

OCRA Annual Outreach Report July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

This past year the pandemic continued to create barriers to serving clients. OCRA was affected by staffing challenges. When possible, we collaborated with other Disability Rights California (DRC) units to meet outreach and training needs. We also maximized our resources by creating new tools for self-advocacy and partnering with outside groups to promote systemic change.

This report provides information on outreach completed between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022. During this period, OCRA conducted 307 outreach activities to 8,228 attendees. This is a decrease of 29% in outreach activities and 38% in attendees from the previous annual reporting period (July 2020 - June 2021). This decrease reflects a focus on directing resources to responding to client and community requests for more direct client services. OCRA also leveraged the resources of DRC to continue outreach to regional center clients and families.

Leveraging Resources of Disability Rights California

Staff vacancies and turnover affected the number of outreach activities and trainings OCRA conducted. Filling vacancies with new staff takes time and new staff typically require significant internal training before they can train the community.

We asked for help from our partner unit, DRC's Advocacy and Community Engagement unit (ACE), to meet outreach requests. Between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, ACE conducted 111 trainings to approximately 3,385 attendees. ACE's trainings covered special education, alternatives to conservatorship, regional center services, and self-determination. This collaboration is not reflected in the number of OCRA outreaches but responded to the needs of regional center clients and their families.

Promoting Systemic Change

Other DRC efforts are also linked to public forums and listening sessions OCRA previously held. Working with community partners, DRC successfully sponsored fair hearing reform to make the regional center appeal process more consumer friendly. DRC also created a new unit, the Fair Hearing Project, geared toward representing the Latinx community in

regional center fair hearings. These positive outcomes are linked to OCRA's outreach efforts over the last several years.

Responding to Community Needs/New Tools for Self-Advocacy

To improve responsiveness to community needs, OCRA held a series of public forums and strategic planning sessions with client and family groups during the previous reporting period (2020/2021). The primary issue identified was the need for more direct representation rather than more trainings. OCRA acknowledged this need and responded. Although OCRA conducted fewer outreach activities this reporting period, OCRA increased its advocacy. OCRA served 227 more clients and opened 232 more service requests than last year.

Building Self-Advocacy Skills: Community groups asked for a series of trainings on a specific topic rather than broad overview of laws. Staff developed trainings for attendees to apply legal information to real-life scenarios and develop self-advocacy skills. OCRA conducted a series of trainings on both special education and Social Security benefits. Staff also presented multiple statewide trainings on the restoration of social recreational services, purchase of service data, and how to prepare for public stakeholder meetings. OCRA also hosted its first statewide self-advocacy conference for regional center consumers.

New and Improved Self-Advocacy Tool: OCRA updated its popular "Rights under the Lanterman Act" (RULA) tool and it is now available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Khmer. This resource provides a quick reference guide to the laws governing regional center services in question-and-answer format. OCRA developed instructional videos in English and Spanish to explain how to navigate the manual. 34,402 people have visited the RULA website since its launch in March 2022.

Following are examples of the different types of outreach activities OCRA staff provided during this reporting period.

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.

Client Asks OCRA to Host a Fun Night of Clients' Rights BINGO.

The evening of March 25, 2022 was not a typical Friday night at Herald House. Clients' Rights Advocate Victoria Virgilio led two fun rounds of virtual clients' rights BINGO. Victoria was invited to present by a client interested in improving his own self-advocacy skills. Helped by her client, Victoria led a lively discussion with the residents of the Community Crisis Home about their individual rights protected under the Lanterman Act, including the denial of rights process. The educational training was held in the home's recreation room while the residents relaxed on comfortable sofas under several large warm blankets.

Each BINGO card had images of rights protected under the Lanterman Act, the California law that gives people with developmental disabilities the right to get the services and supports they need to live in the community. Victoria's assistant made sure that all his peers' questions were answered and that no called images were inadvertently left unmarked on the other players' individual BINGO cards. The residents enjoyed learning about rights from each other and celebrated when another resident yelled "BINGO!"

