californians and a one-half percent increase in the state's sales tax.

In addition, a judge recently blocked more than \$600 million in cuts to Medi-Cal from going into effect. If that and other cuts blocked by judges are upheld by higher courts, it could lead to cuts in other areas of state government. Also, the State Controller has warned that California's cash situation continues to face pressure, as tax revenues continue to be less than projected and costs are higher than planned.

### Next Steps in the Budget Process

The next step in the process is for the Legislature to take up the Governor's plan. They are expected to propose their own ideas and to hold hearings in the coming months to get input from the public. As always, RCOC will follow the situation closely and post information on our website as it becomes available. For the most current information, go to RCOC's website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)) and click on "Latest Budget News."



## Executive Director's Report

# Professionals and Volunteers Both Essential to Successful Community Care

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

In my last column, I reflected on how the Lanterman Act and the principles that gave rise to it have guided Regional Center of Orange County's (RCOC) response to the severe budget challenges that we and the system as a whole have faced in recent years. In fact, since 2009, the community care system has received no less than 44 separate budget-related mandates. Between legislation, budget cuts, payment reductions, and administrative changes issued by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), these mandates have trimmed almost \$1 billion from the system.

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As someone who has spent his entire career serving people with disabilities, I can confirm that many of these mandates represent much-needed system reforms that promote better stewardship and transparency. And I think it is important to remember that, for all of the funding cuts the system has absorbed and all of the changes we have implemented,

the Lanterman Promise has endured. The vast majority of changes have been kept far from consumers and families, and no regional center has been asked to alter an Individual Program Plan (IPP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) to save money.



This is the good news – the silver lining on what has been a dark cloud for many service providers who have been on the frontline during the years of rate freezes, budget

cuts and payment reductions that have challenged our system.

Nobody who provides services to people with disabilities expects to make a lot of money. Their rewards are largely intangible – knowing they are making a positive difference in people's lives, and helping to make the world a better place for people of all abilities. However, these intangibles cannot pay the mortgage on a group home, or the ever-increasing insurance premiums and high fuel prices that affect every California business and organization.

More reforms, especially to address these service provider challenges, are needed. However, some Californians appear to reject further reform, instead envisioning a future without the Lanterman Act. I, respectfully, disagree.

Time and again, the regional center system created by the Lanterman Act has evolved to meet changing consumer and family needs, along with increased expectations for accountability and transparency. I believe we are equal to these new challenges as well, and that among the keys to our success is the

unique balance between professional staff and parent/consumer volunteers that characterizes well-run regional centers.

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***Many of these mandates represent much-needed system reforms.***

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For example, at RCOC the volunteers who serve on our Board understand that they have a solemn duty to serve the interests of the community at-large and of future consumers and families. While I hold the title of Executive Director, I report to the Board. They entrust me with the authority to accomplish the policy goals they set, and hold me responsible for the regional center's performance. I and my senior staff have years of experience and knowledge, which the Board respects. They seek our advice and guidance on policy matters, but we have different and clearly-defined roles created to serve the mission and purpose of the regional center.

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***Among the keys to our success is the unique balance between professional staff and parent/consumer volunteers.***

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It is a remarkably effective and balanced approach to meeting consumer needs and solving problems. It is sensible, also, since no one has more at stake in the future viability of the regional center system of community care than those who rely on it.



## Consumer Advisory Team Update

### Holiday Party Was A Hit With CAT Members

By Jay Connor, CAT Chairman

In keeping with our holiday tradition, the Consumer Advisory Team got together for a special luncheon in December. This year's event was a lot of fun. We sang holiday songs, played Bingo and visited with friends while we enjoyed pizza and sandwiches.



A highlight of the day was a visit by Santa Claus, who took a break from his busy week at the North Pole to greet and pose for photos with consumers and give out prizes to the Bingo winners. I thought I would share with you some of the photos from the event.

If you are interested in getting to know some new people, and learning more about important issues for consumers, please consider attending our next Consumer Advisory Team meeting.

## Upcoming CAT Meeting Dates

March 21  
April 18  
May 16  
June 20  
July 18

CAT meetings are from 10 a.m. to noon at RCOC's new office in Santa Ana, located at 1525 North Tustin Avenue. Call Nancy Mata at (714) 796-5217 ahead of time to let her know you will be there.



