

In the Spotlight

Donald Davis and Cindy Novesky

On September 30, 2017, with more than 100 friends and family attending, Cindy Novesky and Donald Davis enjoyed a fairytale wedding. It was a fun and joyful event, complete with live music and dancing. In her veil, long white dress and glittery shoes, Cindy looked and felt like her favorite Disney princess, Cinderella. Don, her Prince Charming, was handsomely attired in a suit with a pink bowtie. Thanks to Don's younger sister Susan Davis and her husband David Schmidt, the happy couple even got to spend their honeymoon at the Disneyland Hotel!



Don's sister Susan (far left) performed the commitment ceremony and Cindy's sister Kathy (far right) was maid of honor.

The day was the culmination of a loving friendship and romance that spans nearly three decades.

The day was the culmination of a loving friendship and romance that spans nearly three decades.

Don, age 70, and Cindy, age 65, both have intellectual disabilities and are served by Regional Center of Orange County. They met back in 1990 through social events and

outings organized by staff for the group homes where they each lived at the time, years after Don had transitioned from living at Fairview Developmental Center in his teen years. Cindy says Don was a perfect gentleman. Don said Cindy was so beautiful and he "just knew she was the one." Over time, their friendship blossomed and was facilitated by both families, who were happy their loved ones had developed such a loving relationship.

With their respective group homes just half a mile apart, the couple spent every spare moment together. Cindy is able to read and write, so they frequently rode the bus together to Disneyland and to nearby shopping malls. They also became close with one another's families, even traveling with Susan and David on vacations to places like Disney World and Cabo San Lucas in Mexico.

See **Donald Davis** and **Cindy Novesky** 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

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.

RCOC Administration

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Person-Centered Training Now Available to Families

RCOC's embrace of person-centered thinking is already helping us in our efforts to help the people we serve to live better lives. Our new person-centered IPP (Individual Person-centered Plan) format was rolled out agency-wide this past September, and well over 1,250 people now have IPPs that include a photo and one-page description that encapsulates what's important to and for them, and how they want to be supported. These new IPPs also use more person-centered language that focuses on the person's strengths, hopes and dreams, while still highlighting areas where they may struggle and need support in their life.

A number of our service providers have sent their staff to RCOC-provided person-centered training, and many

more have signed up for the intensive, three-day sessions in 2019.

***RCOC is offering a
three-hour person-centered
thinking workshop for
family members.***

Now, we're excited to announce that RCOC is offering a three-hour person-centered thinking workshop for family members and others in a person's circle of support. Separate workshops focus on children age 3 to 15, and older children and adults (age 16 and older). Ask your RCOC Service Coordinator for details, or check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for more information and to enroll.

DDS Issues Program Directives for Self-Determination Program

After selecting the first 2,500 individuals to participate in California's Self-Determination Program in October, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) followed up in December with several directives that specify how the program must be implemented. This includes, for example, which Self-Determination Program service providers must undergo criminal background checks, and rates for Financial Management Service providers.

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

Fairview Should Continue to Benefit People with Disabilities

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

It's not often a public policy proposal comes forward that can honestly be viewed as a victory by people across the political spectrum. However, the proposal RCOC supports for the 100 or so acres of land that makes up Fairview Developmental Center in Costa Mesa is one that everyone in our community can get behind.

For many years, RCOC has been partnering with Fairview staff, the Department of Developmental Services, and other stakeholders to transition Fairview's residents to appropriate, quality homes in the community. We're proud of the progress our collaboration has produced, and pleased to report that we expect the last residents will transition to homes in the community this year.

Though the Developmental Center is not scheduled to close formally until 2021, there has already been a lot of talk about what should be done with this state-owned land and facility. Some have suggested repurposing Fairview for another use. However, the Fairview buildings are quite old. Over the years, they have been something of a "money pit"

for the State of California. In fact, they are currently operating under federal waivers, and it would be cost-prohibitive to fully bring them up to current building and safety codes.



