



## IN THIS EDITION:

This issue focuses on employment resources for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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**Editor:** Robert Levy

## Contributors:

- Eric Aguilar
- Wesley Witherspoon
- Rebecca Donabed
- Robert Levy
- Charles Nutt

## Learn More about Volume 34 Theme



In honor of the fact that October is recognized as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) SSAN has chosen to highlight the issue of Employment for the September 2023 issue of Voices of SSAN. Some articles in this issue highlight members' employment stories, while others highlight organizations that help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) find jobs. There are also articles in this edition that share tips and resources on how people can protect themselves, their families, and their communities from harm. The SSAN Leadership team would like to thank members who wrote articles and shared information for this issue of Voices of SSAN.



## 10 Tips to Protect Yourself from Unhealthy Air

By Eric Aguilar, San Bernardino Regional SSAN Representative

1. Check daily air pollution forecasts in your area. Air Now is a great national online resource that can help you see the forecast in your zip code. The Air Quality Index (AQI) is the tool that is used to measure the safety of the air outside. The six colors in the color-coded tool can let you know when the air is unhealthy in your community.
2. Avoid exercising outdoors when pollution levels are high. When the air is bad, walk indoors in a shopping mall or gym or use an exercise machine. Limit the amount of time your child spends playing outdoors if the air quality is unhealthy.
3. Always avoid exercising near high-traffic areas. Even when air quality forecasts are green, the vehicles on busy highways can create high pollution levels up to one-third a mile away.
4. Use less energy in your home. Generating electricity and other sources of energy creates air pollution. By reducing energy use, you can help improve air quality, curb greenhouse gas emissions, encourage energy independence and save money! Check out the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's easy tips for conserving energy at home.
5. Encourage your child's school to participate in the EPA's Clean School Bus Campaign to reduce exposure to emissions from school buses. To keep exhaust levels down, schools should not allow school buses to idle outside of their buildings.
6. Walk, bike or carpool. Combine trips. Use buses, subways, light rail systems, commuter trains or other alternatives to driving your car.
7. Don't burn wood or trash. Burning firewood and trash are among the major sources of particulate pollution (soot) in many parts of the country.
8. Use hand-powered or electric lawn care equipment rather than gasoline-powered. Old two-stroke engines like lawn mowers and leaf or snow blowers often have no pollution control devices. They can pollute the air even more than cars, though engines sold since 2011 are cleaner.
9. Don't allow anyone to smoke indoors and support measures to make all public places tobacco-free.
10. Get involved. Start by checking out our Healthy Air Campaign which has more information about what you can do.

Help yourself and others breathe easier. Support national, state, and local efforts to clean up sources of pollution. Your life and the life of someone you love may depend on it.



## How to Be Independent

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

It is important to be independent. For some, people can be independent by doing everything on their own. For some, self-advocates can ask for help from their family members or support staff. If you are conserved, your conservator can decide things for you. Pillars of Independence are knowing:

- How to use transportation
- How to make health care decisions, take care of yourself, and make good decisions.
- How to have a social life.
- What it means to work, volunteer, and/or attending day programs
- How to have a routine (things that you do in a day)
- How to budget your money.
- How to maintain good hygiene (cleaning yourself, your clothes, and maintaining good health.)
- How to fix your own meals (cooking, cleaning, and preparing meals).
- How to get some exercise.
- How to use technology such as a computer, phone, tablet, etc.
- How to protect yourself from harm.
- How to make good decisions with your life and ask for help as needed.

Independence is important for people with disabilities. With support, you can live independently.

## SSAN Members

- Sonya Force – 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
- Vacant – 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
- Alex Reyes – SCDD



## The Role of a Community Organizer for a Independent Living Center

By **Rebecca Donabed**, Sequoia Regional SSAN Representative



My name is Rebecca Donabed, and I am the Community Organizer at Resources for Independence Central Valley (RICV). Our main office is in Fresno and our satellite offices are in Visalia and Merced. I work in the Visalia office. I'm in charge of networking and advocating for all of the people that we serve. I'm working to meet as many elected officials as I can, including Mayors, Vice Mayors, City Council Members, Assemblymember, etc. RICV received two proclamations for Disability Employment Awareness month and one for Disability Awareness month. One was from the City of Tulare and the other was from Tulare County Board of Supervisors. I attend a lot of meetings via Zoom such as; SSTAC & VAAC, SSI, Housing, etc. I also run the DAT Meeting which is on the 1st & 3rd Thursday from 3-4:30pm of every month. If you want to reach out to me you can email me at [rdonabed@ricv.org](mailto:rdonabed@ricv.org)

### 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 History of employment at PEC and CES

By Robert Levy, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

Progressive Employment Concepts (PEC) has been helping people with disabilities find employment opportunities since 1995. PEC opened a second location in Davis, California in 2002 called Community and Employment Services (CES) and keeps expanding to serve more clients in the Sacramento region. PEC /CES works to help people with disabilities to have a productive life through employment opportunities like volunteering out in the community, supported employment, or Competitive Integrated Employment (equal pay for equal work). The Executive Director /CEO President and Owner Carole Watilo went to college and got a master's degree in social work. At the start of her career, Carole visited numerous employment sites to get some work experience and learn about the needs of people with disabilities in looking for work. Carole became interested in the field of social work because she likes helping people with disabilities, and continues to enjoy the work that she does to this day.

