DIALOGUE

A Quarterly Publication of the Regional Center of Orange County

VOLUME 40 NO. 4 • FALL 2026

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Empower & Protect Training for Parents



WHEN THEIR CHILDREN ARE BABIES, MANY PARENTS FEEL FAIRLY CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITY TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND KEEP THEM SAFE. But as those sons and daughters grow up, parents of those we serve recognize they can't be with their children 24 hours a day – even if they live in the family home.

So, for many years, RCOC has been proactive in offering a range of safety training options for children, teens and adults we serve through Get Safe (www.getsafeusa.com) -- a safety education service provider with special expertise in working with individuals with disabilities.

RCOC secured special funding to begin offering safety training specifically for parents of those we serve who want to feel more confident addressing safety-related challenges involving their children.

More recently, RCOC secured special funding to begin offering safety training specifically for parents of those we serve who want to feel more confident addressing safety-related challenges involving their children. This might, for example, include bullying and calling 911, as well as overall safety in public settings.

A pilot training course presented this past March was very well-received by attendees, so we are expanding the effort, with two more training sessions in January 2027 that

Cont. on Page 7

DIALOGUE
This newsletter can also be read online at RCOC's website: **www.rcocdd.com**.

Copyright © 2026

Board of Directors
Sandy Martin, Chair
John "Chip" Wright, Vice Chair
Jacqueline Nguyen, Treasurer
Yvonne Kluttz, Secretary
Marcell Bassett
Pankaj Bedekar
Bruce Hall
Frances M.K. Hernandez
Isabel Ibarra
Amy Jessee
Liza Krassner
Lorena Medina
Hilda Mendez
Chinh Nguyen
Rick Perez

Please check the Monthly Calendar on RCOC's website for the most up-to-date information regarding Board meeting dates and format.

RCOC Administration
Larry Landauer, Executive Director
Arturo Cazares, Associate Executive Director
Christina Petteruto, General Counsel
Marta Vasquez, Chief Financial Officer
Jerrod Bonner, Chief Information Officer
Ernie Cruz, Director of Community Services
Bonnie Ivers, Psy.D., Clinical Director
Jennifer Montañez, Director of Case Management
Stacy Wong, Human Resources Director
Carmen Gonzalez, Associate Director, Central Area
Rachel Khorana, Associate Director, Intake
Araceli Mendez, Associate Director, Early Start
Carie Otto, Associate Director, West Area
Greg Shimada, Associate Director of Information Technology
Jack Stanton, Associate Director of Housing
Sean Watson, Associate Director, Risk Management

Attend Irvine Barclay Theatre's Sensory-Friendly Nutcracker!

IRVINE BARCLAY THEATRE IS AGAIN PRESENTING A SPECIAL SENSORY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE OF THE BELOVED HOLIDAY BALLET, THE NUTCRACKER. Taking place on Friday, December 4 at 2 pm at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, the performance features accommodations to help RCOC families and persons-served feel at ease. This includes reduced soundtrack volume, ambient lighting, and open doors to let guests come and go as needed.

Beginning at 1 pm before the performance as well as after the performance, visitors will also enjoy interactive musical experiences, therapy dogs, holiday-themed arts and crafts and photo opportunities with the dancers.

Tickets are $8 per person. Parking is $13 per vehicle. To purchase tickets, scan this QR code or visit www.thebarclay.org.



Call for Spotlight Awards Nominations

We all know a person, group or organization that deserves recognition. RCOC's Spotlight Awards is one way to acknowledge their contributions for improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities in Orange County.

Since 1997, RCOC has hosted an annual gala to honor these amazing role models. With the 2027 event scheduled for April 23, it's now time to get your award nominations submitted.

Scan this QR code to view award categories and criteria, and submit your nominations online.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

RCOC is Committed to Proactive Safety Training

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director



IT IS A SAD FACT THAT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY VICTIMS OF CRIME. And statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics show that those with developmental disabilities face the highest risk among all disability types.

This is not a new phenomenon. Decades ago, RCOC formed a Criminal Justice Issues Committee aimed at developing strategies to help us meet the broad range of needs related to this vulnerability. Among the many things that came out of that Committee was the partnership we formed with Get Safe, a safety education service provider, which leads various personal safety training programs for children, teens and adults we serve.

Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics show that those with developmental disabilities face the highest risk among all disability types.

What began many years ago as very basic safety training has grown in response to the community's needs. Now, we're pleased to offer the Empower & Protect training for parents discussed in this issue's cover story.

I recognize how busy parents' lives are, but I want to personally encourage all of you to see if you can attend one of the two sessions planned for January and February. I think you'll find it engaging, helpful and empowering.

Check Out Our Safety Video Series



As part of RCOC's ongoing commitment to safety education for those we serve, we earmarked special funds to produce a series of 10 fun and educational videos about safety at home and in the community. The first three videos, which were created by Get Safe, are now live and posted on YouTube. Scan the QR codes or visit the links below to view them.

Staying Safe with Others: Buddy System
(https://youtu.be/Wt3qtrSszNs?si=H6ThCBxwPfM_TXs0)

Calling 911: When and How to Get Help
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8XiR_CWGdU&t=14s)

Navigating the Community: Crosswalk Safety
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfnfRslAjpo)

Everyone Should be Able to Feel Safe

By Yvonne Kluttz, Peer Advisory Committee Chair (PAC) and Amy Jessee, PAC Co-Chair





YVONNE – WHO HAS LIVED INDEPENDENTLY IN HER OWN APARTMENT FOR MANY YEARS -- HAD A SCARY EXPERIENCE, WHEN A STRANGER ENTERED HER HOME UNEXPECTEDLY. Fortunately, the person left when it was clear the apartment was not his mother's, but the event still made her feel very vulnerable. Soon after, her independent living service provider helped her obtain a door security bar to prevent this from happening again.

Fortunately, Yvonne was not harmed. But few things make us angrier than hearing about people with disabilities being victimized by people who take advantage of them physically or emotionally. We're equally concerned about tragedies that can happen when a person with disabilities is harmed due to misunderstandings with first responders.

Prevention-focused training can make all the difference. That's why we support RCOC's long-time commitment to safety training for persons served, and are hopeful that parents of children and adults served by RCOC will take advantage of the new Empower & Protect training sessions created specifically for them (see cover story). These trainings empower families with tools to help ensure their loved ones can feel safe in the community.

EVERYDAY WELLNESS:

Prevent Infection Over the Holidays



GET-TOGETHERS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE A FUN HOLIDAY TRADITION, BUT THEY CAN ALSO BE A PLACE WHERE COLDS, FLU AND OTHER INFECTIONS CAN SPREAD. Try these quick tips to prevent infections and enjoy healthier holidays.

1. Wash your hands often, especially before eating, after touching high-traffic surfaces like door knobs, or after returning from public places like airports and stores.
2. Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.
3. Swap hugs or kisses for waves or elbow bumps if people around you are sniffling or coughing.
4. Protect high-risk individuals by skipping any gatherings if you feel unwell or have symptoms of illness.



Workshops & Events

OC Ask the Experts: Adult Day and Employment Service Options

This virtual event is ideal for parents and for students approaching the transition from school services to RCOC services. A panel of experts will discuss and answer questions about employment-related services and day programs, and how to select a service. Scan the QR code to register.

Wednesday, November 18
6-7:30 p.m. via Zoom

Transition Planning: Preparing for Life After Adult Transition

Led by school district experts, this webinar walks attendees through key steps in preparing for life after a student completes the Adult Transition Program (ATP). Scan the QR code to register.

Wednesday, December 9
6-7:30 p.m. via Zoom

Life Care Portfolio: Adults and Early Childhood

Parents attending this event will learn how to use the Life Care Portfolio available from RCOC -- a simple but effective tool for organizing key health, life, work, and educational documentation pertaining to a loved one with disabilities. Scan the QR code to register.

Wednesday, January 20
6-7:30 p.m. via Zoom

One-Page Description Workshops for Vendors

These free Zoom workshops for service providers will equip participants with the skills to use Person-Centered Thinking principles to create an effective and useful one-page description for a person with developmental disabilities. To register, email Leah Saitz at lsaitz@rcocdd.com.

