

## Consumer Spotlight

### Adam Ortega

Adam Ortega inspires others just by being himself. That is quite an accomplishment for somebody who is not yet 10 years old! But this little boy has overcome challenges that many grown men and women would consider daunting.

Born two months premature, Adam experienced a series of medical challenges, including serious (grade 4) brain hemorrhaging, that led many to believe he would be bed-ridden for life. Hospitalized for the first two months of his life, he was considered quadriplegic. He has an intellectual disability and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at one year old. He started having seizures at age three, has auto-immune and gastrointestinal disorders, and has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

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With so many issues complicating Adam's life and upbringing, it would be understandable if Amber Ortega, Adam's mother, felt overwhelmed. And in those first hours after Adam finally came home from the hospital,



Adam Ortega and his mother Amber Ortega.

still needing oxygen and a feeding tube, Amber struggled with the fears that many parents experience – the fear of possibly doing something wrong that might harm her baby. After assurances and encouragement from Adam's doctor, who convinced her that it would be better for Adam to be at home with a loving family than in the hospital, Amber's perspective changed.

Of that first doctor, Amber said: "She was our first hero." Now, while she

acknowledges many difficulties, Amber views her son's multiple issues as simply a list of diagnoses that will enable him to get the support he needs to live as normal a life as possible.

"You can never give up hope on your child," she said. That mother's hope and unflagging devotion, along with Adam's hard work and the dedication of numerous therapists, has yielded phenomenal results.

See **Adam Ortega** page 7

## Dialogue

*Dialogue* is published four times per year by the Regional Center of Orange County for people with developmental disabilities, their families and service providers.

*Dialogue* can also be read online at RCOC's Web site: [www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com).

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### 2010 Board Meetings

September 2 • November 4

The public is invited to attend. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. and are held in the Regional Center Board Room at 801 Civic Center Drive West, Santa Ana.

### RCOC Administration

Larry Landauer, *Executive Director*

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## Board Update

### New Members Join RCOC Board

The families and individuals served by RCOC are fortunate to have three talented and experienced volunteers join the organization's Board of Directors for three-year terms that began June 3, 2010.

**Robert "Bob" Costello** has an adult daughter with Williams Syndrome. As a result of her developmental disability, Bob has been



involved with the regional center system for more than two decades. Now retired and working as a realtor/consultant, he brings strong strategic planning and management skills to the Board, gained through his many years as a high-level business executive. Before moving to Orange County in 2005, Bob was active for several years on the Board of Tri-Counties Regional Center which provided services to his daughter prior to their relocation.

**Luke Franck** provides RCOC's board with a dual perspective – family member and professional. Luke has two family members who have cognitive disabilities, so he



understands the challenges faced by the families RCOC serves. After a 30-year career as part of the management team for San Gabriel/Pomona Regional Center, he has a thorough understanding of regional center services and the challenges of staff charged with implementing board policies. Though retired, Luke is able to continue his service to the community by serving on RCOC's board.

**Tresa Oliveri**, the mother of a young adult son who has autism, is a familiar face to many RCOC families. A public outreach manager for the



Orange County Transportation Authority, she served for seven years as an RCOC board member, including three years as Vice Chair, and was President of the Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA). In 2008, Tresa was honored with the E. Kurt Yeager Servant Leadership Award – a special Spotlight Award recognizing her outstanding volunteer service to RCOC and the community statewide.

The three members' applications were submitted by the Board's Recruitment and Training Committee and then voted on by the entire Board at the June 2010 meeting. All received unanimous support. RCOC's Board Chair Thomasina Parker welcomed the new members, noting that their experience will be especially valuable in light of the significant fiscal challenges that RCOC and all regional centers are facing.

## Executive Director's Report

### Service Coordination: The Heart and Soul of RCOC

By Larry Landauer, Executive Director

Our contract with the State of California details many responsibilities, expectations and performance measures for Regional Center of Orange County. While all are important, I think that the one role that most represents the heart and soul of RCOC is service coordination.



