

DIALOGUE

A Quarterly Publication of the Regional Center of Orange County

VOLUME 37 NO. 2 • SPRING 2023



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Jeffrey Vargas and Alex Mateo

SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LIVES OF ALL PEOPLE, including children and adults with developmental disabilities. These activities enable the development of social skills and personal relationships that foster a sense of community and provide enjoyment to daily life.

In the Spotlight are two persons Regional Center of Orange County serves who have thrived through their participation in social and recreational activities at the OC Children's Therapeutic Arts Center (OCCTAC), a Santa Ana-based non-profit organization that has served individuals with and without disabilities, in fully-inclusive settings, for more than 23 years.

OCCTAC works to meet a broad range of family needs that extends well beyond the arts.

Beginning with just 100 students in music, art, dance and early childhood programs, OCCTAC now serves more than 7,000 individuals who represent the full age and income range and come from as far away as Los Angeles and Long Beach. Through partnerships, grants and collaborations with the City of Santa Ana, County of Orange, Santa Ana Unified School District, RCOC and others, OCCTAC works to meet a broad array of family needs that extends well beyond the arts to encompass mental health counseling for youth and families, student tutoring, work development for young adults, programs for seniors, family mentoring and assistance coordinating social service supports for the entire family.



Jeffrey Vargas shares art he created at OCCTAC

Jeffrey Vargas

Jeffrey, a 30-year-old who has cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability, has attended OCCTAC piano, art, dance and drum classes since June 2022 and loves being there. In fact, his mother, Esperanza Vargas, said she noticed positive changes in him within a week of his first class.

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DIALOGUE

This newsletter can also be read online at RCOC's website:

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Check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for upcoming Board meetings.

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BOARD UPDATE

Two New Members Join RCOC Board of Directors

RCOC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPOINTED BRUCE HALL AND JACQUELINE NGUYEN to each serve one-year terms beginning April 1, 2023. Both are unpaid volunteer positions.



Bruce, who is the father of twin sons with autism, was born legally-blind and has a lifetime of personal experience dealing with assumptions about what a person with disabilities can accomplish. An accomplished professional photographer and former schoolteacher, he has been active for many years in the disability rights movement as an advocate for his non-speaking sons. He has also worked with

the Federation Fighting Blindness, The Center for Autism in OC, and parent groups. He has attended nearly every RCOC Board meeting since 2011. He also served on the Self-Determination Local Advisory Committee for a year and attended its meetings for five years.

He has been active for many years in the disability rights movement as an advocate.

Jacqueline is the mother of a son with autism and severe auditory processing disorders. For the past 17 years, she has worked with agencies and nonprofit organizations serving diverse populations with developmental disabilities. Also active in the community, she's served on the State Council on Developmental Disabilities and taken on various roles where she provided expert guidance on developmental disabilities for local, state and federal emergency management agencies and associations.



She has worked with agencies and nonprofit organizations serving diverse populations with developmental disabilities.

RCOC is Making it Easier to Access Social and Recreational Services

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director



AS ILLUSTRATED IN THIS ISSUE'S COVER STORY, social and recreational activities can greatly enhance the quality of life for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

While regional center funding for those activities was suspended for a number of years, we're pleased that the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has partnered with RCOC and other regional centers to enable much easier access to social and recreational activities.

Key Changes to Enhance Access

One of the most important changes was a service payment exception DDS granted for social and recreational services. Now, RCOC is able to prepay the costs of these services, which is in contrast to all other services we fund, which are paid for *after* the service is rendered.

Now, RCOC is able to prepay the costs of these services.

This change makes a huge difference for families of more limited means or who may be experiencing financial hardship. That is because most programs of this type require payment in advance and many families are not in a position to prepay and then wait to be reimbursed by the Regional Center for those costs.

Another policy change we implemented to facilitate easier and faster access is allowing RCOC Service Coordinators to authorize up to \$200 per month of eligible social and recreational expenditures, without seeking additional guidance from their supervisors.

Federal Requirements Remain

Another key challenge for many families we serve has been the rule - effective March 2022 - that says all social and recreational services must be fully inclusive, serving both those with disabilities and those without disabilities.

All social and recreational services must be fully inclusive, serving both those with disabilities and those without disabilities.

