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MEMORANDUM

TO: Shannon Cogan, Acting Director

FROM: Ibrahim Saab, Supervising Attorney for Outreach
Paula Sandoval, Outreach Coordinator
Eva Casas-Sarmiento, Managing Attorney

RE: Annual OCRA Outreach Report July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

DATE: August 31, 2021

The past year was filled with uncertainty and change. OCRA, along with all stakeholders in the disability community, had to adapt quickly. OCRA needed stakeholder input to help reset our priorities to match current conditions related to the pandemic.

OCRA had interactive and expansive conversations with target community groups to get input on important issues and on how OCRA can improve services. Statewide listening sessions with participants led to connections with smaller groups in regional areas, while one-to-one discussions with local leaders helped identify statewide issues and training needs. OCRA's specific engagement strategies to better understand how to address the needs of clients and families moving forward included:

- Large group public forum discussions
- Small group strategic planning discussions
- Individual conversations with community leaders
- Story sharing during intake clinics and trainings
- Multi-session statewide virtual conferences

The intersection of disability and systemic racism (and resulting racial disparities) was a top issue. OCRA prioritized engagement with traditionally underserved communities of color such as Latinx and African-American communities. Other top priorities that emerged included the rights of clients in institutions, and group home residents facing isolation and increased risk for infections.

OCRA equipped its staff to communicate, collaborate, and engage with the community more effectively. Staff must be ready to engage with clients and families in a culturally competent manner and to communicate effectively orally and in writing. OCRA has taken specific steps to meet this goal. Specifically, OCRA provided a safe place for staff to discuss how the pandemic, social unrest, and other societal factors affected their client advocacy. Staff received plain language training to communicate more effectively. Additional trainings focused on purchase of service disparities in the regional center system and how to connect with clients and families who are disproportionately affected during the pandemic. OCRA ensured staff learned COVID-19-related changes to laws affecting regional center clients and families. Staff were also encouraged to join Employee Resource Groups to foster a sense of belonging and support based on common experiences.

This report provides information on outreach trainings and presentations completed between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021. During this period, OCRA conducted 430 outreach activities and trainings to 13,474 attendees. This is a 27% decrease in attendees from the reporting period between July 2019 and June 2020, which largely occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on in-person activities.

During this reporting period, OCRA increased the number of outreach events conducted as staff developed necessary virtual outreach skills and the public became more comfortable with using virtual platforms like Zoom. In the first half of the fiscal year, OCRA conducted 199 outreach events, compared to 251 in the second half of the year – a 26% increase.

Following are examples of the different types of outreach activities OCRA staff provided: self-advocacy, general, and targeted presentations and trainings.

Self-Advocacy Trainings

Each OCRA office conducts at least one self-advocacy training per contract year. Self-advocacy topics include emergency preparedness, self-advocacy, clients' rights, rights to money management, voting rights, community living options, and employment rights and options.

OCRA Hosts an Exciting Game of Clients' Rights Bingo.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not stop participants of Pace Solano's (Pace) day programs from learning about their rights. In May 2021, North Bay Regional Center Clients' Rights Advocate Yulahlia Hernandez and Associate Clients' Rights Advocate, Annie Breuer, hosted a fun Clients' Rights Bingo game. Before the game, Yulahlia and Annie delivered a package including prizes to each player's home. The 33 attendees learned a lot from the lively discussion. For example, Yulahlia and Annie covered the right to work, to receive unopened mail, and to have visitors. Everyone involved had a great time. One player even shouted in excitement, "Can we do this all day?" Yulahlia and Annie were grateful to collaborate with Pace to host such a successful event, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teens Learn How to Protect Their Money and Identity.

Members of San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center (SGPRC) Teen Titans social group were excited to learn practical ways to protect their money and personally identifiable information. Aimee Delgado, SGPRC's Clients' Rights Advocate, presented the June 2021 self-advocacy training to an audience that included middle and high school students.

Aimee used various scenarios to demonstrate how to apply the information covered in the real world. For example, Aimee suggested how to remain safe while using social media, sending emails and text messages, and making/receiving phone calls. The interactive training also allowed the attendees to share their own experiences and learn from each other. Each participant received a "Hands off my \$\$\$!" kit that included sweet and salty snacks and an OCRA water bottle. The teens can now share these valuable tips with their family and friends.

