

OCRA Semi-Annual Outreach Report

July 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021

The past six months have continued to be challenging for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and for OCRA. Despite these challenges, OCRA remains committed to providing quality services tailored to the unique needs of our clients. This semi-annual report provides information on the outreach trainings and presentations completed during a six-month period between July 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021. During this period, OCRA conducted 144 outreach activities and trainings to 4,355 attendees. This represents a decrease in attendees and outreaches from the same reporting period between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. OCRA suspects the decrease is largely a result of the illness and burnout many are experiencing because of the pandemic. Of the 144 activities and trainings completed during this reporting period, 27.08% were directed to multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities.

The data reflects a continued commitment to provide significant support to traditionally underserved groups, especially during this two-year pandemic period. Between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021, OCRA trained 26 of the 53 organizations that received grants from DDS to address disparities in the regional center system. OCRA responded to the specific requests of these organizations by crafting interactive presentations on topics relevant to the changing conditions brought on by the pandemic. OCRA hopes to keep these collaborative relationships and cultivate new callers to our offices.

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, OCRA works hard to identify creative ways to remain connected and responsive to our clients. For example, OCRA continued to host public forums with members from the Latinx and African-American communities to gain a better understanding of their top priorities during these difficult times. Based on their feedback, OCRA is planning a conference targeting the Black community later this year and will address the topics the community requested. The Latinx community asked for interactive trainings in a “learn-by-doing model,” which our staff provided. During a recent training to a Spanish-speaking group, the presenters used a hypothetical scenario and a real goal from an Individualized Education Program to guide the training. The lively discussion allowed the participants to learn from each other as their advocacy skills improved.

The pivot to virtual outreach helped clients across California participate in OCRA's recent self-advocacy conference. OCRA planned the self-advocacy conference to be an in-person event on one day for up to 150 consumers in southern California. Instead, 365 consumers from across the state participated in a 5-day virtual conference. The use of polls and breakout rooms stimulated participant interaction. More details about that conference are below.

During this review period, OCRA hired Elizabeth Campos as Northern California Outreach Coordinator. Her strong ties to the disability community will be a great asset to OCRA's outreach efforts moving forward. Elizabeth worked for the Society for the Blind in Sacramento as their Orientation and Mobility instructor. Her unique perspective on how to connect with regional center clients who have visual impairments will help OCRA staff throughout the state as they embark on their new two-year outreach plans. Below are examples of the different outreach activities offices provided including self-advocacy, target, and general presentations and trainings.

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.

OCRA Hosts Self-Advocacy Conference.

OCRA presented the "Your Voice Your Choice: Advocacy Starts with You" virtual conference for clients and their circle of support when the in-person event was cancelled due to COVID-19. The five-day series of trainings took place during the week of July 26, 2021 to coincide with the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. 365 participants joined over 5 days. The substantive trainings covered a variety of subjects including the history of the disability rights movement, emergency preparedness, services from the Department of Rehabilitation, and how to relax in stressful situations. Each webinar featured a self-advocate who shared their personal experiences with the session topic. For example, comedian and self-advocate Miguel Lugo presented during the webinar on community living options. He talked about the challenges he faced when he decided to move from his family's home to his own apartment. Many in the audience had questions for Miguel. The attendees appreciated his self-

deprecating humor as he shared his experience on this important topic. The week ended with a resource fair. The fair focused on vendors that offer recreational activities for clients across the state.

General Outreach

OCRA Partners with State Council on Developmental Disabilities for Special Education Training Series.

Clifford Black, Clients' Rights Advocate for Redwood Coast Regional Center clients, collaborated with Julie Eby-McKenzie from the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, to host a three-part special education advocacy series. The series included practical strategies on how to use the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to secure services for special education students. A Special Education Director from a local school district presented on the use of assessments in the IEP process. The series ended with a session on state compliance complaints and due process hearings. The audience enjoyed hearing the different perspectives of each presenter. A representative from a local Family Resource Planning Center joked, "So parents should call OCRA when they want to pull out the big guns?" Given the success of the series, OCRA will host a similar series in Spanish.

Residential Service Providers Learn about Clients' Rights.

The Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center (ELARC) invited Clients' Rights Advocate Alexander Scarlis to present a clients' rights training to residential service providers. Attendees participated in a lively discussion on when a resident's personal rights, including access to their personal possessions, use of the telephone, and the right to have visitors, can be denied for good cause. The participants learned of OCRA's role in determining if good cause exists to deny a client's rights. The audience applied what they learned to complex hypothetical scenarios. They gained a deeper understanding of how to complete the good cause and least restrictive analysis needed to justify a denial of clients' personal rights. This interactive training capped off a positive and productive collaboration with ELARC to honor the rights of our shared clients.