Top left: Andrew Ataris with Santa Claus.  
Top middle photo (L-R): Santa Claus, Mike Murphy and Charles Quinones.  
Top right: Santa Claus with Mary Ayres.  
Bottom left: Carol Oberst and Janice Kane.



## Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

**R**egional Center of Orange County offers these workshops at no cost to parents. To gain the most value from them, parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in a series. The Behavior Management workshop covers essential 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. In all of the workshops, parents are actively involved, and invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. Advance reservations are required and group size is typically limited to 35-40 families.

Contact your service coordinator or Thelma Day at (714) 796-5223 to register or for information on the dates, times and locations of additional workshops being scheduled for this Spring and Summer.

*NOTE: Child care is not provided, so please do not bring children to the workshops.*

### **Behavior Management Workshop with Toilet Training (5 sessions)**

*Presented in Spanish: by Eva Urena, M.A., BCBA, and Juliana Menchaca, B.S. (Footprints)*

**When:** Thursday evenings – February 23, March 1, March 8, March 15 and March 22  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

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

### **Behavior Management Workshop with Toilet Training (5 sessions)**

*Presented in Vietnamese*

**When:** Tuesday evenings – March 27, April 3, April 10, April 17 and April 24  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Westminster Office  
5555 Garden Grove Boulevard, Suite 100

### **Behavior Management Workshop with Toilet Training (5 sessions)**

*Presented in English: by Dr. Joyce Tu, Ed.D., BCBA (Center for Behavioral Sciences)*

**When:** Thursday evenings – April 5, April 12, April 19, April 26 and May 3  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Santa Ana Office  
1525 N. Tustin Avenue  
Parking is located in the structure across from the RCOC office building

## Students with Special Needs Cheer for Their Teams

**F**ans of the “Glee” television show saw Lauren Potter, an actress who has Down Syndrome, try out for the high school’s cheerleading squad and make the team! But what fans might not know is that high school students with developmental disabilities are participating on cheer squads and dance teams all over the country. Sarah Obie, the RCOC consumer spotlighted in this issue’s cover story, participates in Edison High School’s program, along with several of her

friends who also have disabilities. Segerstrom High School in Santa Ana also has its own “Spirit Squad” in which students with special needs participate and cheer alongside their typical peers. The students – with and without disabilities – who participate say that including students of all abilities makes cheering more fun for everyone, and boosts school spirit.

For those who attend schools that do not yet offer the opportunity

for those with special needs to participate, a student-run organization called The Sparkle Effect ([www.thesparkleeffect.org](http://www.thesparkleeffect.org)) offers free information on starting a school-based cheer or dance team for students with disabilities. The site offers a quick-start guide, ideas for raising money to support the program and buy uniforms, and tips for creating the squad and having successful practice sessions.

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# RCOC Families Benefit from Parent Training

The moms and dads who attend the free behavior management workshops RCOC hosts may be a diverse group of individuals with different interests and backgrounds, but they have something very important in common: they are the parents of children with challenging behaviors who are hoping that the workshops and the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques they offer will help. RCOC has good news for these and other parents facing the same issues – with the active involvement of parents in the process, ABA does work.

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*“We leave every class with a new skill that we immediately use at home.”*

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Brandee and Chris Ramirez, parents of a young boy with autism, have seen a huge improvement in their son’s behaviors, and that of their other three children, since they started attending the workshops. “Every class has been so practical,” said Brandee, who is a school teacher with a Master’s degree in Education. “We leave every class with a new skill that we immediately use at home.”

## Research Supports Parent Training

The reports from families are backed up by scientific research that supports the value of parent training. As with most skills, the behaviors a child learns through ABA require practice and consistency. Since parents know

their children better than anyone, and spend so much time with them in a variety of circumstances, parents are in an ideal position to support the professional-led interventions their child receives.

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*Parents are in an ideal position to support the professional-led interventions their child receives.*

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RCOC’s behavioral services agencies also say that parents who have attended the free workshops are better prepared for in-home behavioral services because they have learned some basic information about ABA. In addition, since behavior services are not open-ended, parent training imparts critical knowledge and understanding to enable parents and other caregivers to maintain the child’s skills when formal services by professionals come to an end.

