

OCRA Annual Outreach Report

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Outreach and training are important parts of helping people with developmental disabilities understand their rights. OCRA works hard to provide interactive virtual and in-person trainings to meet this goal. Over the last year, OCRA has participated in activities and trainings about changes in the law and many other topics, and shared information about OCRA's services at resource fairs and meetings in the community.

This annual report provides information on outreach activities and events completed between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. During this period, OCRA conducted 422 outreach activities to 15,464 attendees. This is a 30% increase in outreach activities and a 25% increase in attendees from the previous annual reporting period. OCRA conducted 235 outreach activities between January 1, 2024-June 30, 2024 (the second half of this reporting period). This is a 24.5% increase from the first half of this reporting period when OCRA completed 188 outreach activities.

Commitment to Increasing Self-Advocacy Trainings

Of the 422 activities and trainings completed during this reporting period, 67 (15.8%) were specifically self-advocacy trainings for educating regional center clients about their rights. OCRA's decision to revise its outreach structure to focus on providing self-advocacy trainings to clients showed positive results in its first year. During this reporting period, OCRA more than doubled the number of self-advocacy trainings offered to regional center clients (67 this year compared to 27 last year). OCRA staff presented these trainings in day programs, work sites, group homes, and restrictive settings like Porterville Development Center. OCRA is exploring adding to the topics of approved self-advocacy trainings over the next year.

Commitment to Distinctive Topics of Discussion

OCRA hosted its first statewide webinar celebrating the unique experiences of regional center clients and their brothers and sisters. A group of regional center clients and their non-disabled siblings spoke honestly about the challenges and joys of their relationships. This webinar is part of our ongoing effort to raise the voices of people with

developmental disabilities and their families across California. The full story is below.

Commitment to Unserved or Underserved Regional Center Clients

Of the 422 activities and trainings OCRA completed during this reporting period, 112 (26.5%) were specifically targeted to multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities. This is a 1.6% increase from last year (July 2022-June 2023). People of color were particularly interested in learning more about the restoration of social recreation services and non-medical services. To address this need, OCRA offered statewide webinars on this topic in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Japanese. We explained how to ask for these services from the regional center through the Individual Program Plan process. The presenters provided useful tips on how to show that these services are needed to help with the impact of a regional center client's developmental disability. The trainings also covered changes to the appeal process and provided resources to help with advocating for these important services.

When OCRA was created as a unit of Disability Rights California, it was not immediately serving clients at parity based on race and ethnicity. OCRA quickly started to do targeted outreach. OCRA has surpassed parity for many ethnic groups as shown in the larger Annual Report. OCRA continues to have a dedicated outreach team to find new ways to reach traditionally underserved communities.

Self-Advocacy Trainings

Each OCRA office must conduct at least two self-advocacy trainings per contract year. Many offices conduct more than two. 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, 2023, and June 30, 2024, OCRA conducted 67 self-advocacy trainings, compared to 27 the previous year. This is a 148% increase, and consistent with the larger number of in-person trainings completed over the last year. OCRA will continue to emphasize direct client engagement through self-advocacy training.

OCRA Encourages Regional Center Consumers to Participate in Democracy.

OCRA connected with a local day Program in San Francisco to offer a Voting Rights self-advocacy training. Supervising Clients' Rights Advocate, Alejandro Gastelum and Clients' Rights Advocate, Courtney Mangus worked together to explain why each person's vote matters. The 20 enthusiastic participants enjoyed the interactive training. The audience asked how to register to vote and where to get an "I Voted" sticker. Many in the audience shared that they liked having the sticker to remind others to vote.

The training also included helpful information about how California has tried to make the voting process accessible to people with different disabilities. The presenters reviewed important deadlines for registration and voting. The training also emphasized the dangers of biased information and stressed that no one can tell people with disabilities how to vote.

The presenters knew the training was successful when a potential voter asked whether it was too late to vote by mail. Without skipping a beat, another participant repeated information OCRA just shared - that if the ballot is in the mail by the deadline, their vote will count.

Regional Center Consumers Kick Off Election Season and Learn about Voting.

With the Iowa caucuses kicking off the 2024 presidential election cycle the day before, OCRA presented a voting rights training to Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center's (ELARC) Consumer Advisory Committee. People from ELARC, the ELARC Family Resource Center, and the California Department of Developmental Services also attended.

Clients' Rights Advocate Alexander "Alex" Scarlis started the training with the most important ideas to remember: "People with disabilities have the right to vote. Only a court of law can take that right away and give it back." After a brief discussion of political parties in the United States (there are 6 parties in California), Alex described different places to register to vote. Participants shared their experiences and stories about why voting is important and what they vote for.

