



# Dialogue

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## Consumer Spotlight

### Miles Thornback

Some people would have given up, after applying for hundreds of jobs over the course of nearly seven years, and receiving just three callbacks and no job offers. Not Miles Thornback. A 33-year-old Regional Center of Orange County consumer who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, Miles was determined to find paid, competitive employment after graduating from California State University, Long Beach with a Bachelor's degree in History.

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*Miles was determined to find paid, competitive employment after graduating.*

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Not limiting his job search to work that might use his college degree, he attended countless job fairs and applied for a range of positions, from

museum work to office work, while working with six different employment agencies through the Department of Rehabilitation. The fact that he had no previous work experience hampered his search. However, Miles also believes that many prospective employers – even government entities – simply were not interested, because they did not want to hire a person in a wheelchair.

It wasn't until he teamed up with RCOC service provider Goodwill of Orange County's Employment First Program – partnering with Business Development Manager Eric Bisailon to find a position matching his skill set and interests – that Miles got his chance.

After meeting with Miles to learn more about him and his employment goals, Eric spoke with a former colleague, realtor Jay O'Brien, about Goodwill's one-to-one employment support program, and about Miles. Though they were not previously looking to hire, Jay and his partner, Sammer Mudawar, did have a need for some administrative support for their office, and agreed to interview Miles.



Miles is a fan of science fiction and enjoyed attending the *Star Wars* Convention in Anaheim.

According to everyone, the interview went great. And since October 2015, Miles has been working part-time, five days a week in the RE/MAX Prestige office in Costa Mesa. Miles lives with his parents, Rodney and Yvonne Thornback, in Fountain

See Miles Thornback on page 7.

## Spotlight Awards 2016: Get Your Tickets Now!

Tickets are now on sale for the 2016 Spotlight Awards dinner and dance! The event is scheduled for **Friday, April 8, 2016 at 6 p.m.** at the Embassy Suites in Garden Grove. Individual tickets are \$45, and table sponsorships are available for \$1,000 for a table of ten. Purchase tickets online at the Alliance of Abilities website ([www.allianceofabilities.org/rcoc-spotlight-awards.html](http://www.allianceofabilities.org/rcoc-spotlight-awards.html)). You may also call Integrity House at (714) 542-0855, or download the registration form from RCOC's website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)).

Tickets must be purchased in advance. No tickets will be sold at the door, so don't wait!

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

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### Upcoming 2016 Board Meetings

May 5 • June 2

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

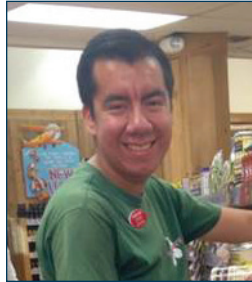
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## Board Update

### Consumer Joins RCOC Board

Steven Mesinas, an RCOC consumer who has an intellectual disability, has

joined the Board of Directors for a one-year term that began on January 7.



Steven Mesinas

A resident of Tustin, Steven is a proud member of the crew at the Trader Joe's market where he has worked for the past three years. He also volunteers with Best Buddies, helping others with disabilities. Since helping adult consumers to secure paid employment is such a high priority for RCOC, Steven's successful experience in the competitive workplace is very valuable. His employer views him as a dedicated and responsible team member.

"I feel that I could be a good role model to consumers to become employed," Steven wrote in the personal statement accompanying his Board application. "I always give my best efforts."

A fan of many sports, Steven enjoys watching baseball, basketball, football and hockey, along with various college sports. He also likes to play video games, spend time with friends, and help his family with chores.

## Budget Update

### California Increases Developmental Services Funding

On March 1, Governor Brown signed two bi-partisan bills enabling and authorizing increased funding in the 2016-2017 fiscal year for California's developmental services system.

The first of these, the Managed Care Organization (MCO) Tax reform bill (S.B.X.2 No. 2), replaces the state's current MCO tax which sunsets on July 1, 2016. It is expected to bring in nearly \$8 billion in federal dollars over three years, providing a stable source of funding for Medi-Cal, and freeing up General Fund dollars to provide increased funding for developmental services.

