

OCRA Annual Outreach Report July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

The goal of OCRA's outreach is for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to know who we are, what we do, and how to reach us. Outreach also helps build strong relationships between OCRA staff, clients, and service providers. Better relationships lead to better advocacy. OCRA aims to be at least at statewide parity with who we serve, given the race and ethnicity of all regional center clients. OCRA has been at statewide parity for many years now. Outreach can improve our service to underserved communities who experience disparities in regional center spending and other services like health and education.

This annual report provides information on outreach activities and events completed between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023. During this period, OCRA conducted 325 outreach activities to 12,352 attendees. This is an increase of 5.8% in outreach activities and an increase of 50% in attendees from the previous annual reporting period (July 2021 - June 2022). OCRA also conducted 174 outreach activities between January 1, 2023, and June 30, 2023 (the second half of this reporting period). This is a 15.2% increase from the first half of this reporting period.

More In-Person Community Outreach and Training

The highlight of this past year was a return to in-person activities. With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, this year the number of OCRA in-person trainings increased significantly. OCRA went to a variety of in-person resource fairs and provided substantive advocacy training on different topics including recent changes to the regional center appeal process and regional center spending disparities based on race, ethnicity, and geography. Between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022 (last reporting period), OCRA conducted 43 in-person outreach activities - compared to 129 during this reporting period.

Commitment to Unserved or Underserved Regional Center Clients

Of the 325 activities and trainings OCRA completed during this reporting period, 81 (24.9%) were specifically targeted to multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities.

OCRA hosted a series of webinars about changes to the regional center appeal process. People of color found the prior appeal process unfair and confusing and advocated for the changes to the law. Many non-English speakers asked for training on how to locate and navigate helpful websites about the changes. The webinar series included English, Spanish, and Mandarin/Cantonese sessions. The interactive webinars showed attendees how to access important websites containing the new appeal forms and resources about the changes. The audience asked questions and learned from each other, creating a greater sense of community.

Commitment to Educating Legal Professionals About OCRA and Regional Center Services

OCRA remains committed to educating the public about OCRA's services and how to qualify for regional center services. The Los Angeles County Public Defenders' Office asked for a 3-part training series on how their clients could benefit from regional center services. Attendees included public defenders, investigators, social workers, and other court staff. The training series began with a virtual meet-and-greet to introduce OCRA staff serving clients of the 7 Southern California regional centers in Los Angeles County. The remaining interactive sessions covered regional center eligibility, with a focus on the 5th category and the recent appeal process changes. The 346 attendees provided positive feedback to improve collaboration with OCRA on behalf of their clients.

Self-Advocacy Trainings

Each OCRA office is required to conduct at least one self-advocacy training per contract year. Most offices conduct more self-advocacy trainings. Topics include emergency preparedness, self-advocacy, clients' rights, rights to money management, voting rights, community living options, and employment rights and options. Between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, OCRA conducted 27 self-advocacy trainings, compared to 18 the previous year. This is a 50% increase, and consistent with the larger number of in-person trainings completed over the last year. For the coming year, OCRA's emphasis will be on direct client engagement through self-advocacy training and the number of such trainings will continue to grow.

Clients Learn About Their Rights and Have Fun.

Clients at Lifetime Day Program were excited for a fun day of BINGO with their friends. Inland Regional Center's Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Bianca Rosales led an interactive game to discuss clients' rights. The 30 participants learned how to improve their self-advocacy skills. Southern California Outreach Coordinator Alondra Castillo joined Bianca to talk about ways to be productive and independent in their communities. Attendees enjoyed spinning the prize wheel and learning from each other. The event was such a success, OCRA will host another BINGO game soon.



Photo: Southern California Outreach Coordinator Alondra Castillo and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Bianca Rosales sitting at a table with a red tablecloth with OCRA's contact information in white letters. Displayed next to the table are a spin wheel and blue vertical banner about OCRA.

Clients Learn Why Emergency Preparedness is Important.

