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This Edition of the Voices of SSAN Newsletter celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Congress designated October as NDEAM in 1988.

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- Viri Salgado
- Crystal Enyeart
- Eric Aguilar
- Wesley Witherspoon
- Robert Levy

From Sheltered Workshop to Real Opportunity: My Journey Toward Inclusive Employment

By Viri Salgado, San Diego Regional SSAN Representative

For years, I worked in a sheltered workshop under a 14(c) program. I started earning below minimum wage, doing the work of staff, yet never truly seen as a professional. Like many people with disabilities, I entered the sheltered workshop system because it was one of the few doors open to me. What started as an opportunity became a barrier to growth.

I was paid just \$4.50 an hour at first, despite taking on administrative duties like billing, shipping, and training others. I kept hearing that I didn't belong in a program like that, yet no one offered me a path forward. Meanwhile, I picked up a second job through an Independent Living Services agency and earned \$18 an hour. That job showed me what was possible outside of the 14(c) system. During the pandemic, I connected with the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) through self-advocacy meetings. I was given the opportunity to participate in the Paid Internship Program (PIP), which gave me the opportunity to gain actual work experience and leadership training.

Thanks to the PIP and the support I received through that internship, I developed professional communication, outreach, and public speaking skills.

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I learned how to collaborate with diverse teams, coordinate events, and advocate for systems change. Most importantly, the internship helped me build the confidence and qualifications I needed to step into a full-time role. Today, I proudly work as the Client Information Specialist at the San Diego Regional Center (SDR). In this role, I help individuals with developmental disabilities and their families connect with services, resources, and self-advocacy opportunities. I support clients in navigating the regional center system, co-lead trainings, assist with outreach efforts, and serve on planning committees for events across the region. My job allows me to give back to the community and empower others who may be facing the same challenges I once did.

Transitioning from a sheltered setting to **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)** changed my life. It wasn't just about getting a paycheck, it was about dignity, respect, and being treated as a valued member of the workforce. California has made strong progress by ending new 14(c) certificates, investing in person-centered planning, and expanding paid internships opportunities. But we need stronger oversight, better wage equity, and career pathways, not just entry-level roles.

Eliminating 14(c) isn't just a policy decision. It's a statement that says: we believe in the talent, value, and rights of all workers, including those with disabilities. We are not less capable. We are not worth less. We deserve equal pay and equal opportunity.

Here are some ideas on how to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month:

1. **Share your story:** Share your employment journey with others on social media, in discussion groups, blog posts, newsletter articles, and podcasts.
2. **Advocate for inclusive employment opportunities:** If you notice language or physical access barriers in your workplace, talk to someone about addressing those barriers. Connect with lawmakers
3. **Lend a hand:** Consider mentoring a fellow advocate in their employment journey.
4. **Show compassion:** Understand the perspectives and challenges others are going through.




Water Safety Tips


By Eric Aguilar, San Bernardino Regional SSAN Representative

Here are essential water safety tips for people with disabilities, whether they're near pools, beaches, lakes, or during emergency situations like floods:


General Water Safety Tips

-  Never Swim Alone: Always have a buddy or caregiver present. Supervision saves lives.

Personalized Floatation Devices (PFDs)

-  Wear a properly fitted life jacket or flotation aid approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, especially if mobility or balance is affected.




Know Your Limits

-  Understand your physical capabilities and avoid overexertion. Fatigue increases risk of injury or drowning.

Emergency Communication Plan



-  Keep a whistle or waterproof communication device on hand to signal for help.

For People with Mobility Disabilities

-  Use accessible pools.
-  Choose facilities with ramps, lifts, or zero-entry access.
-  Practice safe transfers with assistance and equipment (e.g., transfer boards).

Communication Tools:

For People with Hearing Disabilities



-  Establish and share visual cues, like hand signals that indicate you need help with swim partners and/or lifeguards.
-  Swim in areas with visual alarms or strobe lights.

