

In the Spotlight

Alfonso Ponce

Anyone visiting the kitchen at the First American Café at First American Financial Corporation's home office in Santa Ana could be forgiven for not recognizing sociable, confident and independent Alfonso Ponce, as the same person who began working at the Café a little less than two years ago.

According to Goodwill of Orange County's Elizabeth Martinez, the job coach for Alfonso and two other young men who work at the Café, Alfonso's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable: "He used to be timid and shy," she said. "He would barely speak to you then, but I've seen him grow tremendously. Having a disability hasn't prevented him from working and doing a good job."

Alfonso's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable.

Clearly proud of Alfonso's extraordinary personal growth, as well as his work ethic and job performance, Elizabeth applauded the Café's Executive Chef Dore Sommer for providing a positive work environment.



Alfonso Ponce with his mother, Estela Ponce.

"Chef Dore is very supportive and treats my guys the same as other employees," she said. "He makes them all feel like they can accomplish things."

Alfonso's parents, Estela and Orlando Ponce, have also noticed the positive effects of his having a job in an integrated setting in the community.

"He takes the public bus to work all by himself," said Estela, noting that she used to have to wake him up in the morning, but now he uses an alarm to make sure he wakes up early enough to get to work on time. "He even takes his work clothes to the dry cleaner to wash."

"I never ever thought Alfonso would work, and I am so proud of him!" she continued, noting that he is well-liked at work because he is a good worker, responsible in his job, and polite. "Of seven sons I have raised, he is the best. Even his brothers admire him so much!"

Having a disability hasn't prevented him from working and doing a good job.

RCOC's Jamie Trujillo-Garcia, who has been Alfonso's service coordinator for more than four years,

See **Alfonso Ponce** on page 7.

Dialogue

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

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Upcoming 2016-2017 Board Meetings

November 3 • January 5 • March 2
May 4 • June 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, located at 1525 North Tustin Avenue in Santa Ana.

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Board Update

Sylvia Delgado Rejoins RCOC Board

At its July meeting, the RCOC Board of Directors voted to appoint Sylvia Delgado to serve on the Board. The appointment, effective August 1, 2016, goes through July 31, 2019.



Known in the Orange County community as an active and effective advocate for herself and others with developmental disabilities, Sylvia previously served for seven years on the Board – as a member, Board Secretary, and chair of the Consumer Advisory Team. She has also been active in RCOC's Consumers' Advisory Committee (CAC) since its formation, and was appointed to lead that group at the same time she was appointed to the Board.

Sylvia has visited with elected officials to share her perspective on potential legislation.

In 2014, she was honored with the Self-Advocate Spotlight Award for setting a positive example that increases awareness of the gifts and talents of people with developmental disabilities. Living independently in her own apartment, Sylvia also teaches Sunday school and volunteers

with the Young Life Ministry, working with teenagers and young adults with disabilities.

In her role as a Board member and self-advocate, Sylvia has visited with elected officials to share her

perspective on potential legislation. She was a strong advocate for passing legislation that replaced the term "mental retardation" with "intellectual disabilities" or "cognitive disabilities" in state documents.

Sylvia is a great role model for others who might seek to serve on the RCOC Board of Directors.

After transitioning off the Board in 2015, Sylvia continued to be involved and engaged, attending Board meetings, and providing input as a member of the National Core Indicators Community Advisory Council, as well as participating in the CAC.

Dr. LeeAnn Christian, RCOC's Chief Clinical Officer and Board Liaison, says that Sylvia is a great role model for others who might seek to serve on the RCOC Board of Directors: "She is always prepared to contribute. If there are issues to be voted on that she doesn't fully understand, she takes the time to attend our packet review meetings and ask as many questions as necessary to ensure that she's making informed decisions."

Executive Director's Report

RCOC Invited to Partner on Employment Clinics

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

When Governor Brown signed into the law California's Employment First policy in 2013, and the federal government followed in 2014 with a similarly-focused law, nobody cheered louder than the self-advocates, families, service providers and other members of our Orange County community who have long believed that competitive, integrated employment is a realistic option for every adult that RCOC serves.

Competitive, integrated employment is a realistic option for every adult that RCOC serves.

In fact, our Regional Center has been a leader in implementing the policy, which requires regional centers to help families explore competitive, integrated employment as the first option for the working-age adults we serve. However, our leadership in this area preceded these legal mandates and has been driven by our commitment to being responsive to the evolving needs and expectations of those we serve.

Among young adults transitioning in recent years from public high school programs to RCOC services and supports, a paying job in the community has long been the preferred option. These students have enjoyed and benefitted from inclusive classrooms where they interact with



typical peers, so it's a natural expectation that they and their parents have for them to continue experiencing inclusive environments

and to pursue paid work like other members of society. Alfonso Ponce, the person featured in this issue's Spotlight cover story, is a great example of how effective collaboration between students and parents, school districts, RCOC, and others can help young adults with special needs realize their dreams for fulfilling and productive work.

