



Dialogue

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In the Spotlight

Michelle Katagiri-Mena

Before Michelle Katagiri-Mena moved to Orange County, most of the people who worked with her had no idea how much she could accomplish if she were simply given an opportunity. Working in a sheltered workshop after completing public school, she performed piecemeal work that was not challenging for her and earned around 90 cents an hour. Today, the vibrant 23-year-old is employed by CHOC Children's in Orange, where she earns \$15 an hour and is a valued and respected member of the Food Services department team.

After the internship, she was hired by CHOC.

The turning point for Michelle was the opportunity she was given to earn a spot in the Gillman Project SEARCH internship program at CHOC. Gloria Choi, Michelle's RCOC service coordinator, spotted her potential soon after she began receiving services through RCOC in August of 2015 and suggested she apply.

"She's very independent, very smart, and a quick learner, but she was shy and withdrawn when she

started with us," said Gloria, who believes Michelle's shyness and quietness then may in part have been due to the inappropriate work setting she'd experienced previously.

With help from her mom, Kris Katagiri, Michelle applied and prepared for the in-depth intern selection process. Interviewing with Employment & Day Services Manager Arturo Cazares, who facilitates the selection process for RCOC, and Integrated Resources Institute (IRI) which provides job coaching support for the program, Michelle was one of just 10 people selected from a pool of 35 applicants. After the internship, during which she served rotations in Food Services, Bio-Med, and Plant Operations, she was hired by CHOC.

According to IRI Associate Director Linda Seppala, CHOC is not required to hire any of the interns. However, the Food Services group was so impressed with Michelle, they told Linda they wanted her to stay on, even before the internship was completed.

Food Services was also Michelle's first choice for a job, and she is truly grateful for the opportunity.



Michelle and her coworker Christine Burckley.

She likes the people she works with, and she loves to cook. At home, she often makes dinner for her family, preparing everything from pasta and garlic bread, to chicken parmesan, and beef with broccoli.

"Her memory is impeccable," said Linda, who noted that Michelle's role has expanded. "In the beginning, she was just getting the trays ready for the hot food, and other employees did the rest. Now, she does it all!"

Michelle has started out as a per diem worker and hopes to work her way up to a part-time position when one becomes available, and to eventually become a full-time employee.

See **Michelle Katagiri-Mena** on page 7.

Dialogue

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Upcoming 2017 Board Meetings

September 7 • November 2

The public is invited to attend RCOC board meetings. The meetings 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.

RCOC Administration

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Board Update

Two New Members Join RCOC Board

Clifford "Cliff" Amsden and John "Chip" Wright were both recently elected to the RCOC Board of Directors. These two new volunteers will serve one-year terms. At its June 1 meeting, the Board also renewed the Board memberships of Cristina Alba and Hilda Mendez who have both served for the past four years; their new three-year terms end on June 30, 2020.

Cliff Amsden

Many in the RCOC family will remember Cliff Amsden, who previously served for seven years on the Board from 2009 to 2016. The parent of a child with special needs, he has extensive experience in finance, and served as Treasurer and Chairperson of the Policies and Outcomes Committee during his earlier tenure on the Board. His term ends on June 30, 2018.

"I believe RCOC plays a key role in assisting those with developmental disabilities and I would like to see it



Cliff Amsden

continue to function within its current mandate," Cliff wrote in the personal statement included with his Board application. "And perhaps by serving on the Board I can be of support to that effort."

Chip Wright

In addition to his election to the Board, Chip Wright was elected to serve as Treasurer, taking over for



Chip Wright

Bob Costello whose term expired in early June. The parent of a son who has autism, Chip is Executive Vice President with the commercial real estate firm CBRE in Newport Beach. He is active in his church and the community, having served for eight years on the Board of the Life Science Industry Council.

In the personal statement included with his Board application, he wrote: "I truly believe the Regional Center can (and certainly has for our family) make a significant difference in the lives of those with developmental disabilities...I would like to be part of the Regional Center team that continues to make a difference in the community and help explore new areas that can enhance the lives of those affected by developmental disabilities."

Chip's term ends on April 30, 2018.

Executive Director's Report

Check Out RCOC's Employment Stats on the DDS Performance Dashboard

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

If you've read the *Dialogue* newsletter regularly over the past few years, you've probably noticed that we devote a lot of space to the topic of employment for adults with developmental disabilities. We do this because employment is a high priority for the individuals and families we serve.

