

## **OCRA Semi-Annual Outreach Report July 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023**

OCRA recognizes that clients are the foundation of our work. OCRA also recognizes that language access is one part of reducing disparities in services based on race and ethnicity. During this review period, OCRA continued efforts to empower ethnic and language diverse communities by providing information about their legal and service rights in their preferred language. OCRA also focused on increased outreach targeting self-advocacy skills.

OCRA's outreach efforts included open houses, community resource fairs, self-advocacy trainings, and trainings on legal topics, all in different languages. OCRA's statewide outreach team planned and held two major conferences during this reporting period, both in-person and virtual. The in-person conference took place in the central valley and provided Spanish language interpreters. The virtual conference had interpreters in Vietnamese and Japanese. Regional center clients and community leaders helped plan these events and shared self-advocacy stories. Read more about both conferences below.

This semi-annual report gives information on trainings and presentations completed from July 1, 2023, and December 31, 2023. During this period, OCRA conducted 188 outreach and training activities to 7,227 attendees. This is a 24.5% increase in the number of outreaches and 1,059 more attendees compared to the same period in 2022.

In the past 6 months, OCRA spotlighted direct client engagement using DDS-approved self-advocacy training materials. OCRA revamped its outreach structure to further highlight its philosophy that our work must be client-focused. All OCRA staff will now provide 2 self-advocacy trainings per fiscal year, which is twice what OCRA required in past years.

During this reporting period, OCRA conducted 20 self-advocacy trainings. This is a 66.6% increase over the same period in 2022. OCRA is hopeful this positive trend will continue during the next reporting period and beyond.

## Self-Advocacy Trainings

Each OCRA office conducts at least two self-advocacy trainings 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 Engages Inyo and Eastern Kern County Clients in Self-Advocacy Trainings in Their Communities.**

OCRA has been focusing outreach efforts in Eastern Kern County to engage the community and share information about clients' rights. OCRA gave a "Hands Off My Money" presentation to day program participants in the town of Bishop. The next day, OCRA played robust rounds of Clients' Rights Bingo with day program attendees in Ridgecrest. Attendees at both events actively participated to gain skills on how to assert their rights. OCRA conducted both events in English and Spanish to 38 people.



Photo: Picture of Kern Regional Center Clients' Rights Advocate Adeyinka Glover and Peer Advocate Scott Barron.

## General Outreach

### **Valley Mountain Regional Center Clients and Families Learn About Community Resources.**

It was a bright, sunny day for the Valley Mountain Regional Center (VMRC) Disability Resource Fair in October 2023. Clients and their family members came to Modesto to enjoy a fun-filled day with free carnival games and food. Everyone who attended got a free ticket for a meal from one of the food trucks at the event. Cotton candy and popcorn were offered to munch on while playing carnival games or talking with community resources like OCRA.

Clients' Rights Advocate Colleen Yoder and Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Idalia Arroyo talked with 200 clients and family members about the free services OCRA offers. OCRA's prize wheel stayed busy all day as people turned the wheel for OCRA swag. Everyone loved the prize wheel, which encouraged more people to stop by the OCRA resource table. It was a fantastic opportunity to interact with people in a fun environment. Many people also took OCRA brochures for themselves and even other regional center clients.

In addition to OCRA, other vendors were the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Family Resource Network, and Self Advocacy Council 6, among others. Clients and their families met providers and learned about an array of services offered through the regional center. There were also free dental cleanings available to children, a vaccination clinic, and an informational session on working while receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits. Chuck E. Cheese even made an appearance and posed for photos! VMRC's Disability Resource Fair truly had something for everyone and was a wonderful way to bring together the community to learn and play.

### **OCRA Connects with the Inland Empire Down Syndrome Community During a Fun Walk in the Park.**

Excitement was building at Central Park in Rancho Cucamonga in October 2023. People were eager for the start of the annual "Walk in the Park" fundraiser to support the Down Syndrome Family Resource Center (Center). The Center helps to improve the lives of people with Down syndrome and their families through support, education, and advocacy.

The participants enjoyed music, games, food, and arts and crafts. Bianca Rosales, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Inland Regional Center clients, staffed a table promoting OCRA during the resource fair. She also answered questions and scheduled follow-up calls to complete more in-depth intakes to address each person's specific concerns.

Bianca also distributed publications about public benefits, special education, In-Home Supportive Services, and regional center services. Each person received OCRA-branded goodies with OCRA's contact information including cups, pens, and playing cards. After the event, community leaders contacted Bianca to schedule future trainings and to learn more about OCRA's services.



Photo: Bianca Rosales standing next to Barbara Henry and her son David Williams in front of OCRA's resource table in the park.

### **OCRA Attends Inaugural Mental Health Resource Fair at Occidental College on World Mental Health Day.**

In October 2023, Clients' Rights Advocate Boanerges Rodriguez Orellana and Associate Clients' Rights Advocate Ada Hamer attended the Mental Health Resource Fair at Occidental College in Northeast Los Angeles. Boanerges and Ada serve clients of Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center. Assemblywoman Wendy Carrillo sponsored the event to raise awareness about mental health issues.