On a statewide basis, though, the regional center system is still challenged to secure competitive, integrated employment for all of the working age adults with developmental disabilities who want jobs. Certainly, a more robust economy, with low unemployment overall, will help. But at RCOC, we have also stepped up our efforts on this front in a big way by working to develop relationships with our local business community (see the story on page 6 about our Breakfast of Business Champions). We also support service providers in their efforts to do the same and to share their expertise with their peers.

Our community's leadership has not gone unnoticed. I'm pleased to report that RCOC has been selected by Disability Rights California to partner in a pilot project they have devised to identify best practices for collaboration among agencies in providing adults with development disabilities with the knowledge and self-advocacy skills needed to secure competitive, integrated employment.

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The Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE) Clinics, which also involve the Department of Rehabilitation, are a series of training and technical assistance clinics that will take place at RCOC over the course of eight months, beginning in November. Our team at RCOC has identified 20 individuals who will participate. All are currently in day programs or work activity programs, but have expressed a strong desire to transition to competitive, integrated employment.

We are very excited about the potential for the pilot CIE Clinics to help more of the adults RCOC serves to achieve their career goals. We're also honored to collaborate in developing a model which, if successful, could be instrumental in helping thousands of others throughout California to do the same.

Person to Person

Count Me In!

By Sylvia Delgado, CAC Chair and Jess Corey, RCOC Consumer Advocate

Hello Everybody! The Fourth Annual Self Determination/ Self-Advocacy Conference was a great success! About 75 attendees enjoyed several great sessions and received lots of exciting information! The conference theme was “Count Me In!” and sessions focused on how self-advocates could take more control of their own Individual Program Plans (IPPs), ways to spend more time in the community, and making their voice count in the upcoming election. Arturo Cazares, from RCOC, spoke

about community inclusion. A representative from the Registrar of Voters talked about the importance of voting. Sam Durbin, from Integrity House, and Larry Landauer, from RCOC, shared how folks could take charge of their IPP meeting.

RCOC’s Consumers’ Advisory Committee had an information table at the conference. The two of us were among the CAC members there answering questions. Other information

tables provided resources about social meetups, disability rights, self-advocacy and voter registration.

Since it is an election year, there were a ton of questions about assistance with voting. Integrity House also shared a new video they produced called



(L-R) Jess Corey, Sylvia Delgado and Sean Sullivan represented the Consumers’ Advisory Committee at this year’s Self-Determination Conference.

You Can’t Plan My Life Without Me. It’s important for the people served by RCOC to remember that they can make their own choices even though other people want to do it for them sometimes.

Some great tips that were shared about how to take charge of your own IPP were: (1) Be specific about the goals you want to achieve; (2) Take your time – don’t let anyone rush you; (3) Roadblocks don’t mean failure; (4) You can always start where you are, using what you have; and (5) If you can dream it, you can do it!

The take home point from the conference was that everyone’s voice counts!



People attending the conference visited information tables where they picked up information about social meetups, disability rights, self-advocacy and voter registration.

Behavior Management Workshops

Due to the holidays, there will be no Behavior Management Workshops during November and December. The workshops will resume after the first of the year. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Monthly Calendar on the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com).

Adult Transition Webinars

Families that have difficulty finding the time to attend one of RCOC’s transition planning workshops, now have a convenient alternative. Four “Creating a Life Full of Possibilities” workshops, which are focused on helping families and individuals with developmental disabilities prepare for life after high school, are now being presented as live, online webinars. Each includes a presentation, and question and answer session. After each webinar, the session will be posted online where it can be viewed at your convenience. The first in the series, “Options for a Quality Life” took place on October 13 and is now online.



- ABLE Act: Achieving a Better Life Experience** – November 3, 2016
- Post-Secondary Education & Training** – December 1, 2016
- Competitive Integrated Employment** – January 12, 2017

For more information and to participate, go to RCOC’s website at www.rcocdd.com/frc/transition-planning. Advance registration is necessary to get the link to go online. Please sure to log in at least 10 minutes before start time.

Learn the Latest About the ABLE Act

Last year, we shared the great news about the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act that allows people with developmental disabilities to open special accounts where savings can be more than \$2,000 without losing public benefits, like Supplementary Security Income (SSI). While California’s program is still in development, you can now visit the ABLE National Resource Center website at www.ablenrc.org for more information and the latest updates.



Everyday Wellness: Healthy Portions

Are you eating healthy foods, but still having trouble losing weight? The culprit may be portion size. Here’s a rule of thumb that’s easy to remember: for most people, a portion of meat should be about the size of a deck of cards.