OCRA Hosts Interactive Webinar on Public Benefits and Transition to Adulthood.

Benefits planning during transition to adulthood can be bumpy without sufficient planning. Many young adults rely on public benefits as their sole source of income and for healthcare. OCRA's recent public benefits webinar provided practical tips for young adults to keep and maximize Social Security and Medi-Cal benefits as they transition to adulthood. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Maria Rojas presented on the eligibility criteria for Medi-Cal and Social Security benefits and how turning age 18 impacts these benefits. The attendees learned what evidence is needed for continuing eligibility at age 18 and for any future redeterminations. Participants also learned useful techniques to securely share records with Social Security to help avoid identity theft. The training stressed the importance of keeping copies of records submitted to Social Security and a log of all communications with Social Security staff. The engaged audience was also excited to learn how a CalABLE account could increase the monthly benefit amount. The feedback was positive and OCRA connected with many participants after the event.

OCRA Presents Clients' Rights Training to Behavior Services Agency.

Ten behavior service providers eagerly joined OCRA's interactive webinar to learn about their clients' individual rights and their agencies' legal responsibility to protect those rights. Clients' Rights Advocates Rachel Leach and Aimee Delgado enjoyed answering the service providers' hard-hitting and thought-provoking questions. One participant asked if a group home provider can disconnect the Internet if a resident has inappropriate behaviors. Another attendee wondered when and if a residential care provider can take away a resident's personal belongings. Participants discussed possible solutions to complex real-life scenarios. They learned strategies to support clients using least restrictive interventions and how to better educate their clients on their rights.

Target Outreach

OCRA's target communities throughout the state are the African-American community, the Latinx community, the Native American community, and the Asian community, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino, and Polynesian. Of the 144 activities and trainings completed during this reporting period, 27.08% were directed to the multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse communities targeted.

OCRA Helps the Latinx Community Get Vaccine Information.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, OCRA partnered with community-based organizations to educate underserved communities about the benefits of vaccination. Frankie Delgado, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Far Northern Regional Center clients, worked with the Hispanic Resource Council of Northern California (HRCNC) and other grassroots organizations to promote several vaccine clinics for the Latinx community. Many in this underserved population received misinformation about the risks and benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine. With a \$5000 grant from Anthem Blue Cross, HRCNC distributed grocery gift cards to those who chose to be vaccinated. The first two clinics were held in Catholic churches in Chico after the Spanish Mass to more effectively connect with the target population. 71 people were vaccinated at both events. The vaccine participants also received OCRA brochures in English and Spanish. OCRA continues to work with the collaborators to promote additional clinics.

Special Education Summit Teaches the Latinx Community Important Advocacy Skills.

Statewide Associate Clients' Rights Advocate Beatriz Reyes and Managing Attorney Nancy McGee presented a training on how to resolve disputes with the school district for the Latinx community across California. This session concluded a virtual special education summit sponsored by Disability Rights California. The webinar covered techniques to challenge a school district's decision, including informal dispute resolution, mediation, due process, and compliance complaints. With this information, attendees felt empowered to advocate for their children's educational needs. Other sessions focused on early intervention services, special education basics, what a parent can do if behavior or bullying interferes with education, and how to prepare for life after high school. Knowledge is Power!

OCRA Joins Podcast to Connect with Latinx Community.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic suspended in-person trainings, OCRA has worked hard to identify creative ways to stay connected with their clients. Many regional center clients and their families use social media platforms to get information and learn about their rights. Mario Espinoza, Clients' Rights Advocate for Kern Regional Center clients, joined the Mariposa Podcast and Facebook Live Group to discuss how OCRA could help regional center clients. The predominately Spanish-speaking audience

learned about regional center eligibility and services, special education, Medi-Cal, and IHSS. The broadcast was viewed over 200 times!

Underserved Residents of Blythe, California Get Access to Vaccines.

Disability Rights California (DRC) recently received a grant to increase the disability community's access to the COVID-19 vaccines. Bianca Rosales, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Inland Regional Center clients, staffed an information table at the vaccination clinic in Blythe, California. The predominately Spanish-speaking clinic participants could select either the Pfizer or Johnson & Johnson vaccine. DRC worked closely with the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Curative Clinics, and Escuela de la Raza to create a fun and stress-free environment to receive their shots. The two-day event included a taco truck and music from a live D.J. No registration was required. Curative Clinics provided experienced staff familiar with administering shots to people with different disabilities. After their vaccination, attendees visited a resource room to pick up free emergency preparedness backpacks, hand sanitizer, children's books, and packaged food. They also got brochures about additional community programs and services. During the resource fair, OCRA distributed reusable water bottles and brochures about OCRA and regional center services. OCRA answered questions from two workers at the event about their reluctance to get vaccinated. After discussing their options, each changed their mind and got vaccinated.

