



CHATTER

Day of Remembrance



Valley Mountain Regional Center is located on the site of what once was the Stockton State Hospital. An incident that happened during the regional center’s construction led to the first memorials in the state to preserve an important chapter of California’s history.

The California Memorial Project was organized as a result of legislation to assist persons with disabilities to locate and preserve the grave sites of state hospital residents who died while living in the institutions.

Dedication of the monument at Stockton Rural Cemetery during Remembrance Day in 2008. Standing directly behind the marker is Tim Cabral, then Chair of SAC 6.

Remembrance Day Ceremonies are held on the third Monday of September each year to honor the thousands of persons who were buried on state hospital lands mostly in unmarked, mass graves.

Opening in 1852, the Stockton State hospital was the State’s first such institution. But it soon became a part of a chain of hospitals up and down the state, fulfilling what was then California’s policy on disability - segregation and forced sterilization.

Construction crews building near where VMRC now stands unearthed a mass grave

These institutions became so large that the 1910 census showed that one in every 200 Californians lived in a state institution. It is estimated that by 1960, nearly 50 thousand people were buried on hospital grounds.

At Stockton, patients were buried in three known locations around what is today University Park, yet were moved numerous times over the past century. The hospital closed in 1997 and no clear records exist about the location of graves.

As early as 2001, Donald Roberts, then chair of SAC 6, and others were combing the area looking for grave sites. Many remains had been moved to the Rural Cemetery. A small marker was discovered by the groundskeeper while trimming back a rose bush and a remembrance ceremony was held there in 2003. Many remains ended up at Parkview cemetery in Manteca, and a ceremony is now held there each year. But many more remains are unaccounted for.

In late 2005, construction crews building near Park and Aurora streets, about where VMRC now stands, unearthed a mass grave. The remains were eventually relocated to the nearby Rural Cemetery.



Marker discovered at the Rural Cemetery by the groundskeeper while trimming back a rose bush.

The Stockton California Memorial Project Team, which included the Self Advocacy Council 6, was already in place and led efforts to have monuments placed on the grounds of CSU Stanislaus and Stockton Rural Cemetery in 2007.

These were the first monuments placed in California commemorating those who lived and died in the state hospitals. At the 2008 Remembrance Day, over 100 people came to celebrate the monuments being placed.

The California Memorial Project works to restore cemeteries, create memorials, develop oral histories, and hold Remembrance Day ceremonies. The ceremony at Stockton is one of 10 held across the state.



Matthew Hartman Jr. shares his success story of leaving Napa State Hospital at last year's Day of Remembrance held at the Rural Cemetery in Stockton.

Remembrance Day Hits Close to Home

Matthew Hartman Jr. has no trouble remembering those who lived in the State Hospitals - he was one of them.

"I was in Napa for 2 years in the 'eighties," Matt explained. "I've been there and I've seen it. And believe me, you do not want to go to the state hospital.

"If you ever saw the Terminator movie where that kid's mom was in the hospital - that's the way it really was. It was dangerous and scary."

This is Matt’s third year going to the CA Memorial Project’s Day of Remembrance held every third Monday in September at the Stockton Rural Cemetery.

“Someone who has a problem with his temper, maybe they need to be there. But putting somebody there just because they’re handicapped, that ain’t cool.

“They shouldn’ta been treating people like that back then, it’s not right. And if they were buried there, they should’ve at least put their names on the graves.”

“...Putting somebody there just because they’re handicapped, that ain’t cool.”

- Matthew Hartman Jr.

He’s met others at the event who also spent time in the state hospitals. He has traded experiences with them about how life was in the institution.

“If you stay out of trouble and be good, stay to yourself, try to make it, you’re alright,” he explained.

“They kept points and you got a grade. Green light, you got to go out. Red light, you can’t go out. Yellow light, well, you tried.

“You got a red light by doing stuff like slugging the staff, going off on clients, not doing what you’re told. I only got red light once and I learned and kept cool after that.

“They put you in a room and tie you down and lock the door and sometimes, they don’t let you out until morning.”

Matt talked about always having to watch out for trouble and making sure to stay out of the way when it came.

“Everyone was afraid of this one guy because of how strong he was, and when he went off, everybody got scared and they tied him down.”

Matt often thought about escaping, but never made the attempt.

“My friend tried to escape,” he said. “I don’t know what happened to her. I never saw her again. I didn’t want to get caught and tied down. If I left, I didn’t ever want to go back.”

Matt is glad they are closing the institutions.

