

## December Outreach Newsletter 2019



Photo cover from left to right: Callie Frye, LAU Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate teaches the Sacramento Police Department American Sign Language.

### Legal Advocacy Unit

Between May 1 and Sept 30, 2019, Disability Rights California staff provided 199 outreach, training and clinic events, impacting 8,750 individuals with disabilities, family members, advocates and service providers. Of those events, 17 were legal clinics serving 156 individuals; 103 were trainings impacting 2,074 individuals; and 79 were outreach events impacting 6,520 individuals with disabilities. Please see below for highlights of our accomplishments.

### **Sacramento Police Department Receives Disability Spectrum and Etiquette Training**

Last year, the Sacramento Police Department responded to over 11,000 calls involving individual or family member/caregivers from various disability communities and worked with an increasing Deaf homeless population. To promote awareness and improved interactions between law enforcement and people with disabilities, staff from the Legal Advocacy Unit, Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy and the Peer/Self Advocacy Unit trained 20 Sacramento Police Department officers, including officers from their Mental Health Impact Team. Leilani Pfeifer, LAU Outreach Coordinator, provided background information about Disability Rights California. Clients' Rights Advocate, Brittnee Gillespie and Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate, Vanessa Ochoa spoke about regional center services and provided helpful information about interacting with people with developmental disabilities,

such as the impact of loud noises, sirens and light to people who have Autism and other helpful tips.



Peer Self Advocacy Coordinator Leslie Napper, who was instrumental in organizing the training, provided insight into what a person with a serious mental illness may be experiencing when the officers engage with them, along with local resources and alternatives to taking someone to jail. Callie Frye, Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate trained the officers on working with individuals from the Deaf community along how to sign common law enforcement statements such as “you’re getting a warning,” “you’re under arrest” and “get out of the car.” The police department staff appreciated the training and expressed interest in receiving more trainings in the future.

### **Society for the Blind Members Learn about Equal Access to Businesses and Reasonable Accommodations**



On August 15, 2019, Disability Rights California staff trained members of the Society for the Blind, an organization serving individuals who are blind and low vision in 27 counties in Northern California, on their rights to reasonable accommodations from businesses and other places of public accommodation. Attorney Pamela Cohen presented information on people’s rights to accommodations under state and federal laws and gave some specific examples of accommodations that a person can request, like

assistance with shopping. To support her training, Society for the Blind staff organized skits demonstrating how business may violate a person's rights and had the audience to identify how to assert their rights in each situation. This interactive training gave people a fun and hands on way to both learn and apply their legal rights and was a great success.

## **Latinx Community Attend Conferencia de 2019 Aprendiendo Juntos (Learning Together) at the MIND Institute**



Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate, Vanessa Ochoa and Jessica Tellez, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, presented at the Aprendiendo Juntos (Learning Together) Conference. Approximately 200 individuals attended this Spanish-speaking event, where staff presented on rights at an IEP meeting and information about Social Security Benefits. Many families in attendance were unaware of their legal rights, including several who were surprised to learn that they had the right to interpreters at their IEP meetings and to have their IEPs translated into Spanish. Thanks to the event's success, DRC and OCRA are invited to return next year.

## **Educating the Youth and Young Adults About Employment at the Light House for The Blind and Visually Impaired**



Michael Thomas, Senior Advocate, trained individuals at Light House for the Blind and Visually Impaired on transition and Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) services. In his presentation, Michael explained what the Client Assistance Program can do for them and answered questions from the engaged audience. He encouraged participants to contact DRC with questions or concerns about DOR or their transition plans.

### **Angeles Especiales Support Group Learns About In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)**



Mary Rios, a Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate, attended a parent support group to hear about community needs. After reviewing parent concerns, Mary arranged for attorney Maria Iriarte to attend a meeting and train the participants on their rights in the IHSS program so that they could effectively advocate for appropriate services for their children. Forty family members came to hear Maria discuss IHSS and eighteen families met with Maria afterwards during a legal clinic where they received a legal consultation.

### **Vietnamese Parents with Disabled Children Learn About In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and Social Security**



After meeting with community leader Hung Nguyen, from Vietnamese Parents with Disabled Children (VPDCA) and learning about various community concerns, Tho Vinh Bahn, Supervising Attorney for Outreach

and Multi-Cultural Affairs Advocate Raymond Kwong, organized a training and a clinic for Vietnamese families on September 21, 2019. Participants received training on IHSS services from Maria Iriarte and families consulted with Lauren Giardina, Managing Attorney, Clinic Attorney, Lili Graham and Maria on their legal questions. VPDCA thanked us for coming out to help their community and expressed gratitude for the one-on-one time they had with the clinic attorneys.

## Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy

Between May and September, 2019, staff from the Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy (OCRA) conducted 222 outreaches and reached 6,134 consumers. Below are some of the highlights.

### OCRA Shows Commitment to Self-Advocacy



OCRA attends annual conferences that encourage and celebrate self-advocacy. OCRA assisted with the planning and preparation for and attended, the May 4 and 5, 2019 Supported Life Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference in Sacramento. Another annual self-advocacy conference that OCRA helps plan and participate in is the CHOICE's conference that happens every April. This year's conference was on April 5, 2019 in Stockton. Both conferences feature self-advocate speakers and presentations. OCRA enjoys these opportunities to work with self-advocates and share information that supports their advocacy. Christine Hager from OCRA with Lola Brice from Disability Rights California's Accounting Unit were sitting behind the OCRA table at the Amador County Transition Fair in Jackson.

## A Clients' Rights Night with Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Bingo



A room in the Redwood Coast Regional Center catchment area was bustling with excitement. Frenzied marks lined the checkered templates. “Bingo!” one student yelled. She had just finished crossing three pictures in a row – one of a couple getting married, one of a man doing gardening in his yard, and another of a man cooking. These are rights that all people are entitled to, Assistance Clients’ Rights Advocate Mariana Molina Nava explained. As basic as they are, people with disabilities are often denied these rights. Tying together the theme of rights for all individuals, Clients’ Rights Advocate Priscilla Ankara cited the vital excerpt of the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” She explained that through the Bill of Rights, the United States Constitution grants individuals these rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It was an informative, fun-filled Bingo night.

## **OCRA Attends Support for Families 2019 Information and Resource Conference**



On April 13, 2019, the Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy for Golden Gate Regional Center staffed a resource table at the Support for Families Information and Resource Fair in San Francisco. Attendees learned about OCRA, their practice areas, and the services they provide. Clients' Rights Advocate (CRA) Karis Daggs and Assistance Clients' Rights Advocate (ACRA) Gloria Delgadillo-Martinez explained what supports and services are available to regional center clients and how to access them. Parents were eager to learn about special education rights, transition services, and alternatives to conservatorships. OCRA provided a variety of publications about regional center and special education services in several different languages. OCRA staff connected with many people who had specific issues that required opening intakes and provided advice and other services. At the end of the event, families expressed how great it was to learn about the tools and the resources that are available to them. OCRA also connected with a number of community organizations for opportunities to collaborate on future outreach events.

### **Purchase of Service Disparity Leads to the Creation of a New Parent Support Group**

The San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center has addressed disparity in the purchasing of regional center services in many creative ways. One way is to connect families with each other. The Family Resource Center hired staff and organized a parent support group for an underserved community. The Chinese Parent Support Group was formed and has been growing strong over the past few years. The group is an additional resource for parents in the community to connect, share, and learn.

Aimee Delgado, Clients' Rights Advocate, was invited by the parent support group to provide a training on IEP and IPPs. The coordinator

provided interpretation in Mandarin. Aimee also brought materials in both English and Chinese for the participants. Attendees not only had questions answered, but left with information and a connection to a resource in their community.

## **Peer Self Advocacy Unit**

Between May and September, the Peer Self Advocacy Unit provided 261 trainings and facilitated 20 ongoing groups. Below are some of the highlights of PSA's fabulous work.

### **PSA Starts a Spanish Speaking Group at Metropolitan State Hospital**

Spanish speaking residents at Metropolitan State Hospital often times found themselves isolated in their units due to their language barriers. With the overwhelming majority of staff and residents being monolingual English speakers, Spanish speaking residents were often unable to communicate with their peers or the staff available to help them. To address this problem, Peer Self Advocacy Trainer Senobia Pichardo organized the first ever Spanish speaking group at Metropolitan State Hospital, hoping to meet the needs of Spanish speaking residents in the facility. As news of the group spread, it rapidly grew, and now serves fourteen regular members every week. With this new group, Spanish speaking residents have been able to access information about their rights and establish a peer group, some for the first time ever. Senobia quickly learned that many residents lacked basic knowledge about their own legal rights and how to self-advocate and has tailored her groups to teaching Spanish speaking residents about how to enforce their rights and helped reduce the stigma that many felt around their disability. Both the residents and the staff reported that the group has been so successful that some people who rarely spoke or communicated with others in their units are now talkative and engaged. The program has been so successful that Metropolitan State Hospital has established two additional Spanish speaking groups since then. PSA hopes to continue this group and watch it grow.

