

Dialogue

Volume 34 No.3 Summer 2020





In the Spotlight

Orange County Responds to COVID-19

he stay-at-home order put in place to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 presented enormous challenges and caused a lot of hardship for people used to frequent family visits, lots of social interaction, and time spent working, volunteering and enjoying community life. However, it also revealed extraordinary kindness and creativity, as our Orange County families and service providers continued to find new ways to meet needs, support one another, and maintain close, loving relationships.

Family Concerts by Teleconference

Ryan Tsunawaki, who lives at the Amazing Grace group home, missed regular visits with his mom Julie and stepdad Jeff Winge, but this fun-loving family came up with a great way to keep in touch and stay engaged. Each Wednesday, Julie and Jeff dressed up in costume and performed themed concerts via Zoom videoconferencing for Ryan, the other residents, and staff. Concerts ranged from country music, to 1950s dance party, to Disney favorites and more!

Day Programs Online Support

As the need for social distancing made it impossible for day programs to operate normally, many shifted to online channels to stay connected with the adults with developmental disabilities they serve. For Westview Services. that included offering a variety of exercise classes via Zoom, giving people the opportunity to learn dances like the cha-cha and try simple yoga poses. They also produced and shared a series of daily living skills videos on topics like taking out the trash and doing laundry.

Residential service providers like Gilbert Care Homes also stepped up with lots of new activities for people who would otherwise attend day programs. In addition to facilitating online classes created by others, direct care workers led a wide range of academic, cognitive and memory activities, as well as arts, music and fitness activities.





Jeff and Julie Winge (top) performed fun, weekly concerts via Zoom for their son and other residents of his group home (bottom I-r): Teresa Medrano, Michael Vaughn and Ryan Tsunawaki.





Michael Morales (left) of Westview Services led Zoom classes teaching people dances like the cha-cha. Alexa Sprotte (right), who lives at Gilbert Care Homes' Milan home, enjoyed the many engaging activities offered by her residential service provider.

> See Orange County Responds to COVID-19 on page 6.

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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Fiscal Year 2020-2021 **Board Meetings**

Sept. 3 • Nov. 5 • Jan. 14 March 4 • May 6 • June 3

As of this printing, decisions had not yet been made about how the next several meetings will take place (in-person or virtual). Please check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for the most up-to-date information.

RCOC Administration

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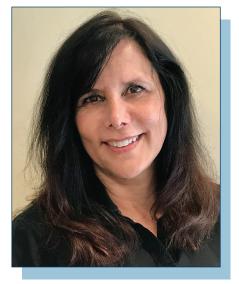
Marta Vasquez, Associate Finance Director

Board Update

Sandy Martin Joins RCOC Board

COC's Board of Directors has appointed Sandy Martin to serve a one-year term on the Board, beginning September 1, 2020. The parent of an adult son with Down syndrome and autism, she worked in finance for approximately 20 years and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Finance from California State University, Fullerton.

Sandy has been active in the Orange County community for more than three decades, including sharing her family's experiences with other parents at RCOC's transition workshops. Currently, she is on the leadership team for Chapman University's Thompson Policy Institute on Disability, and serves on the committee for the Orange County Local Partnership Agreement



Sandy Martin which works to promote competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities.

She also served the Intervention Center for Early Childhood (ICEC) for eight years, as president and a board member, and has been a tireless advocate for people with developmental disabilities through her volunteer work with schools and school districts, as well as nonprofit organizations such as the March of Dimes.

Budget Update

he unpredented effort mounted by the State of California to combat COVID-19 has been extraordinarily costly, both in terms of actual costs and lost revenue resulting from shutting down much of the economy. The budget deficit through fiscal 2020-21 has been estimated at more than \$54 billion, most of which is due to lower projected tax revenue from what is expected to be a slow recovery from the economic shutdown. However, California has a requirement that the budget be balanced. The balanced budget that was enacted avoided cuts to regional center services and relies on, among other things, draws from reserves, a solid economic recovery and additional funds from the federal government. The Governor also declared a budget emergency, which enabled access to billions of dollars in the State's rainy day fund for COVID-19 costs. For up-to-date information about the state budget visit RCOC's website and click on the State Budget and Advocacy link.

