



Harbor Happenings

Cover: Nancy Spiegel Advocating in 1989
Photo Credit: Nancy Spiegel

HARBOR REGIONAL CENTER

SPRING 2024

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Reflection, Celebration, Advancement

By Patrick Ruppe, Executive Director



This year marked a significant achievement for our organization's journey. Harbor Regional Center commemorates half a century of commitment to serving our community. What began as a hope voiced by a pioneering group of parents for community-based services became a reality with the passing of the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Act in 1965. Since that pivotal moment, the regional centers have evolved to become integral in providing local community-based services to Californians with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

As we reflect on and celebrate our journey over the last 50 years, I am reminded of the resilience, determination, and dedication of

the individuals we serve, their families and support networks, our staff, service providers and community partners. Through these unwavering partnerships, we have achieved remarkable milestones and created a strong foundation for the future. Our successes are a testament to the collaborative spirit that defines us and it would not have been possible without your invaluable contributions.

Recently, Harbor's Board of Trustees completed an extensive review and refinement of our vision, mission and values, reaffirming our commitment to these principles as guiding forces for Harbor's future. The core values of Person-Centered Philosophy, Diversity, Equity

& Inclusion, Partnership, Innovation, and Accountability & Transparency will serve as the bedrock for Harbor as we move forward into the next several decades. In pursuit of this, we have diligently worked on refreshing Harbor's brand identity, which you will begin to notice in the upcoming weeks and months. Although the logo and colors are new, Harbor Regional Center remains steadfast in our mission to provide innovative and person-centered services, support, and information to empower individuals with developmental disabilities and their support networks to live their best lives.

Best Regards,

Your Input Matters!

Individual and Family Experience and Satisfaction Survey

As part of Harbor's Strategic Plan, we continue our commitment to improving the experience and satisfaction of the individuals and families we serve. We have recently developed a survey that will be available to you in mid-May based on the goals and objectives within our Strategic Plan.



The survey focuses on four areas and we look forward to hearing about your experiences, opinions and satisfaction with these aspects of Harbor.

The first area is about Communication and Delivery of Information: Provide your feedback about the content of information we provide, whether it is easy to access and understand, and whether it helps you make informed decisions about services and supports.

The second area is about Customer Service: This section will ask for your views about the quality of the customer service you've received from Harbor staff over the past six months, especially in the areas of professionalism,

positive attitude, respect and communication.

The third area is about Person-Centered Service Planning: The person-centered service planning process is meant to help you and your team work together to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Program Plan (IPP) that is directed by you and includes things that are important to you. This section focuses on your experience with the person-centered service planning process during your or your loved ones IFSP or IPP meetings.

The last area is about the Diversity of Harbor's Provider Community: For those who receive Harbor-funded services in addition to case man-

agement, this section of the survey will ask for your views about the diversity of Harbor's service providers, especially those who support you and/or your family member.

You will receive the survey by email in mid-May. If you would like the survey in a different format, such as a paper copy, please inform your service coordinator. All survey responses are anonymous unless you opt for a follow-up call from Harbor staff, including your name and contact details. We value your input and respectfully ask for 5 to 10 minutes of your time to complete it.

We are grateful for your partnership as we work together to shape the future of Harbor Regional Center.

A Journey of Dedication

Photos courtesy of Nancy Spiegel



Nancy holding a meeting at a Cambodian Temple in Long Beach in the early 80s

Nancy Spiegel demonstrates exemplary dedication towards helping individuals with developmental disabilities to live meaningful and productive lives, carrying forward the vision of the Lanterman Act through her work at Harbor Regional Center (Harbor). Nancy was one of the few long-standing employees who have been with Harbor close to the center's inception. She joined the team in 1980 after working as a direct care staff

at the Exceptional Children's Foundation's Adult Day Program. Over the years, she has served in a variety of roles such as a Service Coordinator, Client Services Manager, Public Information Specialist, Director of Community Services, and Director of Information and Development. Her longevity and experience in various roles have been invaluable to the development of Harbor Regional Center. Individuals like Nancy are so important as she helps us

see where we came from and where we plan to go.