Much of the presentation focused on the many ways people can vote and the accessibility to people with disabilities: online, by mail, and in person. Alex also explained the deadlines. At the end, he ran participants through a short

quiz asking important questions like, do I have to show my ID if I vote in person? The answer is no! (with a few exceptions).

During the question-and-answer period, one person mentioned he volunteered as a poll worker. He made a helpful suggestion to his fellow consumers to go to the polls early and not late at night to avoid possible problems. He remembered how during one election he worked, the ballot machines stopped working. Alex pointed to this as another reason to consider voting by mail.

All surveys after the training were positive with one participant writing:

“The training reminded me of the importance of voting to protect my rights as an individual with a disability. Also, my vote is my voice in our democracy.”

Porterville Developmental Center Residents Play Clients’ Rights Bingo.

In June 2024, residents of Porterville Developmental Center were excited to play a fun and interactive game of Clients’ Rights Bingo. Managing Attorney Eva Casas-Sarmiento hosted three sessions of this classic game with different groups of residents. Eva talked about different rights and how they are even more important when living in a locked facility. The audience answered questions about the pictures on each Bingo card. Some participants offered to help Eva by holding up each card so the other residents could find out if the image on the Bingo card was also on their own card. Some residents also helped their friends decide if an image was on their own Bingo card. This helped to create greater connections between residents. The training helped at least one person feel more empowered to ask for an ASL interpreter so he could understand and participate in the Bingo game. Once the ASL interpreter was provided, the resident was able to participate in the game independently. The 70 residents liked learning from each other and choosing an OCRA-themed prize after yelling “Bingo!” Since these trainings were such a success, OCRA plans to schedule future self-advocacy trainings at Porterville.

General Outreach

OCRA Attends NBRC’s Self-Determination Resource Fair in Napa.

In June 2024, OCRA attended the Self-Determination Resource Fair at North Bay Regional Center (NBRC) in Napa. Yulahlia Hernandez, Senior Clients’ Rights Advocate, and Annie Breuer, Associate Clients’ Rights Advocate

hosted a table at the event. NBRC held the event to provide information about the regional center's Self-Determination Program. This program gives people and their families more freedom, control, and responsibility to choose services to help them meet their goals. The event had over 20 booths with service providers and vendors. Attendees at the fair included regional center clients, families, NBRC staff, and service providers. OCRA's table had brochures in many languages and flyers for upcoming webinars hosted by OCRA. Attendees were drawn to OCRA's prize wheel, where people spun the wheel to win different OCRA-themed prizes. Midway through the event, a NBRC client who gets services through the Self-Determination Program, spoke about their experiences. The person explained how it allows them freedom to choose what services they get through NBRC. The speaker said they can choose helpers for college support, nutritional guidance, and learning independent living skills. The fair was a great way for OCRA to connect with the Self-Determination Program community.



Photo: Senior Clients' Rights Advocate Yulahlia Hernandez and Associate Clients' Rights Advocate Annie Breuer standing behind a round table with a red tablecloth. OCRA brochures are displayed next to a colorful prize wheel.

OCRA Celebrates National Siblings Day by Hosting a Webinar About the Special Relationship Between Regional Center Clients and Their Brothers and Sisters.

To celebrate National Siblings Day, OCRA sponsored a statewide webinar about the special relationship between regional center clients and their non-disabled brothers and sisters. The presenters talked about how the sibling relationship is different from the relationship with a parent or caregiver. They also talked about how disability affected their lives.

The event was moderated by Miguel Lugo and Ibrahim “Bebo” Saab. Both moderators also have siblings and receive services from the regional center. Their lived experience helped to guide the discussion and create a safe space where the speakers and 64 attendees felt comfortable enough to share very personal stories about their own sibling relationship.

The siblings spoke about how they support each other in making difficult life decisions or when either sibling faces a challenging life event. The speakers also provided helpful tips on how to build and maintain a strong sibling relationship. The webinar ended with a funny quiz to see how well each sibling pair knew each other. This was a fun and relaxing way to wrap up a webinar about a serious topic.

OCRA Trains Parents and Caregivers at the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s Early Education Conference.

It was a buzzing 3-day conference at The Beehive in South Los Angeles where school administrators, parents, and educators came together for ECEvolution: Shaping the Future of Early Education Conference.

Around 700 participants per day attended this conference presented by the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s Head Start and Early Learning Division. Those who came enjoyed a lively day of activities including hearing from speakers and attending workshops designed to empower caregivers, educators, and families with the latest knowledge and resources to nurture young minds. There were also many wellness activities like massages, cooking demonstrations, and yoga.