The second bill (A.B.X.2 No. 1) is the developmental services funding bill and it authorizes a nearly \$300 million increase in General Fund dollars. With federal matching funds, the total will be approximately \$500.

RCOC is particularly pleased that the funding bill also moves forward the very important process of rate reform, requiring the Department of Developmental Services to submit a rate study to the Legislature by March 1, 2019. The process for determining the rates paid to many service providers has been unchanged for decades and we are hopeful that reform will yield rates for all service providers that better reflect the actual costs they incur to deliver high quality services and supports to people with developmental disabilities.

To read the text of the developmental services funding bill, click on the link that appears on the RCOC website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)).

## **RCOC Supports Consumers Transitioning to Adulthood**

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

**M**any parents tell us that the time their sons and daughters transition from public school-based programs to Regional Center's adult-oriented services and supports is among the most challenging for them.

Like parents of typical children, they recognize that it is in the child's best interest to become as independent as possible, but there are worries about the unknown. The goal of RCOC's adult transition services is to help prepare young adult consumers for the next stage of their lives, while also answering parents' questions and addressing their concerns.

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***All of our adult transition workshops involve parent volunteers.***

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A key component of RCOC's adult transition services are free workshops for parents that provide an in-depth look at various aspects of transition. These include overviews of employment and other adult services, as well as options for continuing education, and benefits planning and management. (A list of upcoming workshops appears on page 4, and also on RCOC's website).

Throughout transition, the RCOC service coordinator continues to be

a family's key contact person, but parents of other consumers who have been through the process can also offer helpful information and insights. So, all of our adult transition workshops involve parent volunteers. Having attended a number of these



workshops, and spoken one-on-one with parent participants, I can attest to the value of sharing that first-hand experience.

In fact, after the last workshop I

attended, numerous parents took the time to tell me how reassuring and encouraging it was to hear others talk about their children's successes, particularly their employment-related experiences. They were also pleasantly surprised to learn about new options, such as the recently-enacted ABLÉ (Achieving a Better Life Experience) accounts that will help consumers save up for disability-related expenses without losing public benefits, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI). (See page 4 for more information on the ABLÉ Act.)

Currently, around half of the more than 19,000 consumers RCOC serves are children under the age of 18. So, the next several years will see large numbers of young women and men going through the exciting process of deciding what they want for the first phase of their adult lives, in terms of living arrangements, employment, and higher education, for example.

The great news is that these young adult consumers are living in what

are, without doubt, the best times ever for the developmental services community.

Of course, California's community care system faces significant challenges on many fronts and I am not, in any way, minimizing those. However, while some old prejudices hang on in some workplaces, opportunities for competitive employment in integrated settings have never been better. The experience of consumers like Miles Thornback, who is profiled in this issue's Consumer Spotlight, and the long and expanding list of RCOC's employer partners are proof of that. And, like many of our service providers and employer partners, RCOC is trying to lead by example as we examine our operation to uncover positions that could be suitable jobs for consumers.

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***Around half of the more than 19,000 consumers RCOC serves are children.***

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One recent example was the hiring of Amber Lopez, an RCOC consumer who prevailed over a lot of other candidates in a very competitive hiring process, before joining the RCOC team in January as a full-time office aide.

We hope that RCOC's adult transition services, and the related stories in this issue of *Dialogue*, provide our young adult consumers and their parents with hope for the future, because there really has never been a better time to be a Regional Center consumer!



## Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act: What it Means for You

By Jess Corey, RCOOC  
Consumer Advocate



Jess Corey

In my role as Consumer Advocate, I try to keep up on new laws

that have an impact on the lives of those served by RCOOC. For the past year, I've been learning more and more about the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act signed into law in December 2014. If you haven't heard about the ABLE Act yet, here is some key information about it.

**Why should you care about the ABLE Act?** It allows you to open special accounts where

savings can be more than \$2,000 *without* losing public benefits, like Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The money you can save in ABLE accounts can help you plan for your lifetime needs.

**What can you buy with ABLE account money?** Among the disability-related expenses that qualify are education, housing, transportation, employment support, and health and wellness.

