

In the Spotlight

Samantha Humphrey and Maddox Chang

Appropriate settings, with appropriate educational goals and appropriate supports are key for children with developmental disabilities to thrive in school. Achieving that combination is the goal of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process undertaken by public schools in partnership with students' parents. However, sometimes parents may disagree with what their school team believes is appropriate.

Sometimes parents may disagree with what their school team believes is appropriate.

That was the case for Maddox Chang's parents Trinh Truong and Michael Chang, and Samantha ("Sammy") Humphrey's parents Elizabeth and Carlos Humphrey when their RCOC Service Coordinators connected them with RCOC's new Educational Services Resource Group Leader Alma ("Jocelyn") Escobar.



Sammy Humphrey (center) with (L-R) brother Carlitos, father Carlos, and sisters Natalie and Hannah.

Samantha Humphrey

For 13-year-old Sammy, born with Down syndrome, the main concern is placement. For several years, Sammy was in the program her school designated for students with mild/moderate needs. Placement was never an issue in her IEP meetings, but when the family moved and Sammy started in a new school, her parents agreed with the IEP goals, but disagreed with the new school district team's recommended placement in a moderate/severe needs program.

Among other things, Elizabeth and Carlos felt the moderate/severe program was not the least restrictive environment for their daughter and that her compassionate personality would lead her to be distracted by other children's behaviors, rather than focused on her own studies. As such, they were pleased that the process requires Sammy to stay in the mild/



Samantha Humphrey

moderate program until an agreement on that part of the IEP is reached.

"I never thought I needed an advocate, but I was so frustrated," said Elizabeth, who noted they'd hired a paid advocate in late 2021. However, when that person was not available, they turned to Jocelyn for help navigating the process.

See **Samantha Humphrey and Maddox Chang** 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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Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Board Meetings

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

Proposed State Budget Falls Short of Community Needs

The Governor's 2022-2023 proposed budget for the developmental services system that funds regional center services and supports does not include plans to expedite implementation of the service provider rate reform that the system requires. RCOC, other regional centers and service providers statewide are disappointed that the Governor and the Legislature do not see the urgency of providing greater increases now. Instead, the proposed budget continues the multi-year, phased approach that was introduced in the current FY 2021-2022 budget.

*The rates do not
reflect the dramatic
increases in labor, gas
and other costs
we are experiencing now.*

It is also important to note that although the rates were updated with cost components as of February 2022, the rates do not reflect the dramatic increases in labor, gas and other costs we are experiencing now.

Below is a timeline of the phased approach in the current FY 2021-2022 budget and the Governor's proposed FY 2022-2023 budget:

- **April 1, 2022** – Not all service providers will receive rate adjustments. Those that do will receive 25% of the increase necessary to bring their rates up to the amounts recommended in the 2019 rate study, updated with cost components as of February 2022.
- **Fiscal Year 2023-2024** – July 1, 2023, service providers will receive an additional 25% of the increase necessary to bring their rates up to the amounts recommended in the 2019 rate study, updated with cost components as of February 2022.
- **Fiscal Year 2025-2026** – July 1, 2025, service providers will receive an additional 40% of the increase necessary to bring their rates up to the amounts recommended in the 2019 rate study, updated with cost components as of February 2022.
- **Quality Incentive Program (Fiscal Year 2025-26)** – July 1, 2025, service providers may qualify for an additional 10%; this component is designed to improve the quality of services.

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

We Can't Wait to Fix the Direct Care Crisis

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

I rarely use words like “crisis” when talking about our regional center system of community care. We are an incredibly resilient, efficient and resourceful community. Throughout my career I’ve been proud of our capacity not just to cope but to innovate in the face of heightened expectations and chronic underfunding. However, what we’re facing now is different.

The proposed budget completely ignores the reality our community is experiencing.

As summarized in the Budget Update story (page 2), the Governor’s proposed budget continues a phased approach to implementing higher rates for the service providers who deliver direct care to people with developmental disabilities. As such, the proposed budget completely ignores the reality our community is experiencing.