**The San Gabriel/Pomona
PARENTS' PLACE**
Teen Titans
Teen Social group
Our Mission: Give teens with special needs an opportunity to socialize in a small group setting.



Hands Off My \$\$!

Join us for a fun educational workshop on Hands Off My \$\$!
Preventing & Reporting Financial Abuse. Presented by Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy.

When: Friday, June 11, 2021
Time: 6:00p.m. to 7:00p.m.
Where: Via Zoom
Phone: 626 919 1091
Free!!
(Each teen will receive a Hands Off My \$\$! kit)



Link to Zoom will be sent after registering.
Please sign up before June 9, 2021.

In order to properly get all kits for this event, **REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.**

This is a fun workshop to learn how to protect your money and your identity also to be careful on social media and look out for scammers. Tips on how to be safe with your money.
We recommend an adult be available for questions or guidance.

FUN!

MAKE NEW FRIENDS!

Photo: Picture of flyer publicizing the fun event.

Emergency Preparedness Can Be Fun!

Ideal Programs invited OCRA's Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for South Central Regional Center (SCLARC), Heiser Lopez, to host a fun and interactive self-advocacy training for their day program participants. Although the attendees joined from home, they were excited to see their friends and learn how to stay safe during different emergencies. Alexander Scarlis, OCRA's Clients' Rights Advocate for the Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center (ELARC), joined Heiser to review how to prepare for fires, earthquakes, and floods. They used the "Feeling Safe Being Safe" workbook developed by the Department of Developmental Services' Consumer Advisory Committee.

Heiser and Alex also used real-life scenarios and an educational video to help discuss what to include in an emergency kit. After each scenario, the participants had a chance to share their personal experiences and recommend how to better prepare for these unexpected situations. The attendees enjoyed learning from each other. The event was such a success that Heiser has scheduled monthly trainings with the group!

General Outreach

OCRA Co-Presents Webinar About Reasonable Accommodations in Hospitals and Alternatives to Conservatorship.

The Family Resource and Empowerment Center for Westside Regional Center (WRC) contacted OCRA because families have had trouble providing support to their loved ones who have been hospitalized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strict “no visitation” hospital rules and precautions implemented to prevent the spread of the coronavirus can prevent people with disabilities from getting the support they need.

Managing Attorney Will Leiner, from Disability Rights California’s Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities practice group, co-presented with OCRA’s Clients’ Rights Advocate for WRC, Kristen Evans. They presented to an audience of WRC families, staff, community groups, and vendors. Will discussed how family members, conservators, and support staff can gain access to hospitals and help people with disabilities who are hospitalized during the pandemic. He spoke on the importance of consumers knowing and exercising their rights. He provided many resources, including recent state health department guidelines and remedies in place.

Kristen discussed less restrictive alternatives to conservatorship, such as advance health care directives and powers of attorney. These documents help people with disabilities make decisions about the care they will receive and who will help them make decisions if they cannot do so. Kristen provided sample documents and resources. She also discussed principles of supported decision-making and how they can be used to reflect a person’s choices and values. Participants provided great feedback on the usefulness and timeliness of the discussion. They already asked to collaborate again on this and other topics in a future training.

Clients Learn to Reduce Stress During COVID-19 Pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our personal physical and mental health differently. We can all learn ways to relax and more effectively cope with stress. This was the goal of Scott Barron, OCRA's Peer Advocate, when Easter Seals invited him to present a virtual training on stress and relaxation to the participants of their Paramount day program. The event helped 45 attendees learned how to recognize stress. Participants also shared their personal experiences on how they have coped with stress during the pandemic. Many participants reported that they felt anxious and lonely, and felt better after hearing some of their friends felt the same way and learning they are not alone.

Scott used materials developed by the California Department of Developmental Service's (DDS) Consumer Advisory Committee to lead the lively discussion. The DDS materials use the "Think Plan Do" model to identify leadership skills to carry out plans for everyday life, including reducing stress. The training materials also included the story of Kristi and her anxiety about her upcoming visit to the dentist to demonstrate how to apply the three-step process. After discussing Kristi's situation, the audience used DDS' workbook to develop a plan for an upcoming field trip to the mall. The group discussed transportation options and fun activities to do at the mall and beat the heat. Everyone agreed planning helps to reduce stress!