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In fact, while the overwhelming majority of regional centers' budgets go to purchasing services and supports that are delivered by service providers in the community, the assistance of the regional center service coordinator is the first and most fundamental service that every consumer receives.

A lifelong promise of caring support and objective counsel, it has been a part of the Lanterman Act since its inception. It is provided to every adult and child who qualifies for regional center help, regardless of whether or not they receive other services funded

by RCOC or have their needs met through public schools or other generic resources.

### Budget Delays Reduce Budget for Service Coordination

With service coordination playing such a key role in the lives of the people we serve, RCOC is continually exploring means and methods to assist our service coordinators to more effectively serve families. However, just as our community's service providers have been stressed by a host of cost-cutting measures, so too have RCOC's service coordinators been challenged to do more with less.

This year, as in past years when a state budget is not passed on time, RCOC and other regional centers will spend many thousands of dollars on interest in order to borrow the money we need to continue operating while we await a budget agreement and funds for the new fiscal year. Unfortunately, the money we spend on interest will not be reimbursed by the state and becomes a cost the regional center must absorb from its Operations budget, which includes the cost of RCOC staff.

Since around 70 percent of RCOC staff are service coordinators who work directly with the more than 17,000 consumers and families we serve, this amounts to a cut in the dollars available to fund service coordination, and has led to an increase in the number of people that each service coordinator assists.

### Technology Helps Overcome Budget Cuts

Though this situation poses challenges, RCOC will not allow budget cuts to diminish the quality of the service coordination that consumers and families receive. Over the years, our regional center has pioneered "Virtual Chart" technology which has led to tremendous increases in the efficiency of staff. We are continuing to leverage this technology to enable service coordinators to become even more efficient, spending less time on paperwork and more time with consumers and families on things that matter most to them.

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Time saved by doing less paperwork can be used for capturing more small, but important details about the person with disabilities that often only a parent knows, but which can make the crucial difference when, for example, a new service or support is introduced or a change in service providers is needed. Importantly, this allows our service coordinators to become even stronger and more valuable members of each family's team as we continue to work together to respond effectively and lend useful support in the event of an emergency or family crisis.

## Consumer Advisory Team Update

### CAT Members Get Cooking at May Meeting

By Jay Connor, CAT Chairman

**M**y favorite CAT

meetings get everyone in the group involved, and our May meeting was one of those. Janice

Retz and three of her colleagues at Independent Endeavors -- Marcia Lawler, Dalene Northrup and Shari Schmitt -- delivered a presentation about shopping, cooking and nutrition that was both fun and informative.

Using a recipe for Chicken Taco Salad as an example, Janice and her team showed how consumers can save money by using coupons in the newspaper to shop for ingredients that they can put together at home for tasty and healthy meals.

We also learned some cooking techniques for making the salad recipe, like



how to wash lettuce and how to remove the core of a head of lettuce without using a knife. Three CAT members got to try the technique on real lettuce, as the group participated in making a big batch of the salad.

To help consumers eat more balanced meals, Janice taught us about the five basic food groups: fruits, vegetables, milk

or dairy, breads and grains, and protein. She showed how the salad recipe we were making was healthy because it included all of those things. Then, she and Marcia made the lesson more fun by challenging several consumers to use “pretend” food items to put together balanced meals that included something from each of the food groups.

Most of us do not have time to cook all of our meals, though, so we also got some good information about how to make healthier choices at restaurants. Since many people order items they see pictured on restaurants’ menus, Shari and CAT member Kathy

### Upcoming CAT Meeting Dates

August 18  
September 15  
October 20  
November 17

CAT meetings are from 10 a.m. to noon at RCOC’s Santa Ana office, 801 Civic Center Drive West. Call Nancy Mata at (714) 796-5206 ahead of time to let her know you will be there.