Instead, RCOC and other regional centers along with advocates across California believe the Governor and Legislature should expedite implementation of the 2019 rate study recommendations, so those badly

needed funds can get in the hands of service providers right away.

We also need to remember that those increased rates, even when fully



implemented, are already outdated. According to the Pew Research Center, only Brazil and Turkey surpassed the United States in their annual inflation rates between the third quarter 2019 and the third quarter 2021. While some expect inflation to moderate in 2022, the fact is that all Californians are paying a lot more for virtually everything than they were paying even a few months ago.

Service providers tell me their inability to offer competitive pay for direct care staff is their biggest challenge. As I have shared previously, service providers in Orange County and statewide have lost large numbers of direct care workers to other, better paying jobs. Many workers have also left for other pandemic-related reasons. Attracting new people to fill these positions requires a level of pay and benefits that is far beyond the capacity of most service providers. Even our largest service providers, with active charitable fundraising volunteers, cannot keep up.

All RCOC-funded services and supports are affected, but as just one example of how this plays out in people’s real lives, I’ll cite day programs. Day programs meet critical needs for thousands of individuals

with developmental disabilities. What isn’t always recognized, though, is that they are just as crucial for the functioning of families, since 81% of those we serve reside in the family home.

Without direct care professionals, there are no services.

When a day program is not providing normal in-person services, it has a cascading effect on the entire circle of support and, in turn, puts pressure on other services such as respite and crisis service providers, who are also depleted and challenged by labor shortages.

As of this writing, just 19% of RCOC’s day programs are back to a relatively normal day schedule, while 81% are still operating via Zoom and other alternative service models due to staff shortages. The situation is similar across the state, and regional centers are speaking with one voice to send a clear and forceful message to California’s elected leaders: without direct care professionals, there are no services.

In addition to expediting implementation of the 2019 rate study rates, California should deliver immediate emergency funding to the developmental services system. It has been done before, when Republicans and Democrats came together in 2016 to pass ABX2-1 with targeted service provider rate increases. Today’s direct care crisis demands equally strong and decisive action.

Person to Person

Get Ready for Summer Fun!

By Sylvia Delgado, PAC Chair

We're already in May and of course you know what that means: summer is approaching fast and, you're probably wondering about fun things to do!

Personally, I love to go to Disneyland -- not just in summer, but all year round. I also like going to baseball games with my independent living group and taking the bus to the beach. The Orange County Fair is fun, too, for walking around and trying new foods. Honestly, I just enjoy being outdoors.

If you're looking for something new to try, you can always check out the Recreation Resource Guide created by RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center. It has details on things like horseback riding, karate classes and other sports activities, as well as camps and lots more. Whether you're an adult or a child, there's plenty to choose from!

Plus, the Guide has been recently updated and is available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. To download it from the RCOC website, go to www.rcocdd.com and click on the Resources for Children and Families quick link, then scroll down to Recreation.



Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

These workshops are free for parents and are being offered via Zoom (rather than in-person). They cover basic principles of positive behavior management, with a practical focus on helping parents 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. Toilet training is the focus of the last session. Advance registration is required. Contact your Service Coordinator or Tracy Vaughan at (714) 796-5223 or tvaughan@rcocdd.com for additional information, and to register.

Presented in Vietnamese by Footprints

When: Tuesday evenings – May 17, May 24, May 31, June 7 and June 14

Time: 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Presented in English by Advanced Behavioral Health

When: Thursday evenings – August 4, August 11, August 18, August 25 and September 1

Time: 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Presented in Spanish by Footprints

When: Thursday evenings – October 13, October 20, October 27, November 3 and November 10

Time: 5:30-8:00 p.m.



Everyday Wellness Tip

Be Prepared for the Summer Sun

One of the best things about living in Orange County is our warm, sunny summers! It's important, though, to be prepared for both the heat of summer and the longer periods of time we tend to spend outside.

For many of us, that means increasing our water intake so we stay hydrated. How much water you need depends on many things, including your weight, health status and medications you may be taking. One way to tell if you're drinking enough water is to check the color of your urine. If it's a light yellow color, you're probably getting enough water, but if it's a dark yellow you could be dehydrated.

