

## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Katie Hornberger, Director  
FROM: Ibrahim Saab, Outreach Supervising Attorney and Paula Sandoval, OCRA Outreach Coordinator  
RE: Semi-Annual OCRA Outreach Report July – December 2019  
DATE: January 23, 2020

This report provides information on the outreach presentations OCRA staff completed between July 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019. During this review period, OCRA staff conducted 259 outreach activities and trainings. This is a slight reduction from the 291 outreaches conducted between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018. Although staff conducted fewer trainings during this reporting period, these presentations reached more attendees than last review period - 10,638 attendees compared to 9,582 attendees between July and December 2018. This represents an 11% increase in attendees. This encouraging data reflects OCRA's ongoing commitment to serving our clients.

Below are examples of the different types of outreach activities and trainings each office provides including self-advocacy, general, and target.

### **Self-Advocacy Trainings**

Each OCRA office conducts at least one self-advocacy training per contract year. During this review period, OCRA staff presented 17 self-advocacy trainings statewide. Self-Advocacy topics include self-advocacy, emergency preparedness, client's rights, rights to money management, voting rights, community living options, and employment rights and options. Here is one example.

## **Far Northern Regional Center Clients Learn How to be Prepared in an Emergency.**

Lorie Atamian, Associate Clients' Rights Advocate for clients of the Far Northern Regional Center, led an Emergency Preparedness Bingo game at the Red Bluff Community Center. Bingo game participants were also attending the 2019 Tehama County Emergency Preparedness Fair put on by the Tehama County Coordinating Council. The vendors included first responders, State Council on Developmental Disabilities, North Valley Animal Disaster Group, health care providers, and many more. The OCRA table alone hosted 80 clients who played Emergency Preparedness Bingo and learned about items they might want to have ready in case of an emergency. Participants had good discussions about how to prepare in the event of an emergency and participants enjoyed playing Bingo while they learned. This was an especially meaningful day in light of the recent Camp and Carr fires that decimated large areas of this catchment area and affected the lives of many regional center clients. Participants played until everyone won a round of Bingo and chose a prize.



Photo: Two clients of FNRC play BINGO.

## **General Outreach**

### **OCRA Celebrates with the disABILITY Movement.**

In October 2019 in Bakersfield, hundreds of attendees at the “disABILITY Movement” showcase and resource fair celebrated individual achievements and learned about community resources for people with disabilities. The Mayor of Bakersfield, Karen Goh, presented several awards to recognize members of the disability community who were able to break through different barriers and secure gainful employment with the help of the

Department of Rehabilitation. Over 200 people attended, as well as 25 to 30 vendors providing employment support, educational services, advocacy services, recreational activities, and other training opportunities. Clients' Rights Advocate Mario Espinoza and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Yasmine Ramos distributed materials and introduced dozens of people to OCRA. It was a fantastic opportunity to interact with clients and their family members to discuss how OCRA's services can help them.



Photo: CRA Mario Espinoza standing behind OCRA resource table

### **OCRA Attends Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center's Back to School Resource Fair.**

In August 2019, OCRA attended the Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center Back to School Resource Fair. Over 100 individuals, both parents and students, loaded their backpacks with much-needed supplies for the new school year. Ada Hamer, Associate Clients' Rights Advocate serving Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center clients, spent all day providing parents with useful information about special education and the new CalFresh policies for SSI recipients. Ada also handed out OCRA goodies, such as bags and pens with OCRA's logo and phone number. As a result of this fair, several parents called OCRA with questions about various areas of law, including special education and county-funded public benefits.

## **Target Outreach**

OCRA's target communities include the Latino community, the Asian community including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino, and Polynesian, the African-American community, and the Native American community. Of the 259 outreaches completed during this reporting period, approximately 36% of the activities and trainings were directed to the multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities mentioned above. Here are some highlights of our target activities and trainings.

