

OCRA Annual Outreach Report

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

This outreach report gives information on community engagement from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. During this period, OCRA conducted 458 outreach and training activities to 16,607 attendees. This is an 8.5% increase in outreach activities and a 7.4% increase in attendees from the previous annual reporting period. We have a high public demand for training and OCRA advocates are meeting this demand with enthusiasm and creativity.

Integrating outreach and community engagement into our work in new and more effective ways continues to be a priority for OCRA. During this review period, OCRA restructured outreach and community engagement in response to staff and community input. OCRA staff collaborate with other DRC programs and community advocacy organizations to plan statewide events and presentations the regional center community asks for. OCRA local offices have always, and will continue, to engage in local outreach and self-advocacy training consistent with the individual preferences and needs of their local communities.

Highlights

As we engage with the community, OCRA uses several tools to remain committed to our core principles. OCRA values being client-directed, promoting self-advocacy, having a local presence, and defending the rights of traditionally underserved communities.

OCRA Uses Creative Engagement and Training Strategies

OCRA's outreach and community engagement activities are based on the expressed needs of clients, their families, and their service providers. For OCRA, listening and responding to the regional center community means they decide what training topics are a priority for them and what learning method is best for them based on their individual needs. This past year, OCRA staff trained on a wide range of topics selected by community members and offered a variety of methods such as traditional lecture style training, listen and share panel presentations, interactive workshop style sessions, and one-to-one clinic consultations. Below are outreach articles describing examples of community engagement: playing games to learn

about rights and services; embedding self-advocacy trainings into community college curriculum; and a “Binder Series” of in-person workshops for families to learn how to organize their records and advocate for services using those valuable records.

OCRA Expands Self-Advocacy Training Options

With input from OCRA’s Peer Advocate and regional center focus groups, OCRA expanded the range of self-advocacy training modules to include two new topics relevant to current events and developments. This past year DDS launched a new IPP template that regional centers began using in January 2025. To prepare for their IPP meeting, OCRA now offers a “Planning My Own Meeting” self-advocacy training option.

Californians have experienced tremendous stress and trauma from natural disasters like fires and major floods. To address the topics of stress and trauma, OCRA added the “Stress and Relaxation” self-advocacy training option. These two new training modules use the “Think, Plan, Do” model promoted by self-advocates.

OCRA Supports Regional Center Clients from Underserved Communities

California’s regional center service delivery system faced intense questions as the State Master Plan for Developmental Services team, several statewide taskforces, and the public examined its effectiveness. Public testimony from regional center clients and families exposed long-standing Purchase of Service spending disparities based on race and ethnicity. Disparities will worsen as cuts to Medi-Cal threaten to again disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. OCRA remains steadfast in our commitment to develop language and culturally appropriate guidance and materials to inform the regional center community about changes in the laws that impact services and legal rights.

Self-Advocacy Trainings

Each OCRA local office conducts at least two self-advocacy trainings per contract year. Many offices provide more than two. All other staff including management, statewide, and administrative staff also present self-advocacy trainings. Topics include emergency preparedness, fair hearings, clients’ rights, money management, voting rights, community living options,

starting a microenterprise, being calm and relaxed, and leading your own team meeting.

Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, OCRA conducted 101 self-advocacy trainings, compared to 67 the previous year. This is a 50.7% increase from the previous annual reporting period. Of the 458 total outreaches activities, 101 (22%) were self-advocacy trainings.

OCRA Talks Clients' Rights with Hybrid Bingo!

January 2025 marked a first for OCRA staff serving Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center clients. Clients' Rights Advocate Alexander Scarlis and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Eduardo Sandoval presented a hybrid version of the Clients' Rights Bingo self-advocacy training for the first time. OCRA's Peer Advocate Scott Barron advised the team leading up to the training. He also assisted with virtual participants remotely while Alexander and Eduardo presented to people in person at the Consumer Advisory Committee meeting. Alexander began with an explanation of how to play hybrid Bingo for those online and for those in person. Virtual participants clicked on card images on a Bingo board created and monitored by OCRA.