“I seen everything in there,” he said. “Things you don’t even want to talk about. I don’t want anyone else to go in there and get hurt.”

Matt currently lives at the Valley Oaks Family Home in Sonora.

“I’m happy where I’m at,” Matt said.

Chapter Reports

In 2015 I was asked to be a key note speaker at the 2016 Choices Conference in Stockton, CA. With help, I wrote my presentation about my life and how I was able to overcome obstacles and challenges that people with learning disabilities face every day. I felt proud to be able to share my story in front of 600 people and I hope that my speech helped to inspire people with disabilities to become more independent and to advocate for themselves. - *Marilyn Pipa*

Jayme Be Jammin'

SAC 6's own Jayme Florez was elected to be this year's Chair for the CHOICES Institute, the Committee that puts on the CHOICES Conference each year.

"I feel kinda' scared and happy at the same time," Jayme said. "I'm going to need a lot of help, but I think I can do it."

Modesto Open Door Services

Open Door Services had their Annual 4th Of July Picnic & Party on July 1 at Sharp Park in Modesto. The consumers from Modesto ODS were joined by some special visitors from Manteca ODS for the days festivities. It made it a huge celebration! A hot dog and potato salad lunch was provided for everyone, making it a perfect kick-off for the holiday weekend. Activities included relay races, arts & crafts, beanbag games and a huge water ballon fight.

Modesto Open Door Services had their Annual Fair Day at the Stanislaus Fair in Turlock on July 12! Many of the ODS Consumers had the opportunity to experience the different exhibits that the fair had to offer. Many also had the chance to go on a few rides including The Thunderbolt, Carousel, Ferris Wheel and Lollipop. After leaving the fair, everyone went to McDonalds and ate their lunch at the park. - *Brandon Ramos*

Area Meeting at Turner Park

Voting Rights was the theme for the August 5th SAC 6 Area Meeting presentation at Turner Park in San Andreas. Fred Nisen, Supervising Attorney for Voting Rights at Disability Rights California, and Barry Smith, Executive Director for DRAIL (Disability Resource Agency for Independent Living), spoke at the event. VMRC manned a voter's registration table and staff from the North Valley Hills Office of the SCDD helped serve chili dogs, nachos, watermelon and soft drinks to the 100 people in attendance. Everyone ate lunch and danced to Jerry's Dance Party DJ service.



Here is a picture of a few of our performers; Mark C., Dena P., Jessica Q. and Johnny R.



Valley CAPS

On Friday June 10 Valley Caps Plus held their 2nd annual Talent Show in Manteca. It was a musical presentation. It was great to see how many friends and family were able to attend and support us with this event. Mark Collins was our MC and kept the audience laughing with his jokes between performances. Some of our performances were Hakuna Matta from The Lion King, Kung Fu Fighting from Kung Fu Panda, Footloose and at the end we invited the audience to join us to perform the Macarena. Our Self Advocacy Group provided the refreshments for the event. We can't wait to start planning our next show. - *Dena Pfeifer*

Reporters Wanted

Become a Chatter reporter and let us know what your self advocacy group has been up to. You can submit your stories and photographs or give us good story ideas by e-mailing our editorial staff at council@sac6.org.

The Chatter is published four times a year by the Self Advocacy Council 6. The Self Advocacy Council 6 acts as the Valley Mountain Regional Center Consumer Advocate and is made up of self advocates from Tuolumne, Calaveras, Amador, Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties. Two representatives from each self advocacy chapter in Area 6 can serve on the SAC6 board.

If you are not already a member of a self advocacy group, join one. Or better yet, get together with your friends and start your own. Let the SAC 6 show you how. Talk to a council member today and find out how to get started. Contact us at 209-594-1476 OR 888-960-2416, or write us at: 701 N. Aurora St. Stockton, CA 95202. Let your voice be heard.



SAC 6 board member Crystal Enyeart with members of the Ability Experience.

Arc of Calaveras & Amador

About 200 hundred people attended the Friendship Club visit of the Ability Experience (formerly known as PUSH America) hosted by the Arc. They have been coming to the Arc for 27 years. 28 cyclists this year from the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity made their way to Washington, DC stopping by for a visit on their way. Combined, the Journey of Hope covers 32 different states, with members cycling over 12,000 miles to spread a message of acceptance and understanding for people with disabilities. To date, the Ability Experience has raised over 15 million dollars to benefit people with disabilities and organizations dedicated to their service since 1989. -Crystal Enyeart



The Self Advocacy Council 6 on the set of the Dating Game at the State-Wide Conference in Sacramento.