### **OCRA Presents at Learning Rights Law Center's Annual Town Hall Meeting to Prepare Parents for IPP Meetings.**

In August 2019, OCRA presented at Learning Rights Law Center's (LRLC's) annual Town Hall Meeting held at the East Los Angeles Community College campus. Over 100 parents attended the all-day event with classes on various topics that impact children with disabilities. OCRA taught parents about how to prepare for IPP meetings and advocate for services that their children need. Natalie Klasky, Clients' Rights Advocate for Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center clients, formerly volunteered with LRLC. LRLC is a local special education non-profit law firm that primarily serves students in Los Angeles County. This was Natalie's second collaborative outreach presentation with LRLC since joining OCRA.

OCRA developed a presentation specifically tailored to meet the needs of LRLC's Spanish-speaking parents. LRLC provided a translator for Natalie, who explained the IPP process and regional center services. The Town Hall attendees were very grateful for this new information. OCRA and LRLC look forward to more collaborations in the future.



Photo: CRA, Natalie Klasky, presenting to audience on how to secure regional center services and IPP planning.

## **OCRA Educates Monolingual Spanish-Speaking Parents About Alternatives to Conservatorship.**

In September 2019, OCRA staff presented a training on alternatives to conservatorship to a monolingual Spanish-speaking parent support group at the Lowman Special Education and Career Transition Center in the San Fernando Valley. Ibrahim Saab, then a Clients' Rights Advocate, and Fatima Perez, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, provided information about alternatives to conservatorship which may protect clients' autonomy rights and be less costly to families, including but not limited to, a durable power of attorney, advance health care directive, and the assignment of educational decision-making authority form. Ibrahim and Fatima also described the legal requirements for a valid power of attorney and advance health care directive. OCRA staff clarified that a power of attorney and/or an advance health care directive may still be a viable alternative even if their adult child cannot sign their own name as long as the signature is made at their direction.

Many attendees shared their frustration about not knowing about these alternatives prior to the seminar. Ibrahim and Fatima used this lively discussion to discuss various real-life scenarios where an alternative to a conservatorship would be useful. The audience also gained a better understanding of the specific powers available under a limited conservatorship. Training materials included extensive resources for the audience to review at home, including numerous Disability Rights California publications and template forms. The participants appreciated the information and provided positive feedback. OCRA is scheduled to provide additional trainings to the same group in the near future.



Photo: (Left) CRA, Ibrahim Saab and (Right) ACRA, Fatima Perez.



### **OCRA Introduces Itself to Todos Unidos.**

The OCRA office for RCEB clients has been trying to reach out to different parts of the Spanish-speaking disability community for outreach and training. While the office has always provided outreaches and training for the Spanish-speaking community, staff are now officially targeting this community as part of their outreach goals. Arthur Lipscomb, Clients' Rights Advocate, and Celeste Palmer, Associate Clients' Rights Advocate, have an ambitious goal to provide an outreach to at least 6 new Spanish language groups this quarter alone. The first of these events occurred at the "First 5" office in Brentwood. While OCRA has provided trainings through First 5 in the past, this group, "Todos Unidos," is new. OCRA gave a "What is OCRA?" presentation to the group, whose members were not familiar with OCRA and had many questions about how OCRA can help their community. Arthur and Celeste look forward to collaborating more with this group and the Spanish-speaking community for trainings and outreaches, while also maintaining the Asian-American community as a targeted group as well.



Photo: CRA, Arthur Lipscomb, educates the Spanish-speaking community about OCRA.

### **OCRA Draws Crowds at New IEP Workshop**

A lively crowd could barely contain their comments and questions at a special education training put on by OCRA in September 2019. OCRA regularly holds legal clinics for an autism support group in Palm Desert. This month, OCRA decided to try something new to get parents more involved in knowing and understanding their children's rights.