McCrystal brought in nutrition charts from places like McDonald’s and Carl’s, Jr. that helped us see how some popular items can contain a lot more salt, fat and calories than many people think. We also learned about “hidden” sugar in common foods. For example, a typical can of soda contains around three tablespoons of sugar!

By the end of the meeting, I think most of us felt better able to make good food choices. Then came the best part – we all got to eat that delicious salad we had made for lunch!

## Consumers Enjoy Food and Fun at Summer Blast

Almost 600 people gathered at KiwanisLand in Garden Grove on Sat., July 24 for Summer Blast – a day of fun, food and good times with friends and family. From 1-9 p.m., attendees enjoyed traditional picnic activities like sack races, softball, face painting, water balloons, and a cake walk, as well as entertainment and dancing with a DJ and two live bands. In addition, the 21-minute documentary film “When I’m Not

Alone,” which chronicles the life of Sam Durbin, an RCOC consumer and former board member, was screened during the day. Organized by Integrity House, with support from Regional Center of Orange County, the event’s ticket sales covered all costs and additional proceeds benefitted the nonprofit Integrity House.

These are just a few of the great photos taken during the day.



## Behavior Management Workshops for Parents

**R**egional Center of Orange County offers these workshops at no cost to parents. To gain the most value from them, parents are encouraged to attend all sessions in a series. The Behavior Management workshop covers essential principles of positive behavior management, with a practical focus on helping parents of children with developmental disabilities change their own behavior and that of their children. The Social Skills Training workshop is focused on helping parents nurture social skills among children.

In all of the workshops, parents are actively involved, and invited to discuss the specific behavioral challenges they are confronting. Advance reservations are required and group size is typically limited to 40-45 families.

Contact your service coordinator or Thelma Day at (714) 796-5223 for additional information regarding dates, times and locations, and to register.

**NOTE: Child care is not provided, so please do not bring children to the workshops.**

### Behavior Management Workshop with Toilet Training (5 sessions)

*Presented in Vietnamese by Julia C. Nguyen-Kim, B.A. and Thang C. Do, M.A., BCBA*

**When:** Thursday evenings – Sept. 16, Sept. 23, Sept. 30, Oct. 7 and Oct. 14

*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC West Office  
5555 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite 100

### Social Skills Training Workshop – Focus on Ages 12 through 18 years (6 sessions)

*Presented in English by Erin Davis, M.A., Parent Training Consultant*

**When:** Tuesday evenings – Sept. 14, Sept. 21, Sept. 28, Oct. 5., Oct. 12 and Oct. 19

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Orange Office  
3111 North Tustin Street, Suite 150

### Behavior Management Workshop with Toilet Training (5 sessions)

*Presented in English by Joyce Tu, Ed.D., BCBA*

**When:** Thursday evenings – Sept. 30, Oct. 7, Oct. 14, Oct. 21 and Oct. 28

*(NOTE: Toilet training is the focus of the last session of this workshop)*

**Time:** 6:30 – 9 p.m.

**Location:** RCOC Irvine Office  
46 Discovery, Suite 200

## Good to Know – How to Dispose of Old Medications

**D**o you have medicine around the house that you no longer need, or that is beyond its expiration date? If so, it is important to dispose of it properly. This is especially true of certain prescriptions that can be harmful, even fatal, if taken by someone other than the person for whom it was prescribed.

Most medicines can be mixed with something like coffee grounds or kitty litter before being sealed in a container such as a re-sealable plastic bag and put in the trash. This will make it less likely that a child or animal might mistake the medicine for food. The safest approach, however,



is to see if your pharmacy will destroy unused medicines. If they do not, they can probably refer you to a local senior center or community center that does.

If you have questions about disposing of medicines, call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at 1-888-463-6332 or visit the Web site at [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

**Adam Ortega** (continued from page 1)

Today, not only is Adam able to walk, he enjoys participating in a variety of sports. Soccer is his favorite, and he has made many friends through sports. He is great with names and is friends with many of the people at his school.

