

ADVOCACY RIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES

NEWSLETTER

Supported Life Conference Is Coming!

Mark your calendars! The 23rd Annual Supported Life Conference will occur on October 7–9, 2009. This year's theme of "A Meaningful Life...Are We There Yet?" The Inclusion Celebration Dessert Social will occur during the evening of October 7 with over fifty concurrent sessions in eleven major topic areas throughout the day on October 8 and the morning of October 9 including: Employment, Relationships, Personal Power and Rights, Living Arrangements, and Grassroots Advocacy. There will also be Keynote Speakers during the luncheons including Dale Dileo from St. Augustine, Florida, speaking on "The Disability Industrial Complex: Ending Segregation of People with Disabilities"; David Hingsburger of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, speaking on "Self-Advocacy: The Our of Power"; and Molly Sullivan from Seattle, Washington, on "Work Incentives and Paid Work—Making Sure Work Pays."

Registration for the conference is happening now and the spaces will fill up fast!! So Speak Up and Speak Out and let your staff know you want to attend. *Self-Advocacy works—keep speaking out!!*

Self-Advocacy Groups

The Advocacy Groups at Sonoma Developmental Center (Sonoma) usually meet on a weekly basis to discuss self-advocacy issues. The active members learn about important issues that matter to them, including learning to speak up and advocate for themselves about what each person wants or needs, learning about their rights and responsibilities, and to share thoughts and ideas with one another in a supportive environment. It is also a learning opportunity about the importance of working cooperatively as a group, listening when someone else speaks, being respectful and learning to take turns.

Recently the Program 4 Advocacy Group went on an outing to Round Table Pizza. Lots of discussions occurred prior to the outing with helpers Craig Brown and Teresa Arnold supporting the members throughout the planning. The group knew they wanted to go eat somewhere so they had to come to a consensus on a number of topics, including: Where should we go? How would we pay for the meal? What kind of food did everyone want? How would we get there? What would be the best time for everyone? Lots of questions emerged and after several group meetings, a dinner out in the community was successfully planned, and the members were able to enjoy an evening out with one another.

The Program 6 Advocacy Group often found itself having lively conversations about the food at



The Program 4 Self-Advocacy Group at Round Table Pizza in the town of Sonoma



Program 6 Self-Advocacy Group meets [photo by JJ Fernandez]

continued next page

Self-Advocacy Groups, continued from previous page

Sonoma during their meetings. Helper Melissa Rusk supported the individuals in creating a list of food favorites, foods the members were tired of eating, and foods they would like to have. During the meetings, the group members decided to invite staff that support them on their residences, as well as a representative of the Nutritional Department. The members enjoyed being able to speak up about their food preferences and dislikes. Some of the members stated that they go out into the community and enjoy eating some of the foods not available to them at Sonoma, but hoped in the future that they might be available on the menu here. The list was forwarded to the Director of Dietetics. Everyone seemed pleased with the outcome of the presentation, including helper Melissa Rusk, who said (about the advocacy group), “It reminds me of why I like my job.”

The Sonoma Regional Project Team

Liz Stoddard, Community Program Specialist (CPS) IV, is the Director of the Sonoma Regional Project. Liz has held this position for one year. She has worked at Sonoma for 10 years and has worked for the Department of Developmental Services for 30 years in a variety of positions including Teacher, Assistant Chief of Education and Assistant to the Medical Director. When asked about her job and what she does, Liz says, “As the Director, I supervise the staff of one CPS II, three CPS Is, and an Office Technician. Our job as a department is to assist the regional centers in developing community resources for the clients who live at Sonoma. We work with Developmental Center staff, parents and families, advocates, regional centers, and other agencies to assure clients receive a successful transition into their recommended community placement. We also provide training for community providers, and follow up services to the individuals who move to the community. Additionally, if an individual is in jeopardy of losing their community placement, the Project provides crisis intervention services. If an admission to a Developmental Center is likely, we conduct an assessment with specific recommendations and ensure all other living options are exhausted before the person is admitted to a Developmental Center. Education and communication are the two most important responsibilities of our department to ensure quality care for clients and for resolving differences.” What she loves most about her job is, “the successful placements of clients in the community, and working with many agencies.” One of Liz’s most memorable moments was, “While living here, a client hoarded many things and his bedroom was very messy. He would not organize or clean it up, or even let staff do it. When he moved into his own apartment, he became very neat. He would even point at staff and tell them to clean up their messes in his apartment. He was so happy to live in his own apartment and he became an active member of the community.”