This means that many of the popular programs, especially camp programs, that have historically served solely those with developmental disabilities cannot be paid for with federal funds. Programs such as the OC Children's Therapeutic Arts Center, featured in our cover story, were in compliance with that rule from the outset, as are nearly all city and county government-operated social and recreational programs.

More recently, however, a number of similarly high-quality service providers such as YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Love 2 Learn, Unlimited Possibilities (formerly UCP), and more have had their fully-inclusive social and recreational programs approved for DDS grant funding. This will greatly improve the range of such program options in Orange County.

If you haven't already done so, please feel free to reach out to your RCOC Service Coordinator anytime to discuss your interests and options. We're always here to help.



PERSON-TO-PERSON

RCOC's Updated Recreation Resources Guide is Online

By Sylvia Delgado, PAC Chair



WITH SUMMER JUST AROUND THE CORNER, you're probably wondering what you could do with your infant, toddler or young child, world's greatest teenager or maybe even an adult son or daughter with disabilities. I can tell you Orange County has a lot to offer, and RCOC's Recreation Resources Guide is a great source for ideas and information.

The Guide was recently updated for 2023 and is available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. Inside you'll find program descriptions, locations, contact information, languages spoken and any COVID-19 precautions observed for programs serving people of all ages and abilities.

There are too many possibilities to name here, but one I have done and thought was a lot of fun in the summer is Special Olympics. Another low-cost activity that's ideal for all ages that I always enjoy is the Orange County Fair.

To download the Guide, visit the RCOC website (www.rcocdd.com) or visit the Comfort Connection Family Resource Center at RCOC's Santa Ana office. And remember, it's going to be hot so don't forget the sunblock!

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 for additional information, and to register.

Presented in Vietnamese by Footprints

When: Tuesday evenings – May 30, June 6, June 13, June 20 and June 27

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

Presented in English by Advanced Behavioral Health

When: Thursday evenings – August 3, August 10, August 17, August 24 and August 31

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

Presented in Spanish by Footprints

When: Thursday evenings – October 5, October 12, October 19, October 26 and November 2

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

EVERYDAY WELLNESS: Use Mindfulness to Avoid Smoking, Vaping and Alcohol

Mindfulness

FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE, DAY-TO-DAY LIFE HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL, PRE-PANDEMIC ROUTINES.

That can be a great thing, when it means more social engagement with friends, family and neighbors as well as more, healthy physical activity. However, some may still struggle with stress and anxiety -- too often turning to unhealthy foods and behaviors out of habit or convenience.

Quit Smoking and Vaping

While rates of smoking have dropped dramatically in recent decades, smoking still accounts for more than 480,000 deaths every year, or about 1 in 5 deaths. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control reports cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the United States.

Experts agree there is no “safe” amount of smoking or vaping.

A relatively new phenomenon, vaping is responsible for far fewer deaths. However, contrary to what some people think, it too can be deadly, as users still breathe in harmful chemicals. Experts agree there is no “safe” amount of smoking or vaping.

Limit Alcohol Consumption

While some studies appear to show some health benefits from moderate alcohol

consumption (one drink a day for women, two for men), a growing number of researchers are concluding that the ideal amount of alcohol – beer, wine or liquor – for any adult is none. That’s because even small amounts of alcohol can disrupt sleep, impact judgement, and interfere with many medications. It may also increase the overall risk of death from various causes, including some cancers and some forms of heart disease.

Getting Help

For some, mindfulness can help by encouraging us to pause, think about the effects of the behavior or food, consider different options, and then make a healthier choice.

Help is also available from your health plan or primary care doctor, who can connect you to free or low-cost resources for quitting unhealthy habits and adopting a healthier lifestyle.



ABC's of Special Education

Meeting Notices Facilitate Successful IEP Meetings

THE MEETING NOTICE IS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR PARENTS TO UNDERSTAND, because it can support them in having a successful IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting. The meeting notice provides critical details about the meeting environment that can significantly impact the parents' ability to meaningfully participate in their child's IEP meeting.

About IEP Meeting Notices

The meeting notice must indicate the purpose, time, and location of the meeting and who will attend. The school team is required to take steps to ensure parental attendance, including scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed upon time and place. It is critical that parents carefully review all of this information prior to the signing this document and returning it to the school.

