Harbor Happenings

Cover: Kareem gets a leg brace
Photo Credit: Jessica Nguyen

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New Video Series Makes Regional Center Services Easier to Understand

By Jasmin Maravilla, Public Information Specialist



Exploring Regional Center Services Videos Coming Soon!

Understanding the many services and supports available through the Regional Center system can sometimes feel overwhelming and complicated. Harbor Regional Center has partnered with the Lanterman and Friends team, Public Pixels Media, to produce a new live-action video series designed to help individuals and families better understand the services and supports available to them. The series provides information to the community in a concise, approachable, and easy to understand format.

The series is written and directed by Regional Center parent Mark Wolfe, who previously wrote and directed 250 episodes of Reading Rainbow. The same approachable storytelling from Reading Rainbow has been used to develop the new service video series. Episodes are produced in both English and Spanish, with American Sign Language (ASL) and additional dubbing in Tagalog, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, and Khmer.

The series is hosted by bilingual actor Valentín México. "Having a warm, friendly host meet with, talk to and connect with some of the people we support, and their service providers will give viewers a sense not just of what supports we offer but how these impact folks throughout our system," shares Patrick Ruppe, Harbor's Executive Director, who recognized the need to balance the Lanterman and Friends universe of animation series with live action videos of specific, personal stories of those receiving and pro-



Behind the scenes with Valentín and Gordon.

viding supports. Ruppe also agreed with the production team that having a bilingual host would demonstrate the commitment the entire regional center system has to Language Access and Cultural Competency.

Thao Mailloux, Harbor's Director of Strategic Communications and Engagement, oversees the project and serves as its Executive Producer. "The thousands of services and supports offered by the Regional Center system can be complex to navigate and understand by anyone," said Mailloux. "When Patrick, Mark and I first talked about these new videos, we all knew that to succeed, they would have to have the right mix of personal stories, relatable descriptions of what specific services are and are not, and a storytelling style proven to educate, inform and emotionally connect with viewers. I believe that when seen by the half million people served by the Regional Centers across the State, and by the millions of family members, service providers and RC Staffers, people will agree we accomplished that."

The first three episodes will focus on Respite, Employment, and Independent & Supported Living Services and will be released this fall.

Watch the new videos and learn more through the Lanterman and Friends Portal.

Announcing Harbor Regional Center's New Strategic Plan!



Harbor's Strategic Plan

Earlier this year, Harbor's Board of Trustees approved a new Strategic Plan for FY 2026/27– 2030/31 and implementation began on July 1st. This plan builds on the strong foundation of our FY 2023/24–2025/26 Strategic Plan and provides a clear, forward-looking framework to guide our work over the next five years.

As with our first Strategic Plan, this new plan continues to provide us with direction in how we support the individuals and families we serve, strengthen our partnerships with service providers, and engage meaningfully with our community. It also re-affirms and refines Harbor's vision, mission and guiding values.

This new plan provides clear goals and objectives to guide our work in the following key areas:

- Improving individual and family experience and satisfaction
- Enhancing service coordination
- Expanding resource development and awareness of available resources
- Strengthening community engagement
- Improving organizational development

We hope that you will review the new plan, envision the regional center we are striving to become, and reflect on your role in helping us achieve that vision. Together, we can continue building a stronger Harbor Regional Center, one that reflects our values and our enduring commitment to the people and communities we serve.

Our Journey with Harbor Regional Center

By Jessica Nguyen, Kareem's Mother



Kareem and His Mother Jessica

Prior to becoming eligible for Harbor Regional Center services, Kareem's parents had no idea this resource existed. Kareem was born at 34-weeks and within two days of his birth had a section of his intestine removed. He spent most of his first year in and out of the hospital. As he grew, his parents noticed that his milestones were delayed and his movements were different. At the suggestion of his pediatrician, Kareem began occupational, physical, and speech therapy. His therapists recommended that he see a neurologist and orthopedist after noticing a delay in the response between his brain and movements. One month before his third birthday, Kareem was officially diagnosed with left hemiplegic cerebral palsy. With so many medical appointments and therapy sessions, his parents felt overwhelmed as they tried to understand what the diagnosis meant for Kareem. His medical team provided information about his condition and shared resources, including California Children's Services Medical Therapy Program and Harbor Regional Center.

