



# Dialogue

Volume 35 No.4  
Fall 2021



## In the Spotlight

### Gary Nguyen

When we think about an adult with developmental disabilities moving out of their family home, we often consider community care facilities (also known as group homes), apartment living with support from independent or supported living services, or intermediate care facilities for those with significant medical needs. For the adults Regional Center of Orange County serves who live outside the family home, those are the most common choices. However, there is another, less well-known residential option – living in a private home supervised by a licensed family home agency (FHA).

Just over 100 adults RCOC serves currently reside in family home agency settings and an FHA can be a great choice for an adult who wants to pursue greater independence in a more family-like environment.

An FHA home has a lot in common with a community care home, including round-the-clock personalized support, but instead of caring for up to six adults with special needs, these homes care for just one or two people. In an FHA home, the persons with disabilities also have their own rooms and are included as members of the family in family activities. They often have chores or other responsibilities, too, just like others in the household.



Gary with his RCOC Service Coordinator Sarah Cazares.

For 28-year-old Gary Nguyen, who has an intellectual disability, living in the Garden Grove home of Jon Hartowicz has provided a great environment to grow his independence for more than eight years.

“Over time, I became part of the family,” said Gary, who had previously been sleeping on a couch at a friend’s house. He is especially grateful to one of his high school teachers for going above and beyond to help him connect with RCOC and to explore and apply for various other public benefits as he neared adulthood.

“Our primary focus at the beginning was to get stable housing in place, since Gary’s family life is very complicated,” said Sarah Cazares, who has been Gary’s RCOC Service Coordinator since then. She is thrilled at how his confidence, daily life skills, and success on the job have blossomed in the positive environment of Jon’s home.



Gary (right) with his long-time caregiver Jon Hartowicz.

“Gary started out needing a lot of supervision, but now he does much on his own!” she said. She also noted that he receives lots of compliments from his cleaning and sanitation

See **Gary Nguyen** 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](http://www.rcocdd.com).

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### Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Board Meetings

Nov 4 • Jan 13 • March 3  
May 5 • June 2

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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## Provisional Eligibility for Lanterman Services

In our last issue, we shared that California's FY 2021-22 budget calls for children ages three and four with significant functional limitations to temporarily receive regional center services on a provisional basis, without the formal diagnosis of developmental disability that would otherwise be required by the Lanterman Act.

Families with a child who meets the criteria California has set for this "provisional eligibility" will receive a letter from RCOC letting them know their child can receive regional center services until age five, when provisional eligibility ends. Children with provisional eligibility will be reassessed at the age of four years, nine months to see if they meet the State's criteria for ongoing services under the Lanterman Act.

Children with provisional eligibility will still transition out of Early Start, which ends on every child's third birthday, and will be assigned a new RCOC Service Coordinator who specializes in Lanterman services. That new Service Coordinator will schedule a meeting within 30 days to walk the family through the process and types of services that may be available to the child, such as case management, assistance with care coordination and communication with the child's public school.

This meeting is important since most of the services children receive after Early Start will be provided by their public school, which is the "generic resource" (see story on page 6) that must be used before any regional center funds can be spent to meet the child's needs.

## How to Support RCOC's Holiday Wish Tree

Each year, the Wish Tree program helps brighten the holiday season by fulfilling holiday gift wishes for more than 500 low-income individuals and families served by RCOC.

You can help by supporting the Wish Tree. To make a financial contribution that will be used by volunteer shoppers to fulfill specific holiday gift wishes, please make your check out to "Brian's Fund" and mail it to RCOC at P.O. Box 22010, Santa Ana, CA 92702-2010.



## Executive Director's Report

### A Special Type of Social Safety Net Program

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

Whether or not you've heard the term "social safety net" you're probably familiar with the concept and many of its major programs.

Generally, the social safety net refers to programs – largely government-funded -- that provide a cushion for people who are poor, elderly or have a disability, and others who may fall on hard times temporarily due to, for example, a job loss, workplace accident, or serious medical condition.

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***Most social safety net programs in the U.S. have been aimed at alleviating poverty.***

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Many of these programs are familiar to most people: Social Security, Medicare and Medi-Cal, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation insurance, supplemental nutrition (formerly known as "food stamps"), and temporary assistance to needy families are just a few examples. Some of these, like Social Security and unemployment insurance, are what are called "contributory" programs – which means that workers and employers pay into them and then have access to benefits later on.

Historically, though, most social safety net programs in the U.S. have been aimed at alleviating poverty and



its harmful effects on individuals and families and, by extension, communities. Thus, as programs for the poor, most components of

the social safety net are means-tested. So, people of greater means (income and/or assets), generally won't qualify to receive benefits. Or, benefits may be paid out, but on a sliding scale, so the more a person earns the smaller the benefit they're eligible to receive.

