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## Celebrating International Day of Persons with Disabilities

By David Forderer, Central Coast Regional SSAN Representative



International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) is recognized in many countries as a day to help everyone become more compassionate and understanding of the challenges faced by people with disabilities. In 1992, after much discussion and advocacy from all over the world, the United Nations (UN) formally recognized that December 3<sup>rd</sup> would be International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD). This year, the theme for the day is “Transformative Solutions for Inclusive Development.” The theme focuses on highlighting the role innovation has in promoting an accessible and inclusive world.

IDPD doesn’t discriminate between mental and physical disabilities. The spirit of the day is to ensure that all people in the world have equal opportunities for work, play, healthcare and for success. People with disabilities are very often contributing and valued members of society. This disability day is all about appreciating them.

IDPD is important for many reasons. First, it builds awareness of people with disabilities since we can sometimes feel left out or invisible in our communities. Second, having an international day for people with disabilities helps people without disabilities understand the difficulties or challenges that people with disabilities have.

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Here are some ways you can celebrate International Day for Persons with Disabilities:

1. Show kindness to people with disabilities by making eye contact, smiling or offering to help someone you notice is struggling
2. Advocate for change in your community if you notice an access barrier like no curb cuts, sidewalks, or push buttons, and talk to store owners, community leaders, and elected officials about your concerns
3. Volunteer your time at a disability-related organization or hospital
4. Attend a local/virtual event or watch recordings of past events
5. Have conversations with your friends and family about the importance of the day
6. Share your story on social media spaces like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

## Resources

[United Nations' Easy-to-Read Plan for Inclusion](#) explains how the United Nations plans to include people with disabilities in their work for the next 5 years

[International Day of Persons with Disabilities \(IDPD\)](#) has information about IDPD, including resources and history

## Coping with the Holidays

By Wesley Witherspoon, USC Children's Hospital UCEDD SSAN Representative



The holidays are a fun time of year, but they can be stressful as well. Here are some tips to cope with the holidays:

1. Don't expect the holidays to be perfect
2. Take a break from the activities of the holidays
3. Don't over-schedule yourself
4. Take time for yourself
5. Take time to prepare for certain activities - traveling, cooking, shopping, etc.
6. Get plenty of sleep
7. Don't overeat or drink
8. Realize that it could be a rough time - missing loved ones, families, and/or friends that have passed away
9. Don't spend too much money - there is life after the holidays
10. Don't fight over holiday leftovers
11. Give to people who are disadvantaged - it makes you feel better about yourself
12. Be realistic
13. Appreciate everyone who helps you
14. Go shopping early in the day to avoid crowds
15. Put your holiday items away after the holidays
16. Be patient - traffic might be heavy
17. Relax
18. Buy holiday gifts as soon as possible - things run out quickly
19. Watch out for your safety - lots of crimes happen during the holiday season
20. Enjoy yourself

I hope that you have a good Holiday Season and best wishes for 2023.



## New Member Bio: Eric Aguilar

By Eric Aguilar, San Bernardino SSAN Regional Representative

Eric is a resident of Fontana, CA. He enjoys 5K mud-running, studying martial arts, hiking, exercising, collecting multi-functional objects, LED lights and working with emergency tools. Eric enjoys Disaster Preparedness work and is actively involved in many different advocacy groups. Eric is a member of Loma Linda Possibilities, San Bernardino Rolling Start, Inc., the Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative, and is the Vice-Chair for the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) for the San Bernardino Regional Office of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD). Eric has volunteered for the Redlands Police Department for the past 12 years, has been an instructor for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Preparedness Program Community Engagement Response Team (CERT) for the past 10 years, and is an Assistant Staff Officer for Diversity with the United States. Eric has a great ambition to inspire others with disabilities with great dreams. Eric has hopes of becoming a Disability Integration Advisor Lead, certified ADA Coordinator, licensed interpreter for American Sign Language, Instructor for the National Emergency basic Academy, instructor for the Functional Assessment service team, and an Instructor for Emergency Management.