The benefits to children learning new skills and maintaining them is, however, just the beginning. Research shows that the whole family’s well-being is improved when parents are trained to participate actively in their children’s care. For example, studies have shown that providing parent training reduces parental stress and increases parental optimism.

## Interactive Training

While parents overwhelmingly report positive experiences with the workshops, RCOC is always looking for ways to make the sessions better

and more useful. Parents who attend are asked to provide feedback, and their input is used to improve future sessions. For example, workshops have become more interactive and parents are now invited to discuss specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. The response to these changes has been very favorable, so RCOC is looking for more ways to increase the amount of time parents have to speak with the trainer about their own situations.

## Training on the Web

In an effort to provide more flexibility for families, and take advantage of the cost-savings that technology can enable, RCOC is now exploring a variety of new options.

For example, RCOC is working on creating an online orientation to give parents an idea of what they can expect from behavior services, and an understanding of the process and family commitment involved to help them decide whether behavior services are right for their family.

In addition, RCOC is exploring the potential for more flexible scheduling for some workshops to make them easier for more parents to attend.

For details on training currently available, check the schedule on page 5. If you think you might be interested in participating, contact your service coordinator or Thelma Day at (714) 796-5223 for additional information regarding dates, times and locations, and to register.



## Sarah Obie

(continued from page 1)

of which Sarah is a member. Now sixteen and very outgoing and sociable, Sarah is also an avid cheerleader for her older brother, Les, who played quarterback for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and will be playing professional football with a new spring league this year. Sarah's mother, Flora, says football runs in the family since her husband, Lester Obie, was also a star player in college and the family, including Sarah's sister Jackie and niece Hope, attend many games together.

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*Through her father,  
Sarah is on the official  
roll of the Yurok Tribe.*

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As much as she loves to cheer on others, Sarah also likes to play sports like basketball and soccer, and she joins in a host of other school activities, such as Best Buddies. She is quick to name math as her favorite subject – because she and the class sometimes get to go off campus to go shopping!

A natural performer, who especially enjoys singing, Sarah used to be involved with the International Children's Choir in Long Beach.



Sarah performed with the International Children's Choir in Native American attire.

While with that group, she and her mother traveled to New York City for performances at Ground Zero and at the United Nations building. She has also performed at Disneyland and at the Los Angeles Coliseum, attired in a costume that honors her Native American heritage. Through her father, Sarah is on the official roll of the Yurok Tribe. With nearly 5,000 enrolled members, it is California's largest tribe. With her family, Sarah has visited ancestral sites by the Klamath River area in Northern California.



Pictured clockwise, from left: Miss California's Outstanding Teen 2009 Monica Stainer, Edison High School Principal D'liese Melendrez, Katelyn Gutierrez and Sarah Obie.

## 2012 Pageant Information

**K**atelyn Gurierrez is already organizing the 2012 pageant, which will take place in November. Those interested in volunteering, donating or participating can check her pageant Facebook page for more information at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Miss-Huntington-Beach-Special-Needs/200898393307627>.

# Angel Mesa: Homecoming Princess



Angel Mesa with her father Dale Soto.

The Miss Huntington Beach Special Needs pageant is one of many examples of the Orange County community’s increasing acceptance and inclusion of young people with developmental disabilities. In her senior year at Tustin High School, Angel Mesa (pictured left), an RCOCC consumer who has Down Syndrome, was selected as one of five members of the school’s Homecoming Court.

While one of the other four princesses was ultimately selected as homecoming queen for 2010, Angel was just a few votes behind and was chosen as first runner-up by her fellow Tustin High School students. For Angel, who blogged about her experience on the Down Syndrome Association of Orange County’s website ([www.dsaoc.org/blog](http://www.dsaoc.org/blog)): “It was a dream come true!”

Since that Homecoming, Angel has graduated and is now in a transition program. Among many other activities, she participates in a dance class at Santa Ana College. She also loves animals and volunteers at the Orange County Animal Shelter.

## Regional Center of Orange County Locations

### Santa Ana Office

1525 N. Tustin Avenue  
24-hr Phone: (714) 796-5100

### 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

### Dialogue Newsletter

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Regional Center of Orange County  
P.O. Box 22010  
Santa Ana, CA 92702-2010



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