The meeting notice provides critical details about the meeting environment

Here are some key things to consider:

- **Are all required team members listed?** It is important to ensure that all individuals on the IEP team who have knowledge or special expertise about the child attend the meeting. It is also critical to ensure that the assigned District Program Specialist/Coordinator is part

of the IEP meeting, if there is a need to review district-wide requests or there are questions that may require district personnel input.

- **Are interpreter services needed?** If you need an American Sign Language (ASL) or other language interpreter to participate at the IEP meeting, one must be provided at no expense to you.
- **Intent to audio record?** Parents may use an audio recorder to record an IEP meeting, even without the school district's permission, as long as the parents give the school district 24 hours' notice in writing of their intention to do so.

RCOC has an Educational Consult Resource Group that can provide parents with support and expertise regarding their educational concerns. To schedule a phone or video consultation, contact your RCOC Service Coordinator.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Jeffrey Vargas and Alex Mateo, cont.

“His mood was elevated and he was more alert,” she said. “He’d wake up early and remind me that it’s program day!”



Jeffrey Vargas with his mother and caregiver Esperanza Vargas

In addition to being fully-inclusive, OCCTAC offers programs, services and supports for people of all ages, so the entire family is welcome and Esperanza typically is with Jeffrey at his classes. Jeffrey is very social and quickly made friends with other program participants, as has his mother who encourages other parents to take advantage of the program’s very supportive environment.

“It’s helpful for parents to de-stress and speak with each other about the challenges our families have,” she said, also noting that OCCTAC staff convey a lot of love to those in their programs and make everyone feel special. OCCTAC’s Founder and Executive Director Dr. Ana Jimenez-Hami remembers how joyful she was when she was told some time ago that when Jeffrey was hospitalized, all he wanted was to get out and go to his classes.

“He dances in his wheelchair, and expresses his emotions and feelings through dance like any other person,” she said.

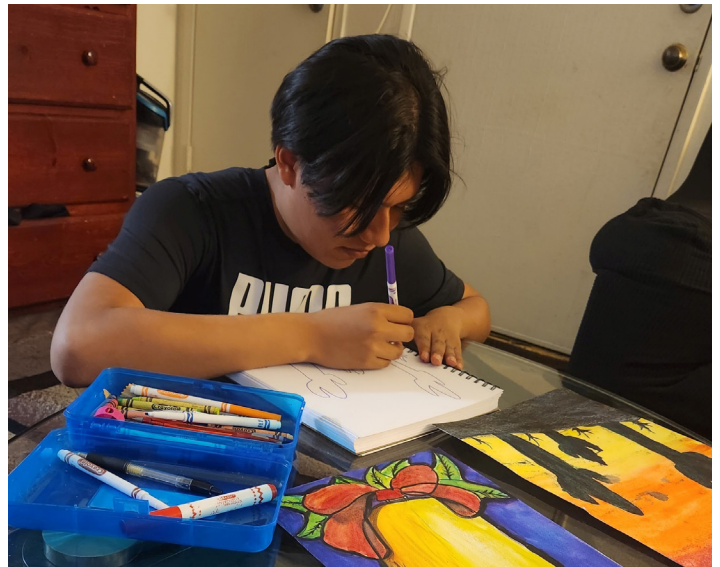
Alex Mateo

Alex, a 17-year-old with autism, has enjoyed OCCTAC’s art, ceramics and digital animation classes since July 2022 and now spends a lot of time drawing outside of class, especially his favorite superhero Spiderman.

His mother, Elizabeth Barragan, appreciates that the classes have helped Alex explore his creative side, but also has seen significant improvement in his confidence, social and communication skills since beginning the program.

“He’s more expressive now and more able to speak up at school,” she said, noting that Alex previously had difficulties in school due his lack of communication skills.

His RCOC Service Coordinator Carlos Correa also pointed out the value of these programs for Alex’s future.



Alex Mateo enjoys creating art at home, as well as in his OCCTAC classes

“It’s been very beneficial for him,” said Carlos. “Not just to expose him to new hobbies, but also to develop his independence and perhaps interests over the longer term for a career.”



REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

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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



Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program

If you need help paying your water bill, the Community Action Partnership of Orange County may be able to help. Assistance ranges from \$200 to \$2,000 for Orange County residents who meet monthly income guidelines and are able to provide copies of their California ID and their water bill from a water company enrolled in CAP OC’s Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program. For more information, call 714.839.6199 or email LIHWAP@capoc.org.