Alexander discussed the clients' rights images on the card while Eduardo and Scott jumped in with more information. The team decided to play blackout Bingo, which allowed for an almost 1.5-hour game covering all 30 clients' rights cards! The rights touched on what choices we get to make in areas like healthcare, education, finances, relationships, communication, recreation, voting, and religion. Alexander also explained how some rights are restricted through conservatorship, Social Security representative payees, or a denial of rights for those in group homes or health facilities. There were Bingo winners and prizes, but most importantly, participants left with an understanding of their rights and to call OCRA if someone takes those rights away.

OCRA Teaches Group Home Residents Financial Abuse Prevention.

In March 2025, OCRA conducted an engaging and informative training session on preventing and reporting financial abuse to the residents of a Mars Group Home. The session educated residents on how to protect themselves from financial exploitation, including recognizing warning signs and knowing who to turn to for help. OCRA advised residents on the importance of being cautious about sharing personal financial information,

specifically warning against feeling forced to give money to salespeople over the telephone or to caregivers, friends, or relatives. Residents were also encouraged to be cautious about making personal loans.

Throughout the session, residents shared examples of people they trust for help, including home staff and family members. Residents also shared what they like to spend their money on, including saving their money. The session was a valuable learning experience and residents felt empowered to contact OCRA for help if needed. At the end of the training, OCRA gave participants brochures and pens with OCRA's contact information printed on them, so they could contact OCRA.

OCRA and Students Role Play Moving into the Community.

In April 2025, OCRA visited La Sierra High School to facilitate self-advocacy training for students getting ready to move into the community as adults. Peer Advocate Scott Barron and Intake Assistant Rachel Llanos met with 13 students in the school library. Scott and Rachel used role play to keep things fun and relatable. Rachel acted like a young adult and Scott played the advocate. Together they showed real life situations and asked questions about jobs, driving, money, and living on your own. The students got involved, asked questions, and shared their thoughts. Students then divided into 2 groups. One group played the advocate role and the other played people wanting to move out.

The group talked about important life topics, like budgeting, shopping for groceries, cleaning a home, and understanding different types of rental agreements. One student practiced how to tell his mom he wanted to move out and live independently. Rachel pretended to be his mom and helped him think through what he would need like a job, housing, and transportation. Rachel supported the client to talk through all the pros and cons of living independently.

A teacher talked about cultural expectations and how young adults with disabilities in some cultures are not encouraged to move out of their parental home. Rachel shared her own experience growing up in a strict environment. Rachel reminded participants that, while the support of loved ones is important, each person has the right to make their own decisions. After the presentation, the students proudly invited Scott and Rachel to their student-run café. They made coffee, explained the menu, and showed off their work skills.

Easter Seals Clients in Norwalk Learn to Feel Calm and Relaxed.

In June 2025, Peer Advocate Scott Barron and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Yesennia Sandoval visited clients of Easter Seals in Norwalk to talk about how to feel calm and relaxed. OCRA began by demonstrating a breathing exercise. This exercise is called the 4-7-8 method where the audience inhales for 4 seconds, holds their breath for 7 seconds, and exhales for 8 seconds. If comfortable, the audience close their eyes and repeat 3 times. This breathing exercise teaches a way to calm down by controlling breathing in stressful situations.

Next, Scott and Yesennia showed a worksheet on screen with examples of situations where they may feel stressed, and what they can do to cope. The worksheet was divided into three sections, "Think, Plan, Do." Volunteer participants shared things that made them feel stressed such as work, traffic, big crowds, and interacting with people they do not feel comfortable with. The group decided to plan a trip to the beach to reduce their stress. The group discussed needing transportation, money, and essentials. They shared how to follow through with the plan such as setting a date, writing it down on a calendar, and inviting others.

The presenters also showed a video of a woman with a developmental disability running an errand, everything she did to prepare for it, and how she avoided getting stressed. This video helped the participants better understand how to prepare for an outing without feeling stressed.

The last exercise was a self-soothing exercise where participants put their thumb between their fists and rested their hands on their legs while doing long inhales and exhales. The presenters gave stress balls to everyone at the end, and they enjoyed the gift.