After becoming eligible for Harbor services, the family met their service coordinator, Vangie Dumas. Vangie walked them through the services and resources available, including workshops and events, social recreational activities, reimbursement opportunities, respite care, and Medi-Cal. Vangie explained that Medi-Cal could help cover fees and services their private insurance would not. Although they did not think Kareem would qualify because of their income, Vangie explained that he could qualify through a waiver provided by Harbor:

Our Journey with Harbor Regional Center

By Jessica Nguyen ...Continued



Two Year Old Kareem

"I had no idea that so many resources were available to us." Vangie facilitated Kareem's first Individualized Program Plan (IPP), where they discussed services and goals. Vangie's guidance made a huge difference; she took the time to explain things, answer questions, and help them understand the resources available to Kareem and their family.

Parents participated in Harbor workshops on toilet training for children with special needs, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and In Home Supportive Services (IHSS). Because a section of Kareem's intestine was removed, his stool remains unpredictable and loose, making toilet training very challenging. The instructor helped the parents review his toileting schedule and encouraged them to remain consistent, which gave the family hope. Attending Harbor's IEP workshop helped the family understand how to advocate for and obtain the services Kareem needed. After applying for IHSS, parents attended a Harbor workshop, where a nurse reviewed the hours of care Kareem required. Kareem was initially denied so the family appealed. Throughout the year-long process, Vangie stayed in constant contact with the family and helped them along the way. The parents advise other families applying for IHSS to document everything and ask if additional support is needed. "It is a long process, but it is well worth the work."

One of Kareem's goals is to participate in social activities, make friends, and learn how to navigate the world. Harbor's social recreation reimbursement has allowed Kareem to attend different activities, where he can socialize with other



Making Crafts at Camp

children and participate in arts and crafts that help him work on skills related to his cerebral palsy. This summer, Kareem attended Camp Escapades. Although parents were concerned because he was not yet toilet trained, Vangie assured them that the camp had OT, PT, and medical staff available so children with special needs could participate. Kareem had so much fun at camp; he saw the Torrance Police and Fire Departments, met Spiderman, went to Bubblemania, participated in sensory play, saw a puppet show, visited a petting zoo, and so much more! One week after camp ended, Kareem was finally toilet trained. Mother shared, "We are now able to go outside without a diaper. That was over five years in the making." The experience made Kareem more confident and independent, and his parents are so grateful that he was able to attend Camp Escapades.

During Kareem's first IPP meeting, they discussed respite care. Mother initially declined as she shared she "felt guilty being away from Kareem." The following year, Vangie brought up respite care again and was able to connect the family to the service. She reminded the parents that taking a break was important for them. A close family friend agreed to become Kareem's respite provider, and the family became comfortable using the service. It allowed them to trust that Kareem was safe without constantly stressing about his needs, while Kareem got to spend time with someone he enjoys. Parents encourage other families to use respite care without guilt. Mother shared, "taking a break does not mean we are doing less for our children. Sometimes, taking that break allows us to come back with more energy and patience for them."

Our Journey with Harbor Regional Center

By Jessica Nguyen ...Continued



Practicing Web Slinging with Spiderman

Throughout the years with Harbor, the family has attended many events. They participated in Harbor's 50th anniversary, where they were amazed by the rides, activities, food, and most importantly, the comfort they felt being surrounded by other Harbor families. It was a nice change of pace from all the medical appointments and therapies. They thought they would stay for an hour but ended up staying the entire time. Kareem loved the rubber duck pond and did not want to leave. The family also attended the Main Building Grand Opening, Halloween Trunk-or-Treat, and the Lunar New Year Celebration. The Lunar New Year Celebration was especially meaningful to mother because she is Vietnamese. She is not able to attend similar events in Orange County because of the crowds and the challenges of navigating events with Kareem's needs. At Harbor's celebration, the family was so excited Kareem was finally able to experience a part of his culture in a place that felt safe and comfortable for him. "Harbor went above and beyond." There was authentic food, a lion dance, and even character cotton candy and sugar candy. "It was unbelievable and felt so authentic." Being able to see Kareem experience and enjoy a part of their culture meant so much to the family. Another event the family attends annually is the backpack giveaway. "This is such a great event to get the kids excited to go back to school." They love getting new backpacks and school supplies, and the free ice cream is an added treat.