**Who is eligible for an ABLE account?** If you are an RCOOC consumer, chances are you are eligible for an ABLE account. You are automatically eligible if you have significant disabilities that happened before you turned 26 years old and if you receive SSI or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). If you have significant disabilities, but don't receive SSI or SSDI, you can still open an ABLE account if you

meet the SSI criteria regarding significant functional limitations.

**When can you open an ABLE account?** ABLE accounts cannot be opened until states develop rules about the ABLE program. When California develops its own rules, qualified individuals will be able to open accounts. However, a recent change in the law also allows qualified individuals to open accounts in another state if their home state hasn't developed their own rules yet. This means quicker access to ABLE accounts if you don't want to wait until California establishes its ABLE program.

To learn more about the ABLE Act or stay up-to-date about its progress in California, visit the National Disability Institute at [www.realeconomicimpact.org](http://www.realeconomicimpact.org) or Disability Scoop at [www.disabilityscoop.com](http://www.disabilityscoop.com).

## Adult Transition Workshops: Creating a Life Full of Possibilities

The transition from public school-based programs to Lanterman Act services and supports can be complicated, so RCOOC offers the following workshops to give parents an in-depth look at various aspects of adult transition.

The workshops also give parents an opportunity to learn from and interact with others who have already been through the process with their children.

All of these adult transition workshops take place at the RCOOC Santa Ana office, located at 1525 N. Tustin Avenue. They are offered at no cost to parents, but advance registration is required. Contact your service coordinator for additional information, and to register.

## Options for a Quality Life

*Thursday, March 24, 2016*

This workshop focuses on employment opportunities for adult consumers, and developing self-determination and independent living skills, including an overview of the types of local recreation, socialization and fitness programs available to help enrich the lives of men and women with developmental disabilities.

(continued on page 5)

## Selecting an Adult Service Provider

April 21, 2016

Choosing the service providers who will help to facilitate an adult consumer's independence and life choices is among the most important decisions a family makes. This workshop provides an overview of the options available to consumers after they graduate from high school, and helpful tips on working with RCOC to make the best choices.

## Post-Secondary Education and Training

May 19, 2016

Like many typical young women and men, those with disabilities may choose to continue their education after graduating from high school. In this workshop, families will learn about the types of post-secondary education and training opportunities available to consumers, and gain valuable guidance on preparing their student to get the most from those experiences.

## Benefits Planning and Management

June 9, 2016

Many people with developmental disabilities need lifelong support from a variety of government benefits programs. This workshop aims to equip families with an understanding of how California's ABLE Act and SSI (Supplemental Security Income) incentives enable consumers to pursue and maintain paid employment without jeopardizing their eligibility for benefits.

## 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. Parents are actively involved, and invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. Advance reservations are required and group size is typically 8-15 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 Spanish by Footprints*

**When:** Tuesday evenings – April 26, May 3, May 10, May 17, May 24  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Cypress Office  
10803 Hope Street

### Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

*Presented in English by Dr. Joyce Tu*

**When:** Thursday evenings – Aug. 4, Aug. 11, Aug. 18, Aug. 25, Sept. 1  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Cypress Office  
10803 Hope Street

### Behavior Management Workshop (5 sessions)

*Presented in Spanish by Footprints*

**When:** Thursday evenings – Oct. 20, Oct. 27, Nov. 3, Nov. 10, Nov. 17  
*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Santa Ana Office  
1525 N. Tustin Ave.

*Parking is located in the structure across from the RCOC office building*

## Local Businesses Applaud Consumer Employees

For consumers making the transition from school-based programs to RCOC services, getting a paying job is a high priority. This is in keeping with the Employment First policies of both the State of California and RCOC's Board of Directors. But also, like typical adults, many people with developmental disabilities gain a strong sense of purpose and identity from the work they do. The daily social interaction that many jobs offer is also appealing and helpful to many.

*Hiring people with disabilities is very good for business.*

The great news is that many of Orange County's biggest employers, as well as numerous smaller firms, have found that hiring people with disabilities is very good for business.

In addition to enjoying the benefits of workplace diversity, federal tax incentives, and supported employment services that help ensure a positive experience for both employer and employee, companies tell us that RCOC consumers are often among their "star" employees.