Nancy has helped to shape the public voice of Harbor, overseeing the development of an extensive library of publications, including newsletters, booklets, videos, managing our website, social media, and legislative relations. Nancy reflects that while keeping up with her varied responsibilities at Harbor has been quite challenging at times, it has also allowed her



Nancy posing with Blair at a Harbor Regional Center Resource Fair

to contribute to our center, staff, individuals served and families, and our community. While Nancy is now retired, Nancy shares some reflections on her career at Harbor.

What are your favorite memories of Harbor Regional Center?

Some of my favorite memories are of taking teams of individuals with disabilities, parents, and service providers to represent the Harbor

community in visits with our legislators, in Sacramento and in their local district offices. I witnessed our team members putting aside their fears and insecurities to tell their stories, and help our legislators understand the importance of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Visiting Governor Brown in his office, together with individual served, Cristina S. and Sofia G. and their parents, was a

special highlight.

Tell us about your biggest accomplishments during your time with Harbor.

I do look back on the opportunities I had to develop newsletters, booklets, and videos in multiple languages, and create our website, electronic newsletters, and social media, all to find better ways to reach more members of our community with the information they needed.

A Journey of Dedication ...Continued

Photos courtesy of Nancy Spiegel

What did you learn from working with the Harbor community? What made you want to work for Harbor Regional Center for 42 years?

When I started out working for Harbor Regional Center in my late twenties, I could not have imagined myself still working here 42 years later. However, as a young woman, I was part of a generation that believed we could change the world for the better! I believe that ALL of us—the staff, service providers, individuals, and families who worked together since the Regional Centers began, to promote new services, greater independence, awareness, and inclusion, actually did just that. As much as we have accomplished, we always know there is more to do and more that our individuals with disabilities can accomplish. When I retired, I felt confident that the younger



Nancy at her home in Long Beach

generations who have joined Harbor Regional Center and are working together in our community today share the

same dreams for ever-expanding opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

“I witnessed our team members putting aside their fears and insecurities to tell their stories, and help our legislators understand the importance of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities.”

The Role of the Service Coordinator



Harbor's Early Childhood Team

Service coordination is a fundamental component of the regional centers. Every person served is paired with a service coordinator (SC), whom the Lanterman Act defines as someone to help you get ready for your individual planning meeting, help you get the services and supports you need, and help you if you are having any problems. Service coordinators want to support you to reach your goals!

The service coordinator is your primary contact and partner at the regional center. They will get to know you and your circle of support by meeting with you and listening to what you share about yourself, such as what is important to you and what you hope to achieve. They also want to know your con-

cerns and anything else you might want to share with them. To best support you, it is important that you share information with your service coordinator. This can include records, updates, and any new services you might have in place. Service coordinators aim to provide you with support, information, and choices.

Depending on your age or if you are supporting a minor—their age, you may meet with your service coordinator every six months or at least once a year for a planning meeting, also known as an Individual Family Service Plan, known as IFSP, or Individual Program Plan, or you might hear it as the IPP. This meeting can occur in person or virtually via Zoom. You can always call

or email your service coordinator any time you need to, our communication and support does not start or end at this meeting! You can contact your service coordinator when any changes occur or when you need additional information or have questions throughout the year. Your service coordinator is available to help with regional center services, refer you to other supports in the community, advocate with you, connect you to Harbor Regional Center specialists, share Harbor updates, and help you plan for the future.

At Harbor Regional Center, we believe success is best achieved by working together and we strive to provide exceptional customer service to you and your family. If you have a question or need assistance and your service coordinator is not available, you can leave a voicemail, send an email, or speak with the service coordinator of the day. You can do this by dialing the extension that is noted in your service coordinator's voicemail message—that will connect you with someone who can help.

