

In the Spotlight

Cassandra Cortes

Go Baby Go is the name of a non-profit program that modifies toy cars to enable children with mobility issues, like three-year-old Cassandra Cortes, to get around on their own. But it could just as easily describe little Cassie, herself, and how she is tackling her challenges!

“She’s scooting around the house now and trying to talk and communicate.”

Her parents, Marlene and Joe Cortes of Santa Ana, are delighted to see how much progress their daughter has made in just the last few months. They credit a combination of factors, including the therapies she’s receiving, the influence of her siblings – especially seeing her baby sister learn to crawl and walk – and the Go Baby Go car. Together, all of these things have helped Cassie to learn the concepts of independence and self-mobility, and have worked together to enhance a wide variety of other skills.

“She’s scooting around the house now and trying to talk and communicate,” said Marlene, who said Cassie used to simply wait to be carried from place to place. And though she’s always

been a happy child who loves to laugh, she did not previously have a strong interest in interacting with others.



Cassandra gets around in her Go Baby Go car

Earlier this year, Cassie was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. However, it took more than two years for medical specialists to pinpoint these diagnoses. Unlike many others with similar conditions, Cassie was neither premature nor underweight, the pregnancy had no complications, and she seemed otherwise healthy and happy. However, Joe and Marlene recognized that she wasn’t reaching key milestones and sought guidance from their pediatrician. Before Cassie’s first birthday, he referred

them to Regional Center of Orange County (RCOC) and ultimately advised them to seek evaluations by a succession of specialists, including neurology, metabolic medicine, genetics, and orthopedics.

At the same time, Joe, who is an Army military police officer, was deployed to serve a year at Guantanamo Bay. Though he was allowed a couple of brief visits home during that time, he was not able to be a part of the original referral to RCOC and Cassie’s many medical evaluations.

“My husband is all about serving the country,” said Marlene. “But not being able to be there for her and the family at that time was the hardest thing about the deployment for him.”

It took more than two years for medical specialists to pinpoint her diagnoses.

Christina Clark, the RCOC Service Coordinator who assisted the family throughout their time in the Early Start program, has great admiration for the courage and strength shown by both Marlene and Joe, who also have two sons and two other daughters ranging in age from one-and-a-half to 10 years old: “There were so many medical appointments,” she said. “With the

See **Cassandra Cortes** 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 website: www.rcocdd.com.

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Upcoming Fiscal Year 2018-2019 Board Meetings

Jan. 10 • March 7 • May 2 • June 6

The public is invited to attend RCOC board meetings. The meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. in the Regional Center Board Room at RCOC's headquarters, located at 1525 North Tustin Avenue in Santa Ana.

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DDS Selects Self-Determination Program Participants

On October 1, the first 2,500 individuals were selected by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to participate in California's Self-Determination Program. Selected by lottery, all had previously registered their interest in the program and most had attended an informational meeting to learn the basics about how the program is expected to work.

Each regional center catchment area was allocated a percentage of the available spaces.

Each regional center catchment area was allocated a percentage of the available spaces, with those spaces distributed proportionally according to disability, ethnicity, and age group for that regional center's population.

Orange County was allocated 151 of the 2,500 spaces, and more than 700 of those RCOC serves have expressed interest in the program.

The next step for the selected individuals is to participate in an orientation session, where they will receive information on what services are available in the Self

Determination Program. They will also receive tools that DDS has been creating to help them choose qualified service providers. These orientations are being planned in the day time hours, evenings, and Saturdays to ensure everyone selected has an opportunity to attend and have their questions answered.

Orange County was allocated 151 of the 2,500 spaces, and around 600 of those RCOC serves have expressed interest in the program.

Individuals who have expressed interest in the Self-Determination Program and were selected for the initial group are not required to enroll, and can decide not to participate even after attending an orientation. If that happens, DDS will again use the lottery process to select alternates to move forward in their place.

To learn more, contact Cathy Furukawa at cfurukawa@rcocdd.com or (714) 796-5181. For the latest program information, visit the DDS website at www.dds.ca.gov/SDP.



Executive Director's Report

Person Centered Planning Can Lead to Better Lives

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

For many of us who have devoted our careers to serving people with developmental disabilities, there's not much that is more gratifying than seeing children make progress. When there are loving parents advocating for them, and nurturing families cheering them on, it's truly inspiring. The Cortes family, featured on this issue's front cover, is a perfect example.

Stories like theirs are even more exciting when you consider that Regional Center of Orange County's embrace of person centered thinking and person centered planning means there has never been a better time for a young child like Cassandra to be entering our system.

There has never been a better time for a young child like Cassandra to be entering our system.