Eric Aguilar was born prematurely at Redlands Community Hospital and was diagnosed with a mild stage of Cerebral Palsy and two different types of seizures. Due to his diagnosis, doctors had low expectations for Eric, doubting that he would be able to talk and walk, let alone live for a long time. Despite all of these challenges, Eric continued to live, and doesn't let his disability stop him from getting involved in his community or chasing his dreams. Eric has become a very well-known volunteer with the Redlands community and has been recognized for his involvement. Eric is excited to continue his leadership development among people with disabilities through SSAN.

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## Register for Upcoming USC Trainings

Contact Wesley Witherspoon, the Consumer Advocate at the University of Southern California (USC) University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at Children's Hospital Los Angeles for information about the upcoming self-advocacy training.





## Disability Employment

By Lisa Cooley, Sacramento Regional SSAN Representative

My employment journey started when I became an Americorp member in Rancho Cordova. I was a Resource Center Aide for the first half of my Americorp year. As a Resource Center Aide, I helped families to access community resources in Rancho Cordova. This is where I learned most of what I know about different types of services in Sacramento. The second half of my Americorp year was spent as a tutor and mentor with first, second and third-graders in elementary school. I helped them with their homework every day and participated in fun activities with them, such as playing games. After my Americorp year, I started doing disability advocacy work with Disability Rights California (DRC) as an independent contractor. I began working with DRC in my second half of college, and I get paid for it every time I help out.

I have tried to get a job in the traditional way, but I have been discriminated against in the past, due to my disability. My advice to anyone who has a disability who wants to work is simply this: Don't get discouraged and don't give up on yourself and get work experience through various kinds of volunteer work because you never know what kind of people you might meet who could help you get your dream job. I don't have permanent employment yet, but my dream job is to get a job in public policy, working for the state or federal government doing disability policy work in Sacramento or Washington DC.

### SSAN Members

- Nathaniel Florez – North Coast
- Charles Nutt – North State
- Lisa Cooley – Sacramento
- Ellen Sweigert – North Bay
- Regina Woodliff – Bay Area
- Robert Balderama – North Valley Hills
- David Forderer – Central Coast
- Rebecca Donabed – Sequoia
- Julie Gaona – Los Angeles
- Sean Sullivan – Orange County
- Eric Aguilar – San Bernardino
- Paul Mansell – San Diego Imperial
- Desiree Boykin – ARCA
- Goldie House – CFILC
- Nicole Patterson – DDS
- Scott Barron – DRC
- Robert Levy – UC Davis Mind Institute
- Kecia Weller – UCLA Tarjan Center
- Wesley Witherspoon – SCDD and USC Children's Hospital
- Maria Marquez – SCDD



## Recapping UC Davis MIND Institute Summer Institute

By Robert Levy, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

The 2022 Summer Institute Conference webinar training was another success. This year was the 17<sup>th</sup> year in a row that UC Davis MIND Institute has hosted this annual event.

Unfortunately, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, the event was held on Zoom because of COVID pandemic protocols. Hopefully, next year (2023), this event will be back in person for the first time since 2019.

One good thing about having this conference on Zoom is that more people from near and far were able to attend the event. This year, there were 636 attendees from 14 different countries. There were numerous presenters like Jackie Armstrong, a SMUD /PEC staff member and Wesley Witherspoon, a University of Southern California (USC) Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) UCEDD staff member were both were part of the panel presentation called "Living Your Best Life: Personal Experiences, Resources and Strategies". There was one other panel presentation and a keynote presenter as well. The theme of this year's Summer Institute Conference was "We Belong: Preparing for Community Life and Fulfillment After High School." My supervisor, Steve Ruder, and many others at the UCD MIND Institute were part of the planning committee that put this year's Summer Institute Conference together by setting up the webinar training and getting the presenters out to share their stories.

The UC Davis MIND Institute conference is an annual event that first started in 2006 with founder UCEDD Executive Director Dr. Robin Hansen from the UCD MIND Institute. There are three different YouTube videos on play lists:

[2022 Summer Institute on Neurodevelopmental Disabilities](#)

### SSAN Mission Statement

The Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (SSAN) promotes leadership and builds bridges that strengthen advocacy among disability communities by focusing on policy change.