The Role of the Service Coordinator ...Continued

If you are experiencing any challenges with your service coordinator, you can always contact the service coordinator's supervisor. Here at

Harbor, this person is called the Client Services Manager. You can find their information on our website directory, by calling the main line (310)

540-1711, or by looking at the back of your SC's business card. We understand that not everyone is a great fit together, just know that you always



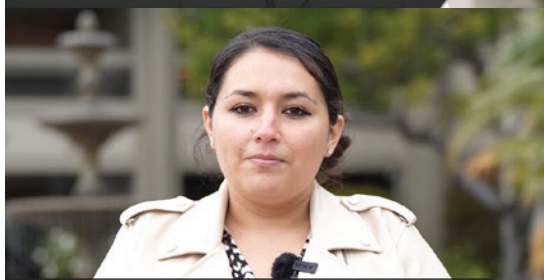
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HARBOR REGIONAL CENTER SERVICE COORDINATOR



ANNA JOHNSON
HARBOR REGIONAL CENTER SERVICE COORDINATOR



TRANG NGUYEN
ĐIỀU PHỐI VIÊN DỊCH VỤ CỦA TRUNG TÂM KHU VỰC HẢI CẢNG

Meet Our Service Coordinators!

have the choice to request a different service coordinator by contacting the Client Services Manager. There is always someone available to help you here at Harbor.

Information on SC Role



Lupita Mendoza, Float Service Coordinator

I have worked at Harbor Regional Center for over 20 years. I started when they had 100 employees and now have seen it grow to over 400 employees. With that growth, I have had the pleasure of seeing the development of innovative resources, as well as the progression of person-centered services. Throughout my time at Harbor, I have worked in various roles and departments, gaining a diverse range of experiences and skills. I have had opportunities for personal and professional growth. From being a project coordi-

nator to case management, as well as moving individuals out of developmental centers and into the community. My time has been filled with meaningful work. Harbor has provided me with the necessary training, tools, and support to excel, while creating a positive and supportive work environment. Colleagues, supervisors, and directors are approachable and foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork. My journey at Harbor has been both fulfilling and rewarding.

Meet Our Service Coordinators! ...Continued



Cady Laycook, Service Coordinator

When I began here as a Client Program Coordinator in 1987, I did not expect I would still be here today having witnessed and participated in monumental changes for our agency and the people whose lives it has touched.

At that time, Harbor occupied two floors of one building. Most of us wrote our reports by hand and Individual Person Center Plans (IPP) were transcribed into typed documents by our clerical staff. Along with most other organizations, we completed a digital transformation. Every year we welcome more people into the Harbor “fam-

ily” of services and supports. The variety of services and opportunities continue to increase as well. Now, we occupy over three buildings and locations.

As a publicly funded agency, we must be responsive to governmental expectations and requirements. This has had a bigger role to play in our activities over the years and balancing accountability with providing individualized services remains a challenge. We have seen some shifts in understanding about disabilities and the best ways to approach services and supports. As our understanding

has evolved, we lean more and more into a person-centered focus, to understand and respect cultures and values in our efforts with and on the behalf of those we serve. All this helps make Harbor a better organization as a whole. We are more than the sum of the parts.

What remains important is that every individual, every family has one or more person connected with Harbor available and active to help meet needs, explore new horizons and move into the future to achieve their best possible life.



Christian Alarcon, Intake Service Coordinator

I started in my position 7 years ago as a service coordinator in the Early Childhood Department. The team was very welcoming and knowledgeable which helped guide me in the path to supporting families. Learning about services we offer, eligibility and transition meetings was overwhelming, but as time went on, I put into practice what I learned from

my team and trainings. Critical thinking is key to finding solutions for challenging issues. I learned about Harbor's culture and values, and the work of other departments.

Throughout my time here, I have met some of the best people you can ever meet. Many service coordinators are hard working with a big

heart. I admire every single person in my department and could not ask to be part of a better agency that is helping the community. Harbor has become like a family and makes me feel seen.

**Information
on SC Role**



The Social Network: Expanding Your Support Circle in Adulthood

By Tim'an Ford, Peer Advocate, Harbor Regional Center



Tim'an shares his sketches

Certain hardships come with being an adult, often causing us to reminisce about the days of our youth. The friendships we make and the activities we partake in during our formative years play a significant role in who we become as we enter adulthood. But what happens when your network begins to dwindle due to those bonds growing further apart and adult responsibilities superseding the things you're passionate about? This is a dilemma familiar to people from all

walks of life. For individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, it can potentially exacerbate feelings of isolation and aimlessness. Speaking as an individual on the autism spectrum, these feelings hit particularly close to home for me. But, with the support of Harbor Regional Center, I found a variety of social-recreational and vocational programs that offer exciting opportunities for personal growth, as well as welcome environments for individuals with disabilities

to build their very own social network.