Later this year, we hope to get survey results for fiscal year 2015-16; however, our most recent National Core Indicators (NCI) data for fiscal 2012-13 provide support for a focus on work. In those surveys, NCI randomly sampled 400 adults served by RCOC who were receiving at least one service, in addition to service coordination. They were asked "If you don't have a job in the community, would you like to have a job in the community?" Of the 400,

just 166 responded and 44 percent of those said yes, they would like a job.

California's Legislature also recognizes the importance of work. In fact, it is now California's policy that competitive, integrated employment is to be given the highest priority for adults served by regional centers. And legislators are holding all regional centers accountable by requiring that employment be one of the metrics the Department of



Developmental Services (DDS) tracks in its online Performance Dashboard.

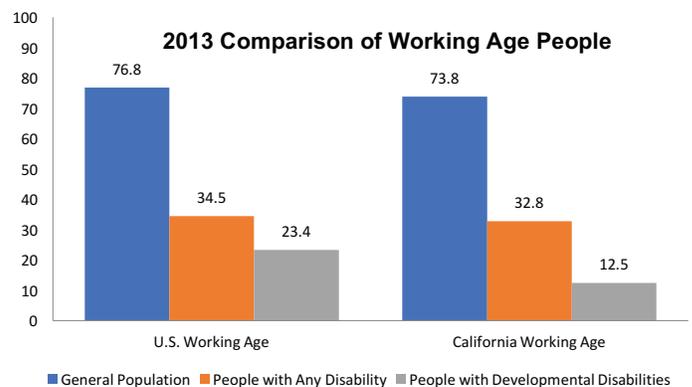
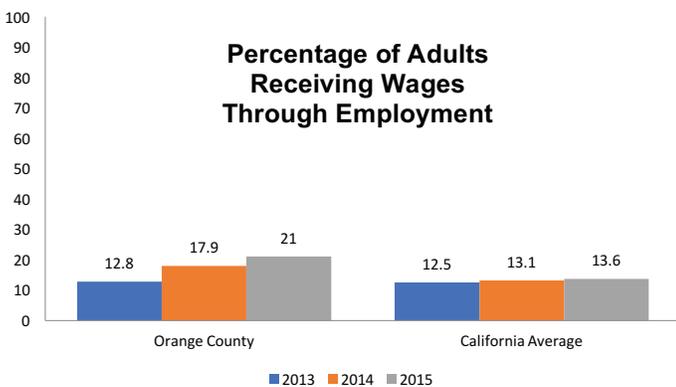
Though we are still challenged to help secure employment for every person who wants a job, the charts on this page (which are drawn from the Performance Dashboard) show movement in the right direction. In 2013, just 12.8 percent of the adults RCOC serves were receiving wages through employment; in 2015, that figure was a full 21 percent. That compares to a California statewide average of 12.5 percent in 2013 and just 13.6 percent two years later. It also brings us in Orange County much closer to the 23.4 percent of

people with developmental disabilities nationwide who were employed in 2013 (the most recent year for which DDS has posted comparison figures).

Another challenge we face is increasing the wages that adults with developmental disabilities receive for the work they do, but we have been gratified at the support shown by our Orange County business community. Local employers are genuinely interested in the talents and skills of people with disabilities, and express appreciation for the value that this type of diversity brings to the workplace.

Our employment-focused service providers have shown remarkable creativity and ingenuity in their efforts to help employers identify jobs that would be good matches for individuals with disabilities. And our public school districts have made great strides in helping to prepare young people to make the transition to the world of work.

We look forward to a time when competitive, integrated employment is the norm for those we serve, as it is for typical adults. In the meantime, our Orange County community can be very proud of the outstanding progress we make when we pull together toward this shared goal.



Get Connected: Making Our Voices Heard!

By Sylvia Delgado,
PAC Chair and Jess Corey,
RCOC Peer Advocate

In our last column we shared exciting information on how things are changing at RCOC, as the organization becomes more person-centered. The idea is to hear your voice and give you more control over how you want things in your life – from the people in it, to how you spend your time.

It was pretty neat to see so many people speak up and support each other!

While a lot of adults with developmental disabilities are already strong self-advocates, many others are unsure about how to share their thoughts about the things that affect them. That can be hard, but the 22nd Annual Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference

that we attended this past May 6-7 in Sacramento offered some helpful lessons.

Sponsored by The Supported Life Institute, the conference



Sylvia Delgado



Jess Corey

theme was “Get Connected” and it featured booths for all kinds of resources, from microenterprises and health, to self-advocacy and disability rights. More than 400 people attended from throughout California and even from some other western states.