Latinx Families Eagerly Join Webinar on IHSS Appeals.

As the sun set on another busy day of work and school, Latinx families postponed dinner to join an interactive webinar about IHSS appeals. The Family Focus Resource Center serving North Los Angeles County Regional Center (NLACRC) families invited Clients' Rights Advocate Rachel Leach to present on this important topic. Fatima Perez, NLACRC's Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, helped Rachel with interpretation for the Spanish-speaking audience. The presenters discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the IHSS appeal process. The 30 participants also learned step-by-step instructions on how to complete and submit a fair hearing request form to appeal a county's decision. This visual demonstration helped to reduce the confusion about different sections of the appeal form. Participants learned practical tips on how to document the need for protective supervision services. Many attendees felt more empowered to advocate for their loved ones after the training.

OCRA Hosts the Asian Community to Learn About Self-Determination.

The waiting room filled up quickly with families interested in learning more about the Self-Determination Program. Helping Hands East Bay invited Clients' Rights Advocate Attorney Arthur Lipscomb to join their Chinese and Vietnamese support groups to explain how the new program differs from the traditional regional center service delivery model. Attendees discussed the benefits and drawbacks of joining the self-determination program. Each training included time for questions. OCRA has already scheduled additional trainings with the groups.

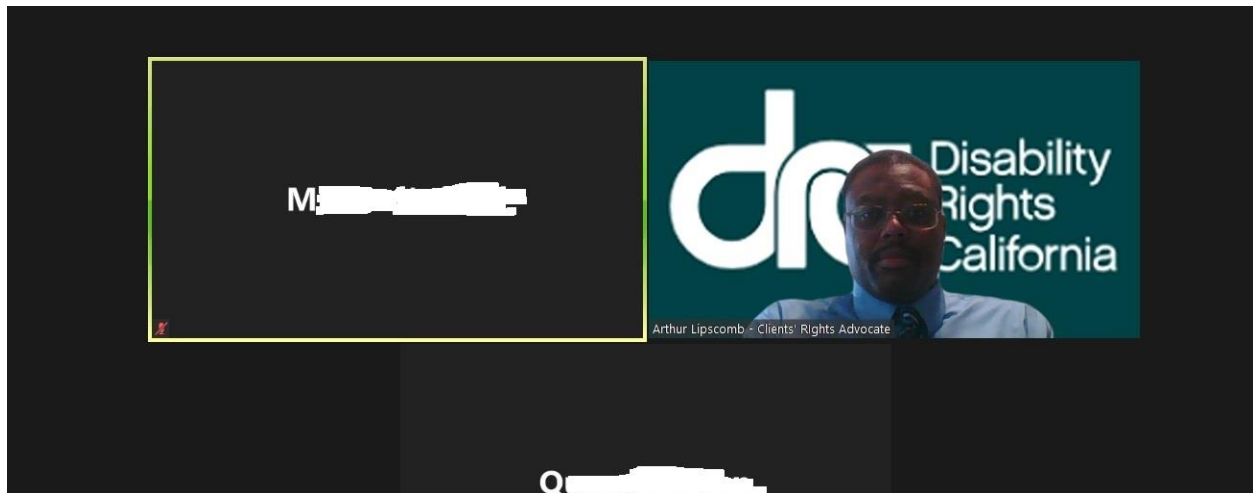


Photo: Image of Clients' Rights Advocate Attorney Arthur Lipscomb presenting via Zoom.

Latinx Families Learn about the Restoration of Funding for Camping and Social Recreation Services.

In late December 2021, OCRA delivered a much-awaited presentation to 118 Spanish-speaking participants from the Latinx community. The webinar explained an important change in the law that can help reduce regional center spending disparities for low-income people of color. Eva Casas-Sarmiento, Managing Attorney, shared that effective July 1, 2021, regional centers can resume paying for camping, educational expenses for children ages 3-17, and non-medical therapies like art, music, dance, and other recreational activities. Participants learned practical tips on how to request these new services and what to do if denied. Service providers from across the state also joined the interactive training. They were interested to learn how to become a vendor under the updated service code. Because of its success, OCRA will offer the same training in other languages.

Conclusion

As the pandemic continues to affect children, adults, families, and staff of the developmental disabilities service system, OCRA will continue to identify creative strategies to connect with the clients and families we serve. OCRA will continue to seek feedback from community stakeholders and groups to ensure that our efforts meet the needs of underserved communities and help bridge the disparity gap. OCRA's Outreach Unit appreciates the opportunity to coordinate virtual outreach presentations and trainings statewide during this public health crisis.