OCRA was proud to participate in this conference. Representatives from several OCRA offices all chipped in to make sure those who attended learned about OCRA and its services. Assistant Clients’ Rights Advocates from the Westside Regional Center, Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center, and Harbor Regional Center offices met with participants directly at OCRA’s information table with lots of goodies and prizes to give away. Clients’ Rights Advocates Matt Alivio and Erica Clark gave a presentation on the basics of Special Education and the Individualized Education Program process as one of the many workshops on the Parents and Caregiver Day of the conference. Supervising Attorney for Outreach, Ibrahim “Bebo” Saab, also led a session about the regional center’s Early Start Program.

This conference was a great opportunity to be in person with the community to hear their stories, experiences, and needs. Many participants heard about OCRA and regional centers for the first time. OCRA looks forward to creating more meaningful connections like these to make sure those who need help have access to it as early as possible.

Regional Center Clients and Staff Learn about Coordinated Future Planning Goals.

In February 2024, the Alta California Regional Center hosted a coordinated future planning panel. The Coordinated Future Planning Team organized the panel to bring professionals, families, and self-advocates together to learn about support for regional center clients and to be fully included in the community and future goals. Kelsey Handcock, Clients' Rights Advocate, was pleased to present on alternatives to conservatorships. It was a packed conference room with close to 75 participants, who were eager to learn more about future planning goals for their clients and family members. The PowerPoint presentation included information on affordable housing services, financial planning, supported decision-making and advance care planning. The panel also included regional center clients who presented on helping other clients find permanent housing. For OCRA, it was a great opportunity to interact with regional center clients, staff, and service providers. Many followed up with OCRA to ask more about future planning goals for their clients. OCRA provided brochures and business cards to attendees.

OCRA Staff Celebrate the Superhero Work Done at OCRA.

Clients' Rights Advocate, Stephanie Krol Vieira, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, Maria Martinez, and Supervising Clients' Rights Advocate, Alejandro Gastelum participated in three superhero-themed summer festivals hosted by San Andreas Regional Center (SARC). At the festivals, OCRA introduced its services to clients throughout the counties in the SARC catchment area. Stephanie, Maria, and Alejandro put on their best superhero capes and met hundreds of SARC clients and their families. OCRA provided information about its services and an overview of how OCRA can help with legal issues common to regional center clients. After the festivals, OCRA received calls from several new clients and collaborated with other community-based organizations. These new connections help to improve the quality of OCRA's advocacy services to SARC clients.



Photo: Clients' Rights Advocate, Stephanie Krol Vieira, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, Maria Martinez standing and smiling in the shade showing off their teal blue capes with the DRC logo visible under a large dark blue star.

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. Here are two examples of OCRA's target outreach.

OCRA Connects with Families at the 9th Annual Tichenor Superheroes Carnival and Resource Fair.

In June 2024, OCRA participated in the 9th Annual Tichenor Superheroes Carnival and Resource Fair. This vibrant event brought together over 70 organizations, each sharing valuable resources and information. With about 434 attendees, the resource fair was a bustling hub of activity, showing the power of community collaboration. OCRA met with many families, including Latinx, Asian, and Black families, introducing them to OCRA's services and ways OCRA can help. The event provided a platform to engage directly with the community, offering critical information about regional center services, appeal rights, and advocacy support. Families were grateful for the chance to learn about OCRA's services and how OCRA can help them understand the complicated regional center system. OCRA also had the chance to collaborate with other community organizations, strengthening its network and improving its ability to effectively serve regional center consumers. OCRA remains dedicated to participating in events like these to ensure all families, regardless of their background, have access to the support and resources they need. The success of this event highlights the importance of OCRA's outreach efforts and the value of building strong community relationships.

Underserved Communities Learn How to Ask for Social Recreation, Camp, and Non-Medical Therapy Services from the Regional Center.

In June 2024, OCRA hosted a statewide webinar about the changes in the law that let regional center clients get funding for social recreational services through the Individual Program Plan process. Supervising Attorney Ibrahim "Bebo" Saab provided useful information on this important topic. The event was offered in Vietnamese and Japanese. OCRA held this webinar in response to feedback from earlier OCRA outreaches to these underserved communities.

The training provided useful tips on how to document the need for social recreational services and what to do if the regional center says no. Bebo also reviewed the new instructions from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) about how regional centers must review and approve these funding requests. He also provided a live demonstration on how to find useful resources on the Disability Rights California and DDS websites. The 47 attendees were given a chance to ask questions about their challenges getting the regional center to pay for these services. This webinar helped to

create trust between OCRA and these underserved communities, which are traditionally reluctant to ask for help with advocacy.

Conclusion

Outreach continues to be an important way for regional center clients to learn about how to access OCRA services. OCRA has taken steps over the last year to strengthen the relationships with the clients we serve by focusing our outreach efforts on self-advocacy trainings. We hope that this trend will continue as we celebrate OCRA's 25th anniversary. OCRA is looking to the future to develop new and creative ways to keep connected to regional center client