General Outreach

OCRA Hosts Booth at In-Person Sonoma County Special Education Transition Fair.

Yulahlia Hernandez, Senior Clients' Rights Advocate, and Annie Breuer, Associate Clients' Rights Advocate hosted a booth at Sonoma County's Special Education Transition Fair. The event is primarily for transition-age youth and their families to learn about services available to adults with disabilities. Yulahlia and Annie attended the fair before in person. But the COVID-19 pandemic caused the fair to be virtual for the last two years. While enjoying the warm sun, Yulahlia and Annie distributed important publications about Social Security benefits, In-Home Supportive Services, and regional center services in both English and Spanish. Around 125 people visited OCRA's busy and fun resource table. Many were excited to spin OCRA's prize wheel to win different OCRA-themed prizes including the popular deck of playing cards. The March 2022 fair was a great way for Yulahlia and Annie to reconnect with many past clients and or community partners they have worked with for many years. They also met new people face-to-face who called their office during the pandemic. Yulahlia and

Annie shared many joyous fist bumps and smiles during this fun day in the sun.



Picture: Senior Clients' Rights Advocate Yulahlia Hernandez and Associate Clients' Rights Advocate Annie Breuer standing in front of OCRA's resource table covered in a red tablecloth.

Social Security Advocates Learn about Regional Center and OCRA.

Johnanthony Alaimo, Clients' Rights Advocate for Harbor Regional Center (HRC) clients, partnered with HRC to train Social Security advocates across the state about services offered by both the HRC and OCRA. HRC's representative also explained the regional center eligibility process and the role of their benefits specialist. During the June 2022 presentation, Johnanthony discussed the role of the Clients' Rights Advocate. He also summarized the Social Security matters OCRA may handle for clients. Through his extensive outreach efforts, Johnanthony emphasized his commitment to helping his community develop their self-advocacy skills to communicate better with Social Security.

Johnanthony provided the 40 participants specific examples of how OCRA can help clients prepare for an upcoming hearing. The examples included reviewing and organizing their exhibits, drafting their sworn declaration, and helping them prepare to testify to ensure that the administrative law judge has enough information to make a fair decision. This intensive level of help and coaching empowers clients to represent themselves when direct representation is not possible. Johnanthony hopes this joint outreach will strengthen his relationship with HRC. He also anticipates that many advocates will refer their regional center clients to OCRA for help.

Independent Facilitators Learn and Share about How to Support Self-Determination Program Participants.

In March 2022, Aimee Delgado, San Gabriel Pomona Regional Center's Clients' Rights Advocate, participated in the first part of a 6-part training series to educate independent facilitators working with consumers enrolled in the self-determination program. The training series was sponsored by the Guidelight Group. Guidelight is a collective of professionals specializing in person-centered services for transition-aged teens and adults with developmental disabilities throughout California.

Mary Rios and Maria Fernanda Iriarte from Disability Rights California's Legal Clinics Project joined Aimee during the training. The 15 participants learned about the different types of Medi-Cal Home- and Community-Based Services Waivers. The training also included a rich discussion about challenges people have had when entering the self-determination program. The audience also shared creative solutions to overcome barriers faced throughout the state. The attendees felt better equipped to advocate for their clients after the training.

OCRA Hosts a Lively Discussion About How to Cope with Stress.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have struggled to keep their mental and physical health strong. Learning how to manage stress is an important skill to develop during these challenging times. Peer Advocate Scott Barron's interactive "Stress and Relaxation" training is just what the doctor ordered. In March 2022, Scott led a spirited virtual discussion on this important topic. The 33 participants, from Easter Seals' Paramount, Cerritos, and Norwalk day programs, shared specific techniques they use to manage their own stress. The attendees reported they enjoy listening to music, exercising, going to the beach, and watching

movies to calm down. Scott also used training materials developed by the Department of Developmental Services Consumer Advisory Committee during his training. DDS's "Think Plan Do" training module included a brief video about Kristi's visit to the dentist along with an interactive workbook to complete. Scott helped the audience use the workbook to create an individualized plan to reduce stress during a situation in the future. The participants enjoyed learning that many of their peers had similar concerns and stressors. This helped the audience feel less alone during their extended period of isolation away from their friends at the day program.