Wednesday, November 18
Wednesday, January 20
10 a.m. to Noon

3rd Annual Countywide Transition Event

Created as a one-stop event covering a range of transition-related topics, such as continuing education, employment, and independent living, this resource fair features panel discussions, breakout sessions and the opportunity to meet one-on-one with service providers and agency experts. Check the Events Calendar on RCOC's website for details.

Tuesday, February 16
Irvine Union School District
Learning Center
3387 Barranca Parkway
in Irvine

ABC's of School Services

School and Classroom Observations



YOU KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD RESPONDS TO CERTAIN ENVIRONMENTS AT HOME, but if you're struggling to understand certain details about your child's educational environment or why a particular placement is being proposed, you may want to consider requesting a classroom or school observation.

A school or classroom observation may provide families with an opportunity to learn more about their child's educational environment, including classroom routines, participation, communication, peer interaction, transitions, and available support.

Requesting an Observation

Observation procedures may vary by school or school district, so if you're interested in this option, it's best to contact the school directly to learn about their scheduling, visitor requirements, and observation procedures. Once you're familiar with the process, it's a good idea to communicate your request by email to the school principal and your child's case manager.

It helps to foster a spirit of collaboration with your school team by sharing in your request what you are hoping to better understand. Also consider the timing of the observation and whether a particular time or setting may provide the most helpful context for clarifying the issue or issues you're seeking to understand.

Things to Keep in Mind

While observations can be very useful, it's important to remember that an observation provides a snapshot of a particular period of time. Activities, staffing, schedules, and student participation may vary at other times of the day or throughout the school year.

Schools may also have procedures to protect student privacy, maintain campus safety, and minimize disruption to instruction. These, too, can affect what you observe.

Overall, however, an observation can provide additional context, enhance understanding, and help parents better collaborate with their IEP team to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child.

Empower & Protect Training for Parents, cont.

are open to all parents of those we serve (for details, see story below).

"Parents who attended the training told us it has helped them to have open conversations with their kids about safety," said Get Safe Executive Director Stuart Haskin. "It also helps them to become better safety role models, and to find teachable moments related to safety, because they learn more about what we teach their loved ones."

"Parents who attended the training told us it has helped them to have open conversations with their kids about safety."

Just as important, he says, is the confidence caregivers gain as they learn practical techniques to de-escalate situations where their loved one could be at greater risk, as well as things they can do proactively to prevent misunderstandings with local first responders. This can be especially important for those whose children have autism, because that disability often is not apparent to law enforcement officers who have limited experience with developmental disabilities.

Whether you're the parent of a young child or an adult, the principles shared in this two-hour course will help you gain greater situational and environmental awareness and learn to evaluate, assess and act in a variety of challenging situations.

"Our goal is always to empower people, not scare them," said Stuart. "Because we want to enable people with disabilities to live in the world we all live in and do everything we can to enable them to be as safe as people without disabilities."

Empower & Protect: A Free Course For Parents

Make plans now to attend one of RCOC's free Empower & Protect parent trainings presented by Get Safe and made possible by the California Department of Developmental Services Language Access and Cultural Competency Fund.

To enable the largest number of families to participate, there will be two training day options to accommodate parents with different scheduling needs:

Tuesday, January 12 at 6 p.m. at RCOC's Santa Ana office, 1525 N. Tustin Avenue.

Saturday, February 27 at 1 p.m. at the Community Services and Recreation Building at 8200 Westminster Boulevard in Westminster.

And, to facilitate participation by our diverse Orange County community, both trainings will be presented in English, with live simultaneous interpretation in Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean. Other languages, including ASL, can be provided upon request.

For more information and to register, contact Derrick Nguyen at 714.558.5401 or dnguyen@rcocddcom.

NOTE: Child care is not provided. Please do not bring children to these events.