Executive Director's Report

Budget Challenges for the Next Couple of Years

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

hen the COVID-19 pandemic hit California, few of us expected the stringent prevention measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus would still be needed months later. While researchers continue working on treatments and a vaccine, one key thing we have learned is that people with developmental disabilities, even young people, are at greater risk from COVID-19, because many of them have the underlying health conditions that make the virus far more serious for them than it is for the typical population.

All of California's efforts have come at a cost.

Thus, while the stay-at-home orders, shutdown of group activities, and temporary transition to "virtual" services have created great hardship, they have also been lifesavers for the people RCOC serves.

We mourn every life lost, and are truly blessed that our community has pulled together so effectively that we have, so far, avoided the tragically high number of infections and deaths experienced in states where much larger residential facilities are still common. I am grateful that our partners at the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) have given regional centers and service providers the flexibility needed to ensure that people's needs

continue to be met

during the pandemic.
An essential part of
this was the State's
decision to allow
regional centers to
continue funding
service providers
such as day programs
during the shutdown.

This has kept many of our vital service providers from going out of business during the lockdown. However, all of California's efforts have come at a cost.

People with developmental disabilities, even young people, are at greater risk from COVID-19.

Between lost tax revenue from shutting down California's economy and the increased spending to respond to the pandemic, our state faces an enormous budget deficit. It is very good news that the Legislature and Governor came to a budget agreement that does not impose cuts on regional center services. However, at this writing, it was not yet known whether the federal government will provide the additional funds California needs to help close the budget gap.

Some of this may not be known until later this year or early 2021, but we are hopeful that regional centers and our service providers will not be asked to return to the unsustainable funding levels of past budget deficit years.

Many of our service providers are just beginning to regain stability and other, equally-important service providers have struggled to hang on and desperately need the long overdue increases planned for this year.

There are limits to what technology can do.

We are proud to report that some of the technology-based efficiencies deployed as a result of the lockdown (see story on page 6) will help us all deliver better and more flexible service and be more responsive to family preferences going forward. But our elected leaders need to know that while our community has been very creative and resourceful during this emergency, there are limits to what technology can do. There is not always a technology solution for an individual's or family's needs, and caring and professional direct care workers continue to be the backbone of our system.

For California to keep its Lanterman Act promise to people with developmental disabilities, service providers need to receive sufficient funding to cover the cost of delivering quality services.

In the coming months, RCOC will be closely following additional budget actions impacting people we serve, and will advocate forcefully on their behalf. If you would like to help, please be sure that your RCOC Service Coordinator has your current email address so we can reach out to you when elected leaders need to hear their constituents' voices.

Person to Person

Adapt, Overcome and Keep Going!

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

ow! Who knew this pandemic was going to last this long? As we write this, we're almost three months into it and many things have changed.

Some things have been difficult and some rather easy, depending on who you ask. We all want to go out, have fun and do things we normally would, but we've had to adapt and find new ways to do the same things.

We all want to go out, have fun and do things we normally would, but we've had to adapt and find new ways to do the same things.

No matter what, though, the most important thing is to keep going!



For Jyusse, that has meant working from home. And there



Sylvia Delgado



Jyusse Corey

have been some positives, too, like having more time to focus on friends and family, and learn new skills. He and his friends and coworkers have been reaching out to check on one another and still communicating, while being safe.

He also encourages anyone who is experiencing new needs because of the pandemic or because they can't work to reach out to their RCOC Service Coordinator for help.

Don't take things for granted, and appreciate what you have.

Adapting has been kind of hard for Sylvia, because her job involves working at big entertainment events. Since all big events have been cancelled, she hasn't been able to work at all for a long time.

Nobody knew that was going to happen, and she wants to work! But she's looking at the positive side, too.

