

Consumer Spotlight

Shannon Gulley

If anybody would know what it's like for a person with developmental disabilities to live on her own, it is Shannon Gulley. Now 45 years old, Shannon – who has autism and a mild intellectual disability – moved into her first apartment when she was just 20 years old.

She currently lives in a one-bedroom apartment in Irvine, but over the years, she has had apartments in Westminster, Anaheim, Orange and Huntington Beach. She has liked something about most of the places she has lived, but Huntington Beach was special.

“I liked living close to the beach,” she said, mentioning the fun she has jumping over the waves and boogie boarding during the warm summer months.

Shannon moved into her first apartment when she was just 20 years old.

Tonya Hernandez, owner and administrator at Independent Living Solutions, which has been Shannon's independent living services (ILS)



Shannon Gulley (above) in her apartment and (left) with her boyfriend Dave.

provider for about four years, said that while Shannon is a very happy and outgoing person, she has had her ups and downs. But she has grown tremendously in the past couple of years.

“Her self-esteem has grown,” said Tonya. “She also used to be shy, but she has opened up a lot.”

Independent Living Solutions staff member Jerilyn Marzett helps Shannon two days a week with a variety of supports, from meal planning and grocery shopping,

to money management and self-advocacy. Tonya and the others on the ILS team who work with Shannon have been so impressed with how she has handled her challenges, coped with adversity, and achieved goals that they named her “Consumer of the Year” at the company's annual picnic last year. The honor came with a framed certificate, a purse, and a \$100 shopping spree that Shannon used to go shopping for new clothes.

However, her ILS provider isn't the only organization that has noticed Shannon's abilities. She has worked at Albertsons for just over a year, and has already been honored for her safety awareness and attention to detail in her job as a courtesy clerk.

See **Shannon Gulley** on page 7

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.

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Upcoming 2013 Board Meetings

March 7 • April 4 • May 2 • June 6
July 11 • August 1

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

RCOC Administration

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Legislative Update

Budget Update

On January 10, Governor Brown unveiled his proposed budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year. It generally contained good news for people with developmental disabilities and their families because it did not include any new cuts in funding for regional centers. In fact, the Governor has proposed a small increase to accommodate growth in the number of individuals with developmental disabilities eligible for services, and changes in consumer service needs.

If the 1.25% cut in payments ends, it will restore \$46.7 million to service providers.

The other very good piece of news is that it assumes that the 1.25% cut in payments to service providers will end as scheduled on June 30, 2013. This cut in payments has been very challenging for service providers struggling to hold on to good staff and maintain good quality services. If the 1.25% cut in payments ends, it

will restore \$46.7 million to service providers during the year.

At the same time, the Governor's budget proposal calls for making permanent the Annual Family Program Fee. This fee, which is only assessed on higher-income families, amounts to \$150 or \$200 per family, and saves \$7.2 million.

The next step in the process is for members of the Assembly and State Senate to review and analyze the Governor's plan, and to propose their own budget ideas. It will probably not be until April or May before we know more about what the next year's budget will contain, but we are hopeful that the economy will continue to get better and improve California's budget outlook.

The Governor's budget proposal calls for making permanent the Annual Family Program Fee.

For the latest information about the state budget, be sure to visit the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com). From the home page, click on News & Events and then Legislation & Budget.

Get Your Spotlight Tickets Before They Sell Out!

The RCOC Spotlight Awards Dinner and Dance is always a sell-out, and tickets must be purchased in advance, so be sure to get yours while they're still available. This year's event takes place on Friday, March 22 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Anaheim. Tickets are \$45 per person and can be purchased by downloading a reservation form from the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com) and then mailing it, with payment, to Integrity House which is organizing the event. If you have questions, or would like to pay by phone with a credit card, please call Integrity House at (714) 542-0855, ext. 248.

Executive Director's Report

RCOC Working to Expand Housing Options for Consumers

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

Most people aren't familiar with California State Senate Bill 812 (2010) which amended Section 65583 of the Government Code relating to housing, but this bill is one that many of us hope will make a big difference in the lives of people with developmental disabilities. That's because it requires California cities and counties to analyze the housing needs of people with disabilities in their area, and to incorporate that analysis into their general housing plan.

Addressing the lack of affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities has long been a priority at RCOC.

Addressing the lack of affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities has long been a priority at RCOC. A large percentage of those we currently serve are children. Like their typical peers, almost all of these children live in their family home with their parents. However, it is important that we are prepared to meet their future needs --

especially in the area of housing – as they make the transition to adulthood.

That's why we are so active in encouraging families to begin transition planning early. It is also why we have made it such a priority to assist consumers in accessing housing subsidies from the federal government – sometimes called “HUD vouchers” or “Section 8 vouchers.” (See related story on page 6.) And it is why we've



taken the initiative to ensure that as SB 812 is implemented, county and city planners and council members for Orange County's 34 cities understand the needs of those we serve.