Carole decided to open her own business because she saw a need for an organization focused on helping people with disabilities find employment opportunities and reaching their goals, whether it is through going to college, learning independent living skills, volunteering, participating in supported employment, or through Competitive Integrated Employment. A lot has changed since the beginning of PEC/CES, like when the organization first started there was no social media. There was not a lot of cell phone use, and the employees used to not work from home.

This year marks 28 years of service to the community for PEC/CES and I am thankful for all that the organization has been able to accomplish. I know that I would not be where I am today, working at PEC/CES and the UC Davis MIND Institute without PEC/CES. Over the years, there have been a lot of changes happening, especially with a lot of the staff being able to work from home, having social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. All employment sites are using Zoom to be more productive. Both PEC and CES are able to get more clients and more staff hired. For PEC/ CES the work will never be done. There are always going to be people with disabilities who need help to be productive in society who can get the services that they need from PEC/CES.

So happy 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary to PEC/CES and many more years. I look forward to helping PEC/CES continue to serve our community of people with disabilities for years to come.



## Self-Determination Success Story: Charles Nutt

By Charles Nutt, North State Regional SSAN Representative

My name is Charles Nutt, and I live in Butte County which is in Northern California. I would like to share my story about my success with self-determination; where it started and where I am today.

Several years ago, I had some weight issues that were affecting my health. I knew I needed a change. I was overwhelmed by the amount of change that would be needed but with determination and consistency, I was able significantly reduce my weight. The change I was able to make on my own, was not enough and I was still experiencing health problems and lots of pain. I went to a kidney specialist, and I was diagnosed with Diabetes. The kidney specialist told me that I needed to lose more weight. I needed to come up with a plan to lose weight faster. So, I prayed for a solution, and I heard about a new service model being offered through the regional centers called Self-Determination Program and decided to sign up for this new kind of approach to my services.

I got involved in this new Self-Determination Program and learned about it through Far Northern Regional Center (FNRC) and the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD). I was appointed to the local Self- Determination Advisory Committee and now I'm the Chair. I put my name in the "soft rollout" and was eventually selected during the second round of the rollout. Through the Self Determination Program, I created a plan to accomplish my dreams.

Though my goals and planning, I developed my budget and spending plan. Through the budget I was able to choose what I wanted. What I wanted was to purchase exercise equipment including a treadmill, exercise bike and bow flex machine. I was also able to hire my own staff to help me with my goals and was able to pay him a decent wage out of my budget.

It was thanks to my previous Independent Living Skills worker, that I was able to make my initial change. By increasing amount of walking I was doing, I was able to see positive change, but I needed mor support. Through the Self- Determination Program, I was able to purchase the equipment I needed to put my plan into action in the middle of a pandemic, without having put myself in danger. It also helped that I was able to get support from a health coach, who gave me tips on healthy ways of changing the way I eat, exercise routines and general suggestions to improve the quality of my life. In December of 2021, I found out that I needed surgery, but the doctor was not going to do the surgery until I met a certain weight requirement.

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**(Continued from page 6 of September 2023 Issue of Voices of SSAN)**

Through the help of my staff and support through my Self Determination Program and my persistence of accomplishing my goals, I was able to meet that requirement. With the right supports and resources, I was able to accomplish my goals, and you can do it too. I was successful in reaching my personal and health goals all within the first year of being in self-determination.

The second year, I focused on building a space for all of my volunteer jobs and my employment including: Co-Trainer, SCDD Statewide Self-Determination Orientation Training; Chair of the FNRC's local Self-Determination Advisory Committee; Chair of the SCDD, North State Regional Advisory Committee; Member of Department of Departmental Services Consumer Advisory Committee; Member of Project SAFE; and a Member of Leaders Empowering Self-Advocates out of San Diego region. Through my Self-Determination Program, I was able to get the resources and support to create a space, and purchase equipment needed to be successful. I continue to work on my health and wellness goals as well.

In my third year in the Self-Determination Program, I wanted to work on conferences or classes to build my knowledge of the Self-Determination Program that was now open for everyone you use regional center services in California. My spending plan helped me to purchase an Uber subscription, and budget money to attend conferences. Even as I focus on new goals, I continue to work on my original health and wellness goals, so that I don't lose the progress that I have made. Thanks again for reading my health and wellness story, and personal success with self-determination. I encourage others to reach out to their service coordinators to learn about the new program and how to get involved!



