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For Immediate Release

OC Nonprofit Vocational Visions Struggles to find 'New Normal' Amidst a Changing Service Delivery Landscape and Proposed State Budget Cuts

Mission Viejo, CA (June 8, 2020) --

Vocational Visions, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving the Intellectual / Developmental Disabled (I/DD) community in Orange County (OC) since 1974, has temporarily closed its doors to in-person service delivery for the first time in over 45 years due to COVID-19 state mandated safety directives.

Having to shutter both facility locations in Mission Viejo temporarily was no easy feat and greatly impacted families and caregivers. Like most OC businesses, Vocational Visions immediately aspired to think outside of the box to ensure continuity in service delivery. The organization quickly put together a plan to offer virtual engagement opportunities through their website, www.vocationalvisions.org, and implemented video conferencing tools, as well as phone calls and drop off deliveries. 'The creativity and dedication of our staff is so heartwarming and I am very proud of their accomplishments during this unique and challenging time,' said Executive Director Joan McKinney.

Engagement examples during this time include activities such as:

- Creating on-demand fitness videos hosted on the organization's website and YouTube
- Cooking demonstrations via various video conferencing tools
- Bingo games and Karaoke via Zoom
- Surprise birthday caravans
- Weekly movie virtual watch parties paired with the opportunity to write a movie review for website posting
- Putting together and dropping off art kits, distance learning projects and care packages
- Continuous onsite job coaching for clients who are essential employees at their worksites



Mariela & Katy's cooking demonstration



Erin Made a Paper Plate Rainbow

Erin completes an art project



Angie and Joey head to Joey's job



Janinne cooks a recipe from VV staff



Elvis Presley Karaoke via Zoom



Alan & César's birthday caravan

The Vocational Visions Direct Support Professionals (DSP) staff has been dedicated to maintaining a sense of routine and normalcy during a time when the world is anything but.

As they strategize their 'new normal' model for in-person service delivery to ensure the safety of participants and employees when they are greenlighted to re-open, they have come face to face with yet another obstacle. California Governor Newsom's "May Revision" to the 2020 - 2021 proposed budget includes \$500 million in cuts to the service delivery system, which, if approved on June 15, 2020, will gravely threaten the stability of disability services. The services provided by Vocational Visions matter greatly to the part of the community population who is often most marginalized. The average participation duration of a Vocational Visions client is 10.5 years, with many having been in attendance for more than 20 years. Mandi Lenaburg, who is the younger sister of Vocational Visions'

longest program participant, Danny, who has been attending since he was 18 years old recently said “thank you for loving my brother and giving him the life that he deserves.”



Danny, who has been with Vocational Visions since 1974, when they first opened

There is a collective realization now, more than ever, of the value these services provide to this community as the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for people with I/DD in terms of pre-existing conditions, isolation, depression and lack of advocacy of care.

Should the proposed budget cuts get approved, when the 2020 - 2021 fiscal year starts in July 2020, Vocational Visions will be unable to sustain the quality of care and service they have proudly provided for almost half of a century.

Additionally, the Vocational Visions DSP staff have truly gone above and beyond in the last three months, many putting their own health, as well as their family’s health, at risk to continue to serve by shopping for and delivering activity/care packages to I/DD participant families and coaching participants at essential worksites. This same workforce that just stepped up may now face cuts to their wages. “Staff already struggle with the wages they are paid now. They have families that they have to support and often work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. It is already hard to find staff and, if we have

to hire at a lower rate, it will be just about impossible,” said Senior Manager Mercy Gordon when describing how the proposed budget cuts would compound existing staffing issues.

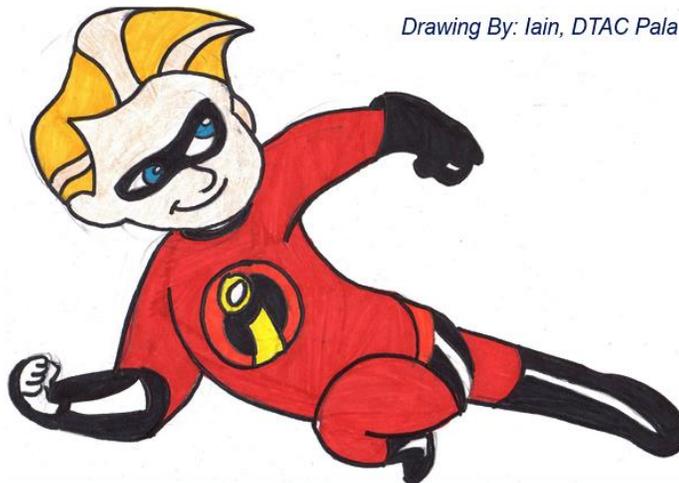
While both the California State Assembly and the California State Senate recently said no to cuts to I/DD services, the battle is not over. The Governor might not agree when finalization of the budget happens on June 15, 2020. “Now is the time to activate as many people as possible to contact the California’s Governor’s Office to hold the line on no cuts. “Let’s make our voices heard on behalf of the those who can’t always advocate for themselves,” implored Joan McKinney.

If you are a California resident and would like to let your voice be heard, on behalf of the I/DD community, please click on the following link by June 14, 2020.

<https://p2a.co/cVG0xka>

In as little as two - five minutes, you can get a message to ALL of your key legislative constituents, as well as to Governor Newsom, with just ONE CLICK of the send button making you a SUPERHERO for the I/DD community.

Drawing By: Iain, DTAC Pala



Be A Hero And Take Action Now!

Drawing by Iain, a program participant since 2009



About Vocational Visions

Vocational Visions was born out of the discovery by Orange County (OC) educators that, post K-12 education, there weren't enough options to continually engage I/DD persons who have transitioned into adulthood. Vocational Visions enhances our community by developing the talents of adults with intellectual / developmental disabilities (I/DD) by creating pathways to employment, life-long learning, and social inclusion. Within the I/DD community, these basic rights and needs for a meaningful life don't get fulfilled without the support of organizations like Vocational Visions. Today, Vocational Visions offers seven unique programs to meet the varying needs of over 400 I/DD OC adult residents. For more information about Vocational Visions, please contact us at 949-837-7280 or visit:

www.vocationalvisions.org

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