There were a lot of interesting topics, and it was pretty neat to see so many people speak up and support each other!

There were presentations on self-determination that offered great reminders of how much all of us can influence how our planning meetings go. Many people left those sessions encouraged, and looking forward to taking control of their futures.

Another session focused on work accommodations and how to ask an employer for them. It’s something

that should be simple, but we learned how hard it can be for some people to even bring up the topic. We also learned that the law requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for their employees with disabilities.

Never forget that there is always somebody around to help.

Among the highlights for both of us were the two keynote speakers: autism advocates Stephen Hinkle and Russell Lehmann. Both shared their personal stories of perseverance, and were GREAT examples of how a person can go from not speaking at all, to accomplishing BIG things!

You can too!

Some of us might not be able to speak so well, but never forget that there is always somebody around to help. And, often, the best way to start is by simply sharing your story.

Creating a Life Full of Possibilities! Adult Transition Planning Workshop

The transition that happens at around age 22, from public school-based services to RCOC-funded services, is an exciting time for young men and women with developmental disabilities and their families. For many, it's a time to begin making real their hopes and dreams for the future.

To help individuals and families prepare for this next stage in life, and to help young people with developmental disabilities begin envisioning the type of life they'd like to have, RCOC regularly hosts free adult transition planning workshops. At these events, experts share information and answer questions about education, independent living options, employment and work training, as well as transportation, benefits planning and management, and more.

The workshop listed below is focused on individuals ages 14 and older, but parents with elementary and pre-school age children are also welcome to attend. Remember, it's never too early to plan and prepare for the future!

When: Tuesday, September 19

Time: 6:30-8:00 p.m.

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

For more information and to register, please email tmailloux@rcocdd.com or call (714) 796-5330.

2017 Summer Recreation Resource Guide

To help parents plan a summer full of mind and body engaging activities for their children with developmental disabilities, RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center released its 2017 Summer Recreation Resource Guide, featuring more than 100 local programs, events and activities suitable for children with special needs.

The 14-page guide provides contact information and websites, along with detailed summaries of recreation, social, camp, sports/fitness, playground/park, art, music, dance, science, cooking and woodworking opportunities. It also includes helpful information about beach wheelchairs, discounts, free passes, and more.

The Guide also includes some questions parents and guardians may want to ask to help identify program/event features and accommodations that might be important for their children.

To download the free Guide, available in English and Spanish, visit RCOC's website at <http://www.rcocdd.com/frc/ccfrc/resources/recreation/>. For additional resource information, please contact your RCOC service coordinator or Comfort Connection at (714) 558-5400 or ccfrc@rcocdd.com.

Note: Some programs fill up quickly. If a program you are interested in is not available, you may want to mark your calendar to contact them in the spring of 2018 for next summer.

Moving on at 3...Transition Workshops for Parents

Every family with a child in Early Start receives transition services to help prepare for the changes that will take place when the child turns three years old and Early Start services end. Many parents say this support is invaluable in helping them understand the differences between Early Start and the school-based education services children with special needs receive from public school districts from the age of three through age 22. The upcoming workshops listed below are offered in English, however, interpreters for other languages can be provided upon request. For more information and to RSVP, please contact Patricia Garcia at (714) 558-5400 or pgarcia@rcocdd.com.

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

When: Thursday, Sept. 28

Time: 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Location: West O.C. Consortium for Special Education, The Innovation Lab, 5832 Bolsa Avenue in Huntington Beach

When: Thursday, Nov. 16

Time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Location: Harper Preschool Assessment Center, 425 E. 18th Street in Costa Mesa

AutFest Film Festival

By Liza Krassner, RCOG Board Member

I never thought I'd see the day when I would attend a film festival dedicated to showcasing films about autism. Yet, on April 22-23, The Autism Society of America staged its first AutFest Film Festival in the City of Orange in honor of Autism Awareness Month. It was themed "Spectrum to Screen" and festival organizer Matt Asner, son of the legendary Ed Asner and the parent of a child on the autism spectrum, reached into his network of entertainment industry professionals to help make this inaugural event a success. Among the Hollywood heavyweights in attendance were *The Accountant's* Ben Affleck, and Peter Doctor and Jonas Rivera, the Oscar-winning creative talents behind Pixar's *Inside Out*.

"You have to have a certain thickness of skin in this business...because success and failure are two sides of the same coin."