OCRA reached out to local school districts in the Coachella Valley and partnered with them to present an "IEP Literacy Training" to parents. Using

blank IEP forms as a template Stephanie Véniez, Clients' Rights Advocate, went through IEPs in both English and Spanish to help parents understand exactly how to read and understand their child's educational program. While Stephanie went through the sections of a typical IEP in English, Laura Coto-Ortega, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate interpreted for a group of Spanish-speaking parents in a dedicated section of the room.

The training was a huge success. In a room which usually sees between 10-15 people, OCRA's new IEP workshop attracted 28 families and over 40 participants. Parents loved the use of real IEP documents to show them how to identify their child's services. OCRA answered so many questions from enthusiastic parents that they decided to host a legal clinic as a follow-up session to the original workshop. OCRA offered more than 20 appointments, which filled up within a few minutes! With the IEP templates the local school district provided, parents left feeling confident about their ability to identify services and goals in their children's educational program. Instead of feeling nervous about upcoming IEP meetings, parents felt excited about being able to read and understand documents they had never understood before. OCRA is confident this workshop will lead to more informed and empowered decision-making.

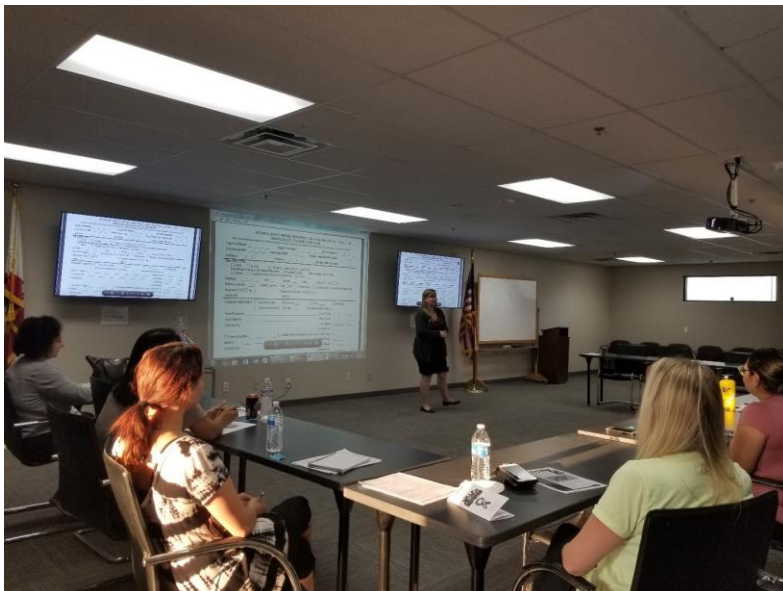


Photo: CRA, Stephanie Véniez, educates audience on special education issues.

### **OCRA Educates Chinese-American Families on Social Security Benefits.**

OCRA presented an outreach training to a family support group in the Chinese-American community in the East Los Angeles area. This group wanted information and guidance regarding Social Security benefits for their adult and minor children. Families were particularly interested in applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for their children with disabilities. Barriers that kept the support group members from applying for SSI in the past included not being fluent in English, different requirements relating to immigration status, and of course, not knowing these benefits even existed. OCRA presented information regarding the SSI application process, resource limits, timelines, and appeals. OCRA also provided publications in Chinese. Family members gained a better understanding of SSI and going over the rules and information allowed them to see if their child might qualify for benefits. They were thankful for the presentation and requested more trainings in the upcoming year. As a result, OCRA plans to offer additional trainings soon.

### **Despite the Rain, Conference on New Self-Determination Program Is a Rousing Success.**

Thunder and lightning did not discourage the 400 members of the developmental disability services community from attending a 2-day conference in Culver City to learn more about the exciting new self-determination program. The event, sponsored by Disability Voices United, the Autism Society of Los Angeles, Disability Rights California, Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy and others was held on November 15-16, 2019 at the DoubleTree Hotel. On the first day, Ibrahim Saab, OCRA's Outreach Supervising Attorney, participated in a panel discussion about how to advocate for a change in a self-determination participant's individual budget. Ibrahim provided useful strategies about how to document an unmet need or a change in circumstances that might justify an increase in the individual budget. He also discussed the appeal process if the request for a higher budget was denied.