Meanwhile, the value of the land has increased exponentially since the Developmental Center opened in

1959. Once in a rural area, Fairview's prime location now makes it highly desirable to both developers and advocates representing a variety of constituencies. Sadly, that has led to unnecessary discord.

The proposal that Regional Center of Orange County and its Board of Directors support is to demolish the outdated and unusable Fairview facility and use the land to replicate the proven example of Harbor Village.

Located on 39 acres that was previously part of Fairview Developmental Center, Harbor Village is comprised of 564 rental apartments and single-family homes. Built in the mid-1980s as a cooperative effort between the State of California and private developers, many of the units are accessible or easily modified to meet special needs.

Harbor Village includes both market-rate units and affordable units for those with and without disabilities. The housing complex features well-maintained and accessible recreation

areas. With a percentage of the affordable units dedicated to low-income adults with developmental disabilities, it provides a residential environment where neighbors are familiar with and accepting of disabilities and residents develop natural, mutually-supportive friendships.

Importantly, the financial arrangements that support Harbor Village embody sensible fiscal policy everyone can get behind.

Private developers – not taxpayers – shoulder financial responsibility for the project, sharing revenue with California, which retains ownership of the land through a long-term lease. Meanwhile, the market-rate rentals provide an ongoing source of funding that subsidizes the affordable units and pays for necessary disability modifications, without additional cost to taxpayers.

In short, Harbor Village represents a prudent use of government resources that delivers a win-win-win scenario.

By adopting this proven model for the remaining Fairview land, Californians will earn ongoing revenue while retaining ownership of a high-value asset. Orange County will increase the number of quality housing units for residents of all backgrounds. And, people with developmental disabilities – most of whom live below the poverty line – will enjoy affordable housing, enabling them to continue to benefit from the investment in Fairview that California made on their behalf decades ago.

Person to Person

Relationships: Separate but Equal...Have We Been Here Before?

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

The two of us recognize that society has changed to become a lot more open and accepting of people with disabilities than it was say, 50 or 100 years ago. But there's one important thing that hasn't really changed much at all, and that's in the area of adults with disabilities finding long lasting, loving relationships.

We don't think it should be that hard for people with developmental disabilities to live like everyone else.

Did you know that most couples who find a way to be together (and there are many!) cannot legally be married, without sacrificing some of the public benefits one or both of them receive?

Imagine, marrying someone you care for and being punished for it!



Sylvia Delgado



Jess Corey

Our cover story features a couple who have been together for many years. It's great to see them have the support of their families, and to see others in the community also overcoming barriers to being together. However, we don't think it should be that hard for people with

developmental disabilities to live like everyone else and have the chance to be connected like everyone else. That shouldn't be denied to us simply because we receive some form of assistance.

Jess knows this issue weighs on the hearts of many adults RCOC serves, and Sylvia has even had her own personal experience with it.

Years ago, Sylvia and her boyfriend at the time wanted to get married, but people kept telling them they shouldn't do it – they should just stay together as boyfriend/girlfriend so they wouldn't lose their benefits. Long story short, they didn't

end up getting married and they're not together anymore, but she knows couples who have managed to stay together for many years.

The desire for loving relationships in our lives is part of what ALL of us are, as human beings.

Some of those couples live in the same apartment complex – together, but living separately. We know that works for some couples, including some who don't have disabilities, but we think that loving and getting married to someone you care for shouldn't be a matter of “overcoming the odds.”

Telling adults with developmental disabilities “you CAN'T” is no longer an option.

The desire for loving relationships in our lives is part of what ALL of us are, as human beings. Whether we have relationships and whether we get married should be our choices to make. Telling adults with developmental disabilities “you CAN'T” is no longer an option.

Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

These workshops are free for parents, and cover 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. To gain the most value from the experience, parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in a series, though toilet training is the focus of the last session. Advance reservations are required and group size is typically limited to 8-15 families. Contact your Service Coordinator or Tracy Vaughan at (714) 796-5223 for additional information, and to register.