*Many people with developmental disabilities gain a strong sense of purpose and identity from the work they do.*

As a group, adult consumers tend to be reliable, dedicated and loyal workers who demonstrate a strong work ethic. Turnover and absenteeism is also often lower than average, contributing to higher productivity and a positive work environment. Plus, like typical adults, RCOC

consumers demonstrate diverse skills and interests, making them well-suited for many different jobs and work environments – from accounting, data entry, and inventory stocking, to landscaping, food service, and senior citizen care, to name just a few.

Logos of some of the area's top employers of RCOC consumers are featured on this page. However, RCOC partners with more than 200 organizations that include people with developmental disabilities in their workforce. A complete list of these employers appears on RCOC's website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)). To view the list, click on Employment for People with Developmental Disabilities under the RCOC Services tab, then go to Current List of Orange County's Employers.





**Miles Thornback** (continued from page 1)

Valley, and arranges for his own transportation to and from work, using the Orange County Transportation Authority's ACCESS system.

Jay and Sammer have been in business for just five years, but their real estate office is sizeable and growing. Miles fits right in with the tight-knit team of 20 people.

"Even the first day, I felt comfortable," said Miles, whose responsibilities include helping with a multitude of marketing and administrative support tasks for the office's real estate agents. Miles' solid computer skills and familiarity with social media enable him to handle things like posting podcasts to YouTube, preparing spreadsheets with market data, drafting letters, and sending marketing emails.

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***"Miles has added a tremendous amount of value to our operation."***

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Though he benefitted from the one-to-one assistance he received from Goodwill job coach Carlos Castillo, just a few months after starting the job, it was clear to Miles, as well as to his employers and Carlos, that Miles no longer needed that level of support. So, in February of this year, they worked with RCOC service coordinator Lorraine Lancaster to transition Miles to a traditional supported employment program, where he receives only as much coaching as he needs to be successful at his job. Currently, that amounts to about three hours a week.

"Miles has added a tremendous amount of value to our operation," Jay said, noting that no special accommodations were necessary to enable him to do his

job. All Jay and Sammer had to do was purchase a desk for him to use, since even with his physical limitations, Miles is able to use a standard computer set-up.

Their successful experience with Miles has made Jay and Sammer big boosters for programs like Goodwill's that help find paid employment for RCOC's adult consumers.

"You'd be really foolish not to explore it, because it's so easy for the employer to try it out," Jay said.

Though Miles genuinely enjoys the work he does and the camaraderie of his coworkers, most of all he is simply grateful for the opportunity to work and gain experience.

"It's a Catch-22," he said, describing the years he was unable to find a job or even get prospective employers to interview him. "You have to have experience, and to get the experience you need, to get hired!"

That's one of the major advantages to consumers served by Goodwill and RCOC's other employment-related service providers -- their job developers cultivate relationships with companies



Miles uses his computer skills on the job at the RE/MAX Prestige office in Costa Mesa.

and organizations that could employ adults with developmental disabilities. These service providers get to know consumers' skills and interests, and help prospective employers think creatively about which jobs and tasks might be suitable for consumers who are looking for work.



Miles with his employers, Sammer Mudawar (left) and Jay O'Brien (right).

While the process of finding the right match can take some time, Miles hopes that other consumers learn from his experience to remain diligent and to never give up on themselves.

"Keep at it!" he said.



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Dialogue Newsletter  

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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

**RCOC Consumers Benefit from Holiday Toy Giveaways**

This past December, nearly 600 low-income families served by RCOC enjoyed brighter holidays through the generosity of numerous individuals, community organizations and businesses. The Wish Tree program, organized by RCOC employee volunteers, fulfilled the holiday wishes of 323 consumers of all ages, while RCOC’s Comfort Connection Family Resource Center’s (FRC) program provided holiday gifts to 264 children from 127 families served by the Early Start program.

Supporters of the Wish Tree included Troutman Sanders, AE COM, CASTO, Girl Scouts, Premier, Brandman University, and CBRE, along with numerous RCOC families, Board members, and employees. The FRC toy giveaway was funded by The Giovanniello Law Group, 24 Hour Home Care, RCOC Board Member Tam Nguyen and Tyrone Nguyen.



During scheduled appointments at the Comfort Connection FRC, parents selected free gifts, which were then wrapped by volunteers.