The resource fair included vendors that offered on-site therapy sessions, local community support and advocacy groups, trauma-informed care for domestic violence survivors, and information about substance abuse and prevention. The attendees also learned about burnout and participated in meditation sessions and breathing exercises to address stress and anxiety.

The organizers hoped that the resource fair would reduce the stigma of mental illness and increase access to mental health services for underserved communities. Boanerges and Ada shared information about OCRA's services. They were excited to connect with the Assemblywoman's office for the first time for this important event. Many attendees contacted OCRA after the event with questions about available services for their loved ones.

### **San Diego OCRA Connects with First Responders.**

OCRA recently connected with First Responders who make up the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) team in San Diego. First responders work with frequent users of emergency systems. Many are regional center clients with dual diagnoses – mental health and developmental disabilities. They looked to OCRA for resources for the people who frequently use their services. Maria Salas, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate, jumped on the opportunity to present "What is OCRA?" to the group. The small group asked great questions and brought up unique situations their clients find themselves in. The group was eager to refer people for advocacy. OCRA received new intakes because of this training and the First Responders showed interest in future collaborations with OCRA.

### **Medi-Cal Providers Learn About Less Restrictive Alternatives to Conservatorship.**

Gold Coast Health Plan (GCHP) invited OCRA to host a training on alternatives to conservatorship for their employees. GHCP operates Ventura County's Medi-Cal managed care system. The audience included 30 staff who work mostly with young adults aged 18-21 with disabilities. The attendees reported they often get questions from patients and their families about how a conservatorship works and whether it is appropriate for their loved one. Many of these patients are also monolingual Spanish- and/or Mixteco-speaking and struggle to find information and resources that are linguistically and culturally accessible.

Clients' Rights Advocate Melissa Maher and Supervising Clients' Rights Advocate Kendra Wagner introduced GCHP staff to OCRA and its role in advocating for people with developmental disabilities. They also summarized how a conservatorship works, including new laws passed to improve the conservatorship system and promote more effective and less

restrictive alternatives to conservatorship. The alternatives included supported decision-making and powers of attorney.

Since the participants worked primarily in the medical field, Melissa and Kendra focused the discussion on advance healthcare directives. They also encouraged the audience to visit Disability Rights California's website to review its publication on alternatives to conservatorship. They asked participants to share OCRA's contact information with any families interested in learning more about alternatives to conservatorship.

### **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 just a few examples of OCRA's target outreach.

#### **OCRA Educates Spanish-Speaking Families About Clients' Rights.**

In August 2023, Clients' Rights Advocate Wilmary Torres, who serves North Los Angeles County Regional Center clients, participated in the regional center's annual cultural education festival for monolingual Spanish-speaking clients and their families. The presentation focused on how to increase cultural awareness and still have access to fully integrated services and support in their local community. Wilmary discussed how to request services through the Individual Program Plan and how to appeal when regional centers deny funding for services.

The presentation included an overview of the recent changes to the regional center fair hearing process. Wilmary also provided information about alternatives conservatorship, including supported decision-making. Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate Fatima Perez joined Wilmary during the resource fair to answer questions about the presentation and hand out Disability Rights California's special education publications and other resources. The attendees appreciated the chance to speak directly with Wilmary and Fatima about their specific situation.

## **Spanish-Speaking Families Learn About Benefits of CalABLE Accounts.**

In September 2023, 58 people joined a Zoom meeting to learn about the benefits of opening an account to Achieve a Better Life Experience (ABLE). Maria Rojas, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Regional Center of Orange County clients, provided the training in Spanish. She explained how ABLE accounts allow people with disabilities to save money without losing eligibility for Medi-Cal or Social Security benefits. Maria also clarified that the IRS does not tax money in an ABLE account if the account holder uses the money for qualified disability expenses. Acceptable disability-related expenses may include rent or mortgage and any related home expenses, personal transportation, and purchases related to their education, health, or employment.

Maria helped the audience visit CalABLE's website for a broader list of approved expenses. She also recommended that the attendees speak to a CalABLE agent if they are not sure whether a withdrawal or purchase is a qualified disability expense to avoid penalties. Participants also learned about the yearly and lifetime deposit maximum for 2023. Maria emphasized that the contribution limit may change each year.

At the end of the training, Maria linked to CalABLE's website so attendees could review the Frequently Asked Questions to learn more about these helpful accounts. Many in the audience were happy to learn about how this saving option can improve the quality of their loved one's life.

## **Dia Del Campesino in Northern California.**

The Hispanic Resource Council of Northern California celebrated the 31st Dia Del Campesino on October 1, 2023. Over 50 agencies came together at Hamilton City Park in Chico to provide free resources and services to the whole community, not just Latinx families. It was an empowering event where people could connect with resources they need. They even offered free health screenings, checkups, and flu vaccines.