Preparing for summer also means making sure we protect ourselves from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays with a proper sunscreen. The lighter your complexion, the stronger the sunscreen you'll need. Whatever sunscreen you choose, be sure to apply it liberally and often. If you don't use enough, you won't get the full sun protection factor (SPF) listed on the product. For face and neck, alone, you should use at least half a teaspoon.

And don't forget to protect your eyes, too. If you're outside for long periods of time, or at places like the beach where there's a lot of reflected sunlight, it's a good idea to wear sunglasses.

Self-Determination Town Hall: May 23

If you're thinking about applying for the Self-Determination Program, you'll want to attend the virtual Self-Determination Town Hall featuring Acting Self-Determination Program Ombudsperson Katie Hornberger. Hosted by RCOC, the event is scheduled for Monday, May 23 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. It will be an excellent opportunity to get your questions answered by one of California's top SDP experts. For information, call RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center at (714) 558-5400. To register, locate the event on the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com) and click on the link.



Facts About Special Education

When a child becomes eligible for special education, most of the services they need are provided by their public school district. That transition can be confusing since school districts operate differently from RCOC's Early Start program. With that in mind, we'll be using this newsletter to regularly share tips and information to help parents better understand how special education works so they can advocate more effectively for their children.

Public Schools as a Generic Resource

The reason schools become responsible for most services is that they are what's called a "generic resource" and regional centers can only consider paying for a service if it is not available through a generic resource. As such, the family's public school district is responsible for all services needed to meet the goals and objectives in their child's

Individualized Education Program. In addition to academic instruction, those services may include speech therapy, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), applied behavioral analysis (ABA), adaptive equipment, counseling and enhanced staffing ratios.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Developed and implemented by public schools in partnership with the parents of a child with disabilities, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) spells out the educational goals for the child and the specific strategies and plans the school will be undertaking to meet the child's educational needs. It's important for parents to know that the IEP is the legal document guiding services and supports. So, while communication with a child's teacher is often very helpful and productive, only goals and plans specified in the IEP are required to be implemented.

Extended School Year (ESY)

Since the public school is where most children will be receiving most of their services and supports during their school-age years, it's important for parents to explore whether enrolling in summer school – called Extended School Year or ESY – will be important. All children lose some skills and knowledge over the summer, so for a school district to authorize ESY a parent needs to be able to show that their child will lose more than a typical child if their education does not continue into ESY. The ESY program is shorter than a typical school day and may take place at a different location with different staff than the regular school program. Like all other plans, for ESY to be provided, it has to be incorporated into the child's IEP so it's important that parents don't wait until the end of the school year to discuss it.

RCOC's Educational Services Resource Group

RCOC has created an Educational Services Resource Group that parents can consult regarding concerns they have about their child's education. Examples of topics often discussed include:

- Your rights at an IEP meeting
- Understanding your child's IEP report
- Process and timelines for assessments
- How to prepare for an IEP meeting
- Requesting your child's educational records
- Non-adversarial advocacy with school districts

To schedule a consultation, contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.



Samantha Humphrey and Maddox Chang (continued from page 1)

Jocelyn, who is fluent in both English and Spanish, helped the parents understand their options and communicate constructively with the school about their concerns and desire to observe the full range of placements before finalizing that portion of Sammy's IEP.

"Parents should be active participants in the IEP process," Jocelyn said. "For that to happen, they need to understand their district's procedural safeguards and their own rights to ensure their child receives the assessments needed to develop an IEP that meets the child's unique needs in the least restrictive environment."

As of this writing, the Humphreys had not yet been able to observe the full range of placement options suggested by Jocelyn (including a "blended" program) and continue the IEP process, but they're grateful for her help.

Maddox Chang

For six-year-old Maddox, who has autism, the issue arose after a fall at school that led to a concussion and temporary support from a one-to-one aide to ensure his safety. When school personnel believed one-to-one support was no longer necessary because Maddox was doing well, Trinh and Michael were convinced their son was still at-risk.