Photo: Image of a bright yellow happy face stress ball.

1:1 Attention from OCRA Helps Client Prepare for Group Home Living.

After completing an intake with a client, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Bianca Rosales realized the client would benefit from an opportunity to learn about their rights in a 1:1 setting. Bianca and the client played a fun game of Clients' Rights Bingo to learn more about their rights and how they can make the system work for them. The client's support person shared they were concerned about the client's ability to live independently once the support person passes away. The client said they wanted this training to learn more about their rights and how to advocate for themselves in the future. The client wanted to be empowered with knowledge but also wanted to start learning in a 1:1 setting because they were not comfortable with change and with groups. This was ideal for the client who already loves playing Bingo. The client enjoyed taking part in the training and is interested in learning more about self-advocacy and decision-making in the future.

OCRA Teaches Clients' Rights with a Bingo Game.

Golden Gate Regional Center's Clients' Rights Advocate Kristin Zlogar and Lead Intake Assistant Gina Gheno led a fun and engaging hybrid Clients' Rights Bingo game during a monthly Community Council Meeting at the Pomeroy Recreation & Rehabilitation Center. Kristin presented in person, while Gina co-presented remotely. Peer Advocate Scott Barron also joined remotely to help with the training. About 30 participants attended in person, and one joined remotely.

Participants learned about OCRA's services before starting the Bingo game. They were excited to learn about their rights and enthusiastically shared real-life examples of what those rights meant to them. Gina and Scott took turns summarizing the audience's responses and added their own examples to ensure everyone understood what those rights meant.

After someone won the first round of Bingo by marking 5 squares in a row, the room clamored to play another round. The hour and a half training allowed Kristin enough time to cover the entire list of clients' rights. While no one wanted the game to end, the participants left the meeting feeling informed, empowered, and confident in asserting and exercising their rights every day.

Consumer Advisory Committee Members Learn How to Stay Safe in an Emergency.

OCRA and the Consumer Advisory Committee of Westside Regional Center met for several hours to talk about creative ways to prepare for an emergency. Committee members asked for this important training after the recent wildfires in the Los Angeles area and constant threat of natural disasters in California. They asked for the training to share their knowledge about emergency preparedness with other regional center clients. The training also covered other emergencies and how to make a plan if cell phones, the internet, or other electronic devices were not working. While the topic was serious, the group enjoyed an upbeat and robust conversation about the needs of people with disabilities in an emergency. Participants practiced ways to prepare and discussed what things should go in an emergency bag. The group also discussed developing a buddy system to make sure everyone has someone to check in with during emergencies.

Community Outreach and Events

OCRA Partners With California Tribal Families Coalition and the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria to Hold a Tribal Training.

In January 2025, Disability Rights California (DRC), including OCRA, partnered with California Tribal Families Coalition (CTFC) and the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria to provide a day-long training. The training was called, "Advocating for Native Families with Regional Centers and Schools."

OCRA's Senior Clients' Rights Advocate Yulahlia Hernandez and Clients' Rights Advocate Annie Breuer co-presented with DRC's Multicultural Affairs Advocate Jesse Lara, and CTFC Attorney and Equal Justice Works Fellow Bre Bollig. The presenters went into detail about accessing regional centers and special education services. Around 40 tribal social workers from the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program attended the training held in Sonoma County. Representatives from DRC, OCRA, and CTFC collaborated to create a presentation tailored to the needs of the local tribal community.

The training covered eligibility and pathway to services for tribal youth in both regional centers and school systems throughout California. There was a specific focus on how tribal advocates can increase tribal involvement and best advocate for tribal youth in special education and regional center matters. The training was interactive, and attendees asked questions and provided feedback about accessing regional centers and special education services throughout the day.

DRC and OCRA were honored to have taken part in this important day with CTFC and the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria. The presenters look forward to continued partnerships with the tribal community to strengthen access to regional centers and special education services for tribal youth.

OCRA Celebrates the Superhero Work Done by Regional Center Clients and Service Providers.