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***“You can never give up hope on your child.”***

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“If he meets you once, he’ll remember your name,” said Amber, who teaches seventh and eighth grade pre-Algebra at Bellflower Middle and High School.

Eclectic in his taste for music, Adam especially loves Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*.



With his mom and two aunts, Adam took an adventure cruise that visited Greenland and Iceland.

The Ortega family’s RCOC Service Coordinator Marisa Patterson thinks that Adam’s accomplishments have a lot to do with the high expectations his mother has for him.

“Amber believes that Adam is capable, and she sees that she has an important role to play, along with the

professionals who are involved with him,” said Marisa, who has been the Ortega’s service coordinator since Adam became eligible for Lanterman Act services five years ago.

A single mom, Amber has been helped by and learned a lot from other parents she has met through support groups. However, since Adam has so many diagnoses, they do not fit completely with any one group. While fellow parents have been a great source of support and information, she gives a lot of credit to Marisa for helping to identify people and resources that can meet Adam’s needs, and encourages other parents of school-age children to allow their service coordinator to be a key member of their family’s team.

“It is difficult being a working parent,” she said, noting that she often uses email and voice mail to communicate with Marisa, since she is often so busy during the day. “But working with the regional center is one of those investments that pays off. Because I let her (Marisa) know what’s going on, she is able to help me. She has gone to every one of Adam’s meetings with the school district.”

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***“Working with the regional center is one of those investments that pays off.”***

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Amber is also grateful to Adam’s two aunts, who live close to them in Westminster. They are very involved in Adam’s life, and help in getting him to day care or other appointments when Amber is in class teaching.



Adam enjoys playing baseball in the Challenger League.

“My sisters are my support,” she said. “They are second mommies for Adam.”

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***Adam’s accomplishments have a lot to do with the high expectations his mother has for him.***

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The three sisters have a tradition of picking a new place each summer to go together on vacation with Adam. Earlier this summer, they traveled throughout Costa Rica, from the Caribbean coast to the Pacific coast. Previous trips have taken them across the United States, from Alaska and Hawaii to New York, and to Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. They have even taken an adventure cruise to the northern islands of Europe, including Greenland and Iceland.

Adam has a wheelchair that goes with them when they travel, in case he gets tired, but Amber said that he loves their adventures and rarely needs the chair.

# Budget Update

When *Dialogue* went to press, the Governor had released his revised budget proposal for the 2010-2011 fiscal year that began on July 1. Unfortunately, the Governor and Legislature still had not agreed on a spending plan and we began 2010-2011 without a budget.

As in past years when this has happened, RCOC made arrangements for a line of credit that would enable

us to continue funding services for the first three months of this fiscal year. Regional centers will receive some funds from the Medical Providers Interim Payment Fund; however, if RCOC must use its line of credit, it will cost many thousands of dollars in interest that will not be reimbursed by the State of California, even after a budget is passed. Since it will, instead, have to be absorbed by RCOC's operating budget, it amounts to another budget cut on top of previous reductions and cost containment measures.

RCOC believes that the community care system has taken all of the cuts it can manage without serious risk to the people we serve. With the state's budget deficit for this year projected at \$19.1 billion, we are concerned that even more cuts could be considered.

Visit RCOC's Web site ([www.rcocdd.com](http://www.rcocdd.com)) for updates and information on how to contact elected officials and urge them to pass a balanced budget that preserves critical services and supports for people with developmental disabilities.

## Regional Center of Orange County Locations

Santa Ana Office	Orange Office	Irvine Office	Westminster Office
801 Civic Center Dr. West 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-5100	3111 N. Tustin, Suite 150 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-3700	46 Discovery, Suite 200 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-4060	5555 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite 100 24-hr Phone: (714) 796-2900

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### Dialogue Newsletter

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