All the agencies were set up with colorful decorations. People of all backgrounds and ages attended. Frankie Delgado, Assistant Clients' Rights Advocate for Far Northern Regional Center clients, was happy to be part of the event again. Organizations shared information about what they do, small businesses sold a variety of goods, and food vendors sold

delicious meals and drinks. They also gave out raffle prizes like bikes, car seats, and grocery store gift cards. There was live music and amazing Folklorico and Aztec dancers. Even though the event does not solely target people with disabilities, the attendees were interested to learn more about what OCRA does. A Far Northern Regional Center service coordinator runs the council and OCRA attends the virtual monthly meetings to stay connected with other agencies in Northern California.

### **OCRA Hosts Virtual Conference for Japanese and Vietnamese Clients.**

On September 29, 2023, OCRA hosted lively panel discussions about how to reduce the challenges Japanese and Vietnamese clients face to get regional center services and supports. OCRA worked closely with community-based organizations for recommendations on the conference theme, training topics, and how to publicize the event. A focus group also emphasized the importance of using culturally competent interpreters during the event. The statewide webinar, “Growing Stronger Together: Supporting Japanese & Vietnamese Regional Center Clients” included two sessions.

The first session focused on highlighting the types of services available from the regional center. The audience also learned how to ask for these services at Individual Program Plan meetings and what to do when the regional center says no. Participants had a chance to meet San Bernardino Mayor Helen Tran. Mayor Tran is the first Asian American elected official in San Bernardino’s history, and the first Vietnamese mayor in the United States. She spoke about her passion for the rights of children with disabilities and how having a nephew with autism has affected her public and private life.

During the second session, independent facilitator Reiko Umeda shared her experience working with Japanese regional center clients interested or enrolled in the self-determination program. She also explained the differences between the traditional regional center system and the self-determination program. Evan Young and his mother Yuki shared how the self-determination program has improved the quality of Evan’s life by giving him flexibility to find services to safely access the community and build lasting relationships with his peers. The audience also asked the independent facilitator questions and learned from one another.



The 142 attendees appreciated having skilled interpreters and conference materials in their preferred language. OCRA is working with people from these communities to schedule additional training events.



Photo: Evan Young and his mother Yuki sharing their experiences with self-determination on Zoom.



Photo: Picture of San Bernardino Mayor Helen Tran sitting next to an American flag.



## **OCRA Hosts In-Person Conference in the Central Valley.**

Known as the “Gateway to the Sequoias,” the city of Tulare graciously welcomed OCRA for its in-person conference. OCRA hosted “Cultivating Power, Strength, and Energy with Regional Center Clients with Developmental Disabilities in the Central Valley,” at the International Agri-Center® on November 15, 2023. Everyone received an OCRA-branded tote bag, notepad, and pen at registration. Spanish interpretation was available.

OCRA worked with community-based organizations and regional centers to encourage Kern and Central Valley Regional Center clients and their circle of support to register for the event. Elizabeth Campos, OCRA’s Northern California outreach coordinator, served as the Mistress of Ceremonies for the day.

All attendees joined the kickoff session about Changing a Culture of “No” to “Yes We Can!” In this session, a panel of disability community leaders, including local regional center clients and family members, spoke about disparities in regional center spending based on race and ethnicity. They also suggested how to navigate challenging systems like regional centers, school districts, the In-Home Supportive Services program, and other public benefit programs.

Each participant chose a morning and afternoon session from a list of 8 topics. The sessions included how to request services from the regional center through the Individual Program Plan process, services for transition-aged youth, and preparing for an Individualized Education Plan meeting. Yolanda Cruz from the State Council on Developmental Disabilities offered an interactive training about public safety for regional center clients in the community and with police interactions.

The Department of Developmental Services’ previous Chief Equity Officer Leinani Walters partnered with Community Program Specialist Sandra Coss to share DDS’ efforts to advance service access and equity for diverse communities. OCRA also offered two self-advocacy sessions for clients. One focused on preparing for an emergency. The participants learned how to put together an emergency kit and create an appropriate evacuation plan. The other was a clients’ rights bingo. The audience learned about their individual rights while having fun. Participants networked with local vendors. They learned about the services and

supports available in their local community. Attendees could also schedule a one-to-one appointment with an attorney or advocate to discuss their specific legal issue. The jam-packed day ended with a raffle and a discussion about what people learned.



Photo: Picture of raffle winner standing next to OCRA Director Shannon Cogan holding his prize.



Photo: Group picture of Disability Rights California staff who helped during the conference.



Photo: Northern California Outreach Coordinator Elizabeth Campos standing behind a lectern on a stage serving as the Mistress of Ceremonies.

## Conclusion

Outreach plays a significant role in OCRA's daily work. Over the next 6 months, OCRA will be involved with the annual regional center purchase of service disparity meetings. This complements our ongoing work toward improving language and service access for underserved communities. OCRA's outreach team also plans to host a statewide event during the next reporting period, which will be a webinar on sibling relationships and regional center clients.