## 17<sup>th</sup> Annual California Memorial Project Remembrance Ceremonies



Each year, the Peer Self Advocacy Unit organizes the California Memorial Project Remembrance Ceremonies (CMP) to acknowledge, recognize, and pay tribute to the people with mental health and developmental disabilities who lived and died in state hospitals. This year marked the 17<sup>th</sup> annual CMP. Over 350 people attended the eight CMP remembrance ceremonies across the state to remember and pay tribute to these people, many of whom were buried in mass or anonymous graves that didn't recognize or honor the value and meaning of their lives. Ceremonies were held at state institutions or cemetery burial sites, including Parkview Cemetery in Manteca, Metropolitan State Hospital, Patton State Hospital, Stockton Developmental Center, Sonoma Developmental Center and Napa State Hospital. Disability Rights California staff provided an overview of the mission and history of the California Memorial Project, followed by speakers from the peer community, local community organizations, such as The Advocates of Person Centered Services, facility staff, state senate representatives and spiritual leaders. Many ceremonies were accompanied by music and songs from various groups, such as the "Tanaka Drum Team" and the "Musical Troop" from residents at Napa and readings, including poems such as "A Design for Living." Following these tributes was a statewide moment of silence. Nature was also in attendance, in the form of deer, rain, mountain lions, flowers at the gravesites and a "Memory Tree." State Hospital residents were grateful to have the opportunity to pay tribute to friends and peers who have passed on or transitioned to the community. They expressed encouragement knowing they, too, will be honored through the Remembrance Day ceremonies.

## **Building a Nest Egg with CalAble**

In the past, people on SSI benefits were only allowed to maintain limited to \$2000 in their bank account. Any additional funds would stop their SSI benefits until their bank accounts were back below \$2000. This savings limit prevented SSI recipients from making expensive purchases, like homes or cars, and also prevented them from preparing for the future. PSA staff introduced self-advocacy group members at a Mental Health Rehabilitation Center to a new program, CalAble, that allows SSI recipients to save more money without the money counted against the SSI resource limits. Excited to learn about this new program, group members asked about the rules and how to enroll. In disbelief, many group members wondered how CalAble was legal. In shock, one said, "I can't believe I can finally save money!" With this information, one group member said they advocated for help from their case manager to take advantage of this opportunity and open a CalAble account. Thrilled to build their own nest eggs, participants eagerly planned for a financially secure future to live independently when they returned to the community.

### **Office of Payee Review & Beneficiary Assistance (OPRABA)**

Between May 1 and September 30, 2019, the OPRABA team conducted ten outreaches that directly served 483 people. Two trainings are highlighted below.

#### **OPRABA Staff Expand Information About Beneficiary Rights to the Deaf Community.**

People in the Deaf Community are regularly isolated by the language barrier and are then uninformed about their legal rights. Without such important information, it is easy for people to take advantage of deaf clients. Intent on addressing this problem, OPRABA staff reached out to community organizations and successfully conducted a training on representative payee obligations and rights to a large community organization serving Deaf consumers. The staff advised clients of their legal rights and self-advocacy tools. The training was so well received by the attending audience that OPRABA was invited to present at a statewide California Department of Rehabilitation training later this year and is looking forward to continuing to develop their relationship and provide more self-advocacy tools to the deaf community.

## **OPRABA Staff Ensure that Adult Protective Services Understands Beneficiary Rights.**

California's Adult Protective Services (APS) offices are charged with investigating allegations of financial abuse for people who are elderly or dependent, including beneficiaries with representative payees where the payee may be abusing the beneficiary's money. To make sure that APS staff understand beneficiary rights well enough to properly investigate these claims, OPRABA staff provided a training to regional managers within California's APS, sharing important information about the legal rights of a beneficiary and issues that a beneficiary may face. The training was so well received that OPRABA was invited to sit on a stakeholder panel consisting of law enforcement, district attorney offices, APS, victims' advocates, and other community organization involved in criminal justice issues involving financial crimes against vulnerable populations.