This summer, Kareem's sister and mother joined Rady Children's Hospital for Family Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C.. Kareem had surgery two days before the trip and was not able to join them.



Jessica and her Daughter Meet Senator Schiff

During Advocacy Day, they met with California senators and members of Congress to discuss Medicaid funding and the importance of protecting these services for families like theirs. Mother shared her concerns with Senator Schiff regarding changes to Medi-Cal Redetermination under H.R. 1, which would require redetermination every six months instead of yearly beginning in 2027. For children like Kareem, whose disability will not change, more frequent redeterminations could create additional stress for families already navigating so much. Senator Schiff awarded Kareem a challenge coin. "It was such a privilege to be able to advocate on behalf of families like ours and to have the opportunity to share our experience."

Looking back, mother realizes how important Harbor has been to their family. When they first received Kareem's diagnosis, they felt overwhelmed and didn't know where to turn. Harbor provided resources, guidance, and, most importantly, someone to help them navigate this new journey. They are grateful to be a part of Harbor and for Vangie's guidance along the way.

A message from Mother: "If you are a parent who is new to this journey, I highly encourage you to use the services offered by Harbor. You do not have to figure everything out on your own. There are resources and people who are there to help you—you just have to reach out and use them. I hope that sharing our journey will help another family realize that they are not alone and that there is support available. Sometimes, you just need someone to show you where to start."

Meet Takashi Ito and Learn About the Language Access and Cultural Competency (LACC) Program

By Takashi Ito, Language Accessibility Cultural Specialist



Takashi Ito, Language Accessibility Cultural Specialist

Throughout the history of California's regional centers, many monolingual, multilingual, and culturally diverse communities have struggled to access services and supports. To address this, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) began funding the Language Access and Cultural Competency (LACC) Program. This annual initiative aims to improve individual and family experience and facilitate more equitable access to information and services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As part of Harbor Regional Center's LACC plan, we created a new role, the Language Accessibility Cultural Specialist, to help fulfill this initiative.

Takashi Ito has been Harbor's Language Accessibility Cultural Specialist (LACS) since December 2022. Prior to this role, Takashi was a Bilingual Service Coordinator for more than 5 years. As a Japanese bilingual, Takashi has closely collaborated with the Japanese-speaking community including attending community events, interpreting for individuals and families during meetings and trainings, and collaborating with community-based organizations to spread awareness about regional center services. Upon further recognizing the need to break down linguistic and cultural barriers, Takashi took the role of LACS to connect with and support diverse communities.

In this role, Takashi hosts a series of listening sessions and focus groups on a routine basis. The purpose of these events is to gather feedback from individuals and families of various language and cultural groups on how to make Harbor's services and support more accessible to our community from the perspectives of their language and culture.



Lion Dance at Harbor's Lunar New Year Celebration

Cultural Celebrations have been a major part of the LACC initiative. During listening sessions, families asked Harbor to provide a space for individuals and families to gather and make connections outside of trainings and events. In the past we have celebrated Cambodian New Year, Black History Month, Dia de los Muertos, Lunar New Year, and most recently, Deaf Awareness Month. We are always delighted to see our community having a fun time at these events!

Focusing on the philosophy of plain language, the review of Harbor's publications and documents and other informative materials is completed by LACS to see whether changes are needed to minimize difficult to understand concepts, acronyms, and other terms that are not familiar to individuals and families that may be new to the regional center. Most recently, with the help of our community, Harbor's outreach brochure was updated to become more culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate. The brochure is available on our website.

