INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

NEW LEADERS JOIN THE BOARD
PAGE 3

THREE RICV JOB OPPORTUNITIES
PAGES 3

PREPAREDNESS NOW WORKSHOPS
PAGE 4

NEW FACES AT RICV
PAGE 5

OUTCOMES AND SUCCESSES
PAGE 6

SIT-INS PAVED THE WAY FOR ADA
PAGE 7

FAIR HOUSING EXPERTS LEAD WEBINARS
PAGE 9

...and much more. Read on!

Federal Update

White House Action in Response to and Recovery from Covid-19

New actions address the needs of people with disabilities & older adults

The White House Administration has announced new actions to address the needs of people with disabilities and older adults in response to and recovery from Covid-19.

According to a White House Fact Sheet, the Administration recognized the Covid-19 pandemic has huge impacts on individuals with disabilities and has resulted in new members of the disability community.

The Administration said it has collaborated and consulted with the disability community and take several key actions to address the unique needs of individuals with disabilities.

Among other actions, the U.S. government released key civil rights guidance to protect persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic or any public health emergency, prioritized Long Covid services, supports, and research in the context of disability; established a call line dedicated to ensuring individuals with disabilities can equitably utilize the Administration’s at-home test distribution program; ensured individuals with disabilities and other high-risk individuals have access to at-home testing; and invested American Rescue Plan resources to build Covid-19 vaccine confidence and access among people with disabilities.

Moving forward, the Administration says it will take several key steps to ensure disabled individuals, regardless of where they live or the level of community transmission of the virus, have equitable access to Covid-19 testing, masks, and other critical mitigation strategies.

The Administration confirmed commitment to implementing these policies and developing additional policies in close collaboration with the disability community—keeping equity and accessibility at the center of the U.S. Covid-19 response and beyond.

To read about the particular actions in more depth, visit Page 12.
RESOURCES for INDEPENDENCE (RICV) is a disability resource center empowering independence by providing services to residents of Fresno, Merced, Madera, Kings, and Tulare Counties.

RICV’s programs and services offer expanded choices, opportunities, and options so persons with disabilities can live independently, be valued equally, participate fully, and be in control of their lives.

www.ricv.org
voice 559.221.2330
email info@ricv.org

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A Message from the Executive Director:

**Moving forward in 2022 and beyond**

Greetings!

I am so proud of the community we serve and our staff who have stepped up to respond to the pandemic as it has taken many turns in the past couple of years and continues to affect many.

It is important for RICV to persist with COVID-19 support and education. Our team is working hard to ensure this through ongoing community outreach, wellness checks, PPE distribution, and other services. And we stay committed to providing services through our other valuable core programs and services, like emergency preparedness, assistive technology, advocacy, and work readiness.

To ensure the organization’s strength and expansion, the RICV Team and Board of Directors have been developing a strategic plan to drive the organization forward. It includes ideas identified by you, our stakeholders, consumers, staff, and partners. We are grateful to everyone who shared their sincere feedback with us as we work to put this plan together.

Highlighted and consistent areas in the information we received include: expanding access to services both geographically and culturally, addressing distributing information in multiple languages, expanding RICV reach by continuing to strengthen our services to specific and targeted populations, and continuing to diversify communication methods. We are anxious for the strategic plan to be finished and distributed.

Lastly, I would like to share a sneak preview of what is to come in October of this year! RICV Board and staff are working on our first in-person event since the onset of the pandemic, Disability Pride in the Park, a one-day celebration of disability diversity and inclusion! This is exciting and we will share more details very soon!

All the Best,

Suzanna Gámez
LEADERSHIP

Schaefers and Johnson join the RICV Board of Directors

RICV recently welcomed two new members to the organization’s Board of Directors.

Norma Schaefers is a native of Michigan but relocated to California in 1989. She currently lives in Visalia and is a sales executive for Infinite Hospitality. Norma brings 30-plus years of expertise in leadership, business engagement, and community relations.

With a passion for helping others, in particular those with special needs, Norma said she enjoys challenges and loves animals. She has two dogs, two Manx cats, and an elderly rescue cat.

Norma is a proud mother of four, has ten grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren with another on the way.

Christopher Johnston is a disability and LGBTQ advocate. A graduate from the Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling program at CSUF, he works as an associate professional clinical counselor. At the age of 23, Christopher acquired quadriplegia. He says he lives by the phrase “Always Adapting,” and in his free time he enjoys creating art and music. His creative outlets can be viewed on Instagram (@nuff_art).

