



Dialogue

Volume 35 No.3
Summer 2021



In the Spotlight

Residents of Salerno Apartments

The difficulty that many people face in finding an affordable place to live is a nationwide problem, but it's particularly challenging for the adults with developmental disabilities that Regional Center of Orange County serves who want to live on their own, rather than with family or in a residential facility. Even those who are employed usually don't make enough money to be able to afford market rate rentals here, which are consistently among the highest in the country.

It can take seven to 10 years before a person receives a HUD voucher.

The solution for many is to put their names on a waiting list to receive a housing voucher from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that can be used to help pay their rent. However, these waiting lists are very long. Since it can take seven to 10 years before a person receives a HUD voucher, RCOC recommends that families

work with their RCOC Service Coordinator to get on the waiting lists long before their loved one needs a voucher – ideally, as part of the planning process for transitioning from public school services to adult services through RCOC.

RCOC actively works to build partnerships with local governments and other housing advocates.

Recognizing the crucial role that safe, appropriate and affordable housing plays in the lives of the adults we serve, RCOC also actively works to build partnerships with local governments and other housing advocates with the goal of securing

commitments from developers and communities to set aside some of the units in their affordable housing projects for adults with developmental disabilities. These types of projects usually take years to complete, but the funds that RCOC may provide, as a small portion of the total development, helps to ensure that a certain number of units will be available in perpetuity to those we serve.

One great example of this type of partnership is the Salerno Apartments project in Irvine, which was completed earlier this year. With land provided by the Irvine Community Land Trust and funding from a variety of sources (including

See **Residents of Salerno Apartments** on page 6.



Front row: Alfonso's mother Aida Mijares, Melissa Yu Mijares and Melissa's sister Mildred Yu. Back row: Melissa's mother Marlene Yu, her father Michael Yu and husband Alfonso Mijares, Jr.

Dialogue

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Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Board Meetings

Sept 2 • 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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Budget Update

Some Good News in the FY 2021-22 State Budget

California's greatly-improved economic situation, along with significant federal funds to help states with pandemic-related costs, helped deliver a state budget for fiscal year 2021-22 that has good news for individuals and families served by regional centers. Here are some key items that affect our developmental services community.

• Service Provider Rates:

Throughout the budget process, RCOC and other regional centers as well as legislators and California's non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) urged elected leaders to modernize outdated rate structures and increase the inadequate rates currently paid to regional center service providers. We're pleased that the process of rate reform will begin to be phased in with the FY 2021-22 budget, but extremely disappointed that the State failed to take this opportunity to deliver the complete rate reform our dedicated service providers need and deserve.

• Provisional Eligibility for

Lanterman Services: When most children in the Early Start program reach their third birthday, they transition out of Early Start which is run by the regional center to

services provided by their public school district. Legislation enacted in concert with the FY 2021-22 budget allows for children ages three and four with significant functional limitations to receive regional center services on a provisional basis, without the formal diagnosis of developmental disability that would otherwise be required under the Lanterman Act.

- **Excessive Caseloads:** There is broad agreement that current funding levels require regional center service coordinators to support more individuals and families than is optimal, so we and others advocated for additional funds to enable regional centers to hire a substantial number of new service coordinators. Sadly, while our elected leaders acknowledged that more reasonable caseloads are important and that regional centers are facing ever-increasing demands, they failed to include any new funds for this purpose in the FY 2021-22 budget. They indicated intent to allocate funding in the 2022-23 fiscal year budget; however, this is not guaranteed since California produces its budgets on a year-to-year basis.

For details on the state budget, go to the Department of Finance's budget website at www.ebudget.ca.gov or the Department of Developmental Services website at www.dds.ca.gov/transparency/budget-information.

Executive Director's Report

Self-Determination Program is Now Open to Everyone RCOC Serves

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

It's been nearly eight years since then-Governor Jerry Brown and California's Legislature authorized California's Self-Determination Program (SDP), with the goal of providing people with developmental disabilities and their families more control and more responsibility for choosing and managing their services and supports. What began as a pilot program for just a few thousand people is now (as of July 1, 2021) open to anyone served by a regional center (except those living in licensed settings like skilled nursing and intermediate care facilities, unless they are preparing to move away from that setting).