Behavior Management Workshops

ue to the COVID-19 situation, the Spanishlanguage Behavior Management Workshop for parents that begins in August will take place via videoconference. There will also be a Vietnamese-language workshop in October, though the format has not yet been confirmed. To learn more and to register for these free workshops, please contact your RCOC Service Coordinator or Tracy Vaughan at (714) 796-5223 or tvaughan@rcocdd.com.

She was approved to receive unemployment benefits, and that allowed her to pay several important bills and save up for the deposit and first month's rent on a new apartment.

We can all learn from the big lessons Sylvia is taking from this experience: Don't take things for granted, and appreciate what you have. And, do what you can when you have time now, because you never know if you'll get around to it later.

Everyday Wellness

How to Wear and Care For a Face Mask

s we're learning more about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, face masks continue to be an important tool to help keep people healthy. People who don't know they're sick or have very mild symptoms can still transmit the virus to others, and that is the main reason health experts recommend that most people (but not young children)

wear them. Here are some quick tips about face masks.

Keep the Mask Clean. Ideally, a cloth mask should be washed every day after use. You should also wash your hands before putting it on, and after removing it.

Ensure the Mask Fits. The mask should cover your nose and mouth

and fit snugly under your chin and against the sides of your face.

Avoid Touching the Mask. Don't put the mask up on your forehead or around your neck. If you do need to touch it, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer afterwards.

Take Care When Removing the Mask. Remember, the mask may have germs on it after a day of use, so handle it only by the ear loops or ties.



Be Prepared for Your Virtual IEP

hile RCOC does not have authority or responsibility for public school special education, we want to do everything we can to help parents understand the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and be effective advocates for their children. At the time of this printing, it appeared that many school districts were making preparations to conduct at least some of their IEP meetings via teleconference. With that in mind, here are eight tips from the West Orange County Consortium for Special Education to help you prepare for a virtual IEP. And remember, your RCOC Service Coordinator is happy to answer other questions you might have, and can even attend the meeting with you if you like.

Do a test run – If possible, do a test run before the meeting starts to ensure your device is charged, appropriately connected to the internet, and functioning properly.

Check that mic! – Since there may be several people on the video conference, it's best to have everyone mute their microphone when not speaking. This reduces a lot of background noise and shows respect for the speaker. Also, avoid typing or using your keyboard as this noise can be very distracting. And when you are speaking, speak up so everyone can hear you clearly.

Location, Location, Location – Choose a
quiet space that will not have
distractions. Pick an area that will
be free of other people to protect
your confidentiality.

Dress the part – If you're on a video conference, be dressed appropriately. Even on audio only, being dressed appropriately for the conference content can help with having the corresponding mindset. If somebody shows up dressed inappropriately, the host will block their video participation.

7 No snacking – Try to eat a snack before your virtual meeting so that you can refrain from eating during the meeting.

Get ready for your close-up

- Think about the angle of your camera and ensure there is plenty of light to avoid casting odd shadows.

The best lighting is a window for natural light in front of you.

Housekeeping! – Please make sure your background is appropriate. It should be uncluttered and clean. Also make sure there is not a glimpse into more personal areas of your home, i.e. the bedroom or a bathroom. Zoom has virtual backgrounds you may consider.

Silence your phone – Turn off or silence cell phones.

Courtesy of West Orange County Corsortium for Special Education Orange County Responds to COVID-19 (continued from page 1)

Food Deliveries to Those in Need

The team at Integrity House normally provides independent living services and operates two clubhouses where they provide job skills training and employment services. When the pandemic hit and shut down the clubhouses, they took it upon themselves to help people with developmental disabilities who were having difficulty getting food while sheltering at home. On a weekly basis, staff picked up items from local food banks, along with donated bread from Panera Bread, and delivered the groceries to up to 14 households. To keep everyone safe, the bags of food were left on the families' doorsteps.



Seyed Tari of Integrity House helps to pack up food to deliver to adults with developmental disabilities.

COVID-19 Emergency Prompts Lasting Efficiencies at RCOC

COC's Virtual Chart system, which has been cloud-based for years, made it much easier for our Service Coordinators to transition to work full-time from home. It was the cornerstone of our ability to remain fully-functional during the stay-at-home order, but there are a number of other tools adopted for the emergency that will

enable us to deliver better, more efficient service long after the pandemic is over.

To make interactions with those we serve even more seamless, RCOC's technology team made arrangements to allow for staff to use their cell phones as an extension of their office phones. A giant leap beyond simple call-forwarding, this enables our staff to use their cell phones to answer and place phone calls from any location using their office phone line. Importantly, when calls are returned by cell



phone, caller ID displays the staff member's RCOC office number (rather than a blocked number), so the person being called knows it's someone from RCOC on the line.

We've also heard from a lot of families that they're just too busy for in-person meetings with their Service Coordinator, and that they sometimes prefer teleconferencing or videoconferencing. With that in mind, RCOC has purchased the necessary Zoom licenses to enable videoconferencing to continue to be an option for individuals and families who prefer it.

To make it easier for families to review and sign key legal documents such as consent forms related to RCOC services, we've also been looking into electronic signatures. By eliminating the need for RCOC to mail paper documents and the burden on families to return them, electronic signatures streamline processes and reduce costs.

NOTE: Individuals and families must opt-in to use electronic signatures, and may still choose to sign with traditional hand-written signatures.

COVID-19 Response Survey

hile RCOC quickly began active outreach to ensure individuals and families received the services, supports and resources they needed during the pandemic, we also initiated a brief survey to get community feedback on our response to the COVID-19 emergency. A total of 1,200 persons served, family members and others associated with RCOC completed the online survey, which was created for free. Here are a few key findings:

- 90% of respondents said they knew RCOC staff were working and available during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- 60% of our respondents said they had already been contacted by their RCOC Service Coordinator to check on new needs they might have. At the beginning of the lockdown, which is when we launched the survey, Service Coordinators focused on contacting the most vulnerable individuals and families, but it was not long before we reached 100% of those we serve.
- 82% of our respondents said they did not want to be contacted by their Service Coordinator at that time.
- Of those who had reached out to their Service Coordinator for help, 94% said they had received a response or been able to connect with them about their current needs.



Medical Person-Centered Descriptions

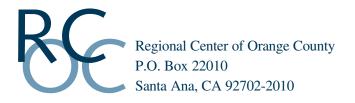
challenges when a person does not communicate verbally and their loved ones or direct care staff are not able to visit. At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was happening in some parts of the country as hospitals banned all visitors as part of their efforts to contain the virus and keep patients and staff safe.

RCOC rolled out a brief form aimed at providing medical staff with key details about a person in an easy-to-understand format.

To help ensure the people we serve are heard, understood by hospital staff, and have their rights respected, RCOC rolled out a brief form aimed at providing medical staff with key details about a person in an easy-to-understand format. In addition to family and RCOC contact information, this medical person-centered description covers basic medical history and allergies, as well as details like sensitivities, personal assistance needs, and how the person expresses his or her likes, dislikes and feelings.

RCOC shared the form with service providers who care for those at higher risk for hospitalization. However, it could be useful for any individual or family to have as an emergency readiness tool.

If you would like to use the form, please contact your RCOC Service Coordinator. It only takes a few minutes to complete with a Service Coordinator's help since many items can be auto-filled by our system.



Dialogue Newsletter **If I**



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INSIDE
In the Spotlight: Orange County Responds to COVID-191
Board Update2
Budget Update2
Executive Director's Report3
Person to Person4
Behavior Management Workshops4
Everyday Wellness: How to Wear and Care For a Face Mask5
Be Prepared for Your Virtual IEP5
COVID-19 Emergency Prompts Lasting Efficiencies at RCOC6
COVID-19 Response Survey7
Medical Person-Centered Descriptions7

Regional Center of Orange County Locations

Santa Ana Office

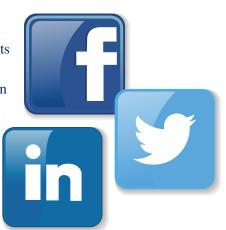
1525 N. Tustin Avenue 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-5100 Cypress Office

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

Get the Latest RCOC Updates on Social Media

Then you follow RCOC on our social media pages, especially Facebook and Twitter, you'll have access to timely information and news, as well as events and activities of interest to people with developmental disabilities and their families. Families have told us our social media pages, as well as our website, have been especially useful to them during emergencies and fast-changing situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whenever possible, we provide social media information in English, Spanish and Vietnamese to ensure all members of our community have access to the latest information. And, our website features a convenient translation tool – simply scroll down to the bottom of any page and you'll find the translator on the right hand side.





Serving Orange County's 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 Vietnamese. As of this printing, many of the programs and organizations that families have relied on for summer activities for their children are either still closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic or operating differently to help prevent more widespread exposure to the virus. However, some virtual and limited in-person camps may be available, so be sure to check out our updated Recreation Resources Guide, available on our website in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Please also remember that while some programs and businesses are reopening, continued vigilance to prevent exposure is vital, because people with developmental disabilities, including children, often have the underlying health conditions which make COVID-19 far more serious for them than it is for the typical population.

RCOC has posted authoritative and up-to-date information on its website and social media pages regarding COVID-19; however, since some of these materials are presented in English only, Vietnamese speakers with questions or concerns are invited to reach out directly to RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktruong@rcocdd.com.

When to Contact Your Service Coordinator

ach individual or family served by RCOC is assigned a Service Coordinator, whose job is to help them identify their hopes and dreams for a full and productive life, and then partner with them to access services and supports available through RCOC's network of providers to make their vision a reality.

There's no need to wait until a formal IPP/IFSP meeting, because your RCOC Service Coordinator's always here to help.

As a person served by RCOC, you'll meet with your Service Coordinator regularly to review and revise the Individual Program Plan (IPP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) that details your goals as well as services and supports needed to reach those goals. However, it's important for all individuals and families to know that they can contact their RCOC Service Coordinator any

time they have a question or concern. There's no need to wait until a formal IPP/IFSP meeting, because your RCOC Service Coordinator's always here to help.

This is especially important during uncertain times, as we've experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The disruptions caused by public school closures and stay-at-home orders caused many families to need additional RCOC services, such as respite or day care, while some have transitioned temporarily to having family members – rather than outside agencies – provide respite in their homes.

Some families have also shared new needs that are not related directly to the person served, such as difficulties arising from a parent's illness or job loss. In these cases, RCOC Service Coordinators have been able to provide valuable guidance and help accessing other government-funded programs. When no government programs are appropriate, Service Coordinators can often locate and put families in contact with free or low-cost community

resources that might benefit a family. These range from local food banks and sources for free diapers, to legal aid, language-specific support groups, and much more.

As public schools gradually reopen and more people return to regular work schedules away from home, we expect that the needs of many individuals and families we serve could change. If you need help or are experiencing new needs since we contacted you, please be sure to call or email your Service Coordinator.

If, for any reason, you feel your Service Coordinator is not as responsive as you would like or you are uncomfortable speaking with that person, you can always contact the Supervisor and ask to be reassigned. We want to ensure you have a positive relationship with your RCOC Service Coordinator, so if you need to reach the Supervisor, simply call our main phone number, provide your family member's name and date of birth, and the receptionist will connect you to the Supervisor.

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Stop the Spread of Germs

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

















cdc.gov/coronavirus

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Serving Orange County's Hispanic Community

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RCOC has posted authoritative and up-to-date information on its website and social media pages regarding COVID-19; however, since some of these materials are presented in English only, Spanish speakers with questions or concerns are invited to reach out directly to RCOC Community Outreach Coordinator Reina Hernandez at (714) 558-5406 or rhernandez@rcocdd.com.

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