Christopher said he is thankful to be a part of RICV and looks forward to meeting everyone at future events.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Dynamic people needed for RICV team

The efforts and dedication of our staff is one of reasons RICV is a unifying, driven force for empowering independence and improved lives. But we need help. RICV currently has three positions open and needing to be filled.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST—Help people with disabilities learn about, obtain, and use different types of assistive technology or durable medical equipment to empower them to live more independent, self-driven lives.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH SPECIALIST—Provide education and awareness on a variety of issues and topics through aggressive community outreach. Includes the coordination and attendance at community events where RICV should have a presence.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER—Network within the disability community and with government entities to create positive social impact.

All positions are full-time and include benefits. For more information, email RICV’s Director of Programs, Sarah Harris at sharris@ricv.org.
**INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

**PEER SUPPORT**
Be lifted and lift others!
Every Wednesday
2:00 p.m.
Email: ldownnum-hanzal@ricv.org

**DISABILITY ADVOCACY TEAM**
Help push for disability awareness and rights.
2nd & 4th Tuesdays/month
1:00 p.m.
Email: sharris@ricv.org

**BE ABOUT IT!**
Get involved & engaged.
Youth-ages 16-25
Every Friday
3:30 p.m.
Email: jnoble@ricv.org

**COOKING for INDEPENDENCE**
Learn new tricks in the kitchen and test new, delicious recipes.
2nd & 4th Tuesdays/month
2:30 p.m.
Email: ebrown@ricv.org

**CHLOE’S SELF-CARE CORNER**
Join in Take Care Tuesdays and learn how to practice self-care.
1st & 3rd Tuesdays/month
4:00 p.m.
Email: chagen@ricv.org

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**Three Preparedness Now Workshops set for May and June**

Wildfires, Pets, and Fireworks—that’s the line-up for the next few months of the Preparedness Now Workshops for 2022. RICV’s Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Hai Normen, will be presenting the following virtual workshops:

**May 2-WILDFIRE AWARENESS.** Did you know May is National Wildfire Awareness Month? While wildfires may not be prevalent everywhere, fires affect our mountain and foothill communities, and the air quality for the entire Central Valley. This workshop will focus on prevention and preparedness. There are steps to take to prevent wildfires. Learn all about them on Monday, May 2 from 2-3 p.m.

**June 6-PET PREPAREDNESS** June is National Pet Preparedness Month, giving us all a helpful reminder of what to do in case of an emergency or natural disaster. It only takes a short time to create an emergency plan for yourself and your pets and it can prove to be lifesaving. Join in June 6 at 2 p.m.

**June 27-FIREWORKS SAFETY** The Fourth of July is a time of celebration, but fireworks can be dangerous. Learn how to keep yourself and others safe on Monday, June 27 from 2-3 p.m.

To register for the workshops, email Hai at hnomen@ricv.org.

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**RICV celebrates April’s Autism Acceptance Month**

Join RICV in celebrating Autism Awareness Month. April used to be known as Autism Awareness Month. But in 2021, the designation changed to Autism Acceptance Month. It’s a simple – but important – revision.

The Autism Society of America announced the suggested shift in terminology last year, urging the media to go along, to ignite change in the lives of those with autism and their families, said Christopher Banks, President, and CEO of The Autism Society of America.

"Awareness is knowing that somebody has autism," Banks said. "Acceptance is when you include (a person with autism) in your activities. Help (them) to develop in that community and get that sense of connection to other people."

Autism is identified by a range of conditions, which may affect how individuals behave, communicate, interact, and learn. About 1 in 44 children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and more than 2% of adults in the U.S. are estimated to have ASD.
RICV adds Merced & Fresno team members

Help us in welcoming Denise Santora and Anita Ramirez to RICV. Denise is the new Work Readiness Specialist serving the Merced area, while Anita is a new Employment Exploration Specialist at the Fresno office.

What did you do as a teenager that makes you cringe now?

Skipping school. I remember a time when I didn’t want to go to school, it was my freshman year. I told my mom and she let me stay home for a whole semester. I cringe at that now because I would never allow my children to stay home in that way.

What would your warning label say?

Sometimes I can be loud. It’s just me talking. “Caution: Hearing Protection REQUIRED in this area.

What is the craziest thing you ever did on a date?

Went to the Fresno Fair and got on a ride, and I got so sick. Since then, I don’t do rides.

What actor would you choose to play you in your biopic?

Gal Gadot. I know I look nothing like her but, who not? She’s beautiful.

What songs are on the soundtrack to your life?