Our Regional Center has always been committed to good stewardship that puts the needs of those we serve first. The same is true for many of our service providers. However, person centered thinking takes the focus on the individual to a whole new

level. It provides an inventive and creative framework for identifying services and supports that are more meaningful, while improving the health and safety of the people we serve.



I'm especially pleased at how positively our service provider community has responded to the person centered training we're

offering, and I'm looking forward to getting feedback from families on the training we'll soon be offering them (see story on page 5).

RCOC's transition into a fully person centered organization will take time, but we're already seeing some remarkable results. Service coordinators, managers and other RCOC staff are thinking more creatively about how we can meet individual and family needs. It's enabling people with developmental disabilities to have a self-directed experience, even if they are not selected to be part of the State's self-determination program.

Service providers, too, are beginning to think more about the purpose behind IPP (Individual Program Plan) goals. For example, for a person with challenging behaviors, the "old school" approach would be to achieve a reduction in those behaviors and declare success; a person-centered approach pushes deeper, recognizing that while the goal is crucial, it is a means to an end – enabling the person with disabilities to more fully participate in life activities that matter

to them, whether that be socializing with peers, attending a baseball game, landing a rewarding job, or something else entirely.

Family members, too, are learning new things about what's important to their adult children or siblings. And parents of young children are gaining new tools to help get their daughters and sons off on the right foot. Cassandra, for example, now has a vivid one-page description that her parents can share with school district staff, respite staff, and even healthcare professionals who may interact with their daughter. An outgrowth of the person centered planning process, the one-page description provides key insights about what makes Cassandra amazing, what makes her happy, and how she can best be supported. Now a key part of her IPP, it will be continuously updated to keep pace with her as she grows, develops and matures.

The one-page description provides key insights about what makes Cassandra amazing.

Cassandra recently transitioned from Early Start to Lanterman services, so she is now receiving most of the services she needs through the public school system. However, when she graduates, and transitions to adult services provided through RCOC, her family (and the thousands of other families we serve) can be assured that person centered thinking will continue to guide RCOC's efforts to help her live a healthy, happy and rewarding life.

Person to Person

Changes at RCOC Are All About YOU!

By Sylvia Delgado, Peer Advisory Committee Chair & Jess Corey, RCOC Peer Advocate

We're both really excited about how person centered thinking is changing the way we do things here at Regional Center. It is about YOU and making it possible for you to have what you need to have the life you want.

As a person served and an RCOC Board member, Sylvia has a unique perspective on both person centered thinking and the many other changes that have happened since she's been a part of RCOC.



Sylvia Delgado



Jess Corey

Along with person centered thinking, a highlight for her was changing the language in the Lanterman Act to use the term “intellectual disability” in place of “mental retardation.”

Also important to her have been changes to RCOC's policies to use person centered language, so persons served can understand every part of the process, as well as RCOC's dedication to healthy living and self-determination.

Jess's perspective on the changes at RCOC has been shaped by his work as RCOC's Peer Advocate, which has allowed him to attend workshops and conferences that give him a lot of hope for the future. One of those took

place recently in Portland, Oregon. It was hosted by The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices, and Jess attended with several other RCOC staff.

He had the honor of speaking on a panel of advocates, where he shared what it means for persons served to have the ability to access the things they need, and to have everyone in their life learn what's important to them. Another key thing he learned is that person centered thinking can apply to almost any situation. It can also be adjusted as a person grows, which allows a person's plan to change as they do. That's important, because – like we said – it's all about YOU!

Update on CalABLE

In past issues, we've talked about the ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Act, a federal law aimed at allowing families of people with disabilities to set aside money for their loved ones' future needs without making them ineligible for government benefits.

While California's program has been delayed, the launch is getting closer. Program Director Dante Allen says that CalABLE is scheduled for launch in late 2018 or early 2019 at the latest. For the latest news and to learn more, visit <https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/able>.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

Due to the holidays, there will be no Behavior Management Workshops beginning in November or 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).

Person Centered Training for Service Providers and Families

We've talked a lot in this newsletter about person centered thinking, and how RCOC is using the person centered training that all of our staff have undergone to help the people we serve to live better lives. This approach and way of thinking about providing services and supports represents a major change. It is also the foundation for meeting soon-to-be mandated federal requirements for service planning and various types of services and supports.

So far, 150 service provider staff members have undergone the two-day, intensive training.