## The History of Employment at UC Davis MIND Institute

By Robert Levy, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

This year marks 25 years since the UCD MIND Institute opened its doors, but it all started at a different location for the first 5 years. There were several families who have family members with disabilities who thought we should have a permanent research center at a permanent location site. Back in 2003 the UCD MIND Institute opened its doors at their new location where it has continued to operate for the last 20 years. 3 years later in 2006 the UCD MIND Institute decided to start program called the Center of Excellence for Developmental Disabilities to help other people with disabilities to have a productive life. In 2006 the UCD MIND Institute decided to start to develop a day-long conference called the Summer Institute. Now the UCD MIND Institute has done a lot of YouTube videos with different types of programs and keeps people informed through website updates. Services have also expanded internationally. The MIND Institute started to use social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

In the fall of 2021, The MIND Institute started new programs called the Redwood Seed program and the PCORI PAIR grant project being a 2-year program which it will end this year. The MIND Institute also does the Northern California Business Council committee including the LEND trainings during the period from September through May each year. I provide presentations to that group, as well as for the UCD Medical Student module training each year. Now we use Zoom to do our staff meetings and numerous other meetings. It's been much better than driving back and forth and using up the time that we could do more work at home to get more work done.

I would like to wish a happy 25th anniversary to UCD MIND Institute and say congratulations on 25 years of service to the community. This work will never be done, there will always be more work to do to help people with disabilities to have a productive life. If it wasn't for several families who had decided to develop this idea there wouldn't be the UCD MIND Institute and I wouldn't have job. So, keep up the good work and I can't wait to celebrate 30 years of service in 2028!





## Kudos Corner

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

Julie Gaona is a great self-advocate. She has done numerous presentations to SSAN, in her local region of Los Angeles, and statewide over the years. In October of 2022, she was appointed to be a member of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities and served as the Chair for the Employment First Committee briefly before the creation of the Employment First Office. Julie has had numerous leadership roles in SSAN throughout the years.

Julie has been a member of SSAN representing the Los Angeles region since 2012 when she took over the role of Regional Representative from Kecia Weller, who took on the role of representing the UCLA Tarjan Center UCEDD on SSAN.

Julie belongs to numerous self-advocacy committees and has led many trainings and created many training manuals with the Los Angeles Regional Office of SCDD over the years. Julie lives independently with her husband and does a great job of advocating for her needs.

Julie is an expert on relationships and the co-chair of PAC of USC. Julie enjoys having a variety of responsibilities on her plate but makes the time to collaborate and support others. I think that we all should say congratulations to Julie Gaona for all the self-advocacy work that you have been doing over the years. From all of us at SSAN Kudos to you Julie Gaona!

The **Los Angeles Office of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities** has exciting **trainings** coming up on **Zoom**:

- The **California Budget Process** on September 11<sup>th</sup> in English/ September 18<sup>th</sup> in Spanish
- **Testify** and Influence **Public Policy** on September 25<sup>th</sup> in English/ October 2<sup>nd</sup> in Spanish
- How to be an **Effective Board Member** on October 9<sup>th</sup> in English/ October 16<sup>th</sup> in Spanish

All trainings are held at **10 AM** over Zoom using the link: <https://bit.ly/3qEUp5X>

Contact [Sofia.Cervantes@scdd.ca.gov](mailto:Sofia.Cervantes@scdd.ca.gov) for more details.



## 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 to check out:



[Lawmakers Work to Improve Air Travel on Disability Scoop](#) through SB 1459 and other bills. [Disability Scoop](#) is an online resource with disability-related news



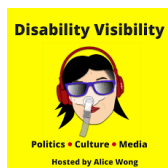
[Social Security Administration Blog](#) has SSI information



[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



## 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.



# VOICES of SSAN

September 2023

Volume 34

## 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 ABLÉ Account](#)
- [Office of Self-Determination Ombudsperson](#)
- [US Dept Of Education Office of Civil Rights Digital Access Series](#)
- [How to Talk about Disability Sensitivity](#)
- [20 Ways to Boost Your Mood from Tips for Success](#)

## SAVE THE DATES

Disability Rights California



[Events and Trainings](#)

CalABLE



[News](#)

[and Trainings](#)



[DO](#)

[Network Training Library](#)

Plain Language COVID-19

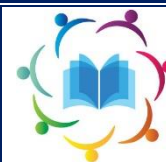
Resources Available on:

[SCDD Website](#)

Register for the Monthly

[California Statewide Self-](#)

[Advocacy Chats](#) on Zoom



SARTAC

Self Advocacy and Beyond

[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