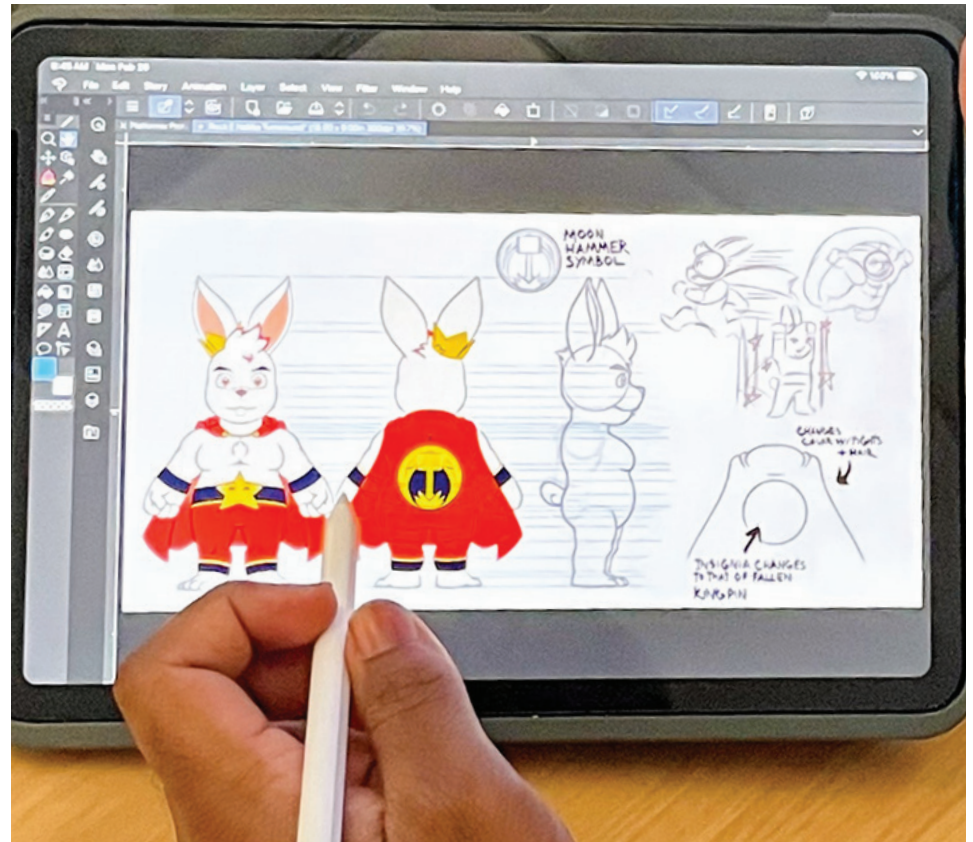
Though all programs in partnership with Harbor share the same goal of supporting our community on their path to self-advocacy and integration within the community, certain programs require you to consult your service coordinator first to determine if a program should be included in your Individual Program Plan, or IPP. To illustrate this dichotomy, I provide you with my experiences in two distinct programs: **OurTism** and **Game Gen**.

OurTism is an organization that offers recreational activities designed by and for individuals on the autism spectrum. Founded by sisters Gail & Lillian Carrier, the program's main objective is to provide a safe space for neurodivergent teenagers and adults to interact with their peers in a casual setting. Furthermore, the program offers workshops, seminars, and specialized coaching for both individuals on the spectrum and their family members. After their free consultation, I decided to attend one of

“The task of growing one’s own social network in adulthood is an arduous yet rewarding one..”

their monthly hangouts that happen every third Saturday, and had a good time talking to like-minded adults who shared the same interests as me. If you’re looking for recreation and networking at an affordable price, I suggest reserving a spot at one of OurTism’s monthly hangouts or attending their Virtual Support Group for adults every Thursday night.