With that in mind, RCOC has taken the initiative to offer training on person centered thinking to our service provider community. So far, 150 service provider staff members have undergone the two-day, intensive training that covers a variety of conversational, planning and problem solving skills that will help them to more effectively support people with developmental disabilities to achieve more meaningful lives

in the community. In the course of the training, participants also learn to employ those skills to develop insightful one-page descriptions about each individual they serve – these descriptions are a key tool for ensuring that all services and supports are selected and delivered in ways that respect the values and priorities of the person served.

“The training opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking and processing,” said Nima Zadeh of ABEDI, Inc., who attended one of the first training sessions. “With the training team’s clear and informative instructions I managed to put what I had learned in practice immediately.”

In 2019, RCOC plans to offer this service provider training once a quarter.

RCOC is also organizing training on person centered thinking for families.

Since parents are key members of the circle of support for a person with developmental disabilities, RCOC is also organizing training on person centered thinking for families. These

will be one-day sessions, intended to empower family members to be more effective advocates for their loved ones. Importantly, they will share practical techniques to help parents listen more effectively to their loved one, and help that person to have a voice that is fully heard in planning sessions and in day-to-day life.

“At its heart, person centered thinking is about figuring out what matters most to each individual we serve, and doing everything we can to help them live a life that’s meaningful to them,” said RCOC’s Person Centered Thinking Coordinator Cristina Mercado, Ph.D.

Service providers interested in attending person centered thinking training can check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC’s website (www.rcocdd.com/news-and-events/calendar) for a schedule of dates and a flyer with enrollment information.

The schedule for family-focused training is still being finalized. However, interested parents can contact their RCOC Service Coordinator who will provide training dates and information when it becomes available.

Safety Stu's Corner

Bus Safety

Hello! Safety Stu here! In this issue, we're talking about Bus Safety, so let's start with a few key tips:

1. Always be aware of your surroundings. If someone, or something, gives you that "uh-oh" feeling, pay attention to it.
2. Use the SAFE method (scan, assess, forecast, execute).
3. Try to sit close to the bus driver – that person can help you if you need it, and it's easier to get off the bus if you have to.



Stuart Haskin

4. **TELL** – always tell the bus driver or trusted adult if something happens that doesn't feel right to you.

What if the person sitting next to you starts asking lots of personal questions like, "where do you live?" "where do you go to school?" "what's your phone number?" DO NOT give them that information.

Instead, tell them they should not ask those questions and move to a seat closer to the bus driver. If the person continues to bother you, or follows you, **TELL** the bus driver. Do not get off the bus at an unfamiliar stop just because you are concerned the person might be following you, because you could get lost. Instead, if the person follows

you off the bus, go to the nearest store and ask someone who works there for help.

What if it's the bus driver who is being mean, not listening to your requests for help, or doing something else they shouldn't do? First, you need to get out of the situation safely by calling 911, using your voice or making a scene. Then immediately tell someone you trust – a parent, caregiver, or Service Coordinator. **TELL** them what happened and how you feel. If they act like it's no big deal, then tell another trusted adult, and **KEEP TELLING** until someone listens to you.

Get Safe, and RCOC always want to make sure you are safe and that if something has happened, that you are being heard. Have a **SAFE DAY!**

RCOC Organizes Fifth Annual Backpack Giveaway

With support from sponsors Premier Healthcare Services, 24Hr HomeCare, and BPSOS which provided free backpacks and school supplies, RCOC hosted two back-to-school events for more than 230 children with developmental disabilities and their families. The events, on July 28 and August 25, were organized by RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center, which worked with service coordinators to identify children we serve from low-income families. Those families were then contacted by Comfort Connection and invited to participate.



Hilda Mendez, Deanna Wright and Alexander Hays, Alma Morales (Community Relations Manager for Premier Healthcare Services) and Larry Landauer

Cassandra Cortes
(continued from page 1)

other children to care for, and her husband deployed serving our country, I don't know how Marlene did it!"



Cassie with her father Joe Cortes

Marlene credits her own mother, who lives nearby, with providing much-needed support while Joe was away. Still, as months passed, and all the tests kept coming back normal, these devoted parents sometimes thought they might never find answers to their questions.

“With the other children to care for, and her husband deployed serving our country, I don’t know how Marlene did it!”

At that time, Marlene said, “Regional Center was so important, because the medical appointments can take months. Regional Center came out right away to evaluate her, and we started with physical therapy and

occupational therapy right away. Even though we didn’t have a diagnosis, they didn’t wait. They said we can tell something is wrong.”

“Regional Center came out right away to evaluate her, and we started with physical therapy and occupational therapy right away.”

When Cassie was finally diagnosed, Marlene and Joe felt the self-doubt many parents of children with developmental disabilities experience, but they are naturally warm and positive people and quickly moved past that. They now see the world differently, accepting their daughter’s challenges and choosing to focus on the positive.