OCRA plans to provide a Voting Rights training to these groups before Los Angeles County's special election to choose a new mayor.

OCRA Hosts a Denial of Rights Training.

Benson is a residential services provider that runs Enhanced Behavioral Supports Homes in the Inland Regional Center catchment area. An Enhanced Behavioral Supports Home is a group home that provides extra training, staff experience, supervision, and behavioral planning for people whose behaviors would not otherwise allow them to live in the community. Benson contacted OCRA to request a training about OCRA and the denial of rights process for their behavioral staff. Jens Sorenson, Clients' Rights Advocate for Community Integration, educated the Benson staff on the "denial of rights" process. This is a very limited and precise procedure that allows a home to temporarily restrict some rights of residents under some conditions. Jens finished the presentations with hypothetical examples to illustrate a mix of common and complex clients' rights issues. Jens also trained the Benson staff on the role of OCRA and explained the areas of law OCRA can help with. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has limited OCRA's ability to conduct in-person outreaches, OCRA continues to provide effective trainings to residential providers through video conferencing. This flexibility allows OCRA to adapt to the unique schedules of homes like Benson and ensures that providers remain educated on clients' rights.

Target Outreach

OCRA's target communities in 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. Approximately 33% of

the activities and trainings during the reporting period were to multi-ethnic and language-diverse communities . Clients and families from all communities can and do attend OCRA's non-target trainings also.

Cantonese Community Learns about Supplemental Security Income.

In February 2022, 15 people from the Cantonese-speaking community joined an interactive training about the eligibility criteria for Supplemental Security Income. Support for Families invited Golden Gate Regional Center's Clients' Rights Advocate, Alejandro Gastelum, and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Paul Zubatov, to present on this important topic. The collaborator also agreed to pay for simultaneous interpreters in Cantonese to ensure the audience understood the discussion.

Alejandro and Paul used real-life scenarios to explain how to apply the complex income and resource limit rules in different situations. The trainers also recommended how to show an applicant meets the Listing criteria for different disabilities. They also gave strategies about what documentation to submit with an initial application and appeal. The audience also asked questions about their unique circumstances. The attendees benefited from hearing about the challenges each participant faced when communicating with Social Security. Several participants contacted OCRA after the training with questions about Notices of Action. The event was so popular OCRA will offer the same training in Spanish soon.

OCRA Attends Disability Resource Fair for Asian Community.

OCRA was thrilled to attend an in-person disability resource fair sponsored by We Embrace. We Embrace predominately serves Alta Regional Center consumers of Asian and East Indian descent. The group strives to offer a comprehensive support system for the families of children, adults, and seniors with a variety of disabilities. It also advocates for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, housing, recreation, and leisure activities. Jasbir Soomal, OCRA's Administrative Assistant, initially introduced Clients' Rights Advocate, Kelsey Handcock, to We Embrace's Director to discuss effective ways to better connect with the Asian community. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, Clara Torres, also joined Jasbir and Kelsey at the resource fair.

OCRA's resource table included helpful information about how to secure regional center services, In-Home Supportive Services, and special education. The attendees were also encouraged to visit DRC's revised "Rights under the Lanterman Act" manual on DRC's website. Attendees who visited OCRA's resource table could also choose from several popular OCRA-themed prizes. The event was such a success that OCRA has scheduled several substantive trainings for the near future. This June 2022 event was hopefully the beginning of a long-lasting relationship between OCRA and We Embrace.



Photo: Clients' Rights Advocate Kelsey Handcock and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Clara Torres standing behind OCRA's resource table covered in a red tablecloth.

OCRA Prepares Community Members to Attend and Advocate at POS Disparity Meetings Across the State.