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For People with Visual Disabilities

-  Familiarize yourself with the layout of the pool. Ask someone who can see to walk with you around the perimeter of the body of water.
-  Use textured tiles or ropes to mark safe zones.




In Case of Flood or Emergency

-  Locate accessible evacuation routes ahead of time.
-  Have a waterproof "Go Bag" with medications, ID, and emergency contacts.
-  Notify emergency services of specific needs during evacuations.

Extra Beach Safety Tips

-  Stay close to lifeguard stations.
-  Use beach-friendly mobility aids (e.g., beach wheelchairs).
-  Watch for strong currents, rip tides, or sudden drop-offs.

Final Tips

-  Take water safety classes tailored for people with disabilities.
-  Inform lifeguards or companions about your needs.
-  Teach caregivers how to assist with water safety and rescue techniques.



Leadership Investment Training (LIT)

Become a strong leader in your community with RICV's comprehensive eight-week hybrid training series starting September 25, 2025, at 10:00 AM.

Topics include:

- September 25: Introduction to LIT and Disability History
- October 1: Government
- October 8: Mental Health
- October 15: How to Read a Bill
- October 22: Voting
- October 29: Legislative Staff
- November 5: Advocacy
- November 12: Graduation

Scan QR Code to register:





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.

Visit the [SSAN Page](#) on the SCDD website to check out past newsletters, annual reports, and meeting info. You can also navigate to the SSAN page by clicking on the “Self-Advocacy” tab at www.scdd.ca.gov.

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**

Recap of the California Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference

By Robert Levy, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

On Friday, May 9, 2025, more than 400 people attended the 29th Annual Statewide Self-Advocacy Supported Life Conference. The two-day event concluded on Saturday, May 10, 2025, and was held in person at the Wyndham Hotel in Sacramento, CA.

The conference brought together self-advocates, allies, and professionals, from across the country—including a presenter all the way from Michigan. My co-worker at Progressive Employment Concepts, Jackie, gave an excellent presentation on Supported Decision-Making, a topic that my supervisor Steve is also passionate about.

I had the opportunity to present about my own employment journey—how I transitioned out of a sheltered workshop and moved into competitive employment. I spoke about my time working at Target, and how I now hold two positions: one at the UC Davis MIND Institute and another at Progressive Employment Concepts.

Brittney, a client from Community Employment Services (a partner of Progressive Employment Concepts), gave a powerful presentation on building connections and relationships within the community. Crystal and Dena shared their insights on living independently and what it takes to succeed on your own.

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Many others presented throughout the event—the list truly goes on! There were also many micro-enterprise business owners in attendance, proudly displaying and selling their products at vendor tables.

A big thank you goes out to the entire Supported Life Conference Planning Committee for their hard work and dedication to organizing such a successful and meaningful event. This year’s theme, *“Follow the Yellow Brick Road,”* was inspired by the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz* and the recent release of the movie *Wicked: Part One* and made me think of the song *“Goodbye Yellow Brick Road”* by Elton John that was released in 1973.

Looking ahead, the 39th Annual Supported Life Conference is scheduled for Thursday, October 9, 2025, and Friday, October 10, 2025, at the Wyndham Hotel in Sacramento. Then, in May 2026, we will celebrate the 30th Annual Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference, which is planned to be held at the Wyndham in Sacramento.

I hope to see you at a future conference!

SSAN Members

- Sonya Force – North Coast
- Vacant – North State
- Lisa Cooley – Sacramento
- Ellen Sweigert – North Bay
- Sara Desumala – Bay Area
- Crystal Enyeart – North Valley Hills
- David Forderer – Central Coast
- Rebecca Donabed– Sequoia
- Julie Gaona – Los Angeles
- Sean Sullivan – Orange County
- Eric Aguilar – San Bernardino
- Viri Salgado – San Diego Imperial
- Desiree Boykin – ARCA
- Russell Rawlings – 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
- Rosie Ryan – SCDD

MEET Crystal Enyeart:

New SCDD North Valley Hills Representative



By Crystal Enyeart, North Valley Hills Regional SSAN Representative

Hi, my name is Crystal Enyeart and I am the new SSAN representative for North Valley Hills region- (Amador, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, & Tuolumne counties). I am from Amador County. I live on my own with my emotional support cat, Pixie.