“The first thing I noticed [about the Cortes family] was their advocacy for Cassandra and their drive to have what’s best for her,” said their current RCOC Service Coordinator Natalie Gutierrez, who is also impressed at how understanding, accepting and loving Cassie’s siblings are. “It’s very sweet to see how they are with her.”

They now see the world differently, accepting their daughter’s challenges and choosing to focus on the positive.

Marlene said that while it took some time for them to see progress with therapy, she and Joe are glad they got Cassie started with it at a young age, and encourage others to take

advantage of the many resources available to them through RCOC.

“Get as much information as you possibly can,” she said. “Attend every meeting and workshop you can, because the more you’re willing to talk to people, the more you find they are willing to help.”



The Cortes family at a military Christmas party in 2015, the year Cassandra was born



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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

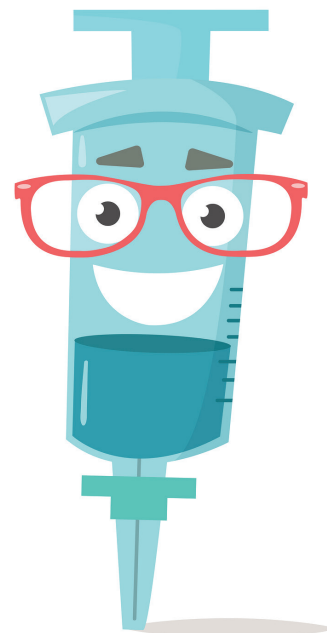
Cypress Office

10803 Hope Street, Suite A
24-hr Phone: (714) 796-2900

Everyday Wellness Tip: Get a Flu Shot

You may remember last year's flu season was one for the record books. Lots of people got the flu and their illness was also more severe than usual. If you were one of them, you were probably one of the first in line to get a flu shot this year, in hopes of avoiding the flu this year. If not, don't delay any longer, because the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends getting a flu shot by the end of October.

Unless you have a medical reason for not getting the flu shot, it's a simple and effective way to avoid getting sick. And remember, just because you got a flu shot last year doesn't mean you can go without this year. There are many different strains of flu virus and they are constantly changing, so each year's vaccine is specially formulated to prevent the particular flu viruses the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believes will be most likely to spread and make people sick.





Events and Activities in the Vietnamese Community

Regional Center of Orange County has prepared this insert especially for the individuals and families we serve who are most comfortable communicating in the Vietnamese language. These events, programs and activities are presented in Vietnamese and/or are geared specifically for those in Southern California's Vietnamese community. However, they are not funded or endorsed by RCOC and this information is provided as a courtesy. If you know of other opportunities you would like to share with others in the Vietnamese community, please contact RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.



9th Annual OC Autism Breakfast with Santa

OC Autism, a non-profit organization, will host their 9th Annual Breakfast with Santa at Atlantis Play Center. The event will feature fun activities for children with special needs (i.e., arts and crafts, face painting, pictures with Santa, etc.), resource fair, food, and entertainment. Each child will receive an unwrapped gift of their choice. \$5 donation per ticket. For more information, call OC Autism at (714) 203-5213.

A limited number of free admission tickets are available on a first come/first served basis and must be picked up at the RCOC office in Santa Ana or Cypress. For free tickets, contact Kaitlynn Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Saturday, Dec. 15 – 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Atlantis Play Center at 13630 Atlantis Way in Garden Grove

After-School Parks Program

Throughout the school year, elementary school-aged children can enjoy quality recreational activities offered on a free, drop-in basis through the Parks & Playgrounds Program. Activities may include arts & crafts, games, sports, and "just plain fun." The hours are 2:30 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday at the locations below.

Bolsa Chica Park at 13660 University Street in Westminster
(714) 865-6568

Liberty Park at 13900 Monroe Street in Westminster
(714) 412-2617

Sigler Park at 7200 Plaza Steet in Westminster
(714) 715-0262

Tree Lighting Ceremony

This free event will feature guests from the North Pole, as well as performances by various community groups, delicious food available for purchase from local non-profit organizations, games, a spectacular fireworks show, and much more!

Saturday, Dec. 1

4:30 - 8 p.m.

Fountain Valley Recreation Center & Sports Park

16400 Brookhurst in Fountain Valley

Snoopy House Holiday Display

An Orange County holiday tradition since 1966 that attracts an estimated 80,000 visitors annually, the Snoopy House features holiday scenes populated by "Peanuts" characters and is available for viewing from 5:30 to 9 p.m. nightly from Dec. 14 through Dec. 23 in front of Costa Mesa City Hall located at 77 Fair Drive. Opening night will be Dec. 14 with a formal presentation beginning at 5 p.m. Santa will make special visits to the event from 7-9 p.m. from Dec. 14 through Dec. 23. Children and their families will have opportunities to receive free photos with Santa.

Child Care Assistance for Working Parents

For parents who work outside of the home, finding someone they trust to look after their children during work hours is a major challenge. When one or more of those children have special needs, the challenge can be even greater, but RCOC can help.

Support is available for RCOC parents who choose site-based child care centers and family child care homes, as well as those who prefer in-home care.

While parents are expected to bear the basic cost of child care (as they do for their typical children), RCOC is able to help with costs that are over and above that amount and are directly related to the child's disability. For example, if a personal aide is required to enable a child care center to meet the enhanced physical needs of a child with cerebral palsy, RCOC can usually pay the cost for the aide.

One key requirement is that in two-parent households, both parents must be either employed outside the home or going to school full-time. Also,

child care assistance is generally available only during the hours both parents are at work, and the child is not in school. This can include nights and weekends.

Support is available for RCOC parents who choose site-based child care centers and family child care homes, as well as those who prefer in-home care. In fact, RCOC can even help to put families in touch with service providers that have multilingual staff and specialize in child care for those with special needs. Families can also contact the local Children's Home Society (www.chs-ca.org) directly at (714) 456-9800 – their multilingual experts provide free referrals to families looking for appropriate child care that's close to home or work.

U.S. law makes it illegal for any child care provider to discriminate against children with disabilities.

Another key thing for all parents to know is that U.S. law makes it illegal for any child care provider to

discriminate against children with disabilities, or to charge a family more because their child has special needs. Rather, they must look at each child's individual needs and see if reasonable accommodations can be made to include the child in their program. That accommodation might include a personal aide, as noted above, but could also simply involve modification of certain activities or small changes to the physical environment or schedule.

Even if a family is not eligible for child care support from RCOC, almost all families can receive respite services.

Importantly, even if a family is not eligible for child care support from RCOC, almost all families can receive respite services that are invaluable for giving parents a much-needed break from the stresses of raising a child with developmental disabilities.

If you'd like to learn more about child care help from RCOC, or respite care services, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.



Events and Activities in the Hispanic Community

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Fiesta de Navidad – Destellos de Angeles

Organized by Conexiones Educativas, this event is for families with children who have special needs, and will feature entertainment, a raffle and gifts. All ages and diagnoses are welcome. Pre-registration is required. For information and to register, call or email Cecilia Mercado at (714) 398-4710 or ceci.mercado@yahoo.com.

Monday, Dec. 17
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.



Down Syndrome Association Breakfast with Santa

The event will take place on Saturday, Dec. 1 from 9-11 a.m. at the Garden Grove Elks Lodge, 11551 Trask Ave in Garden Grove. For more information, call the DSAOC at (714) 540-5794.

Grupo de Autismo Angeles

The organization will host its 20th Annual Gala dinner in November and annual Christmas party in December. For details, contact Alexa Hernandez at ahernandez.alex@gmail.com.

Letters to Santa in Fullerton

From Nov. 27 to Dec. 17, there will be special North Pole Express mailboxes in three Fullerton locations. Children who write a letter to Santa and place it in a stamped, self-addressed, and unsealed envelope in one of the three North Pole Express mailbox locations listed below will receive a response from Santa. A "Dear Santa" form will also be available.

Fullerton Public Library
353 W. Commonwealth Ave.

Fullerton Community Center
340 W. Commonwealth Ave.

Fullerton City Hall
303 W. Commonwealth Ave.

Fullerton New Year's Eve Celebration

Celebrate New Year's Eve at this family-friendly, alcohol-free event featuring live music, food, roaming entertainment, zip lining, children's activities, and a midnight fireworks show. For information, call Fullerton Museum at (714) 738-6564.

Monday, Dec. 31
7 p.m. - Midnight
Downtown Fullerton Plaza

(continued on back)

Bright Futures (Program for Parents)

Discovery Cube's award-winning program is designed for low-income parents of children six and under to help their children (1) become school-ready, (2) develop their complex language and reading skills in English and Spanish, (3) understand number sense, and (4) incorporate science-thinking skills. The goal is to equip parents with skills to enable their children to successfully enter school and ultimately

become productive, problem-solving community members. Registration is required. Contact Elena Serratos at (714) 263-3866 or eserratos@discoverycube.org.

Second Wednesday of every month
7-8 p.m.

Discovery Cube Orange County
2500 N Main Street in Santa Ana

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