RCOC's Housing Community Advisory Council is leading a key element in our effort, which is to identify when housing issues will be discussed at city council meetings, and to mobilize volunteers to attend and advocate on behalf of those with developmental disabilities. All it takes is a few parents, family members or consumers in each area to make a big difference. If you're not able to attend meetings in-person, you can still help. RCOC can provide contact information and suggestions for calling, e-mailing or writing letters to your local city council members, mayors and city planning officials. Anyone interested in participating can e-mail us at ddhousing@rcocdd.com.

It's important for those making public policy and planning decisions to understand the diversity of

individuals with disabilities. For example, the needs of a person with cerebral palsy can be very different from those of a person with autism or Down syndrome. However, we also want them to know that with the right services and supports, virtually every consumer – even those with the most severe challenges – can live safely and with dignity in the community.

The fact is that living options for consumers in Orange County are as varied and diverse as the individuals we serve. Though the majority of people we serve have very low incomes, with federal housing subsidies, almost all of them can afford an apartment. And while we're finding more and more young adults choosing Independent Living or Supported Living situations, many people still prefer a group home or a family home agency environment because they want to be around other people more of the time. The key point to remember is that there are choices that didn't exist even a decade ago, and RCOC is here to help navigate the housing landscape.

A good resource for those beginning to explore housing is on RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com). In the Consumer section, under Description of Services, click on Residential Services and you'll find *Where I Can Live*. This easy-to-read guide answers common questions about residential services and offers suggestions to help a person with disabilities come up with a vision of how, where and with whom they would like to live, and to make good choices about what's best for them.

Consumer Advisory Team Update

CAT Team Enjoys Holiday Gathering in December

By Sylvia Delgado, CAT Chair

We all had a great time celebrating the holidays at our December Consumer Advisory Team meeting. We got together for a luncheon, where we visited with

friends, played bingo, and got to visit with Santa Claus. It was a big group, so we weren't able to get pictures of everybody, but here are a few photos taken that day. Thanks to everyone for coming and making it such an enjoyable event. I hope we will see all of you at our next meeting!



Upcoming CAT Meeting Dates

- March 20
- April 17
- May 15
- June 19
- July 15

CAT meetings are from 10 a.m. to noon at RCOC's Santa Ana office, located at 1525 North Tustin Avenue. Call Kelly Rico at (714) 796-5330 ahead of time to let her know you will be there.



Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

Regional 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. The Social Skills Training workshop is focused on helping parents nurture social skills among 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 40-45 families.

Contact your service coordinator or Tracy Vaughan at (714) 796-5223 for additional information regarding dates, times and locations, and to register.

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

Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

*Presented in Vietnamese by Thang C. Do, M.A.,
BCBA and Tran Luu, M.A. (Footprints)*

When: Tuesday evenings – March 5, March 12,
March 19, March 26 and April 2
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus
of the last session of this workshop)*

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOO Westminster Office
5555 Garden Grove Boulevard, Suite 100

Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

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

When: Tuesday evenings – April 2, April 9,
April 16, April 23 and April 30
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus
of the last session of this workshop)*

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOO Santa Ana Office
1525 N. Tustin Ave.
Parking is located in the structure
across from the RCOO office building

Social Skills Training Workshop – Focus on Ages 5 through 11 years (6 sessions)

Presented in English by Footprints

When: Tuesday evenings – May 7, May 14,
May 21, May 28, June 4 and June 11

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

*Presented in Spanish by Dr. Ana Lorenz, Ph.D.
(Lorenz & Associates)*

When: Tuesday evenings – May 7, May 14,
May 21, May 28 and June 4
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus
of the last session of this workshop)*

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOO Westminster Office
5555 Garden Grove Boulevard, Suite 100

Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

Presented in English by Melissa Sweitzer, Ph.D.

When: Tuesday mornings – July 9, July 16,
July 23, July 30 and August 6
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus
of the last session of this workshop)*

Time: 9:30 a.m. – noon

Location: RCOO Santa Ana Office
1525 N. Tustin Ave.
Parking is located in the structure across
from the RCOO office building

HUD Vouchers Can Be Key to Consumer Independence

In Orange County, the average one-bedroom apartment rents for more than 150% of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) that most people with developmental disabilities rely on as their sole source of income. With housing so expensive, the federal rent subsidies (also called vouchers) available through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) can be the key to adults with developmental disabilities being able to live on their own.

Almost anyone who receives SSI benefits will be eligible for a HUD voucher.

To be eligible for a HUD voucher, a person generally cannot make more than 30-50% of the area's median income. According to Leah Saitz, RCOC's Supported & Independent Living Coordinator, almost anyone who receives SSI benefits will be eligible for a HUD voucher. Also, there are certain things – such as having a disability – that will cause a person to be placed higher on the waiting list for a voucher.

There are limits, but typically having the voucher means that the person will be required to pay 30-40% of his or her income toward monthly rent, and the federal government will pay the balance directly to the landlord. Individuals can rent an apartment, a single-family home, a condominium, or a mobile home.