Please look out for opportunities to have your voice heard at upcoming listening sessions and focus groups and join our future cultural celebrations to learn about services and have fun with Harbor!



Harbor Staff celebrate at Harbor's first Deaf Plus Awareness Resource Fair!

The Importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accommodations

By Tim'an Ford, Peer Advocate

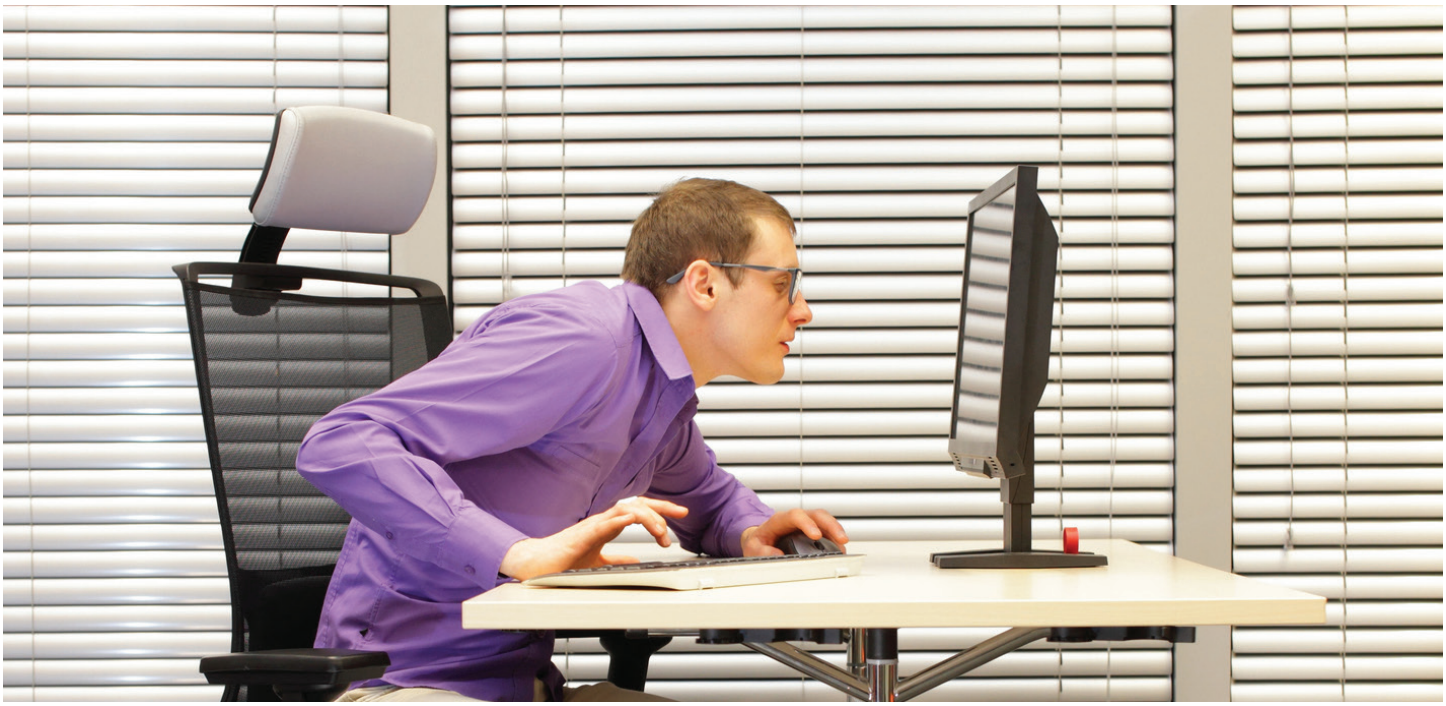


Tim'an Ford in Front of Harbor Regional Center

One of the most crucial aspects of workers' rights is the ability to request accommodations be made for them in relation to their health and safety. Our community members are no exception to this, as our daily health and safety needs are among the highest priorities when it comes to our quality of life. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals who are currently employed as well as those seeking employment. I understand that the prospect of requesting accommodations from your employer can be quite intimidating, but you have the right to request accommodations at any given time; especially when a workplace barrier is preventing you from completing a given task. In honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, this article will discuss the importance of ADA accommodations and how to initiate these crucial conversations.