SSAN's past Newsletters, Annual Reports, and Meeting info, can be found at [www.scdd.ca.gov](http://www.scdd.ca.gov) under the "Self-Advocacy" tab

**Let us know if you want to see anything specific in future newsletters!**

How do you contact the SSAN Newsletter Editor Robert Levy? Leave a message for him by contacting the SCDD Self-Advocacy Coordinator **Riana Hardin at (916) 263-8196**

**Check out the [SCDD YouTube Page](#) for stories from self-advocates, past meetings, and more!**



## The Need for Civil Conversation

By Paul Mansell, San Diego Regional SSAN Representative

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

—US Constitution Amendment 1

The founders of this country viewed the right to free speech as so important that they made it the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Nowadays, it seems that people approach conversations expecting to argue and disagree with someone else - that we may have lost sight of what free speech is and is not. When we hear the term 'free speech,' we bring up images of newspapers, magazines, radio talk show hosts, TV personalities, or protestors, but communication is much more than that.

Humans have a uniquely complicated form of communication that allows us to express our ideas, values, and opinions. Communication is an important part of society, as it allows for expression through the arts (like music, dance and paintings) and allows us to learn new things through listening or reading. Communication is so important that it is taught in school at all levels and we have the ability to improve our communication skills by always using them.

Communication is not a competition; who can out-talk another? We commonly think this because of watching debates or news programs. Communication is understanding where we are coming from, where we have common interests or ground, what solution will help the most people or do the most good, and how to go about working together for the common good. To accomplish this and for communication to be genuine and authentic, we need to trust and feel safe with one another. Because of this polarization (strong different opinions) that has gone on for so long, people fear that conversation is a head game, an attempt by one to persuade another to their point of view. That is not communication but debate or argument, in which people think and talk in bullet points and code.

I suggest we consider a different type of communication, such as civic conversation. It is not focused on winning or having one-sided conversations and thinking about what one will say next, but a process to identify the situation, explore the issues involved, and maybe solve the problem at hand and come up with a solution that works for everyone involved in the conversation.

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Instead of winning or scoring points, we should seek commonly regarded facts as a starting point. We must politely listen to what others say without judging them and clarify what is being said for mutual understanding. When we approach conversations this way, we move beyond talking points. Sometimes, when conversations get too far away from the original topic, we may need to redirect people back to the original topic. Communicate in the spirit of gratitude and respect, as proper communication is precious and rare these days. Many refuse to engage in conversation.

There is an assumption that if people just heard me out, they would agree with me. That is naïve and short-sighted. We all are entitled to our opinions, as distasteful as they might be to people who don't agree. A good conversation technique is where one person talks at a time, then allows time for the other participant to give their thoughts on the topic. Conversations done this way ensure that everyone is heard and understood, and no one is talking over another person. This country sorely needs excellent and honest civic conversation. Leaders, pundits, and the media have sold us short on this. They say things to win support, gain votes, and get higher ratings, leaving us emotionally distraught and wound up. We deserve better than this and can do better than this. Instead of packing up our lives and moving to a city where everyone agrees with us, let's practice some good old-fashioned civic conversation. It might not solve all the problems in this country, but it is worth a try.

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## Dreams Come True

**By Ellen Sweigert, North Bay Regional SSAN Representative**

It's unbelievable that I was once a young teenager back in High School proving to the world that people with disabilities can become leaders. Years after my high school graduation, I had been excelling in disability advocacy in Monterey. Around 2013, I moved up to Napa, when I learned about disability advocacy in the community of Napa. That was a huge step that helped me network and Parents Can found me. I have always been surrounded by and active in disability advocacy. Help from Parents Can became a steppingstone that led me to reaching my dream job as the Consumer Advocate at North Bay Regional Center. I thought this childhood dream of mine was unreachable. Now, I feel accomplished = after all my hard work, my dream job found me, and I am able to help other people with disabilities become advocates and get involved in self-advocacy.





## Member Reflections

By **Scott Barron**, Disability Rights California SSAN Representative

My name is Scott Barron. I am the Peer Advocate for the Office of Clients' Rights Advocacy (OCRA), a program under Disability Rights California. OCRA assists clients throughout California who are served by the regional center system. As part of my work with OCRA, I am responsible for providing a range of self-advocacy training, such as Emergency Preparedness and basic Clients' Rights. I also sit on internal and external committees. My journey as a SSAN member began five years ago in December 2017. When I was asked by our former program director to represent DRC and OCRA on the Statewide Self-Advocacy Network, I was eager for the opportunity to represent people with disabilities from all over southern California. As I approached this new role, I not only thought about the issues impacting individuals with disabilities, but also how that support may change or evolve in the future. My goal for the first meeting was to listen and absorb information from my fellow self-advocates. I was familiar with some information because we had participated in a DRC-sponsored monthly call, in which self-advocates shared their work and collaborated on projects.