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, with presenter Mary Rios of Disability Rights CA. For more information and to RSVP, contact Giulia Rodriguez at 714.558.5402 or grodriguez@rcocdd.com.



Tuesday, June 27

6-8 p.m.

Topic:

How Working Affects SSI Benefits

Wednesday, August 30

6-8 p.m.

Topic:

Regional Center Hearings and Appeals

Parent Workshop: Healthy Relationships

This virtual workshop allows parents to preview presentation content and talking points, and ask questions to determine whether they would like their children to participate in healthy relationships workshops and/or other topics presented by Planned Parenthood. For more information, contact Ingrid Jbeili at 714.558.5406 or ijbeili@rcocdd.com.

Thursday, May 11

6-7 p.m. (Spanish) 7-8 pm (English)

Comfort Connection Presentation: Gesture Development

Presented virtually by Christine Espitia, RCOC Speech Pathologist, this workshop focuses on communication of infants and young children and is ideal for parents and other caregivers. For more information and to register, contact Giulia Rodriguez at 714.558.5402 or grodriguez@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, May 31

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Transition...Moving on at 3 Workshop

This workshop takes place virtually and aims to educate and support parents before, during and after their child's third birthday. Topics include assessment and eligibility determination for school district services, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, and ongoing eligibility for Regional Center services. Presented in English, Spanish translation may be provided when requested in advance. Register online via the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website (www.rcocdd.com). For more information, contact Patricia Garcia at 714.558.5400 or pgarcia@rcocdd.com.

Tuesday, June 6

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 31

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Childcare Support and Eligibility

FINDING APPROPRIATE CHILDCARE FOR THEIR CHILD WITH DISABILITIES CAN BE A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE FOR MANY PARENTS. The challenges often increase during the summer months, when school is not in session, so now is a good time to share how RCOC can help families with childcare support.

Who is Eligible?

To receive childcare support, the person served must be under 18 and living in the family home. In addition, both parents or the single parent must be employed full time outside the home or be a full or part-time student.

What is RCOC Able to Fund?

As with all services and supports, RCOC is required by the Lanterman Act to ensure all appropriate generic and private resources are accessed prior to authorizing the purchase of childcare support. This process may begin with the RCOC Service Coordinator providing the family with information about generic resources such as In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and assisting them in accessing circles of support and natural supports.

A family should not be charged a higher childcare rate solely due to their child having a disability.

For those whose childcare needs cannot be met by family members, community, generic, or alternative resources, RCOC may fund a portion of the cost of childcare that exceeds the amount charged to serve a child without disabilities. This might, for example, involve paying for an aide if one is necessary for the child to participate in a typical, inclusive childcare setting.

It is also very important for all families to remember that under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a family should not be charged a higher childcare rate solely due to their child having a disability. The ADA also mandates that reasonable accommodation be made by the childcare provider. RCOC can assist parents in identifying what might be done to include their child with special needs.

How to Get Childcare Help

If you are interested in exploring RCOC-funded childcare support, please contact your RCOC Service Coordinator any time.



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.

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 with Vietnamese interpretation. For more information and to register, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at 714.558.5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Tuesday, June 6

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 31

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Tech Support Workshop

Are you uncertain how to access an encrypted email from RCOC, reset your password, or use DocuSign to sign a form sent by your RCOC Service Coordinator?



Conducted in Vietnamese, this workshop will show you how to access those encrypted messages and use DocuSign. For more information and to register, contact Kaitlynn Yen Truong at 714.558.5405 or ktuong@rcocdd.com.

Tuesday, July 18

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Parent Support Group for Vietnamese Families

These support groups provide a caring environment for parents of adult children with special needs to share and gain valuable information, advice and resources. Conducting their meetings in Vietnamese, the groups usually also provide opportunities for parents to benefit from the experience and support of professionals, and learn valuable coping and intervention strategies. For more information, contact the individual support groups below.

Vietnamese Parents for Disabled Children Association (VPDCA)

Contacts: Hung Gia Nguyen at 714.527.9216 or vpdcahung@yahoo.com or Tien Nguyen at tienvpdca@gmail.com

BPSOS Center for Community Advancement

Contact: Thu Tran at 714.897.2214

Vietnamese Parent Support Group for Children with Special Needs/Mental Health Challenges

Contact: Project Vietnam Foundation at 714.888.5800 or info@projectvietnam.org.

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