I learned about self-advocacy through a People First class at a program in Amador County years ago. That group connected me to the Self Advocacy Council 6 (SAC6), a regional self-advocacy group supported by the North Valley Hills Regional Office of SCDD. I like going to the SAC6 Board meetings because I get to learn from other advocates. SAC6 also elected me to represent them on the Valley Mountain Regional Center Board of Directors. I am also a past Regional Advisory Committee member of the SCDD North Valley Hills Regional Advisory Committee.

I take my leadership roles very seriously and enjoy sharing information between groups- I give reports to the SAC6 and the VMRC Board. I have given presentations at conferences and in zoom CHATS. I like doing advocacy work as it keeps me busy, and I can help people get information. I am excited to be a part of SSAN!



I first heard about SSAN through the updates Robert Balderama shared during the SAC6 meetings. Robert has represented the North Valley Hills Region and SAC6 since 2012. So, when he decided to retire and asked SAC6 if anyone was interested in applying for his seat- I said YES! I hope to do as good a job as Robert has done all these years! We all THANK him for his years of service and leadership and wish him all the best in his retirement!



Fire Safety and Prevention

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

It is September, and in California, that means it is officially fire season! Brush fires can occur almost anywhere, so it is important to be prepared. Below, I share tips for what you can do if you see a fire, and what to do to prevent a fire.

1. If you see a fire, evacuate to a safe place immediately and call 911 to report the fire.
2. Maintain the space and landscaping around your home and property by regularly cutting the grass and trimming trees, bushes, and shrubs. Make sure it does not grow too much.
3. Don't hoard stuff inside your home and on your property.
4. Buy a fire extinguisher and/or fire blanket.
5. Learn the best evacuation routes before a disaster
6. Even after the brush fire is over, in a strong rainstorm, burn areas are at risk of experiencing mud slides and flooding.
7. Don't fight chemical and electrical fires on your own. Call 911 immediately, but if it is safe to do so, unplug the power source before evacuating to safety.
8. If you smoke, use ashtrays and be sure they are fully extinguished before putting in a trashcan.
9. Learn what to do if a fire starts in locations, you visit regularly (friend's homes, work, stores, places of worship, public transportation, etc.)
10. Know where the fire alarms, fire sprinklers, and fire hydrants are located.
11. Take a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class to prepare for fires. In CERT classes, they train people in what to do in a fire.
12. Make sure you maintain your vehicle to prevent it from overheating.
13. Be careful when you cook something, make sure you turn off the stove and oven when you are done.
14. Make sure to keep open space around a space heater. Don't put anything in front of a heater.
15. In any emergency, always listen and follow directions of first responders (paramedics, police, fire fighters)
16. If you catch on fire, stop, drop and roll if you can do that.



PEC/CES: Celebrating 30 Years of Service

By Robert Levy, UC Davis MIND Institute UCEDD SSAN Representative

Progressive Employment Concepts/Community Employment Services (PEC/CES) is proudly celebrating 30 years of service! Since opening its doors on October 16, 1995, the organization has grown tremendously, providing support to individuals through agencies like Alta Regional Center and the Department of Rehabilitation.

Carole Watilo, the founder of PEC/CES, has always had a strong passion for helping people with disabilities. Inspired by her own journey, she envisioned creating opportunities and supporting people with disabilities in a variety of work settings including Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), volunteer work, higher education, and even those with independent who are their own bosses. An example of the important services PEC/CES offers is a training course called Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). This training is a 40-hour professional development program used to prepare both staff and clients to advocate and succeed in competitive employment.