"I was really nervous going into the IEP, because I felt there was so much at stake with the one-to-one aide," said Trinh. In addition to consulting with the parents ahead of the IEP to ensure they understood the process, as well as their rights and options, Jocelyn attended the IEP meeting –



Maddox (left) with sister Sienna in Chinese attire on Lunar New Year 2022.

not as an advocate, but to help ensure clarity and understanding of what was discussed and agreed upon for inclusion in the IEP.

Trinh said many parents feel awkward insisting that specific details discussed during the IEP meeting be placed in the child's IEP document. Some think that can make them appear adversarial or untrusting of school and school district professionals. However, Jocelyn notes that clear communication and expectations are key to successful parent-school collaborations. There is also always the potential for staff changes, so documenting specific plans and goals is essential to ensure new aides or teachers can follow through on agreed upon approaches.

Trinh notes that many parents of young children are still coping with the emotional upheaval of having a child with special needs, and the demands of day-to-day life make it a struggle to keep motivated as their child's primary advocate.

"Having someone like Jocelyn who is strong and encouraging really helps," she said. "She made me much more confident going into the IEP."

The work they'd done together resulted in an agreement that a one-to-one aide was, in fact, still important to ensure Maddox would be safe. The team also agreed upon more and more challenging educational goals for him, which was also very satisfying to Trinh and Michael.



Maddox Chang (third from left) with (L-R) father Michael Chang, mother Trinh Truong, sister Sienna and Michael's parents.

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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

Thank You Southern California News Group

C OVID-19 made many parents hesitant to bring their young children to the pediatrician for regular check-ups. It is during these routine visits that many potential developmental delays are identified and where many parents are referred to their local regional center for assessments. Sadly, during the pandemic lockdowns, regional centers throughout California, including RCOC, experienced a significant drop in referrals for Early Start services.

Since early intervention is so critical for helping children close the developmental gap and achieve their maximum potential, we were thrilled when Southern California News Group – the parent company of the Orange County Register – agreed to partner with us to raise awareness of developmental milestones and the availability of RCOC-funded developmental screenings. The partnership included quarter-page ads that were produced by SCNG with content provided by RCOC, and ran free-of-charge in the Orange County Register on October 19, 2021, February 14, 2022 and March 14, 2022.

Thank you Southern California News Group for your support of our community!





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. 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 ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Virtual Coffee Talk

Join RCOC Cultural Specialist Kaitlynn Yen Truong and other Vietnamese-speaking parents for these informal conversations via Zoom. These sessions will feature guest speakers from Disability Rights California. For more information and to RSVP, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Thursday, June 16

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Topic: Medicaid Waiver

Thursday, July 14

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Topic: Regional Center Services

Thursday, August 25

10 a.m.-Noon

Topic: Special Education

Thursday, September 22

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Topic: Alternatives to Conservatorship

New Parent Orientation for Vietnamese Families

If your family is new to RCOC, you'll want to join this special virtual orientation for Vietnamese-speaking parents. Learn about RCOC and the role of your RCOC Service Coordinator. You'll also learn about the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Program Plan (IPP) process for identifying the types of RCOC-funded services and supports that can benefit your family. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and improve your advocacy skills, and you'll learn about other free supports available through RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center. For more information and to RSVP, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, June 29

6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Moving on at 3...Transition Workshops for Parents

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. This session takes place virtually via Zoom and is offered in Vietnamese. For more information and to register, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.



Thursday, June 9

6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Fountain Valley Summerfest

Celebrate the summer with food, carnival rides, entertainment, fireworks after dark, and more at the Fountain Valley SummerFest. The \$5 admission price applies to all attendees aged 5 years and older and will be used to help offset increased costs and the costs associated with ensuring that Summerfest is a safe event for as many families as possible. For more information, call (714) 839-8611 or email FVRecreation@FountainValley.org. For daily event hours and to buy tickets, visit the website at www.fvsummerfest.com.