As I look back five years later, listening is still the number one tool in my advocacy toolbelt. When I attend SSAN meetings, I think about the same questions. For example, "how I can help assist someone to make their life easier or what issues are relevant in the disability community today?" and "how I can make a difference for future generations." I appreciate all the training and guidance SSAN members provide during each meeting and the respect that is given to each member when sharing their ideas. I would like to see SSAN include the younger generation in the self-advocacy movement. Our issues evolve because of how we present them, and shared information should also evolve. We need to start thinking of ways to meet people where they are so they can lead from where they are. Technology is power! My wish for SSAN is that the group continue our hard work while maintaining flexibility and understanding the way we provide self-advocacy may not be what the future generation is interested in. In the words of my Director Andy Imperato, Lead on!



## DDS' CAC is RECRUITING!

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) provides advice to DDS on policies, programs, legislation, and regulations that affect the lives of Californians with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### About the CAC:

- ☀ Fifteen (15) self-advocate members from all over California
- ☀ Meets at least four (4) times a year in Sacramento, or online with Zoom
- ☀ Members share information with their local self-advocacy organizations
- ☀ Brings input from those groups back to the CAC
- ☀ Transportation, hotel, meal, and facilitator costs (if needed) will be paid by DDS

### If you would like to apply to be a CAC member, here is what you need to do:

- \* Check the link below to see if we are recruiting from your regional center.
- \* You must have an intellectual or developmental disability and receive regional center services to apply.
- \* You must be a member of a local self-advocacy group or other organization that serves or empowers people with developmental disabilities.
- \* You **MUST** be nominated for membership by your local self-advocacy group or developmental disability organization.

**Please note:** Regional Center employees are not eligible for CAC membership.



Interested advocates should fill out the online [DDS Consumer Advisory Committee Application](#) and submit it with their nomination letter.



## Good News Corner

Here are some examples of websites that you can find uplifting news:

- [The Good News Network: California](#) for up-to-date information about interesting positive things that are happening
- [Positive News](#) is a site that you can check out to see what is happening around the world that is positive
- [Good Good Good](#) shares really good news, not just feel-good news
- [Happy News](#) celebrates all that is good in the world
- [Optimist Daily](#) is a site that shares solutions and good news from around the world

## Disability-Related Reads and Podcasts

Here are a few Self-Advocacy and Disability-related publications that SSAN members are reading:



[Disability Scoop](#) is an online resource with disability-related news



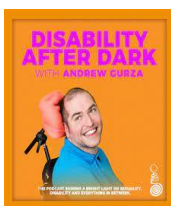
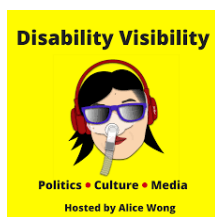
[Social Security Administration Blog](#) has SSI information



[World Institute on Disability News](#) has updates on what is happening around the world



[RespectAbility News](#) has updates on national efforts to engage people with disabilities in the political process





## Kudos Corner

**By Robert Levy**, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

Kudos to Kecia Weller! Kecia has been a great advocate on SSAN since 2012, starting as a representative for the Los Angeles Regional Office and then as a representative for the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Tarjan Center UCEDD on SSAN since 2013. She studied Leadership, Government, Psychology, and American Sign Language at Santa Monica College.

Kecia is very involved in disability advocacy and cares about raising awareness of sexual assaults of people with disabilities. Kecia was on the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) from 2012-2018 and chaired the Employment First Committee. She is a founding member of the “Silence = Violence” Network and was appointed to be a member of the Department of Developmental Services Developmental Services (DS) Task Force in 2013. Kecia has advocated for change in both Sacramento and Washington, D.C. and presented at conferences, such as the Supported Life Institute, California Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference, and the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD). Kecia has participated in the Council on Leadership and Advocacy (COLA) and been a part of Disability Voices United (DVU) Emerging Leaders program.