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

Presented in Vietnamese by Footprints

When: Tuesday evenings – March 19, March 26, April 2, April 9 and April 16

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOC Cypress Office
10803 Hope Street, Suite A

Presented in Spanish by Footprints

When: Thursday evenings – May 9, May 16, May 23, May 30 and June 6

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOC Santa Ana Office
1525 N. Tustin Avenue
Free parking in the structure across from the RCOC office building.

Presented in English by Advanced Behavioral Health

When: Thursday evenings – Aug. 8, Aug. 15, Aug. 22, Aug. 29 and Sept. 5

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: RCOC Cypress Office
10803 Hope Street, Suite A

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.

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.

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.

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.

Safety Stu's Corner

See Something, Say Something

Hello Friends! In this issue, we're talking about self-advocacy.

As many of you may already know, self-advocacy means speaking up for your own interests, including things that can help you to be safe in your home, at work, out in the community, and in your relationships.

Did you also know that you can help advocate for others?

For instance, what if a friend at your day program tells you that a staff

member at their group home is not allowing your friend to call their mom or dad? Would you be able to help your friend by telling a trusted person, such as a supervisor or your RCOC



Stuart Haskin

Service Coordinator about what's happening? The answer is: **YES!** That trusted person could talk to your friend to find out what is happening at their group home and possibly act to fix the situation.

So, does that mean that you would be a snitch or a tattle-tale? **NO!** Reporting abuse or neglect to get help for yourself or for another person is a **BIG** part of self-advocacy, and you should be proud of yourself for speaking up. When

you tell a trusted person about an odd situation, he or she can help determine if what's happening is a simple misunderstanding, or something more serious.

If you're afraid someone might be mad at you for speaking up, you can always do it Ninja Style! That means, like a ninja, you can report an odd situation to a supervisor or Service Coordinator without drawing attention to yourself. You could do that by speaking privately to them, calling when no one else is around, or by writing a note to them.

Whether you speak up publicly or in secret, looking out for yourself and your friends is always the right thing to do. Simply put: if you **see something, say something!**

Have a **SAFE DAY!**

Festive Holiday Events for RCOC Families

Hundreds of low-income children and adults served by RCOC enjoyed brighter holidays through the generosity of numerous contributors to RCOC's Wish Tree program and Comfort Connection Family Resource Center's toy drive.

Wish Tree supporters included: SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union, Brandman University, CASTO Chapter 2, Girl Scouts Unit Oso Valley Service Unit, Troutman Sanders, AE COM, New Life Mission Church, Exceptional Home Care, Premier HomeHealth Services, and Fox Dealer Interactive, along with 19 individuals, including RCOC Board members and employees.

The toy drive was made possible by: 24 Hour Home Care (which also provided volunteer gift wrappers and refreshments), The Giovanniello Law Group, the Steele family, Accredited Home Care, Cortica Care, Premier Healthcare Services, Fox Dealer Interactive, RCOC's Peer Advisory Committee, and several members of Orange County's Vietnamese community, including Tam Nguyen, Jayce Dung Yenson, and Linda Nguyen.

In addition, Grammy-nominated Latin jazz star and UCI Professor Dr. Bobby Rodriguez and the Barclay Theatre's ArtsReach Program engaged with RCOC families during a holiday concert sound check to celebrate the season.



(L-R) RCOC Executive Director Larry Landauer, Margarita Swift and son Bradley Swift, Dr. Bobby Rodriguez and RCOC Board Member Liza Krassner.

Donald Davis and Cindy Novesky
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Don and Cindy around the time they first met.

“In a short period of time, Cindy became my sister,” said Susan, who has been Don’s strong advocate since their mother passed away.

Many years ago, Cindy and Don decided they wanted to get married, so they would never have to be apart, so Susan asked the administrator of their group homes if the couple could live together and share a room.

The couple spent every spare moment together.

“I was told no, and that they would lose their benefits if they lived together,” said Susan. Though disappointed, the couple never gave up on their dream and neither did their families. In fact, their commitment to each other only deepened. Twenty years ago, Don was hit by a truck while crossing the street. It was a serious accident and he was first hospitalized and then spent six months recuperating in a rehab

facility. Cindy was by his side every weekend.

“She found ways to take the bus to see him,” said Susan. “She was his motivation for his physical therapy – to get home to Cindy. It was her love that got him back home.”

Susan said she knew then that they would be together forever, and two years ago – at Cindy and Don’s request, and with the support of Cindy’s sister Kathy Aranda – she again inquired about whether the couple might live together in the same group home. This time, though, she spoke with Don’s RCOC Service Coordinator, who affirmed that arrangements can, in fact, be made for those in romantic relationships to live in the same home.

Happily, in 2017, the couple moved into a new group home. They enjoyed living together, and told their sisters Susan and Kathy that they wanted a wedding, so plans were soon underway. The two also transitioned to the same RCOC Service Coordinator Kandyse Tran, which ensures that their individual needs are met, while also taking into account their special relationship.

“When something is going on with one of them, it affects the other,” noted Kandyse, who applauded the teamwork with and between the two families who have supported and facilitated their loved ones’ dreams.

“They didn’t need a marriage certificate,” said Susan, who notes that Cindy and Don’s commitment to



David Schmidt, Don, Cindy and Susan Davis enjoy frequent family outings.



Cindy and Don danced together at their wedding in 2017.

one another is every bit as real and strong as any conventional couple. And, like any other couple, they face day-to-day challenges in their relationship, which they say they overcome through a combination of love, loyalty and mutual respect.

“We help each other out,” said Don.

“When one is having a bad day, we try to calm each other,” Cindy added.



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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 Enough Sleep

Good sleep is essential for good health, because it's when you're sleeping that your body does a lot of "repair" work on cells, muscles and organs. Most adults need 7-8 hours to be at their best, but lots of people do get that much shut-eye. Here are some quick tips to help you cultivate good sleep habits.

- **Set a regular sleep schedule.** Go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time – even on the weekends – and avoid napping during the day.
- **Avoid screen time before bed.** The blue light emitted by TVs, phone and computer screens stimulates your brain at a time when you need to relax.
- **Get regular exercise during the daytime.** Exercise helps to reduce stress and promote relaxation, but vigorous exercise immediately before bed may keep you awake.
- **Steer clear of caffeine, alcohol and nicotine.** These can all make it difficult to sleep. Even alcohol,



which may initially make you drowsy, interferes with proper sleep.

- **Don't snack after dinner.** Going to bed with a full stomach can cause heartburn, which can lead to a restless night's sleep.



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, some 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.

Asians and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities California Statewide Conference

The theme of this conference, "Transitions," emphasizes transitioning from school to college, from college to employment, from childhood to independent living, from job to job, and from job to retirement.

Panels cover information on public benefits, health care, resume writing and job searches, employment laws, navigating special education, educational and job accommodations, assistive technology, mental health and autism, and financial planning. Vietnamese translation/interpreter is available upon request.

Scholarships may be available for individuals/family members served by RCOC. For more information and to inquire about scholarships, contact Kaitlynn Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Friday, March 8 and Saturday, March 9
Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa
1600 S. Disneyland Drive in Anaheim

Roadmap to Success Special Program Resource Fair

Hosted by the Garden Grove Unified School District, this event provides an opportunity for special education students and parents to learn about programs and services available after high school. For more information, contact the Department of Parent and Community Outreach at (714) 663-6084 or email lbui@ggusd.us.

Monday March 11
5 – 7 p.m.
Rancho Alamitos High School
11351 Dale Street in Garden Grove

Mardi Gras for Autism

Fullerton Care Autism Coalition will host family friendly, sensory oriented attractions and a resource fair for families with children who have autism. The event is open to the public and no RSVP is required.

Saturday, April 6
11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Fullerton Train Depot Center
110 E. Commonwealth in Fullerton



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Join the City of Westminster in celebrating the season at the annual Spring Festival. Taking place annually on the Saturday of the weekend before Easter, the event features live entertainment, delicious food, craft vendors, an extensive resource fair, fun children's activities and a visit from the Easter Bunny! For more information, stop by the Community Services & Recreation Department at 8200 Westminster Blvd., call (714) 895-2860 or email CSRonline@westminster-ca.gov.

Saturday, April 13

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Westminster Civic Center

8200 Westminster Blvd. in Westminster

Employment Support for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

As for adults without disabilities, a paying job in the community can instill self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment and purpose for a person with developmental disabilities. This is one of the reasons the State of California and RCOC have both adopted Employment First policies, which mandate that we explore competitive, integrated employment as the first option for the working-age adults we serve.

The State of California and RCOC have both adopted Employment First policies.

Though regional centers across the state are challenged to secure competitive, integrated employment for all of the adults with developmental disabilities who want jobs, RCOC and our community's employment service providers have

been recognized for our efforts to help the adults we serve achieve their career goals.

This includes creating partnerships with prospective employers to identify jobs that could be done by people with developmental disabilities, and partnering with employers on internship programs, such as Project SEARCH and the Paid Internship Program, that enable people to gain important job skills and experience. It also includes working to match an individual's skills, talents, abilities and interests with the right job and employer.

Once a person with disabilities is matched with a job, RCOC's employment service providers typically provide on-site job coaching support. A job coach's goal is to help facilitate the person's success in the workplace. Like all RCOC-funded services, the level of employment support provided depends entirely

on the individual and his or her needs. It can range from continuous, direct supervision in the workplace by a job coach to daily, weekly or monthly monitoring where the job coach checks in periodically with the person and employer to facilitate communication and resolve any workplace issues.

If you'd like to learn more about employment services from RCOC, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.





Events and Activities in the Hispanic Community

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Free Workshops from TASK

The following workshops are offered at no cost to parents by TASK, which specializes in special education support for people with disabilities and their families. For more information on any of these events, and to RSVP, call TASK at (714) 533-8275 or go online to www.taskca.org.

Assistive Technology at No Cost and Adaptation Ideas for Very Low Cost: In this workshop, learn great ideas for adapting everyday items for little or no cost, and how to access free software and iPad apps that can be helpful. You will also learn about built-in accessibility features on your computer and iDevices.

Thursday, Feb. 28 from 9 – 11:30 a.m.
TASK
100 West Cerritos Avenue in Anaheim

Effective Communication Skills: This workshop provides tried and true tips on how to positively advocate for your children, strengthen the relationship between parents and services agencies, and help create an appropriate IEP.

Wednesday, March 27 from 6 – 8 p.m.
TASK
100 West Cerritos Avenue in Anaheim

Assessment Process through School Districts: This workshop provides an overview of the importance of parent input and ways to ensure that all of a child's needs are being considered when determining appropriate school services and placement options.

Wednesday, March 20, from 9 – 11 a.m.
Magnolia Park Family Resource Center
11402 Magnolia Street in Garden Grove

Parenting Education Series

This free, seven-week workshop series covers child development and attachment, healthy communication, effective discipline, parenting styles, parenting together, fostering a healthy parent-child relationship, and more. Limited childcare support is available for children 2 years and older. Parents, relative caregivers, and legal guardians with children of all ages are invited to participate. For more information and to RSVP, call the Minnie Family Resource Center at (714) 972-5775.

Thursdays, from 6 – 7:30 p.m.
May 9, May 16, May 23, May 30,
June 6, June 13 and June 20
Kennedy Elementary School
1300 McFadden Ave., Room 13,
in Santa Ana

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Conexiones Educativa

RCOC was among the organizations supporting the Conexiones Educativa Conference on Nov. 26 at the Downtown Anaheim Community Center. The Spanish-language event shared resources, advice and education for parents of children with special needs. Conexiones Educativa is a nonprofit organization that offers counseling and education services to parents to help them obtain the most appropriate services for their children in the areas of special education, public benefits, early intervention, and more. For more information about Conexiones Educativa, contact Cecilia Mercado at (714) 398-4710 or ceci.mercado@yahoo.com.



(above) Event organizer Cecilia Mercado and RCOC's Patrick Ruppe at the Conexiones Educativa Conference.

(L-R) Sara Ventura, Maribel Garcia, and Reina Hernandez shared information with attendees.

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