Over the years, the entertainment industry has amassed a body of creative work about autism and used that to inform, misinform, entertain, and make money. There are hits and misses, mainly in the portrayal of autism. Yet there's no doubt that film can inspire and visual stories can influence policy and opinions. And, as a stakeholder, nothing piques my interest more than a platform that

promotes workforce development for persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). What got me excited about AutFest is that it encouraged and brought together individuals with autism and industry professionals to network and explore potential employment and partnerships.

Hollywood is starting to recognize that those with autism can contribute to the industry.

"You have to have a certain thickness of skin in this business...because success and failure are two sides of the same coin," according to Affleck.

If it's that hard for pros like him, it's going to be just as hard if not harder for those with ASD. Animator Dani Bowman, who owns her own animation production company, says "the hardest part is that it's fast and getting the direction can be hard sometimes because we process differently. I have periods of being unemployed or underemployed." Budding writer Keaton Bicknell shares, "I've observed that it's not just what you know, it's also who you know that could get you in this industry." He's got that right. Entertainment is, after all, a very competitive business.

Currently, 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with autism, with symptoms ranging from mild to severe. As they mature and transition into adulthood, we have reason to be optimistic. Years ago, when *Rain Man* debuted, most people had a one-dimensional view of persons with ASD and expected all to be like Dustin Hoffmann's portrayal of Raymond Babbitt. Now, we know the autism community is much richer and more diverse than that, and we are learning more and more each day about how to help those on the autism spectrum to be happy and productive members of society.

The hope expressed by those organizing and attending the AutFest Film Festival is that, like so many other business enterprises, Hollywood is starting to recognize that those with autism can contribute to the industry.

"It's bringing and also celebrating diversity," said Bowman. "Yeah, some coaching would be helpful, too!"



L-R: Keaton Bicknell, Dani Bowman and Liza Krassner.

Michelle Katagiri-Mena
(continued from page 1)

What she enjoys most about her work is that she is always learning new skills and how to use those skills on the job.

She is responsible for a long list of complex tasks that are critical to ensuring food safety and patient health.

She also enjoys interacting with families and patients when she prepares and delivers food trays to patient rooms, but her duties are wide-ranging. She is responsible for a long list of complex tasks that are critical to ensuring food safety and patient health, as well as accuracy and efficiency of the operation. After she was hired, she also had to learn how to operate and navigate a brand new iPad-based system for food ordering and tracking, as well as a hand-held credit card machine that's used when family members order extra meals or food items.

When Michelle first started work and was learning what was expected of her on the job, IRI provided support 100 percent of the time. As she has become more comfortable with the job and proved herself capable of working independently, IRI has cut back dramatically on the amount of time they spend with her. Still, a job coach is always available if she needs help.

Michelle's family couldn't be more proud of her success.

"She knows she has potential, but other work experience programs didn't care if she was bored," said Kris. "She has learned so much, and shown that she can do a job that a person without a disability would do."

Michelle's family couldn't be more proud of her success.

Now living in Aliso Viejo with her mother, Michelle was diagnosed with autism when she was around two years old. Kris said their family's



Michelle baked her mother's 40th birthday cake.

experience mirrored that of many others, as Michelle had appeared to be developing normally and then there was a sudden change -- she became introverted and uncommunicative, and started exhibiting patterns of behavior common among many individuals on the autism spectrum.

Michelle was diagnosed with autism when she was around two years old.

As Michelle grew up and transitioned out of special education services and into regional center services, Kris worried that she might never be able to work in a typical job and support herself. However, with what she earns now, Michelle pays her own cell phone bill and is even saving up in case she might want to move out on her own someday.

"It's kind of scary, but it's good for her to spread her wings," said Kris.



The family took a vacation to San Diego last year. Front: Michelle's mother Kris Katagiri. Back (L-R): Kris' boyfriend Chris Allen, sister Krissi Mena, Michelle, and Michelle's boyfriend Brandon Castaneda.



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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

**Everyday Wellness:
 Wear Sunscreen**

Almost everybody loves a day at the beach in sunny Southern California! But remember when you’re out there swimming, surfing, walking, or just hanging out with your friends that it’s important to protect your skin from the sun’s damaging rays.

Using sunscreen anytime you’re in the sun can prevent painful sunburns and help you avoid skin cancer. Look for a sunscreen with at least a 15 SPF (SPF stands for sun protection factor) and remember to reapply it any time you’ve been in the water or have been sweating a lot, since that will cause most sunscreens to wash off.