Primary Care Providers Learn About Regional Center Eligibility and How OCRA Can Help Their Patients.

In January 2021, Maitria Moua, OCRA's Clients' Rights Advocate for Central Valley Regional Center, worked with the San Joaquin Valley Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (NDD) Collaborative to present to over 100 medical providers at the annual Autism Symposium for Primary Care Providers. Parents of children with disabilities and the University of California San Francisco Fresno (Community Regional Medical Center) in California's Central Valley founded NDD. Maitria provided a brief overview of OCRA. She explained who is eligible to receive Early Start and regional center services. Maitria also emphasized the significant role primary care providers can play in identifying individuals who could benefit from Early Start and regional center services. Before the symposium, many physicians and nurses did not know how OCRA could benefit their patients.

Several physicians recently referred patients to OCRA for help and Maitria is working with various nurses to schedule additional trainings.

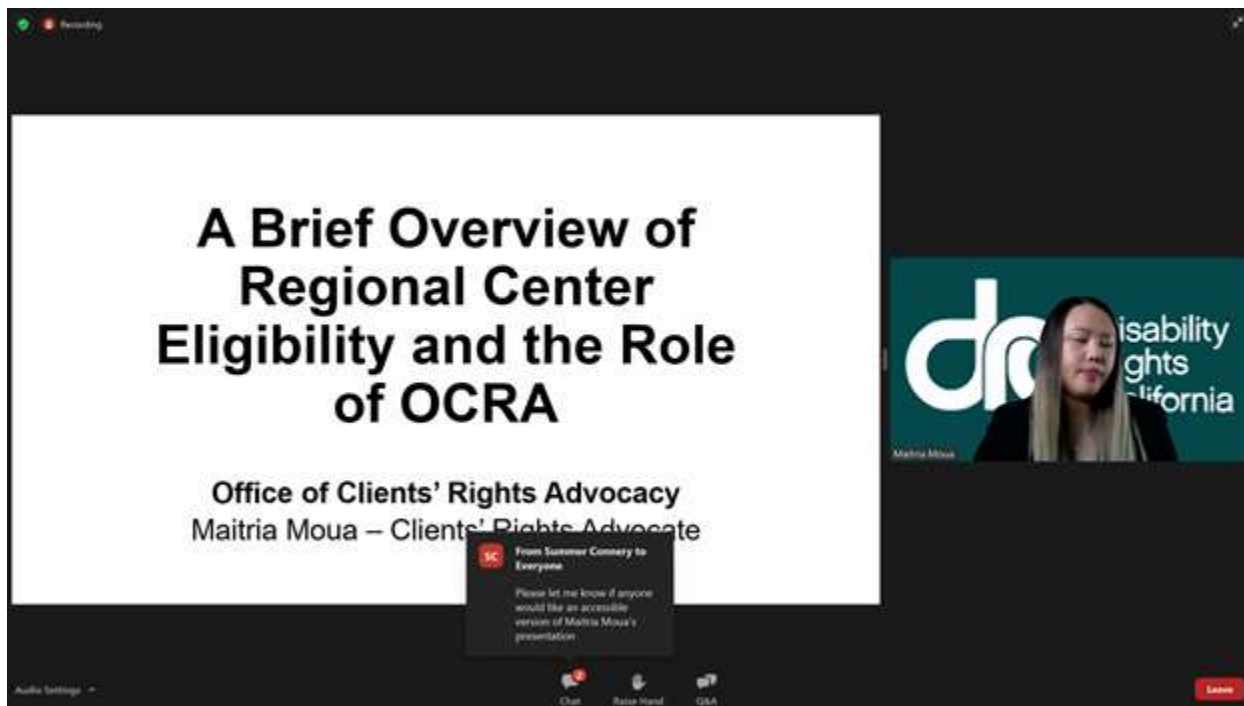


Image: Maitria Moua on Zoom presenting to primary care physicians about Regional Center eligibility and the role of OCRA. The image above was featured on UCSF Fresno's Facebook page.

OCRA Hosts Series of Clients' Rights Trainings for Service Providers.

Liberty Healthcare (Liberty) operates several Enhanced Behavioral Supports Homes (EBSHs) in the areas served by the San Gabriel Pomona Regional Center and San Diego Regional Center. These new homes hire staff with specialized training and experience working with regional center clients whose behaviors would not otherwise allow them to live safely in the community. These facilities also offer supplemental supervision and intensive behavioral intervention planning.