In December 2021 and January 2022, to prepare for Purchase of Service (POS) public stakeholder meetings about disparities in regional center

services, OCRA held community education trainings. OCRA also held two “office hour” events in early March to help the community prepare for their local regional center POS Disparity meetings. OCRA provided the information for the events in English with simultaneous Spanish interpretation. The trainings were well-attended and represented various regions in California, including individuals and their families served by Inland, Valley Mountain, and Alta California Regional Centers, and Regional Center of the East Bay. OCRA reviewed POS disparity data with the attendees and answered their questions about how to advocate to minimize the disparities. People openly shared their regional center experiences and saw themselves reflected in the data. Attendees of one office hour event included members of a parent support group who wanted help preparing their members to attend the POS Disparity meeting with their local regional center.

Latinx Community Learns about SSI Overpayments.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected OCRA’s ability to hold in-person trainings. With the growth of virtual trainings, many in the Latinx community have had better access to informative presentations from the comfort of their own home. Statewide Assistant Clients’ Rights Advocate, Emely Lopez, partnered with Parents Helping Parents to offer Tri-Counties Regional Center consumers and their families a training about Supplemental Security Income overpayments. Emely gave the audience specific examples about why an overpayment may occur. The audience also appreciated Emely’s recommendations about how to avoid an overpayment.

Emely led a lively discussion about the right to receive a proper Notice of Action with their appeal rights in their preferred language. She also explained the difference between a Request for a Reconsideration and a Request for Waiver of overpayment recovery. Emely allowed time at the end of her presentation for the audience to ask questions about other topics. People enjoyed learning about different services available to regional center consumers and their loved ones.

Alternatives to Conservatorship Training Offered in Spanish and Vietnamese.

In March 2022, San Andreas Regional Center’s Clients’ Rights Advocate, Stephanie Krol Vieira, provided Parents Helping Parents (PHP) with an

interactive training about alternatives to conservatorships. PHP agreed to cover the cost for simultaneous interpretation in Spanish and Vietnamese.

OCRA Director, Shannon Cogan, joined Stephanie during the training. Shannon provided several scenarios to begin a lively discussion about how to apply the law to complex fact patterns. Shannon emphasized the importance of preserving people's individual autonomy while still recognizing the significance of familial support. Over 70 people attended the interactive training. The audience enjoyed learning from each other. Stephanie and Shannon allocated time for the attendees to ask clarifying questions about concepts they still did not understand. The presenters received positive feedback and generated several ideas for future trainings for the PHP community.

OCRA Travels to Invaluable Imperial Valley Parent Conference.

OCRA participated in an exciting in-person event for about 100 consumers and family members of San Diego Regional Center in Imperial County in March 2022. This year's Imperial Valley Parent Conference was possible thanks to Exceptional Family Resource Center and SELPA of Imperial County. This resource and exhibitor fair connected consumers and families with over 15 vendors, provided 5 conference-style workshops, and allowed attendees to win prizes. The conference provided the opportunity for everyone to learn and connect with resources to support children and adults with disabilities.

Maria Salas, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, spent her day chatting with families, providing information about OCRA, and listening to their concerns. She completed intakes for clients to get help from OCRA. She also handed out helpful publications to families. This was the first in-person outreach in almost two years for OCRA to meet with consumers in person and engage with service providers and staff from day programs and other agencies. Many families took brochures and learned about OCRA for the first time. OCRA hopes to stay connected and participate in next year's conference.



Photo: Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Maria Salas standing behind resource table at Imperial Valley Parent Conference.



Photo: Parents of a regional center consumer who won OCRA's gift card.

Conclusion

OCRA will continue to seek feedback from clients and their families to ensure they have a voice in directing our services. Over the next year, OCRA will respond to the needs of the community, which includes more direct representation to clients, with a possible increase in trainings. OCRA hopes to increase in-person trainings as appropriate to pandemic conditions while continuing to use virtual options as well.