Ross Abaya, Community Program Specialist II, has worked at Sonoma for a little over six months and prior to that had worked at Agnews Developmental Center since 1988. During his time at Agnews he worked in various classifications including Psychiatric Technician Trainee Candidate, Psychiatric Technician, Senior Psychiatric Technician, Staff Service Analyst, and Associate Governmental Program Analyst. Some of his most memorable moments include, “attending team meetings or special events and seeing the dedication of each team to the folks they serve, and facilitating a transition support meeting that lasted three hours, only to find out the next day that the norm is



The Sonoma Regional Project Team:
L to R: Ross Abaya, Robin German,
Wendy Reid, Jennifer Swift, Candace
Beveridge & Liz Stoddard

continued next page

The Sonoma Regional Project Team, continued from previous page

about a third of that.” When asked about his job and what he does, Ross says, “It’s a lot like a M.A.R.R.I.A.G.E.: Meetings, Assessments, Reports, Road Trips, Interviews, Admissions, Group home/day program tours, and Emails.” When asked what he loves most of his job, Ross says, “As a fairly new employee at Sonoma, I can’t think of a better way to get to know the people who reside and work here.”

Jennifer Swift, Community Program Specialist I, started working at Sonoma a little over four and a half years ago. She started her career as an Individual Program Coordinator. When asked what she loves most about her job, Jennifer says, “following up on individuals that have moved to wider community placement and seeing how much they enjoy it and grow into who they can be.” Prior to coming to Sonoma, Jennifer worked as a Group Home Administrator, Behavioral Aide, Day Program Instructor, and a Supported Living Services Assistant. One of her most memorable moments was, “Watching Lynda blossom during the transition visit process and finally her placement” (story on page 4). She appreciates how her new position and environment allows her to “apply a variety of skills and experience gathered in my previous 18 years working with those that have special needs in the wider community.”

Candace Beveridge, Community Program Specialist I, has worked at Sonoma for a little over three years. She started on Judah as an Individual Program Coordinator. “I was assigned to the Judah Cottage and soon found myself looking forward to what each day would bring from some very special guys and a great interdisciplinary team.” What she enjoys most about her current assignment is, “the diversity of my job. I interface with Sonoma staff, Regional Projects, and Regional Center representatives, and meeting and assisting consumers from all over the state.” One of her most memorable moments was “My first Sonoma Regional Project (SRP) ‘Road Trip’ was with part of my Judah team and part of my new SRP team. The best of both worlds rolled into one trip.”

Wendy Reid, Community Program Specialist I, started at Sonoma in 1987 as a Psychiatric Technician Trainee, eventually becoming a Psychiatric Technician in 1991. Wendy worked on the residential programs for 12 years, in the Registry department for two years and in the Quality Assurance department for one year. She left Sonoma to pursue other opportunities, returning six years later to her new assignment at Sonoma Regional Project. Wendy states, “I love being a member of a team that is highly dedicated to their work and committed to serving others. I especially like partnering with others and drawing upon their strength and attributes to move forward and get things done.” Her fondest and most memorable moment was, “June and I singing and using hairbrushes as microphones to the Rolling Stone tune, ‘I Can’t Get No Satisfaction.’” She goes on to say, “It gives me much pleasure and joy to be back at Sonoma as a member of the Sonoma Regional Project.”