We at RCOC have always embraced the expansion of new options to enhance the lives of those we serve.

We at RCOC have always embraced the expansion of new options to enhance the lives of those we serve, because we have long recognized that no two persons with disabilities and no two families are alike. Each one's situation, dreams, goals and objectives are unique.

Among the many big changes that I, personally, applauded and that has

over time become an established part of our community care system is supported living services. These services, introduced more than



two decades ago, enable adults with developmental disabilities to live in their own apartment, typically with their rent subsidized

with federal housing vouchers.

The Self-Determination Program, like supported living services, isn't ideal for everyone we serve, but it has the potential to make just as big a change in California's system of community care. Why? Because the principles upon which SDP is based are a major departure from the traditional model of services:

- **Freedom.** You plan your own life and make your own decisions.
- **Authority.** You decide how your individual budget is spent for your services and supports.
- **Support.** You choose your own paid and unpaid services and supports.
- **Responsibility.** You take responsibility for the decisions you make.
- **Confirmation.** You make decisions in your life by designing your own services.

Of course, it's crucial to remember that the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has created very detailed and specific rules for SDP. And, all of the services purchased with a person's individual budget in SDP must – like services purchased through regional centers –

qualify for reimbursement from the federal government. A person cannot, for example, purchase products or services that aren't directly tied to achieving the goals in their IPP (Individual Program Plan) nor can they purchase services that can be funded through other available resources such as health insurance or their school district.

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As I've shared with readers of this column many times before, any person RCOC serves can have a self-determined life in the current, traditional system. Our very strong commitment to person-centered thinking is helping to make RCOC Service Coordinators more responsive than ever before to individual needs and circumstances. If you want to continue having your Service Coordinator's help with your service needs, then traditional services may still be best for you. No one will be forced to try SDP.

But if you want to manage your own IPP and the services you receive independently, the SDP might be ideal for you because it will bring greater independence from the regional center system. Though the numbers are still quite small, we have seen some very successful transitions into SDP during the past three years as this new model has been rolled out. So, if you think SDP might be right for you, be sure to visit RCOC's website to learn more.

Person to Person

The Journey to Independent Living

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

The journey to independent living is unique for each person RCOC serves, but both Sylvia and Jyusse have experienced various living situations, and each has been living on their own for several years, so they have some good advice for other adults who may be thinking about living independently.

Families may be a little nervous when their loved one wants to move out.

It took Jyusse a grand total of 11 years before he found his current living situation. While he was well into his 20s when he moved out on his own, he knows that families may be a little nervous when their loved one wants to move out. That's normal because changing how and where you live affects everyone who's close to you. He recommends talking about the reasons you want to live on your own — whether it's to be

closer to work, to enable you to get out in the community more, or (as it was for Sylvia) to be



Sylvia Delgado



Jyusse Corey

able to live by your own rules rather than someone else's.

One of Sylvia's best tips is to always be sure to see the apartment before you make a decision. You don't want to be disappointed when you come into your new place

and it's not exactly what you had in mind. For example, a place may be smaller than you expected. Plus, you'll need to know the kinds of furniture

and appliances you'll need to get and what will fit in the new place.

He recommends talking about the reasons you want to live on your own.

The time it takes to find an affordable apartment or be awarded a federal housing voucher to help pay the rent can be frustrating. However, Jyusse and Sylvia have learned that patience is important for this journey. They encourage adults who think they might want to live on their own to speak up and to know they can always reach out to their RCOC Service Coordinator and others in their circles of support for help.

Looking for a Roommate?

A lot of the adults RCOC serves either can't afford to live alone, or simply prefer the companionship of a roommate when

they move out of their family home. Often, parents and service providers can help, but RCOC also maintains a list of adults we serve who are seeking roommates. So, if you're interested in living independently but don't want to live alone, be sure to reach out to your RCOC Service Coordinator to discuss ways we might be able to help.