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY
P.O. Box 22010
Santa Ana, CA 92702-2010

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SANTA ANA, CA
PERMIT NO. 1285

DIALOGUE NEWSLETTER

INSIDE

In the Spotlight: Empower & Protect Training for Parents 1
Attend Irvine Barclay Theatre's Sensory-Friendly Nutcracker! 2
Call for Spotlight Awards Nominations 2
Executive Director's Report 3
Person-to-Person 4
Everyday Wellness 4
Workshops & Events 5
ABC's of School Services 6

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 12th Annual Back-to-School Event

With Aveanna Healthcare donating backpacks, 24 Hour Home Care donating packs of school supplies, and dozens of social-recreation service providers showcasing their programs, RCOC hosted a fun back-to-school event and resource fair at Heritage Museum of Orange County in Santa Ana on July 25. Thank you to Orange County Children's Therapeutic Arts Center for helping facilitate the event. And thank you Aveanna, 24 Hour Home Care and our many service providers and volunteers for helping children we serve and their families get a solid start to the school year!



REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

Serving Orange County's Korean 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 Korean language. These events, programs and activities are presented in Korean and/or are geared specifically for those in Southern California's Korean 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 Korean community, please contact RCOC's Fei Cho at 714.558.5410 or fcho@rcocdd.com.

Multicultural Mid-Autumn Festival and Vendor Community Resource Fair

Hosted by RCOC and sponsored by the California DDS Language Access and Cultural Competency Fund, this festive Sept 19 event was attended by 942 people, including several elected officials and more than 50 organizations.



Meet Fei Cho



Meet Fei Cho, the newest member of RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center! As a Korean-speaking Service Coordinator, she is excited to work with our Korean-speaking families to help connect them with resources. She can be reached at fcho@rcocdd.com or 714.558.5410.

Candy Caneland and Craft Fair

The City of Buena Park's 55th annual Candy Caneland & Craft Fair features entertainment, food, games, free raffles, and a snow slide plus a Craft Fair featuring over 100 artisans. Santa Claus will be on hand this year to spread holiday cheer! Parking will be limited. Please use shuttle to and from Peak Park Pool, 7225 El Dorado Drive.

Saturday, December 12, 2026
10 a.m.- 4 p.m.
Ehlers Event Center
8150 Knott Avenue
in Buena Park

Transition Resource Fair

Presented by the Orange County Local Partnership Agreement, a collaborative organization aimed at enhancing competitive integrated employment opportunities and transition services for youth and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities, this event will bring together local families, students, and support vendors.

Tuesday, February 16, 2027
4 – 8 p.m.
IUSD Learning Center
3387 Barranca Parkway
Irvine

Why Support Groups Matter for Parents of People RCOC Serves



IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY INVOLVED WITH ONE OR MORE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS, THERE ARE A LOT OF GOOD REASONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER TRYING ONE OUT.

Emotional Support

Being part of a parent support group allows you to connect with other parents, many of whom are facing the same challenges you are. The group can provide a space to interact freely with other families who can understand and identify with you in ways that parents of typical sons and daughters may not. This type of emotional support can be incredibly helpful for overcoming the isolation some parents can feel and help manage stressful situations. The group can also be a great place to organize play dates with other families with whom you develop mutual trust, as you are comfortable dealing with one another's children and their challenges.

Resource Sharing & Education

Since many support groups include both new and experienced parents, you may also learn new strategies for coping with challenging behaviors and situations, such as family vacations, managing behaviors on airplanes, and at big family gatherings.

Support groups are also an excellent place to ask other parents about resources in the community, such as medical and other providers experienced in serving individuals with disabilities.

Many support groups also host educational events specific to their group's focus, in different languages, and with particular sensitivity to the community's cultural preferences.

How to Find a Support Group

RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center maintains an up-to-date list of dozens of Orange County parent support groups. Scan the QR code to access the list, or reach out to Comfort Connection for help at 714.558.5400.

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

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 Jessica Bautista Vidal at 714.558.5406 or jbautistavidal@rcocdd.com.



Hispanic Heritage Celebration

Hosted by RCOC and sponsored by the California DDS Language Access and Cultural Competency Fund, this festive Sept 13 event featured OCCTAC's Children's Folkloric Dance Group and a special presentation on anxiety management, while attendees met with RCOC specialists to learn about available resources.



Nutcracker Holiday Village

Join the Nutcracker Holiday Committee, the City of Anaheim, the Downtown Anaheim Association, and the Anaheim Community Foundation for holiday entertainment, food, and fun! Admission is free and guests will enjoy a variety of holiday happenings, including dog costume contest, holiday crafts, unique shopping, pictures with Santa, and tree lighting at the steps of City Hall.