A genie grants you the ability to have infinite amounts of one item. What is it?

So, if a genie granted me an infinite amount of something I would choose wishes, and I would spend my days wishing things for people.

What is the strangest food combo you enjoy?

The strangest food combination I enjoy is putting A1 Sauce on my Chicken Alfredo. LOL. Weird, but so good.

If your pet could talk, what would they say about you?

I have a Bichon Frise named Stella. She’s 11 years old. If Stella could talk, she would tell you I need to take her on more car rides and walks. She would also tell you I stay up way too late—Stella waits up for me.

If given the opportunity, what book would you write?

If I could write a book, I would write a children’s book, something short and sweet.

What movie could you quote by heart?

“Titanic.’ I went to the theatre and watched it 10 times when it first came out. It’s one of my favorites.
Home modifications boost home safety and independence for persons with disabilities

RICV assists people with disabilities in transitioning from a nursing home or institutional setting to a move back in the community. RICV’s Transition and Diversion services also provides home modifications and other diversion services to keep people with disabilities from entering an institution, and instead allows them to live in the safety of their homes.

Recently, RICV completed two more Transition and Diversion projects for consumers who use wheelchairs. Both consumers needed remodeling of their bathrooms so the showers would accommodate them, keep them safe, and increase their independence.

With the first project, (photo at right), the consumer had been in a serious motorcycle accident over a year ago and set a goal to return home. His bathroom at home was no longer suitable due to his wheelchair use. The entrance to his home was also an issue as it consisted of a porch with stairs. These two situations were barriers to his being able to return home.

With assistance from RICV and Department of Rehabilitation transition funding, a ramp was installed at his home’s entry, and the entire bathroom was remodeled and fit with a roll-in shower.

Likewise, another RICV consumer’s bathroom, (photo at left), was remodeled to include a roll-in shower to accommodate her wheelchair. She can now use her bathroom safely and independently. “I’m already planning a bathroom-warming party!” she said.

Young man meets goals via weekly cooking classes

RICV consumer Kenny Sides had a goal. He wanted to learn to cook. It was one of his primary goals on his person-centered plan. A high school student, Kenny’s schedule prohibits his participation in RICV’s twice-monthly Cooking for Independence classes. Thanks to RICV’s Youth Empowerment Specialist, Aubrey Alfano, Kenny is able to have one-on-one cooking classes with Alfano via Zoom.

According to Alfano, each week Kenny indicates what he would like to learn to cook, and they work together to find a recipe, compile a shopping list, and then get cooking via Zoom.

“Since Kenny lives outside of Fresno, connecting via Zoom has been a vital link to connect him to RICV services,” said Alfano. “It has been nothing but fun to have our cooking sessions.”
On April 5, 1977, a group of roughly 150 disability rights activists took over the fourth floor of a federal building in San Francisco for 25 days. They would not leave, they said, until President Jimmy Carter’s administration agreed to implement a four-year-old law, Section 504, protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 helped pave the way for the ADA. Under the law, no program receiving federal funds could discriminate against people with disabilities. But the law was never properly put into effect. Officials in Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford’s administrations developed but never implemented a set of regulations for the law.

"Through the sit-in, we turned ourselves from being oppressed individuals into being empowered people."
- Judith Heumann, Activist

The choice to hold a sit-in as opposed to other tactics had symbolic significance. Sit-ins were used effectively with the 1960s civil rights movement. The sit-in brought together a cross-disability coalition of activists. According to activist Judith Heumann, "Blind people, deaf people, wheelchair users, disabled veterans, people with developmental and psychiatric disabilities and many others, all came together."

More importantly, a sit-in upended popular notions of people with disabilities as weak, incapable of asserting themselves, or as objects of pity.

On April 28, 1977, Section 504 regulations were signed into law. While the disability rights community would have to wait until the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act for more robust protections against discrimination, Section 504 was a significant victory.

"Discomfort and anxiety was the order of our day-to-day existence. Everyone faced these questions, How can I get my meds? Where will I sleep? What about food?"
- A Section 504 Sit-In Demonstrator

"Through the sit-in, we turned ourselves from being oppressed individuals into being empowered people. We demonstrated to the entire nation that people with disabilities could take control over our own lives and take leadership in the struggle for equality," Heumann explained.

The demonstrators received support from outside groups, such as the Black Panther Party, which provided them with food throughout the sit-in. But many went without the care of attendants, or back-up ventilators, catheters, or other necessary equipment.
People with disabilities left behind by telemedicine and other pandemic medical innovations

“Accessibility needs to be part of what we do as a government, as a society. The ADA says you don’t just have accessibility when things are running normal.”