Early Start Parent Orientation

If your family is new to RCOC and receiving services through the Early Start program, welcome! We offer these free workshops to help parents understand how to monitor their child's development and also to ensure parents understand all of the services and supports that are available through Early Start to help their child thrive and narrow the developmental gap. For information and to register for these Zoom workshops, contact Nickie Patton at (714) 558-5404 or jpatton@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, September 8
10 to 11 a.m.

Wednesday, November 10
2 to 3 p.m.

Moving on at 3...Transition Workshops for Parents

For 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. These free transition workshops help 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. These workshops take place virtually via Zoom and are offered 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.

Wednesday, October 13
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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

Everyday Wellness Tip

Getting Your Child's Sleep Schedule School-Ready

A good night's rest is important to ensure a child is ready to learn in school, but it's also important for overall health.

Since most students will soon be returning to in-person classes at their schools, here are some tips for helping your children make the transition to the regular sleep routines they need for school.



- Balanced day and sleep routines are especially important for children with special needs, so make sure your child is getting the right amount of sensory and/or physical activity throughout the day. Also keep eating and napping times consistent, especially bedtime.
- Many sodas and snacks with chocolate are high in caffeine and sugar, which can wreak havoc with sleep, so avoid them in the late afternoon and evening.
- Prepare for sleep with a “quiet time” routine that includes powering down screens and other electronics and might also include turning down the lights, which signals winding down. Also try relaxing activities, like reading a book together, giving a bath or gentle massage, or listening to music.
- Each child is different, but favorite blankets, pillows and stuffed toys can help create a calming place for sleep. If sounds are relaxing for your child, play soft music, nature sounds, or white noise. Similarly, consider installing blackout blinds in the bedroom to prevent sleep disturbances from light entering windows early in the morning.

Residents of Salerno Apartments (continued from page 1)

RCOC), it is an 80-unit complex. Some of the apartments are rented out at market rates, which helps to subsidize the affordable apartments dedicated to veterans, those at risk for homelessness, low-income residents, and those with developmental disabilities.

Some of the apartments are rented out at market rates, which helps to subsidize the affordable apartments.

Ten of the Salerno Apartments units, all built to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards, are now occupied by adults served by RCOC who pay a reduced rent that averages 30 percent of their income.

Melissa Yu Mijares

Among those residents is 29-year-old Melissa Yu Mijares, who became eligible for RCOC services when she experienced traumatic brain injury as a result of two strokes that caused her to lose mobility and the ability to speak when she was just a teen.



Melissa and Alfonso

An incredibly positive and self-motivated young woman, Melissa worked hard on her therapies to regain as much capacity as possible. In the beginning, she had no voice. Gradually, she was able to speak in one-word sentences. A few years later, she was able to speak in full sentences and was regaining the ability to recognize people.

“I was determined to motivate myself and to have a voice,” she said, noting that she’d made enormous progress beyond that when, a few years later, she was in a serious car accident that sent her to the hospital for 10 days, set back her progress dramatically, and led to even more serious medical complications.

As part of her recuperation and rehabilitation, Melissa spent a good amount of time at the gym which is where she met her husband, Alfonso Mijares, Jr. The two of them got married in December 2018. The couple moved into one of the new one-bedroom Salerno Apartments units in January 2021.

“I was determined to motivate myself and to have a voice.”

Now able to speak clearly and advocate very effectively for herself, Melissa uses a wheelchair to get around. She says the new apartment is a big improvement over their last place, which was not wheelchair-friendly and had a smaller bathroom and shower. It’s a little further away



Melissa enjoys cooking in her wheelchair-accessible kitchen.

from the stores where she does her shopping and offices where she has doctor appointments, but she has Access transportation services in place to help her get around.

Melissa has personal assistance support from her mom who is her IHSS (In-Home Supportive Services) worker, but with her accessible kitchen, she’s able to cook in her wheelchair and usually makes lunch and dinner while Alfonso takes care of getting breakfast for the two of them.