Kecia is currently the co-Chair of the National Peer Support Network, serving with the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) as a Disability Advocacy Group Representative.

Kecia Weller is an asset to SSAN and a great example of a self-advocate for the community. Check out her podcast on plain language “In Other Words” wherever you listen to your podcasts.

From all of us SSAN members, the SCDD staff members and the community, kudos to you Kecia Weller! Keep up the good work and we look forward to hearing about your future projects.

### Learn About SSAN

#### Member Organizations

- [Association of Regional Center Agencies](#)
- [California Foundation for Independent Living Centers](#)
- [Department of Developmental Services](#)
- [Disability Rights California](#)
- [University of California, Davis MIND Institute](#)
- [University of California, Los Angeles, Tarjan Center](#)
- [University of Southern California, Children’s Hospital](#)

#### Self-Determination Update

Self-Determination is LIVE in California. Check out the [DDS Self-Determination Newsletter](#) for the latest on California’s Self-Determination Program. Talk to your service coordinator to learn more.



## Tips for Staying Positive in Trying Times

There is so much happening in our communities right now and at times it can feel over whelming. Here are some tips for keeping calm that we want to share with you:

- Remember your ABC's: Always Be Caring
- Listen to music: your favorite artist, or type of music
- Have a dance party and move around
- Try boxing or Thai Chi
- Talk to a friend or family member
- Mentor another advocate
- Write about how you are feeling or thinking
- Read and learn something new
- Go for a walk or jog outside: fresh air is good for you
- Check out a coffee/tea shop and people watch
- Volunteer for an issue that you care about
- Share your story/experiences with others
- Get plenty of rest to feel energized for the next day
- Try to eat healthy
- Practice Yoga/stretching or mindful meditation
- Know that you are not alone
- Stay involved in your community by joining a board

### Community Resources

[SARTAC Zoom Meetings](#)

[ARCA Regional Center COVID-19 Resources](#)

[DRC's Build Back Better Resources](#)

[SSA Ticket to Work Tips to Open Your ABLA Account](#)

[Office of Self-Determination Ombudsperson](#)

[US Dept Of Education Office of Civil Rights Digital Access Series](#)

[How to Talk about Disability Sensitivity](#)

## SAVE THE DATES

**Disability Rights California**



[Events and Trainings](#)

**CalABLE**



[News and Trainings](#)



[DO Network Training Library](#)

**Plain Language COVID-19 Resources Available on: [SCDD Website](#)**

**Register for the Monthly California Statewide Self-Advocacy Chats on Zoom**



[Current Issues and Resources](#)

[Voting Resources](#)

**DRC Voting Hotline:  
888-569-7955**

[Disability Vote California](#)

**Have questions about the Self-Determination Program? [The Self-Determination Advocates Leadership Group](#) meets monthly on Zoom**



# VOICES of SSAN

December 2022

Volume 31

## Help Save A Life!

### Join Project Self-Advocates for Emergency Education (SAFEE) a FREE Hands-Only CPR Training

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of every month  
Starting in January of 2023 Register for **one** class only  
**(Non-certified training)**  
Limited to (30) people

Date	Time
January 13 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am
February 10 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am
March 10 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am
April 14 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am
May 12 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am
June 9 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 am – 10:30 am

### 2 STEPS TO SAVE A LIFE



### Participants will learn:

- \* How to do hands-only CPR
- \* When to call 9-1-1

### To get ready for Practicing Hands-Only CPR:

Find one of the following in your home



Empty disposable water bottle with cap



Rolled up yoga mat



Toilet paper roll!



Foam stress toy

Or... something that you can compress about 2" and it pushes back!

### Registration Zoom Link:

[https://bit.ly/ARCProjectSAFEE\\_CPRTraining](https://bit.ly/ARCProjectSAFEE_CPRTraining) Habrá interpretación en Español disponible

For more information, or if you need an accommodation to participate in these trainings, please contact in advanced:

Debbie Marshall: [debbie.marshall@scdd.ca.gov](mailto:debbie.marshall@scdd.ca.gov)

Jennifer Lucas: [jennifer.lucas@scdd.ca.gov](mailto:jennifer.lucas@scdd.ca.gov)



In collaboration with:

