

are struggling to do the best that they can in a system that has layered with rules and regulations that require an immense amount of paperwork. This has effectively removed service system providers from the role that legislature originally intended. As the system has grown, transparency and the need to return to the original intent of the Lanterman – individual choice is essential. The voices of families and individuals-served appeal for more control and self-direction in their lives.

Issues identified in the audit clearly point to the need to return to a service model which is person centered and directed towards the needs of the individual. The Individual Choice Model, proposal by DDS as part of the trailer bill language, never materialized. It is a model that would give more direction and control to families and possibly address some of the concerns raised in the audit and in our community. We have heard repeatedly from families that they want the option to choose the service vendor who they believe will best work with their child. Despite this, families are not offered a list of existing vendors. Neither are they empowered to use the Parent Vendor process to hire a vendor of their choosing. We strongly feel that families should have the right to choose their vendors, not the Regional Center.

It is critical to hear the voice of those who receive services. We therefore recommend that the committee seek out families and individuals who receive services, for their input on the Individual Choice Model proposed in the trailer bill language. This would provide a further opportunity to hear their personal stories and suggestions on how to move in the direction of a system that is more responsive and person-centered.

The California State Audit report identified a number of areas of concern. Tri-Counties Regional Center was selected to participate in the audit. In our role, families and individuals contact us regarding potential rights violations and areas of concerns that, though they may not reach the level of a rights violation, raise questions about the effectiveness of the IPP process.

A specific area of concern is the current regional center practice which limits the ability of stakeholders to find vendors that would best meet the needs of their family member. The concerns are as follows:

- **Vendor Selection:** As stated above, we have heard from families that they are unable to select the vendor that would best meet the needs of their loved one. Instead, they are provided a single vendor source to use, or go without the service. When things go wrong, and families seek to transfer cases, they struggle with finding another vendor that is better suited. One of the recommendations Area Board 9 has made to the Regional Center has been to **develop and provide a vendor list to families** so that they can make the best selection for their child. Subsequent to the audit, we understood that a vendor list would be provided, but to date, we have not seen it.

Area Board 9

- **Utilizing Vendors from other Regional Centers:** Families have reported their difficulty in being able to access vendors utilized by other, neighboring regional centers. Though a professional might be vendored through a regional center, other than Tri-Counties, the authorization is not automatically transferred so the vendor is required to initiate a new vendoring process for Tri-Counties Regional Center. This delays services. What is more, some vendors find this process too lengthy and they will not proceed with it. This limits choices for families, and requires that services be selected from a small pool (or certain cases, a pool of one) of vendors.
- **Parent Vendor:** To overcome the obstacle of a limited pool of vendors, families have attempted to use the **Parent Vendor process**. This is a process whereby the family becomes the vendor and chooses to work with a qualified agency that may not be a vendor of the regional center. Rates are set, and are not appreciably different from other regional center vendors. This allows for choice and flexibility. Tri Counties Regional Center has been very reluctant to provide this as an option to families and in some cases argued that since there is a vendor available (which might not meet the needs of the family) the family must use them rather than utilize the Parent Vendor process.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this process. It is our hope the input from stakeholders and community groups will contribute to the creation of a more transparent, family/person centered process.

Yours sincerely,



Ted Martens
Chair, Area Board 9