Clients' Rights Advocate Stephanie Krol Vieira and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Maria Martinez happily took part in three superhero-themed summer festivals to educate regional center clients about OCRA's services. These Superhero events took place in the San Andreas Regional Center catchment areas of Santa Cruz, San Jose and Salinas counties. Stephanie and Maria put on their best superhero capes and met hundreds of San Andreas Regional Center clients and their families during these events. The attendees enjoyed learning more about how OCRA can help them with a variety of legal issues. Several new clients contacted OCRA for help after the festivals. Stephanie and Maria also connected with regional center vendors and explained the advocacy help OCRA can provide their clients.

OCRA Attends Town Hall Alongside Regional Center, DDS, and Group Home Staff.

OCRA joined representatives from the Department of Developmental Services and staff of a recently opened group home in a town hall meeting in San Andreas Regional Center's Watsonville satellite office to address the concerns of the neighborhood where the group home is located. Tensions were high as community members felt their concerns had been ignored by the regional center. The regional center invited Clients' Rights Advocate Natima Neily to explain the legal rights of people with developmental disabilities, including their right to live in their community in the least restrictive environment. Originally scheduled for an hour, the discussion lasted closer to three hours as everyone committed to recognizing community concerns while working collaboratively to identify solutions to help people with developmental disabilities feel welcomed and a part of their community.

OCRA's Binder Series Helps Families Organize, Empower, and Advocate.

OCRA recently completed the first of 3 sessions of an in-person "Organize, Empower, Advocate" Binder Series at the office for Harbor Regional Center clients. This series was designed to support families, providing practical tools to help families take control of service systems through hands-on organizing, personalized guidance, and increasing their advocacy skills. Each session focuses on a key topic. The first introduced basic organizing strategies and taught participants how to sort and maintain records for special education, regional center, Medi-Cal, and other services. The second is on In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), including protective supervision, self-assessments, and hazard logs.

By creating a consistent and welcoming in-person space, OCRA gave one-on-one support tailored to each family's situation. People brought in their actual paperwork and got help organizing their binders and understanding how to use the materials in real-life advocacy efforts. OCRA staff also went over self-assessments for IHSS and protective supervision, giving families the chance to ask questions and build confidence in using these tools. Families left each session not only with an organized binder, but with a stronger sense of clarity and empowerment. One participant shared, "It was really helpful to have someone help me organize my records because I had really struggled to do it on my own...I just recently found out about your

office, and it was good to know where I could find your publications, they look really helpful.” The Binder Series has proven to be a powerful model for meaningful engagement. OCRA looks forward to expanding the series with new topics, including special education and regional center advocacy, all with the same goal to help families organize, empower, and advocate.

OCRA Participates in the 5th Annual Powwow at Santa Clara University.

In May 2025, Santa Clara University and the Native American Coalition for Change hosted their 5th Annual Powwow. The event took place at the St. Ignatius Gardens on the campus of Santa Clara University. The Muwekma Ohlone tribe originally lived on what is now the campus. This event gives Native American tribes an opportunity to socialize and celebrate cultural traditions. Dancers of all ages in colorful outfits competed for prizes throughout the day. Vendors sold a variety of handmade items including jewelry and clothing. OCRA staffed an information booth with brochures highlighting OCRA's services and other programs within Disability Rights California where visitors could spin a colorful wheel and win a bag full of goodies and learn about OCRA services.



Photo: Clients' Rights Advocate Sylvia Kennedy standing next to a colorful prize wheel behind a table with a red tablecloth at the 5th Annual PowWow.

While the event was not disability-focused, OCRA recognizes the Native American community is underserved and hopes to make connections.



Photo: A person dancing with a colorful shawl at the 5th Annual PowWow.

OCRA Encourages the Community to Attend SCLARC's Purchase of Service Public Stakeholder Meeting.

In March 2025, OCRA gave an "Equity in Regional Center Purchase of Services" presentation to the Spanish-speaking parent support group, Grupo de Apoyo Ángeles sin Límites. This group meets each month and regularly invites speakers to share information on disability-related topics. The group creates a supportive environment where people openly share personal experiences. Participants referred to each other as "Compañera" or "Compañero," reflecting camaraderie and mutual trust. Their bond went beyond conversations about their children, taking on a familial quality that revealed genuine concern for one another's lives.

Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Henry Melendez conducted the training in Spanish. He reviewed the Purchase of Service data from the South Central Los Angeles Regional Center, highlighting significant disparities in the allocation of services among clients, drawing attention to how services are allocated based on race, ethnicity, language, and other factors. By breaking down the data in a clear and relatable way, Henry helped parents recognize how these systemic inequities could affect children and families. Many asked thoughtful questions and offered personal stories that showed the disparities highlighted in the data. They shared firsthand experiences of unmet needs and barriers in accessing services for their children.

Henry explained that the upcoming stakeholder meeting is a place to voice those concerns and proposals directly to regional center representatives. He encouraged parents to attend, highlighting that this forum is specifically designed for people to share perspectives, advocate for change, and hold the system accountable. OCRA offered practical tips on how to effectively voice concerns during the public meeting, encouraging them to speak with confidence and clarity. OCRA also emphasized the importance of having a support system and explained they are not alone in their advocacy efforts.

The Health Care Community Learns About OCRA.

In June 2025, OCRA's Associate Director Kendra Wagner and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Frankie Delgado offered a virtual training to the staff of Gold Coast Health Plan about how OCRA can help people interested in qualifying for regional center services. The audience included staff from the health plan's management teams, Health Education Program, Utilization Management Program, behavioral health, and pharmacy

departments. All the attendees work with clients in the Tri-Counties Regional Center catchment area. The presentation was a success and OCRA was invited to return for other substantive trainings in the future.

Futures Explored Staff Learn about the Rights of Conservatees.

Futures Explored invited Clients' Rights Advocate Kelsey Handcock to present a substantive training on the rights of conservatees. Kelsey's office serves clients of Alta California Regional Center. Futures Explored gives its members social, recreational and volunteer activities to help build life skills and participate in their local communities. Kelsey presented information on the different types of conservatorships, the rights of conservatees, and how staff can help people in their program protect their rights and live their most independent lives possible. OCRA held this lively discussion with 70 participants who learned how to challenge a conservatorship and how to protect a conservatee's choices. OCRA provided brochures and resources for staff to distribute to members in their programs. Surveys from the training showed participants all learned something new and described the training as excellent and useful. One participant said they appreciated that Kelsey used some of her real-life experience which made her "relatable," instead of just being "professional."

OCRA Gives CalABLE Training at Spanish-Speaking Parent Support Group in Napa.

In May 2025, OCRA provided a substantive training about CalABLE accounts to Spanish-speaking families in Napa. Yulahlia Hernandez, Senior Clients' Rights Advocate, and Annie Breuer, Clients' Rights Advocate, gave the training at ParentsCAN in Napa. ParentsCAN is an established family resource center in Napa that coordinates many parent support groups for families that have children with disabilities. OCRA collaborated with ParentsCAN to give this CalABLE training during one of their support groups for Spanish-speaking parents who have children with autism. OCRA traveled to their new office in Napa. Their office is always bustling with parent advocates, families, self-advocates, and children. In the main lobby, there is a large children's play area filled with books, toys, and climbing equipment. They often have childcare for families when they hold parent support group meetings. During the training, OCRA provided information in Spanish about what CalABLE accounts are, how you can maintain SSI benefits while saving money, how to open an account, and what expenses you can pay from it. Families had questions and there was

active discussion throughout the training. OCRA is grateful for the opportunity to provide information about CalABLE accounts to Spanish-speaking families in Napa. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with ParentsCAN to help families in Napa.



Photo: Senior Clients' Rights Advocate Yuhlahlia Hernandez and Clients' Rights Advocate Annie Breuer standing with attendees at CalAble training.

Conclusion

During this review period, the federal and state governments forecasted dramatic health care and public benefits reductions. Increased community engagement is necessary to grow California's disability movement to protect the legal and service rights of regional center clients, especially low-income and immigrant communities of color. OCRA stands ready to meet the challenges ahead by uniting with regional center clients, family members, and service providers for the common goal of preserving precious services and basic human rights.