Unlike OurTism, which offers a more generalized approach to social support for people with disabilities, Game Gen is a vocational program and regional center partner that specializes in teaching teens and adults with disabilities the fundamentals of video game design. Game Gen offers a plethora of classes and seminars meant to build your skills in computer sciences; including but not limited to coding, character design, asset creation, video editing, programming, and marketing. As a lifelong artist and gamer, this was an opportunity to build upon my unique set of skills and network with people pursuing a career in the gaming industry. Though I am still in the early stages of



Close up of Tim’an’s character development

my learning path and balancing my education with a day job, my time in Game Gen has opened my eyes to just how broad the horizon is for individuals with disabilities. Having learned valuable life skills and practices to build upon my creative portfolio, I highly recommend checking out Game Gen’s website to see if this is the path for you.

The task of growing one’s own social network in adulthood is an arduous yet rewarding one for the inner growth it fosters and the opportunities it opens up for you. I hope my experiences with OurTism and Game Gen inspire you to look into new programs for adults. Find more information through the Family Resource Centers.

OurTism



Game Gen



Parent-to-Parent Support: A Shared Experience

By Maria Elena Walsh, Manager Harbor Family Resource Center

Acquiring multiple services for your loved one may be a daunting task for many. Some families may want to access programs like Supplemental Security Income (SSI), In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), or food assistance through CalFresh, but may not know where to start. Others may not un-

derstand how to approach their insurance company to request Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy services. Sometimes there are questions about what a regional center funded service means. Sure, respite services sounds great, but what does it entail and what should you expect when

someone is caring for your loved one? These questions are common and our Parent Mentor Program is here to help families!

Parent Mentors are full time employees of Harbor Regional Center, who help support families. The Parent Mentor Program is voluntary

Why I Became a Parent Mentor...



Maria

My son was diagnosed with autism at age 2 and I always wanted to work for an organization that helps families. I told myself that one day I will work for Harbor Regional Center and here I am. I am glad I got hired because now I'm able to help families because my personal experience helps me to understand what they are going through.



Christina

When my son was a toddler and needed services, I did not have anyone to guide me. Thankfully, I pushed through and found the services he needed at my local regional center. I became a mentor so I could help families have an experience that was different from mine. I wanted to prevent them from going through what I had to go through, by offering my support that comes from my personal experience.

and time-limited and you and your service coordinator decide if the services could be helpful to you. Our five Parent Mentors are dedicated family members of an individual served by a regional center. They understand first-hand how the regional center system works and what to expect when trying

to acquire services. They come from diverse backgrounds and have a multitude of experiences that help them to assist families in a personal and focused way.

The goal of the program is simple, connect families to services and supports their child who is served by Harbor,

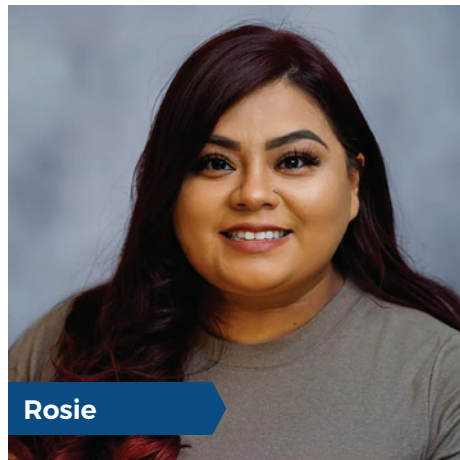
may need. This includes helping families to understand processes to apply for various community-based resources and services long after they participate in this program.

Parent Mentors host clinics in both Long Beach and Norwalk where anyone can visit and ask questions.



LaTeanara

What made me want to become a parent mentor is my compassion for people. Aside from growing up with a family member with a developmental disability, I have spent many years working with children with disabilities. This is where my passion grew for helping others in need. I am able to see my family experience and work experience come together to assist families at Harbor.



Rosie

Growing up I knew I wanted to be a part of a service that supports individuals with developmental disabilities and their families because I am a family member of a person with developmental disabilities. I knew that being a part of the Parent Mentor team, I could offer the support and stop some the barriers that my family struggled with from time to time.



Anayantzín

I wanted to become a Parent Mentor to be able to work in my community and help families navigate and understand Regional Center services. Being a Parent Mentor has allowed me to work closely with families and share stories and experiences that are relatable to my family.





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