In April 2023, OCRA visited CLIMB day program for the first time. Alexander Scarlis, Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center's Clients' Rights Advocate, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Eddie Sandoval, and Peer Advocate Scott Barron visited to talk about why emergency preparedness is important. Sebastian from the day program eagerly volunteered to participate in a skit to show what can happen if someone is not prepared for an emergency. Eddie explained how to create an emergency plan and what to include in an emergency kit. The day program staff also helped the 9 attendees fill out a refrigerator magnet with important information for first

responders. Each person completed an emergency preparedness workbook and received a “Feeling Safe Being Safe” DVD created by the Department of Developmental Services. At the end of the training, the audience and day program staff got an OCRA gift bag.



Photo: Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Eddie Sandoval is standing in front of a group of people in a large conference room during the emergency preparedness training.

General Outreach

OCRA Attends Northern California Tech Expo in Santa Rosa.

Yulahlia Hernandez, Senior Clients' Rights Advocate, and Annie Breuer, Associate Clients' Rights Advocate, hosted a table at the Northern California Tech Expo (Expo) at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa. The local Independent Living Center for people with disabilities for Sonoma, Napa, Lake, and Mendocino counties organized the Expo. There were over 20 booths with service providers and assistive technology vendors at the event. OCRA's table included brochures in different languages and handouts about public benefits and services. OCRA's prize wheel was popular and drew people in to win different OCRA-themed prizes. Dancers from Alchemia also entertained everyone with their moves. Alchemia is a visual, performing, and media arts day program for

North Bay Regional Center consumers. The major highlight of the day were performers who danced to popular Disney songs! The audience cheered and clapped during their performance. Yulahlia and Annie were grateful to be part of this fun community event.



Photo: Clients' Rights Advocate Yulahlia Hernandez and Associate Clients' Rights Advocate Annie Breuer standing behind a table with a red cover with OCRA's 800 number in the center. A blue vertical banner also includes the DRC and OCRA logos. Publications and a spin wheel are also displayed.

LAUSD Families and Staff Learn About Alternatives to Conservatorship.

Despite the impending Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) strike and school closure, over 50 participants, including teachers and family members, attended OCRA's training on Alternatives to Conservatorship. Family members, staff, and teachers from across west Los Angeles attended the virtual training in March 2023. This training was part of a Parent Workshop for Students with IEPs. LAUSD's District Office of Transition Services, which helps students with disabilities over age 14

transition from school to adult life, put on this workshop. The workshop also had presentations on Westside Regional Center resources and Social Security benefits.

Matt Alivio, Clients' Rights Advocate, Ana Rivas, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, and Katie Meyer, Supervising Clients' Rights Advocate, presented and connected with the community in attendance. They described the alternatives to conservatorships, but more importantly, why they can be better for clients and families. There was lively discussion in both English and Spanish during the presentation. People asked questions live and using the chat feature. For OCRA, it was a great opportunity to connect with this community, especially the large number of Spanish-speaking participants and those who directly support Latinx communities in the west Los Angeles area.

Return of Festival, Fair, and Fun for the Entire Community.

OCRA was one of over 50 exhibitors that participated in Parents' Place Family Resource & Empowerment Center's 28th Annual Information Festival and Fair in Los Angeles County. Thanks to the California Department of Developmental Services, California Department of Education, City of West Covina, and private donations from community organizations, a variety of activities were available for the community.

The event spanned an entire community park and was thoughtfully organized into different areas. There was a fun zone for face painting, game booths with prizes, clowns, entertainment, and moon bouncers. The event also had sensory areas for children, teens, and young adults. The sensory areas varied from a quiet space to hands-on activities involving different materials and textures. Parent needs were included; there were designated areas designed to encourage networking and connecting with parent support groups. Families could also relax and unwind in a quiet open space, yet still watch all the excitement around them. Aimee Delgado, Clients' Rights Advocate, and Adan Barrera, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, both serving clients of San Gabriel-Pomona Regional Center, met with the community and shared information about OCRA. The diverse community was happy see OCRA shared brochures in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.



Photo: Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Adan Barrera standing behind a table with a white tablecloth. He is standing under a blue canopy distributing resources.

Target Outreach

OCRA's target communities around the state are the Asian community (including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino, and Polynesian), the Black or African American community, the Latinx community, and the Native American community. Of the 325 outreach activities completed during this reporting period, 81 were specifically directed to multi-ethnic and language-diverse communities. This is about 25% of all outreach activities. Clients and families from all communities can and do attend OCRA's non-target trainings.