Their apartment also has a lower toilet seat and sink, and its own washer-dryer in the unit. The complex has numerous high-quality amenities such as a pool, community and exercise rooms, and accessible elevators. In addition, the landscaping and building design, materials and maintenance all meet the high standards set by the City of Irvine.

The apartment is ideal for Melissa’s needs and perfectly located since Melissa’s parents live in Irvine and Alfonso’s parents aren’t far away. His mom lives in Santa Ana and his father lives in South Gate. While the place isn’t large, Melissa was thrilled they were able to host a special family dinner that she cooked for both their moms on Mother’s Day.

Ian Mishkin

Most of Salerno Apartments' residents with disabilities were contacted by their RCOC Service Coordinator, who suggested they apply for one of the units, but 24-year-old Ian Mishkin, who has cerebral palsy, learned about the opportunity from his mom. She's always been a big supporter of his independence and had been actively helping him search for appropriate, affordable housing when she learned about the new project.

He's not entirely on his own, though, because he has a roommate.

The timing for Ian was perfect. He had been living with his father, with whom he's also very close, but he really wanted to get on his own and start his own life.

"So far, it's been fantastic," he said, noting that living in his own apartment means that he's learning how to do things like cook and do his own laundry for the first time. He's not entirely on his own, though, because he has a roommate – a long-time family friend – who is able to drive the two of them to the grocery store and other places where Ian does the shopping.

Both Ian and his parents felt that having a roommate was a good idea for safety reasons, since Ian sometimes has seizures. He also just enjoys having another person around that he can hang out with when he wants some company. When this story was written, Ian wasn't receiving independent living services (ILS), but with many pandemic-related restrictions being lifted in Orange



Ian Mishkin is learning to cook now that he's living in his own place.

County he thinks he might benefit from having those supports in place later on.

And, while his roommate is able to drive, Ian also has Access transportation services in place so he's not completely reliant on his roommate. Since his medical condition puts him at greater risk from COVID-19, he's spent most of his time at home lately but may need that transportation support more regularly when he starts classes at Saddleback College in the fall.

Ian has worked at his father's company and has a wide variety of interests, but his true passion is politics. In fact, he's followed world news and political news since he was a young child and has even thought about running for office. Right now, though, he plans to study political science in hopes of someday working as a staffer for an elected official.

"At first, I was scared," he said, confiding that he was homesick living away from both his mom and his dad for the first time. "Being on my own, I wasn't sure what was going to happen. The first week, I called my mom every night."

"You'll get there eventually, if you just have more confidence in yourself."

Now, he said, he often talks to her just once a week because his life is much busier since he's responsible for more of his own day-to-day household chores and errands. He's also built a lot more self-confidence and encourages others who are thinking about living on their own to look past their short-term fears and keep their eyes on their long-term goals.

"You can do it," he said. "You'll get there eventually, if you just have more confidence in yourself."



Each of the Salerno Apartments units has its own washer and dryer, and Ian does his own laundry.

Dialogue Newsletter    

INSIDE

In the Spotlight: Residents of Salerno Apartments.....	1
Budget Update.....	2
Executive Director's Report.....	3
Person to Person.....	4
Looking for a Roommate?	4
Early Start Parent Orientation	5
Moving on at 3...Transition Workshops for Parents.....	5
Everyday Wellness Tip	5

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

**Submit
Spotlight
Awards
Nominations**
**Online
Year-Round**

You probably know someone who deserves to be recognized with a Spotlight Award for their outstanding achievements or their work to support people with developmental disabilities in Orange County. But we've heard that since the awards are given out just once a year, it can be difficult to remember all the details when nomination time rolls around.

To make the process easier, RCOC is now accepting nominations year-round and you can submit a nomination online through our website (www.rcocdd.com). Simply click on the RCOC Annual Spotlight Awards quick link on the home page. From there, you can view the award categories and criteria in English, Spanish or Vietnamese, along with complete information (also in three languages) about how to submit a nomination online, via email, by regular mail, or in person.