The following day, Kate Hornberger, OCRA's Director, moderated a panel on how the self-determination program can help transitions out of school and into adulthood. Presenters also explored how self-determination may assist individuals who are transitioning from locked facilities back into the community. OCRA's Peer Advocate, Scott Barron, and Outreach



Coordinator, Paula Sandoval, staffed OCRA's resource table and distributed useful publications to approximately 65 individuals on a variety of subjects including self-advocacy skills and securing additional regional center services. The attendees were grateful for OCRA's assistance. OCRA's team approach and participation in this large-scale and specialized event exemplifies why outreach is so important to OCRA and for the disability community.

**The Hoopa Tribe Learns About Special Education in Scenic Valley.**

Parents of school-aged regional center clients gathered to hear a presentation on Special Education Rights from OCRA staff. The presentation took place in Hoopa on the Hoopa Valley Tribe Reservation, adjacent to the Klamath River. The picture below shows our view from the conference room. The group of parents meet regularly to discuss issues that impact their children. Recently there have been concerns about the local school district and the lack of compliance with supports and services listed on students' IEPs. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Redwood Coast Regional Center clients, Mariana Molina Nava, presented strategies to advocate for supports for their children at IEP meetings. The discussion was lively, with full participation from parents that have successfully advocated with the local district. The group shared and supported each other from a place of mutual understanding and experience. Participants were encouraged to call OCRA to discuss their special education concerns or any other issues addressed by OCRA.



Photo: Hoopa Valley Tribe Reservation

### **OCRA Outreach Brings Holiday Joy.**

OCRA staff serving Valley Mountain Regional Center clients attended the Family Resource Network (FRN) Holiday Open House on December 7, 2019. There were over 300 attendees and the children enjoyed themselves. FRN has several activities throughout the event area - sensory, arts and crafts, mini basketball, snacks, and the best part of course, Santa Claus. Each child received a toy and a picture to keep. OCRA staff spoke to several family members and explained what OCRA does and passed out many business cards. The response was positive and the families enjoyed learning about OCRA and what services were available. An employee from FRN said this was the first year she invited outside agencies to attend and discuss services. She said that she was so glad she did.

### **10th Annual Breakfast with Santa Serves 4,000 attendees!**

What started as 30 people enjoying milk and cookies 10 years ago has grown to 4,000 people enjoying complimentary fresh food and drinks, entertainment, games, cookies, jewelry, stocking decorating, face painting, and gifts for all children. This event is sponsored by OC Autism, a multicultural parent group in Orange County to support children with disabilities and their families, and provide resources that help to live a happy and independent life. Maria Rojas Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, and Jacqueline Miller, Clients' Rights Advocate from the OCRA Orange County office met and talked to several hundred children and family members about OCRA. OCRA English, Spanish, and Vietnamese brochures were provided for information about advocacy services, and areas of law OCRA practices. Several local organizations provided volunteers for the event including Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts. Local celebrities such as former American Idol contestant William Hung, Senator Thomas Umberg, Congressmen Lou Correa and Harley Rouda, the OC Autism monkey, and Santa attended and supported this event. Senator Umberg was very interested in what OCRA does and services OCRA provides. Jordan and Toni from the film *Perfectly Normal* made an onstage appearance, and also stopped by to chat with OCRA. Everyone enjoyed the hospitality and festivities.

### **Conclusion**

OCRA continues to build relationships within the community by networking and providing trainings to persons served by the regional center system.

OCRA strives to connect with target communities to close the gap in disparity in the system. The first six months of the two-year outreach plan have been a great success. We are confident that our efforts will continue to educate clients and their families about their rights to improve the lives of individuals OCRA serves. OCRA's Outreach Unit appreciates the opportunity to coordinate outreach presentations and trainings statewide.