After attending a clients' rights training given by Jens Sorensen, Clients' Rights Advocate for Community Integration, Liberty asked OCRA to present a series of trainings on the fundamentals of clients' rights for their new staff working in homes in Ramona and San Diego. Since EBSHs provide 24-hour care, Jens worked with Liberty to schedule trainings to

accommodate their staff schedules. For example, Jens offered several trainings early in the morning so overnight staff could attend.

During the training, Jens clarified that regional center clients' rights are not only limited to those outlined in the Lanterman Act. He explained clients are also protected by the United States Constitution and other state and federal civil rights laws. Jens also reviewed the role of the Clients' Rights Advocate in the denial of rights review process. He used several hypothetical scenarios to illustrate common clients' rights issues residential providers may encounter. Despite the pandemic, Jens continues to find creative ways to educate service providers on respecting clients' rights.

Target Outreach

OCRA's target communities throughout the state are the Asian community – including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino, and Polynesian – the African-American community, the Latinx community, and the Native American community. Of the 430 outreaches completed during this reporting period, OCRA directed approximately 33% of the activities and trainings specifically to the multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities that OCRA staff have targeted. Clients and families from all communities can and do attend OCRA's non-target trainings as well.

Reconnecting with Latinx Families During a Hands-On Review of Their Appeal Rights.

Many families are uncertain about how the COVID-19 pandemic affects their right to access regional center services like respite, day care, and personal assistance. The members of Harbor Regional Center's Broader Spectrum Broader Minds Spanish-speaking parent support group understand firsthand how hard it has been for this traditionally marginalized population to know how to advocate for essential services during these difficult times. Clients' Rights Advocate Johnanthony Alaimo presented an interactive training on the right to appeal a regional center denial during the COVID-19 pandemic. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Vanessa Juarez provided Spanish interpretation.

The event also covered proper notice requirements and the right to a Notice of Action letter. Johnanthony and Vanessa provided recommendations on the type of evidence to submit to establish that a service should continue. They concluded the training by providing a hands-

on demonstration on how to complete the appeal and other complaint forms. The participants appreciated the “learn by doing” model to better understand and apply the information to real-life situations. Johnanthony and Vanessa were happy to reconnect with this group and plan to schedule other interactive trainings.

OCRA Concludes Informative Training Series with Fiesta Educativa.

Monolingual Spanish-speaking families throughout southern California were excited to learn how to better access regional center services for their loved ones. The March 2021 event concluded a four-part training series presented by OCRA staff from across southern California. OCRA collaborated with Fiesta Educativa to develop the web series to more effectively address the unique needs of the Latinx community.

Samantha Avalos, OCRA’s Assistant Clients’ Rights Advocate for Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center (ELARC) consumers, reviewed how to qualify and apply for Early Start and regional center services. Samantha also described how to develop an accurate and comprehensive Individualized Family Support Plan. The 51 participants learned how to prepare for the transition from regional center to school district services and to understand the services available under the Lanterman Act once a child turns three years old. Samantha also provided practical tips on how to advocate for services during an Individual Program Plan meeting. The attendees were eager to learn about the requirement to pursue generic resources, but still request gap funding from the regional center if necessary. Many in the audience appreciated learning about their right to appeal regional center denials.

Alexander Scarlis, OCRA’s Clients’ Rights Advocate for the Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center, facilitated a lively discussion with the attendees to conclude the training. Alex explained OCRA’s procedure for representing a client. He also clarified the criteria to receive respite services and the importance of ELARC’s respite assessment tool. Fiesta Educativa was so impressed with the presentation, they have scheduled additional OCRA trainings.

Conclusion

As the pandemic continues, OCRA will identify creative strategies to connect with clients and families. OCRA will seek feedback from community stakeholders and groups to ensure that our efforts accurately

meet the needs of underserved communities. We intend to continue identifying engagement strategies to help bridge the disparity gap. We hope to resume in-person trainings once it is safe to do so. Meanwhile, our staff will utilize virtual platforms to present substantive and self-advocacy trainings. OCRA's Outreach Unit appreciates the opportunity to coordinate virtual outreach presentations and trainings statewide during the public health crisis.