Robin German, Office Technician, has been an employee of Sonoma for two and a half years, but has worked for the Department of Developmental Services for three and a half years. Prior to this, Robin was a preschool director/teacher for 13 years, working for a local private non-profit school. Robin says, “I am especially happy to be working in a department that helps individuals with choices. Being a part of a team that helps individuals choose where they’d like to live and what they’d like to be doing in their community, to making sure that supports and services are in place for them to be successful, is very rewarding.” One of Robin’s most memorable moments is, “being in a Transition Support Meeting for a consumer who was considering community placement and he was asked what he needed for this community placement. It was absolutely wonderful to see that person smile, become very excited, and opened up with all the things that he wanted.”



The Road to Potato Salad

by Jennifer Swift

LLynda turned 63 this last February and now gets potato salad whenever she wants to help make it, which is often. Those that have worked with Lynda over the years never knew this seemed to be the key to her happiness.

Lynda came to Sonoma Developmental (SDC) in October 1987 residing most recently on Lathrop since January 2002. In June 2007, her Interdisciplinary Team determined that Lynda was an extremely capable woman who could live successfully in the wider community despite an unsuccessful attempt in August 2006. After many discussions with her Regional Center Representative about her preferences, needs, and supports, the search for a home began. In March 2008, California Mentor was designated as the agency to help realize that ideal for Lynda. Ron S. and Darryl B., and their home was identified as a good match in February 2009. The home has been described by visiting Lathrop staff as a comfortable and warm three-bedroom, single-story house in north Vallejo, that you immediately feel at home in.

When her circle of support met again to meet Ron and Darryl, most believed that they were a good fit for Lynda and transition planning should begin. There was one voice of dissent and that came from her Volunteer Advocate, Carmenza Harikian, who voiced some very good questions and concerns—the most important one and often heard here at SDC was, “Why Lynda? This has been her home for so many years and she is older now and comfortable. Why make her go through this change?”

Those that responded discussed valid points that it was her right to live in the least restrictive environment; she enjoyed smaller, quieter environments; and she would have increased opportunities to explore new activities and interests. While those opinions encouraged Carmenza to accept that the transition process was going to proceed and she voiced full support of Lynda in the process, there was lingering doubt and concern on her part about the move away from SDC.

Beginning in March 2009, Lynda had several visits with Ron and Darryl, initially at SDC, then at their home, so that all three could determine if this was a good match. On her first visit to the home, Darryl prepared a barbecue lunch and served potato salad. Lynda asked for and ate three servings of the latter. The visits were very successful and by the end of April she was calling the Vallejo house rather than SDC, home. During her provisional placement (May 27–31) Lynda received visits from Carmenza, Lathrop staff, and her sister Jodi whom she had not seen in many years. All of them were extremely pleased with Lynda’s home and Mentor family, but what struck the bargain was the evident happiness Lynda displayed.

Lynda spent the initial three weeks of her move acclimating to her home, Mentor family, and the city of Vallejo. Not surprisingly, Lynda often chose to sleep in until 10 AM, have a leisurely breakfast and then assist with household chores and shopping. At the end of June, she began visits to PACE Georgia, which was to be her new day program, and she has been doing extremely well. Her 30-day follow-up meeting was held recently and Carmenza cheerfully opened the meeting by saying that she had been wrong. Lynda was happier than anyone had seen her before and obviously this was due to the wonderful home and family that she now has. When this writer asked Lynda what was the best part of living in her new home she responded, “Want some potato salad?”

Lynda’s move to the wider community would not have been such a success without the participation and cooperation of staff at Sonoma Developmental Center, North Bay Regional Center and California Mentor.



Linda & Carmenza
[submitted photo]

ARO Newsletter
Volume 2, Number 3, ©August 2009
Sonoma Developmental Center
P.O. Box 1493
Eldridge, CA 95431



Editor: JJ Fernandez, Office of Planning & Communications
Photography & layout: Nancy Flack, Central Program Services