The services that California's regional centers provide are completely different from all of these other social safety net programs.

While many of those we serve have low incomes and face significant financial struggles getting by in a high-cost area like Orange County, regional center services are not specifically a program for the poor. In fact, when an individual or family seeks our help, their income plays no role at all in decision making about either the types of services they receive or the level of services authorized.

Instead, regional center services are provided equally to people of all income levels and service decisions are based entirely on a person's disability-related needs. When we look at the Lanterman Act, which

created the regional center system, it's easy to see why that difference is so important.

The Lanterman Developmental Services Act represents California's promise of inclusion and meaningful community life for its people with developmental disabilities and it is unique among the 50 states. While some states only provide funding for disability services to the extent they're covered by the federal government and accept waiting lists for services as normal, that is not the case in California.

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***Regional center services are provided equally to people of all income levels.***

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As I have shared with our Orange County community, the pandemic has brought on severe labor shortages for our service providers. Statewide, there simply aren't enough direct care workers. This has caused some of those we serve to face delays in beginning new services or resuming pre-pandemic services or service levels, but it is not acceptable to us for that to continue.

RCOC has joined other regional centers in continuing to advocate for higher rates to better enable service providers to hire and retain qualified staff. This was not adequately addressed in the current year's budget, but we are not giving up and we are grateful for your continued support as we work together to help California keep the Lanterman promise.



## Person to Person

### Generic Resources in My Life

By Sylvia Delgado, PAC Chair

**H**ello Everyone!  
I hope you had a wonderful summer, and that it was better than last year when we were locked down and not able to do our normal summer stuff. A lot of those things – like classes at city recreation centers and local sports programs – are provided by what RCOC calls “generic resources.”

An easy way to think about generic resources is that they’re programs and services you

use that are paid for by others, rather than RCOC. I have a lot of experience with generic resources and RCOC has helped



me to access many of them. While some are just for fun, there are lots of generic resources I can’t imagine living without.

Like when I go to the doctor, RCOC doesn’t pay for it. CalOptima is the generic resource that pays the bill for me, but you may be covered by private health insurance. It’s the same with in-home supportive services (IHSS). I have cerebral palsy and need help with daily activities. RCOC doesn’t pay

for my personal assistance, but they helped me get signed up with IHSS.

I live in my own apartment with independent living services (ILS) through RCOC, but regional center doesn’t pay my rent. I’m able to live on my own because I have a HUD housing voucher and Social Security benefits that help pay my bills.

When we’re new to the regional center, we may think the regional center can do it all for us, but it doesn’t work that way. The good news is that RCOC is here for you. If you need help, don’t hesitate to ask your RCOC Service Coordinator who can usually point you in the right direction.



### Helping Hands for Holiday Travel

**I**s your family traveling through Orange County’s John Wayne Airport this holiday season? The Airport’s Helping Hands team provides free airport tours to help travelers with special needs become familiar with the terminal, check-in and the security process before traveling. For pre-travel special needs assistance, call (949) 252-5200 or email [info@ocair.com](mailto:info@ocair.com).

The team can also provide help on the day of travel to help guide travelers through the arrival, check-in, security and boarding processes. Stop by the information booth in Terminal B arrival (lower) level baggage claim or dial “0” from any of the courtesy phones located throughout the terminal.



## Behavior Management Workshops

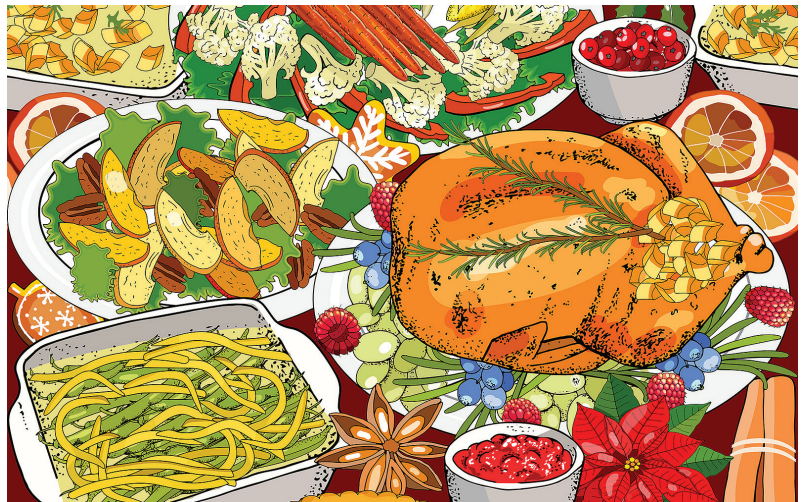
**D**ue to the holidays, there will be no Behavior Management Workshops beginning in November or December. The workshops will resume after the first of the year. For the most up-to-date information, visit the Monthly Calendar on the RCOC website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)).

## Moving on at 3... Transition Workshops for Parents

**F**or most families, when their child turns three years old, Early Start services end and the child often transitions to school-based education services from public school districts. This free transition workshop helps parents understand the differences between Early Start and school-based services, learn about the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process schools use to determine what services a child receives, and much more. The workshop takes place virtually via Zoom in English; however, Spanish or Vietnamese translation may be provided upon request. Register online by visiting the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website. For more information and help with online registration, please contact Patricia Garcia at (714) 558-5400 or [pgarcia@rcocdd.com](mailto:pgarcia@rcocdd.com).

**Thursday, December 2**  
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

## Everyday Wellness Tip



## Healthy Habits for the Holidays

**W**ith lots of families again planning festive gatherings this holiday, there are bound to be temptations to over-indulge. Here are some tips that can help keep the whole family's healthy habits on track this season.

If you're trying to be healthier...

- **Eat Slowly and Mindfully:** Even if you can't control the meal, itself, you'll probably eat less and enjoy it more if you take your time to thoroughly chew and enjoy every bite.
- **Bring Your Own Snacks:** We often don't think about the grazing we do before and after the big meal, but if you bring your own snacks (like celery sticks with nut butter or veggies and hummus) you know at least some of the food you're eating will be healthful.
- **Plan Some Physical Activity:** Make sure the family isn't just sitting around visiting and watching TV by starting a new tradition, like a Thanksgiving Day hike everyone can do.

If you want to help *others* be healthy...

- **Be a Cheerleader, *Not* a Coach:** Applaud healthy choices, and avoid shaming which can just make a person feel less capable of making good choices going forward.
- **Don't Pressure Others to Eat:** People who love to cook can inadvertently sabotage others' healthy habits when they push them to accept extra servings of a dish and say things like "I made this just for you!" or "Aren't you going to finish that?"

## Facts About Generic Resources

**W**hen you see the word “generic” what comes to mind?

If you’re like a lot of people, you may think of a product that’s cheaper than the “brand name” version. While that may be the case with some items you buy in a grocery store or pharmacy, that’s not at all what is meant when your Regional Center Service Coordinator uses the term “generic” resources.

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***The simplest way to think about generic resources is that they are the services paid for by other agencies.***

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Children and adults with developmental disabilities often need a lot of different services to make community living possible. The simplest way to think about generic resources is that they are the services paid for by other agencies, rather than the regional center.

### Public Agencies that are Generic Resources

Many generic resources are publicly-funded agencies that provide services to all members of the public – not just people with disabilities. Some of these, such as public schools and community colleges, public transportation, and local parks and recreation programs, are offered to everyone in the community regardless of the person’s condition or income level. Others, such as

Medi-Cal (known as CalOptima in Orange County) are only available to people whose income is below a certain level. And others, such as the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and Social Security, may have other qualifying criteria, such as medical need, age, or disability.

NOTE: Several years ago, California passed a law requiring health insurance companies to cover behavioral health services such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) for their policyholders. Now, by law, regional centers are no longer able to fund ABA, speech therapy, occupational therapy or physical therapy services unless the family is not eligible for Medi-Cal and does not have private insurance.

### Community-Based and Other Generic Resources

RCOC also helps those we serve access community-based generic resources to meet general family needs, as well as needs identified in the Individual Program Plan (IPP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). These may include non-profit organizations such as Children’s Home Society, Family Support Network, YMCA, and many others that generally offer their programs or services on a no-cost/low-cost basis or provide assistance on a sliding scale.

### Rules for Regional Centers

When working with individuals and families, RCOC is required to follow detailed rules set forth in the Lanterman Act. One of those rules

is that the regional center can only consider paying for a service if it is not available through a generic resource.

Any services and supports we fund must also be related to the person’s disability. RCOC cannot, for example, purchase toys or cell phones. In addition, parents are required to provide the same level of support to their child with a disability that they provide for a non-disabled child. This “parental responsibility” is defined in the Lanterman Act.

### What is a means-tested benefit?

**M**eans-tested benefits are available only to people whose “means” (income and/or assets) are below a certain level. For example, a typical family of four cannot receive Medi-Cal unless their household income is below \$36,156 per year. Income limits vary widely, depending on family size, and often change year-to-year to account for inflation.

Regional center services are unlike most other government-funded public benefits, because they are not means-tested. While many of those we serve are low-income, our services are provided equally according to the individual’s need, regardless of the family’s financial means.



**Gary Nguyen** (continued from page 1)  
coworkers at St. Joseph's Hospital, who appreciate that he's always on time and does such a good job.



Gary with the memory board of Karen McCord, his first mentor when he moved into the family home.

The home where Gary lives is supervised by California MENTOR, an agency that provides other services and supports, along with its family home agency program.

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***Just over 100 adults  
RCOC serves currently  
reside in family home  
agency settings.***

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When a person served by RCOC is interested in pursuing this type of living situation, the FHA service provider seeks out nurturing caregivers whose interests, qualifications, family size, location, and other preferences are a good match with those of the person served. FHA staff visit their homes regularly to ensure the necessary services and supports are in

place, and that relationships between families and persons served continue to be good matches. They also provide training to the caregivers and are responsible for record-keeping.

Gary is very interested in technology and enjoys playing video games, so the fact that Jon is tech-savvy was a key factor in his decision to choose the home. Gary now has a TV in his room, and Jon has helped him learn to use his cell phone and come up with creative ways to use the phone more effectively, since Gary does not read or write.

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***An FHA can be a great  
choice for an adult who  
wants to pursue greater  
independence in a more  
family-like environment.***

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Jon is also proud to have supported Gary's growth over the years. As an essential worker, Gary continued working three days a week throughout the pandemic and Jon says he now calls for his own transportation to and from work. He also rides his bike all over and often goes to lunch by himself on his days off.

When Gary moved in as their first resident, Jon and his mother Karen McCord were operating the home together and included Gary in their family traditions and travels. Together, they visited Hearst Castle in Cambria and traveled to Prescott, Arizona to see Jon's aunt and enjoyed the Festival of Lights at Riverside's Mission Inn.



Gary enjoys cooking in the home. Here he's making up a batch of spaghetti with meatballs.

Sadly, Karen passed away in 2019, but Jon continues to find his role as caregiver very satisfying and the household now includes a second man with special needs, as well as a roommate. The roommate has received training from California MENTOR and can also provide care when needed.

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***"Over time, I became  
part of the family."***

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"The best part of the role of caregiver is actually the mentoring," said Jon. "And helping someone to become better with their independent living skills."



Gary enjoys playing video games on the TV in his room.

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## Regional Center of Orange County Locations

### Santa Ana Office

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

### Cypress Office

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

## RCOC Hosts Backpack Giveaway

With support from sponsor Aveanna Healthcare, RCOC hosted a backpack giveaway for students with developmental disabilities on July 25. The event was 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. Thank you to the volunteers, including RCOC Board Member Liza Krassner (pictured front left), for helping at the event!







## Serving Orange County's Vietnamese Community

**R**egional 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 Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or [ktruong@rcocdd.com](mailto:ktruong@rcocdd.com).

### Virtual Coffee Talk

**J**oin RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong and other Vietnamese-speaking parents for these informal conversations via Zoom. Discussion topics change, depending on needs and interests and times vary to enable more parents to participate. For more information and to RSVP, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or [ktruong@rcocdd.com](mailto:ktruong@rcocdd.com).

**Thursday, November 18**

10 a.m. to noon

Topic: Public Benefits and Generic Resources for People with Developmental Disabilities

**Thursday, January 20**

6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Topic: Living Options

### Little Saigon TV Interviews RCOC's Executive Director

**O**n August 24, RCOC's Executive Director Larry Landauer was a guest on Little Saigon TV's Our Community (OC) Healthy and Education Show, hosted by Julie Diep. During the hour-long show, he shared details of the services RCOC provides to children and adults as well as special concerns of the Vietnamese community. While Larry was interviewed in English, the host translated their conversation throughout the program, enabling both English speakers and Vietnamese-only speakers to benefit from the information. The interview can be viewed on Little Saigon TV's website ([www.littlesaigontv.com](http://www.littlesaigontv.com)) and YouTube channel and on RCOC's website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)). From the RCOC home page, click on the News Coverage page under the News & Events tab.



Larry and Julie Diep on Little Saigon TV.

### Tune in to Cuộc Sống Tươi Đẹp and Câu Chuyện Đời Sống

**B**e sure to tune in to these two shows hosted by RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong.

The TV show, Cuộc Sống Tươi Đẹp ("Beautiful Life" in English), shares information on community health and medical issues, child development, special education and legal issues. It also introduces social service resources to educate and support Orange County's Vietnamese community. Contact Vietmedia at (714) 757-8290 for additional details and air times.

The radio show, Câu Chuyện Đời Sống ("Life Story" in English), focuses on sharing information about the services and supports available to people through Regional Center of Orange County, and also offers information about social services and community resources to support individuals with special needs and their families. It airs Sunday from 6-9 a.m. on FM 106.3 or you can listen live on the website [www.radiochuyensangchunhat.com](http://www.radiochuyensangchunhat.com). For more information, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or [ktruong@rcocdd.com](mailto:ktruong@rcocdd.com).

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# Introduction to Public Benefits

During the person-centered IPP (individual program plan) and IFSP (individual family service plan) process, planning teams discuss and set goals and objectives for health, housing, daily activities and work, self-care, finances, leisure time, community participation, and more. This is essential, because a person's developmental disability can impact nearly everything in their life. However, the Lanterman Act places clear restrictions on which needs the regional center can address and which entity is required to provide the funding for each needed service or support.

Many needs are met by RCOC's network of more than 1,700 dedicated service providers who deliver everything from early intervention services for very young children to residential and employment support for adults. Others are met by tapping what are called "generic resources" (see story on page 6) such as the in-home supportive services (IHSS) program for personal assistance, Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) for transportation needs, and local public schools for special education for school age children.

Some resources are available only to low-income individuals and families, while others – such as public schools and buses – are available to everyone in the community equally, regardless of income.



But what about needs an individual or family might have that go above and beyond what RCOC or these types of generic resources offer?

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***Some resources are available only to low-income individuals and families, while others – such as public schools and buses – are available to everyone in the community equally.***

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In many cases, federal, state and/or local governments offer additional public benefits or programs. These may take the form of direct financial assistance, as with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and several programs through the Orange County Social Services Agency. The government also provides subsidies for low-income families to receive discounts on critical services, as with the CARE (California Alternate Rates for Energy) program.

Other public benefits, such as the WIC (Women/Infants/Children) supplemental nutrition program and CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids), offer a combination of aid, education, and other services and supports to those with specific needs.

Since RCOC Service Coordinators do not have comprehensive expertise with certain benefits or may be specifically prohibited from assisting those we serve in applying for them, we make available on our website a list of public benefits that people with developmental disabilities and their families may be able to access. (NOTE: This list is regularly updated, but it is not comprehensive.)

The application process for some public benefits is complicated, so RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center's bilingual specialists are also able to direct families to organizations in Orange County that provide free assistance to Vietnamese speakers who wish to apply.

If you'd like to learn more about some of the public benefits you or your family may be able to receive, please visit the RCOC website ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)) and click on Community Resources under the Family Support tab. You can also contact RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center directly at (714) 558-5400.



## Serving Orange County's Hispanic Community

**R**egional Center of Orange County has prepared this insert especially for the individuals and families we serve who are most comfortable communicating in Spanish. These events, programs and activities are presented in Spanish and/or are geared specifically for those in Southern California's Hispanic 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 other Spanish speakers, please contact RCOC Community Outreach Coordinator Reina Hernandez at (714) 558-5406 or [rhernandez@rcocdd.com](mailto:rhernandez@rcocdd.com).

### RCOC Parent Orientation

**I**f your child is age three or older and is being served by RCOC, it's important to understand the differences between the Early Start program (which serves children under age three) and the RCOC services and support now available to your family under the Lanterman Act. This very important virtual workshop, presented in Spanish, will educate parents about RCOC, the role of your RCOC Service Coordinator, and the Individual Program Plan (IPP) process for identifying the types of services and supports that can benefit your family. You'll also find out how to request additional services your family may need, and learn about other free supports available through RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center. For information and to register for this Zoom workshop, please contact Reina Hernandez at (714) 558-5406 or [rhernandez@rcocdd.com](mailto:rhernandez@rcocdd.com).

**Friday, January 7**  
10 to 11 a.m.

### La Opinión Interviews RCOC Families at Back-to-School Event

**J**uana Ramirez and her son Ethan Fernandez of Westminster (pictured below right) were among several families interviewed by the Spanish-language newspaper La Opinión at the July 25 back-to-school backpack giveaway event benefitting low-income families served by RCOC. In addition to covering the event, the newspaper's story shared helpful information about the range of services available through RCOC to support individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. The La Opinión story can be read on the newspaper's website (<https://laopinion.com/2021/07/26/cuadernos-y-mochilas-una-ayuda-para-el-regreso-a-clases/>) and on RCOC's website. From the RCOC home page, click on Media Kit under the News & Events tab, then select Interviews and Appearances.



*Photo courtesy of La Opinión.*

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