Sunday, December 6, 2026
Noon – 7 p.m. (tree lighting at 6 p.m.)
Center Street Promenade between Clementine St. and Anaheim Blvd. in Anaheim

Tamale Festival!

The 13th annual La Habra Tamale Festival will feature tamales and other food vendors, live music and entertainment, tree lighting and fireworks and a special children's zone.

Saturday, December 5 - Euclid St. between La Habra Blvd. and Bridenbecker Ave. in La Habra



Why Support Groups Matter for Parents of People RCOC Serves



IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY INVOLVED WITH ONE OR MORE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS, THERE ARE A LOT OF GOOD REASONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER TRYING ONE OUT.

Emotional Support

Being part of a parent support group allows you to connect with other parents, many of whom are facing the same challenges you are. The group can provide a space to interact freely with other families who can understand and identify with you in ways that parents of typical sons and daughters may not. This type of emotional support can be incredibly helpful for overcoming the isolation some parents can feel and help manage stressful situations. The group can also be a great place to organize play dates with other families with whom you develop mutual trust, as you are comfortable dealing with one another's children and their challenges.

Resource Sharing & Education

Since many support groups include both new and experienced parents, you may also learn new strategies for coping with challenging behaviors and situations, such as family vacations, managing behaviors on airplanes, and at big family gatherings.

Support groups are also an excellent place to ask other parents about resources in the community, such as medical and other providers experienced in serving individuals with disabilities.

Many support groups also host educational events specific to their group's focus, in different languages, and with particular sensitivity to the community's cultural preferences.

How to Find a Support Group

RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center maintains an up-to-date list of dozens of Orange County parent support groups. Scan the QR code to access the list, or reach out to Comfort Connection for help at 714.558.5400.

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

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 Derrick Nguyen at 714.558.5401 or dnguyen@rcocdd.com.

Winter in the Grove

The event will feature song and dance performances from local schools and performers, holiday crafts and inflatable activities for children of all ages, a holiday craft boutique featuring handmade gifts from local vendors, and a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus!

Saturday, December 5
3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Village Green Park
12732 Main Street
Garden Grove



Multicultural Mid-Autumn Festival and Vendor Community Resource Fair

Hosted by RCOC and sponsored by the California DDS Language Access and Cultural Competency Fund, this festive Sept 19 event was attended by 942 people, including several elected officials and more than 50 organizations.

Christmas Fest at Old World

Old World Huntington Beach transforms into a festive winter village with this seasonal celebration featuring holiday shopping, food, live entertainment, and family-friendly activities.

November 15, 2026 to January 3, 2027
11 a.m.-10 p.m.
The Biergarten at Old World HB
7561 Center Ave. #49 in Huntington Beach



Why Support Groups Matter for Parents of People RCOC Serves



IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY INVOLVED WITH ONE OR MORE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS, THERE ARE A LOT OF GOOD REASONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER TRYING ONE OUT.

Emotional Support

Being part of a parent support group allows you to connect with other parents, many of whom are facing the same challenges you are. The group can provide a space to interact freely with other families who can understand and identify with you in ways that parents of typical sons and daughters may not. This type of emotional support can be incredibly helpful for overcoming the isolation some parents can feel and help manage stressful situations. The group can also be a great place to organize play dates with other families with whom you develop mutual trust, as you are comfortable dealing with one another's children and their challenges.

Resource Sharing & Education

Since many support groups include both new and experienced parents, you may also learn new strategies for coping with challenging behaviors and situations, such as family vacations, managing behaviors on airplanes, and at big family gatherings.

Support groups are also an excellent place to ask other parents about resources in the community, such as medical and other providers experienced in serving individuals with disabilities.

Many support groups also host educational events specific to their group's focus, in different languages, and with particular sensitivity to the community's cultural preferences.

How to Find a Support Group

RCOC's Comfort Connection Family Resource Center maintains an up-to-date list of dozens of Orange County parent support groups. Scan the QR code to access the list, or reach out to Comfort Connection for help at 714.558.5400.