Reasonable accommodations come in different forms and each level of accommodation varies from person to person. However, the important thing to remember is that reasonable accommodations exist so you may continue to perform essential functions for your job and receive equal opportunities for growth as all other employees. Here is a list of examples that fall under reasonable accommodations:

- Changing job tasks
- Providing accessibility parking
- Improving accessibility in a work environment



Trackball Accommodation Eases Navigation

- Modifying presentations and training materials
- Providing alternative equipment or software
- Allowing a flexible work schedule
- Providing an aid or a service to increase access
- Reassignment to a vacant position

Though you have the right to request any of these accommodations, you must be willing to engage and negotiate with your employer to initiate the implementation process. After disclosing to your manager or human resources that you have a disability, you then need to list the ways in which your disability is impacting your work. This should initiate a dialogue between you and your employer in which you work together to figure out which accommodations are the most effective. If your need for accommodations is not immediately clear to your employer, you may be required to provide additional documentation of your disability; for which Harbor Regional Center is able to provide support through our Employment Services. Once the accommodations are agreed upon and have been implemented, it is up to both the employee and employer to keep track of these accommodations to see if they do, in fact, provide meaningful support in getting the job done and uplifting you as an essential figure in the workforce. Lastly, this is an ongoing process which requires regular communication to ensure that the accommodations work to your benefit or if you're in need of modifications to better suit your needs.

Looking Back on Harbor's First HCBS Community Fair

By Brian Carrillo and Aimee Fabila, Provider Relations Specialists



Jacqueline and Kaitlin of Alo consultation are All Smiles Before their Presentation

Harbor Regional Center proudly hosted our first Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Final Rule Community Fair at The Grand in Long Beach on August 26th. Our goal was to bring individuals, families, providers, and community members together to learn more about the HCBS Final Rule and the services available in our community. Looking around the room, it was clear that there was a lot of interest in having these conversations. It was great to see so many people show up ready to learn, connect, and share.

We had approximately 60 attendees and 36 vendors join us. The event began with a presentation from Alo consultation, a partner Harbor has worked with for several years, who presented on the HCBS Final Rule. Alo consultation highlighted what really matters: people's everyday rights, privacy, choice, having control over where you live and what you do, and being treated with dignity and respect.

Alo consultation reframed the commonly asked question of **"How do we get around this?"** to **"How are we going to support this?"** It may seem like a small change, but it represents a much bigger change in how we think about supporting people and upholding their rights.

Alo consultation shared real examples of providers find-



Harbor Staff at the Fair

ing creative ways to support choice, privacy, and communication. Their message was simple: don't just meet the HCBS Final Rule—normalize it. Supporting people's rights should be part of everyday practice, not just something we think about when we're checking a box.

After the presentation, everyone had a chance to visit the resource fair and meet with our 36 vendors. Great conversations happened throughout the room as people asked questions, learned about services, and made new connections.

Looking Ahead

As we look back on our first fair, we are encouraged by the response, highlighting the genuine interest in learning more about HCBS and creating more opportunities for people to connect.

We're already looking ahead to another HCBS Community Resource Fair in early 2027, with hopes of bringing in even more vendors, families, self-advocates, and community members.

It was great to see people served by the regional center, their circles of support, Harbor staff, and service providers come together around making sure the people we support have choice, a voice, privacy, dignity, and respect. We're excited to keep the momentum going and see what comes next!



Harbor Happenings

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TORRANCE OFFICE
Main Building
21309 Hawthorne Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90503

(310) 543-0100
www.harborrc.org

LONG BEACH OFFICE
1155 E. San Antonio Dr.
Long Beach, CA 90807

MAILING ADDRESS
21231 Hawthorne Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90503

Editorial Team: Thao Mailloux, Erika Segovia and Jasmin Maravilla

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