Inclusion Works! National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Helping the adults we serve to find jobs in the community is a top priority year-round at RCOC. On a national level, the month of October is designated National Disability Employment Awareness Month by the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition to calling attention to the contributions of people with disabilities in the workplace, NDEAM provides an opportunity to educate businesses and the broader public about the value of a diverse workforce that includes people of all abilities, skills and talents.

NDEAM provides an opportunity to educate businesses and the broader public about the value of a diverse workforce.

Among the ways RCOC marked this important month is our “Breakfast of Business Champions” event.

This year, the theme of the national celebration was “Inclusion Works.” Individuals with disabilities, employers, service providers, family members and others were encouraged to participate throughout October by using the hashtag #inclusionworks in social media posts to share their own experiences and images about how inclusion works in our community.

“By fostering a culture that embraces individual differences, including



disabilities, businesses profit by having a wider variety of tools to confront challenges,” said Jennifer Sheehy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy. “Our nation’s most successful companies proudly make inclusion a core value. They know that inclusion works. It works for workers, it works for employers, it works for opportunity, and it works for innovation.”

The effort to celebrate the contributions of people with disabilities in the workplace began in 1945, as many soldiers who fought in World War II returned home with physical disabilities. Later, in the early 1960s, those with all types of disabilities were included.

To learn more about NDEAM, visit the Department of Labor’s website at www.dol.gov/ndeam.

RCOC Breakfast of Business Champions

On October 14, RCOC brought together eleven of Orange County’s most impressive employers of

people with developmental disabilities for the Regional Center’s second “Breakfast of Business Champions.” The morning event celebrated these employers’ support for those we serve and sought their input on ways to advance RCOC’s goal of helping more adults with developmental disabilities to secure competitive, integrated employment in the community.



Home Depot was among the employers recognized at the event. Pictured here (L-R) with RCOC’s Chief Operating Officer Janis White (third from right) are Home Depot’s Adam Capeluto, Tiffany Davis, Sheila Bobard, Gaye Clark, and Mellissa Ramirez.

Alfonso Ponce (continued from page 1)

gives high marks to the staff at Edison High School in Huntington Beach, where Alfonso attended his adult transition program.

“They have a wonderful staff who worked with us and the family,” she said, noting that when Alfonso completed his transition program, he was ready and able to work.

Adult transition, a four-year program that students typically begin at age 18, focuses on building functional skills such as learning to take public transportation, and work skills like using a computer, time management and business etiquette. Students often do volunteer work during transition, giving them work experience that helps to build their resume. Ideally, the student is able to go directly from their transition program into a competitive, integrated job in the community, as Alfonso did.



Alfonso (left) works at the First American Café with Chef Dore Sommer (right).

“An effective transition program paints a picture that helps RCOC and others on the planning team to truly understand a student’s skills and interests,” said Jamie.

According to Alfonso, working in a restaurant was always his dream. “Angel (his teacher) took me to work in the restaurant and I liked it,” he said. “I was offered the job.”

At the First American Café, his duties are diverse, ranging from washing dishes, emptying the trash, and sweeping to

folding boxes, organizing produce, and cleaning the walk-in freezer. His favorite part of the job, though, is washing the dishes and putting them in the dishwasher. He said he hopes to stay in this job for a long time.

“I want to stay there because they all like me a lot,” he said. “Even my boss (the chef) likes me a lot!”

Working in a restaurant was always his dream.

Alfonso also has encouraging words for other students who are interested in getting a job after graduation.

“You can get help,” he said. “There are three kids like me (at the Café). You can do it!”



To work in the restaurant, Alfonso had to learn about food safety and proper food handling, and take an exam to become certified.

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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

**Company Support Needed: Wish Tree
 Brightens the Holidays for Those We Serve**

Are you or your company looking for a fun way to help others during the holidays? If so, we hope you’ll consider supporting RCOC’s Wish Tree program. Each year, Wish Tree helps brighten the holiday season for more than a thousand individuals served by RCOC.

The Wish Tree begins when service coordinators contact low-income individuals and families served by RCOC and identify their holiday gift requests, such as children’s toys, clothes, store gift cards and movie tickets. Individual Wish Tree supporters – as well as companies, churches and volunteer organizations – then purchase the requested items, wrap them, and deliver them to RCOC. Volunteers then make sure the gifts are delivered in time for the holidays.

If you would like to help, but don’t have time to purchase and wrap gifts, you can still participate by making a financial contribution that will be used by volunteer shoppers to fulfill specific wishes. Checks should be made out to “Brian’s Fund,” and mailed to RCOC, P.O. Box 22010, Santa Ana, CA 92702-2010.

If you would like to **donate** to the Wish Tree program, contact Jennifer Casteel at (714) 796-5330 or email wishtree2@rcocdd.com. To be considered as a Wish Tree gift recipient, contact your service coordinator.