PEC/CES provides a very supportive environment and keeps their staff informed about important information. Three of my co-workers and myself work together to publish a quarterly newsletter, much like SSAN's newsletter, where we write about events and changes in the service system. PEC/CES also has social media accounts where we highlight community updates, important news, and share photos from in-person events. I also contribute to the PEC/CES Corner by maintaining the calendar of events and sharing updates with staff. This helps everyone stay in the loop about upcoming events they might want to attend. Finally, PEC/CES keeps the organization informed by holding quarterly Zoom meetings where they discuss important news and updates, and select the Employee of the Quarter

PEC/CES is an amazing place to work and take care of their staff. This can be seen by how long staff choose to stay with the agency. Among the longest-serving staff, is Rob. Rob has worked at PEC/CES for over 28 years! He is closely followed by Bob, who has been with the organization for more than 26 years. Carole, the OG and founder, remains the longest-serving staff member, who has dedicated 30 years to the mission. Together, they've witnessed many changes—clients and staff moving on to new jobs, retiring, or sadly, passing away. Through it all, they continuously welcome both new and returning faces into the PEC/CES family.

As PEC/CES continues to move through the decades, it will stay committed to supporting people on their employment journeys and daily lives—just as they've supported me.

Happy 30th birthday, PEC/CES!

Tips for Turning Concern into Action

It can be hard to know what you can do to help advocate for change. SSAN members have shared some ideas on how you can turn your concerns and worries into action:



- Share your thoughts with family members and friends.
- Consider mentoring another advocate.
- Write down the issue or problem that you are having, then think about it and make a list of your ideas about what would make the situation better and who would be able to help make the change happen.
- Write a social media or blog post.
- Listen to, host, and/or be a guest on a podcast.
- Write a letter to the editor or an opinion piece for your local newspaper or organization's newsletter.
- Contact your local representatives about important issues.
- Get involved in your community by joining a club or board.
- Attend a city council meeting to share your concerns.
- Connect with your local regional center, independent living center, and/or State Council on Developmental Disabilities regional office and ask about their self-advocacy groups and trainings.
- Donate your time by volunteering for an organization.
- Join a board or commission working to address an issue you care about like the [Department of Developmental Services Lived Experience Advisory Group \(DDS LEAG\)](#).
- Learn about the issues important to candidates running in upcoming local, state, and national elections.
- Let your voice and your choice be heard by voting.



Disability-Related Reads

Here are a few Self-Advocacy and Disability-related publications to check out:



[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.

Disability-Related Listens

Click on the logos to check out some creative content on disability related topics.



Learn About SSAN Member Organizations:

- [Association of Regional Center Agencies \(ARCA\)](#)
- [California Foundation for Independent Living Centers \(CFILC\)](#)
- [Department of Developmental Services \(DSS\)](#)
- [Disability Rights California \(DRC\)](#)
- [University of California, Davis \(UCD\) MIND Institute](#)
- [University of California, Los Angeles \(UCLA\), Tarjan Center](#)
- [University of Southern California \(USC\), Children's Hospital](#)



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Community Resources



[SARTAC Zoom Meetings](#)

[ARCA Public Policy Resources Library](#)



[DRC's Resource Library](#)



[CalABLE](#)



National Council on Disability

An independent federal agency committed to disability policy leadership since 1978

[National Council on Disability](#)

[Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program](#)



The State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) has a tool for advocates to share their story and wants to hear yours! [Storytellers](#), is a [blog](#) where people with disabilities, their family members, professionals who work in the field disability services can share their stories of successes and struggles.

You can find the Storytellers blog under the "News and Events" tab on the top of the [SCDD website](#) as "SCDD Blog". We look forward to reading the next story, it might be yours!

SAVE THE DATES

Disability Rights California



[Virtual Trainings](#)

CalABLE



[News and Trainings](#)



[DO Network Training Library](#)

Plain Language Resources
Available on:
[SCDD Website](#)

Register for the Monthly
[California Statewide Self-Advocacy Chats](#) on Zoom!



[Current Issues and Resources](#)

[Voting Resources](#)

DRC Hotline: 888-569-7955

[Disability Vote California](#)