We're excited to see who you nominate for RCOC's spring 2022 Spotlight Awards!



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 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. 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.

Screening Event Identifies Children with Developmental Delays

On May 21, RCOC collaborated with several of our community partners to host a free developmental screening event at Westminster's BPSOS Center for Community Advancement. Approximately 30 children up to age five were seen by early childhood development health and medical specialists in: speech and language, fine motor skills (like assembling puzzles, drawing pictures), gross motor skills (like walking and standing that require use of large muscle groups), along with emotional and behavioral health, vision, hearing, dental, and overall health. Of these, 11 children were referred to RCOC for follow up. Pictured below, on the right, is RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong who helped at the event.



Behavior Management Workshop for Parents

This Vietnamese-language workshop series is free for parents, and is being offered via videoconferencing (rather than in-person) due to the pandemic. The sessions cover basic 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. Contact your RCOC Service Coordinator or Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktruong@rcocdd.com for additional information, and to register.

Thursday evenings from 6:30-9 p.m.

Sept. 30, Oct. 7, Oct. 14, Oct. 21 and Oct. 28

Virtual Coffee Talk: September 23, 6:30-8 p.m.

Join RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong and other Vietnamese-speaking parents for this informal conversation via Zoom. Discussion topics change, depending on needs and interests, and can include COVID-19 updates, RCOC services, resources available in the community, special education and more. For more information and to RSVP, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktruong@rcocdd.com.

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Living Options Outside the Family Home

A little over half of the people RCOC serves are adults, but the overwhelming majority of them still live in the family home. Living with parents can have advantages, especially when a young person isn't sure about what they want to do after graduating from high school. However, it's important for families to know that RCOC can help with a variety of services and supports that enable adults with developmental disabilities to live safely and independently in the community. And, the severity of a person's disabilities is never a barrier since RCOC can help find a suitable home where any individual's needs can be met.

The severity of a person's disabilities is never a barrier.

Of the nearly 3,700 adults RCOC serves who live outside the family home, around 1,630 live in group homes that typically serve up to six

adults with similar needs, while a growing number – currently almost 1,400 — receive supported living services (SLS) or independent living services (ILS). Though SLS and ILS are increasingly preferred, all of these living options nurture a person's life skills and independence. This growing independence is a natural progression for adults with disabilities, and can be important for the person as his or her parents grow older and ultimately pass away.

All of these living options nurture a person's life skills and independence.

When a person with disabilities chooses a supported living or independent living arrangement, their RCOC-funded service provider works one-on-one with them to help them perform, or learn to perform, important daily life activities, such as grocery shopping, house cleaning, and

meal preparation. When the person with disabilities also has physical challenges, they may also qualify for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) which funds personal assistance for things like using the bathroom, bathing, and getting dressed.

The specific services a person receives depends on his or her individual needs. Since most adults with developmental disabilities have low incomes and usually can't afford the high cost of rent in Orange County, RCOC can also help them to access affordable housing or federal financial assistance for housing.

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If you'd like to learn more about living options for adults or think your family member might benefit from these services, be sure to contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.





Serving Orange County's Hispanic Community

Regional 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. 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.

COVID-19 Resources and Information

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.

Navigating Early Start Services for Your Child

If your family is new to RCOC and receiving services through the Early Start program, welcome! This Spanish-language workshop is free and will help parents understand the Early Start program and how it can help their child thrive and narrow the developmental gap during the crucial birth to age three time frame. Another major focus for this workshop is to educate parents about how to request additional RCOC services they may need, and to ensure they understand all the services and supports that are available through Early Start and through RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center. For information and to register for this Zoom workshop, please contact

Giulia Rodriguez at
(714) 558-5402 or
grodriguez@rcocdd.com

Wednesday, October 20
10 to 11 a.m.



Virtual Orientation for New RCOC Parents

If 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 now under the Lanterman Act. This very important 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.

Monday, October 4
6 to 7:30 p.m.

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