Latinx Families in the City of Lynwood Learn About OCRA.

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's Latinx parent support group invited OCRA to present on the services OCRA provides for regional center clients. Henry Melendez, South Central Regional Center's

Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, gave the presentation in Spanish. Most of the audience were monolingual Spanish-speaking family members. Some medical professionals also attended. The attendees were happy to learn about OCRA's services directly in a language they could understand.

OCRA Provides 3 Trainings in Spanish, Cantonese, and English to Support for Families.

Courtney Mangus, Statewide Clients' Rights Advocate, organized 3 trainings with Support for Families. These trainings, between March and May 2023, summarized OCRA's services, the In-Home Supportive Services program, and Social Security benefits. The training series was in English, Spanish, and Cantonese. The IHSS training covered eligibility, the application process, and the appeal process. Courtney also provided suggestions about how to prepare for in-home assessments and how to document the need for more hours. For her Social Security presentation, Courtney described the different benefits available to people with disabilities. She explained the complicated income and resource limit rules. She also gave recommendations about how to establish eligibility under Social Security's disability criteria and how to avoid overpayments. The audience had an opportunity to ask questions and learn from each other. The participants appreciated having the training translated into their native language. Several participants contacted OCRA for help after the training.

Latinx Families Get Familiar with the IHSS Appeals Process.

Vanessa Juarez, Harbor Regional Center's Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, provided a training about the In-Home Supportive Services appeals process to the Long Beach Family Resource Center (LBFRC) Latinx Spanish-speaking parent support group. During the presentation, Vanessa provided an overview of the IHSS program, including how hours are determined and how to ask for more hours. OCRA also discussed topics of interest for families, including an overview of protective supervision - how to ask for it and how to fill out the forms. The group asked for hands-on learning on how to file appeals and about timelines. OCRA showed the appeal form and filled out a sample form with the group. Participants appreciated the review of the appeal forms as well as other common IHSS forms. After the presentation, OCRA answered general

questions and scheduled intakes for personal questions the participants had. LBRC invited OCRA to return for more training.

Parents Learn About the Supplemental Security Income Benefits.

OCRA summarized the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program to members of the Lowman Special Education & Career Center. Parents wanted to learn more about SSI and changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. OCRA's advocates serving clients of North Los Angeles County Regional Center are Wilmary Torres, Clients' Rights Advocate, and Fatima Perez, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate. They were excited to meet with families in person. Parents were eager to ask questions as they shared problems they faced with the SSI program. OCRA provided specific information on the SSI eligibility process and their appeal rights. OCRA also demonstrated how to fill out an appeal form, as sometimes this can feel overwhelming. With this knowledge, families felt more confident asserting their appeal rights and about the information they should gather to qualify for SSI benefits.

Inland Regional Center Describes New Programs and OCRA Describes How to Get Them.

On a crisp spring morning in April, around 300 Inland Regional Center (IRC) clients and their families filled the James L. Brulte Senior Center, snacking on muffins and coffee while listening to IRC pitch various underutilized services and new programs. Their presentation was compelling enough. Need a few hours' break from care? Ask about respite hours. Interested in a local sports club or other community group? Ask about social and recreational funding.

Following the IRC presentation, attendees met with various IRC programs, vendors, and OCRA. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Bianca Rosales and Clients' Rights Advocate Jens Sorensen, familiar with the realities of navigating these programs and services, sat ready to help and answer questions on how to ask for and get these services approved. Although some clients already knew about these programs, they had encountered roadblocks in getting them, and were eager to learn about different self-advocacy strategies and resources. By the end of the day, nearly all OCRA pamphlets, publications, and other outreach goodies were handed out.



Photo: Assistant Clients' Right Advocate Bianca Rosales and Clients' Rights Advocate Jens Sorensen sitting at OCRA's event table with contact information, publications, pamphlets, and various outreach goodies.

Conclusion

Outreach plays an important role in OCRA's daily work. It is how we connect with our clients and how we improve accountability and responsiveness to them. To provide quality services to our clients, we need to know the people and providers in our local areas and have connections to statewide partners in the service delivery system. For this coming year, we look forward to an even greater focus on direct client involvement and collaboration in our outreach work. We also look forward many more in-person events and activities, while still offering virtual events for people who need that more accessible option.