In Orange County, the HUD vouchers (also called Section 8 vouchers) are made available through four government agencies. The Anaheim Housing Authority, Garden Grove Housing Authority and Santa Ana Housing Authority each make vouchers available to low-income people who live or work in their cities. The Orange County Housing Authority administers the program for those who live in the other cities and communities throughout the county. All of the housing authorities take applications online and several have informative websites, but here are the most important things for families and consumers to know about HUD vouchers.

1. Get on the Waiting Lists

A person must be at least age 18 to file an application with any of the area's housing authorities. Since it can take several years, even with the disability preference, for a person's name to come up on waiting lists, it is important not to wait until the consumer is fully prepared to live on his or her own to apply. Remember, if a person qualifies for a voucher before he or she is ready, they will never be forced to use it.

2. Keep Your Information Updated

When a person's name finally comes up on the waiting list, the housing authority will try to contact them using the information they have on the application. So, whenever

a consumer moves or gets a new phone number or e-mail address, it is critical that their voucher applications are updated. Vouchers can become available at any time, and having current information on file ensures that a consumer can be reached by the housing authority.

3. Learn About Available Supports

RCOC has learned that some consumers have turned down vouchers because they didn't think they were ready yet to live on their own. Leah strongly encourages consumers and families to meet with RCOC before they make that kind of decision. "If people first applied years ago, they may not fully understand the range and types of services that are available to support a person with developmental disabilities," she said. The individualized services offered by RCOC make apartment living a safe option for many adults who did not think they could ever live in their own place.

4. Contact Your Service Coordinator

While both the regional center and the various housing authorities provide a great deal of information online, remember that your RCOC service coordinator is always here to help. If you have questions or concerns, whether about housing or any other topic, please call or e-mail your service coordinator.

Shannon Gulley (continued from page 1)

The recognition included a nice certificate and a gift card from the supermarket.

Joseph Nacario, Director of Integrated Resources Institute (IRI) – the program that employs Shannon’s job coach – emphasized that Shannon interviewed for her position at Albertsons, just like other employees. He noted that, among other qualities, she has excellent customer service skills and experience that made her a good fit for the job.

“No matter what happens during a day, you come back to home sweet home.”

Before she got the job at Albertsons, Shannon worked as a volunteer at the Irvine Animal Care Center with support from IRI. With all of her other activities, she doesn’t currently have time for that volunteer work, but she loves animals and shares her apartment with her beloved tabby cat named Munchkin. Shannon even took Munchkin to see Santa at Christmas!

Shannon also enjoys taking classes at Coastline Community College. She’s looking forward to taking an applied academics class that will cover math, writing, reading and budgeting. She also has taken cooking classes, and one of her specialties now is cooking on her George Foreman Grill.

She sometimes cooks for her new boyfriend, Dave, who said that she’s a good cook. The two actually met many years ago, when they both worked at a Taco Bell restaurant. And it was food that brought them together again, when they ran into each other recently at a cooking class in school!

Molly Sullivan, Shannon’s RCOC service coordinator, noted that Shannon’s situation underscores the importance of the federal government’s Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 voucher program for adults with developmental disabilities. With the voucher, Shannon pays 30% of her income from her job at Albertsons and the money she gets from Social Security toward her rent, while HUD pays the rest.



Shannon with her cat Munchkin.

Molly cautioned that it is essential for families to plan in advance for the transition from the family home to an apartment.

“It can take some time for arrangements to be made and to get on the waiting lists for the HUD vouchers,” she said.

Before she lived on her own, Shannon had tried living in a group home. While that option works well for many of the adults that RCOC serves, Shannon wasn’t happy in a group home.

When asked what she would like other people with developmental disabilities to know about living on their own in the community, she was both realistic and encouraging.

“It’s scary at first, when you live on your own,” she said. “But it can be exciting too. You realize you have your own place, and you’re doing things you want to do. You are both more excited and more relaxed. No matter what happens during a day, you come back to home sweet home.”



Tonya Hernandez, Shannon, Jerilyn Marzett and Joseph Nacario.

Orange County Consumer Helps Light Capitol Christmas Tree

RCOC consumer Christian Anderson was selected to help Governor Jerry Brown and First Lady Anne Brown light the State Capitol Christmas tree at a special ceremony in Sacramento on Wed., Dec. 5, 2012. Ten-year-old Christian was joined by his parents, Brian and Lee Anderson, and his two brothers, Patrick and Brandon. All three boys have been diagnosed with autism.

This is the 30th year that a child with a developmental disability has participated in the tree lighting

ceremony. Decorated with hundreds of festive, hand-crafted ornaments made by children and adults with special needs, the tree was also strung with 10,000 ultra-low wattage LED lights.

“We congratulate Christian Anderson for being selected to help the Governor light the tree during the ceremony,” said Terri Delgadillo, Director of the Department of Developmental Services. “The annual Tree Lighting Ceremony is a wonderful way to welcome the holiday season and to celebrate children and adults with special needs.”



Christian Anderson with his mother Lee.

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

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Dialogue Newsletter

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