June 16-19

Fountain Valley Sport Park

16400 Brookhurst Street in Fountain Valley

Enter at Brookhurst and Heil

summerfest

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Behavior Management Workshop for Parents

This Vietnamese-language workshop series is free for parents, and is being offered via Zoom, rather than in-person. 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 are 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. Toilet training is the focus of the last session.

Advance reservations are required. Contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at (714) 558-5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com for additional information, and to register.

Tuesday evenings
May 17, May 24, May 31,
June 7 and June 14
5:30-8 p.m.

Basics of Special Education

When the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed, it guaranteed a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all children with disabilities, including those with developmental disabilities who are served by RCOC.

There is a priority placed on including children with disabilities with their typical peers as much as possible.

These special education services and the assessments needed to determine a child's special needs are provided through a family's local public school district, using a process called the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Least Restrictive Environments

There is a priority placed on including children with disabilities with their typical peers as much as possible. So, as part of their responsibility to provide a free and appropriate

education, schools are required to place the child with special needs in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) suitable for them.

Parental Rights and Involvement

Parents know their children better than anyone, so they are active participants in the IEP process for their child. Parents must also give consent for the special education services and supports a school provides by signing the IEP document. Since the IEP covers a range of topics, a parent may consent to some aspects of the IEP and withhold consent where they disagree with the school team's recommendations.

Procedural Safeguards

In most cases, parents and schools collaborate effectively to complete relevant assessments, develop educational goals, agree upon educational services, and determine a placement that is appropriate for the child. However, when there is a disagreement between the school's experts and the parents, the IDEA provides a range of what are called procedural safeguards that give the parents an opportunity to work with

the school to reach an agreement on what's best for the child. If an agreement is not reached, the IDEA has a "stay put" protection that keeps the child's current IEP in place. You can invoke "stay put" by simply not signing the part of the IEP that you disagree with and the child "stays put" in the current service until the dispute is resolved.

Language Requirements

Recognizing that children attending public schools come from diverse cultural backgrounds, schools are required to provide written notices in the parents' native language. They are also required to provide interpreters, if needed, for IEP meetings.

Additional Resources

A great deal of information about the IDEA and the IEP process is available on RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com). From the home page, click on the Community Resources page under the Family Support tab and scroll down to Special Education.

If you'd like to learn more or would like help understanding your options with your child's special education program, you can always 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. 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 Comfort Connection Family Resource Center Parent Service Coordinator Giulia Rodriguez at (714) 558-5402 or grodriguez@rcocdd.com.

Virtual Coffee Talk

Join other Spanish-speaking parents for these informal conversations via Zoom, which will feature guest speakers from Disability Rights California. For more information and to RSVP, contact Giulia Rodriguez at (714) 558-5402 or grodriguez@rcocdd.com.

Monday, June 6
6-8 p.m.

Monday, July 25
6-8 p.m.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Clinic

Presented by Support for Families, this free virtual workshop will be in Spanish and will provide families with an overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Participants will also be provided with resources pertaining to IDEA and IEPs. For information and to register, call (415) 920-5040 or email info@supportforfamilies.org.

Thursday, June 16
4-6 p.m.

In-Home Supportive Services: Preventive Supervision

Parents Helping Parents is offering this free workshop via Zoom to help parents learn about California's In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, eligibility criteria for the state-funded program, and how to apply for services. Registration is required. For information and to register, email info@php.com.

Tuesday, June 21
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Potty Training: Creating Toileting Independence

This presentation provides basic, practical strategies every parent needs to implement a successful toilet training program. You'll learn about approaches important for all children, as well as how to address unique issues that arise for children with special needs. This workshop is presented in English, but Spanish translation may be provided when requested in advance. For more information and for help with online registration, contact Patricia Garcia at (714) 558-5400 or pgarcia@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, August 31
6:30-8:30 p.m.

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Tuesday, June 7
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Tuesday, August 23
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on what's best for the child. If an agreement is not reached, the IDEA has a "stay put" protection that keeps the child's current IEP in place. You can invoke "stay put" by simply not signing the part of the IEP that you disagree with and the child "stays put" in the current service until the dispute is resolved.

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