Bryan Bashin
CEO, LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco

Divya Goel, a 35-year-old deaf-blind woman in Florida, has had two telemedicine doctors’ appointments during the pandemic. Each time, she was denied an interpreter.

Her doctors told her she would have to get insurance to pay for an interpreter, which is incorrect: Under federal law, it is the physician’s responsibility to provide one.

Goel’s mother stepped in to interpret instead. But her signing is limited, so Goel, who has only some vision, is not sure her mother fully conveyed what the doctors said. Goel worries about the medical ramifications—a wrong medicine or treatment—if something got lost in translation.

Telemedicine, teleworking, rapid tests, virtual school, and vaccine drive-throughs have become routines as we enter Year 3 of life amid Covid-19. But as innovators have raced to make living in a pandemic world safer, some people with disabilities have been left behind.

Those with a physical disability may find the at-home Covid tests hard to perform. Those with limited vision may not be able to read the small print on the instructions, while blind people cannot see the results.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 4 adults in the United States have some sort of disability. Though barriers for persons with disabilities have long existed, the pandemic brings life-or-death states to such long-running inequities.

People directly affected by accessibility barriers, especially those living in communal settings or the homebound, often don’t have the time, money or energy to file legal complaints.

Federal, state and local governments also violate disability statues. An investigation last year found government vaccine websites were inaccessible to the blind.

Following an outcry from disability advocates, the CDC updated its list of those with increased risk of severe Covid to include people with disabilities. And the National Institutes of Health announced an effort to create accessible at-home Covid tests.

With the shift to online appointments, the inaccessibility of telemedicine has become more of an issue. The Americans with Disabilities Act and other disability statues are being violated when health care providers do not provide telemedicine technology with captioning or the ability for interpreters to be in the same teleconference.

When Lisa Hamlin needed to see her nurse practitioner, she was initially thrilled to set up a telemedicine appointment to avoid the risk of Covid exposure. Until she realized the virtual visit wouldn’t have captioning.

As a person with hearing loss, Hamlin lip-reads and uses captions to help understand video meeting. She could barely follow along during the appointment. As director of public policy for the Hearing Loss Association of America, she was enraged. But she was hesitant to do much about it.

A small number of health care providers offer interpretive services. Zoom has a captioning option, but more than 35% of physicians have no idea of their legal responsibilities to patients with disabilities under the ADA.

Goel’s doctors broke the law, but they are not being punished or penalized for it. And she doesn’t know whom she would talk to about suing.

Although there have been technology advancements to give persons with disabilities more independence and connection with others, the pandemic has stripped much of it away.

The accelerating shift toward at-home testing is another growing problem for Americans with disabilities, said Bryan Bashin, CEO of the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco.

“Accessibility needs to be part of what we do as a government, as a society," Bashin said. "The ADA says you don’t just have accessibility when things are running normal."
Know your Fair Housing rights. Increase your knowledge. Learn from the experts and get the facts regarding Fair Housing. These two free webinars will deep-dive into vital Fair Housing topics ranging from, but not limited to, gaining accessibility, assistance animals, understanding the difference between the FHA and the ADA; and learning the Fair Housing Act’s history and its changes and evolution.

**PHASE ONE—MAY 03** from 1:00-2:30 p.m.

RICV is hosting this free webinar presented by Jan Garrett, Program Manager of the Pacific ADA Center, a project at the Public Health Institute in Oakland. Jan has 25+ years of training experience in disability law, accessibility requirements and disability awareness. As a person born without limbs, Jan understands the importance of educating others about disability civil rights.

[Click Here to REGISTER](#)

**PHASE TWO—JUNE 23** from 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

This free RICV-hosted webinar will be presented by Kara Brodfuehrer, Senior Fair Employment and Housing Counsel for the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), Kara focus is on educating Californians about their rights under the laws enforced by DFEH including, the Fair Employment and Housing Act. She has an extensive history providing counsel in landlord/tenant disputes, affirmative litigation, and civil commitment hearing.

[Click Here to REGISTER](#)
Second booster available for vulnerable and high-risk groups

Recently, the FDA and CDC made people 50 and older and the immunocompromised eligible for another booster – an important action to offer increased protection to some of the most vulnerable and high-risk groups. This is especially important for the elderly (65+) and those with serious underlying medical conditions in these populations.

As FDA and CDC have also made clear, getting your third dose – the original booster shot – remains incredibly important for everyone who is eligible. For most people who have been vaccinated and had one booster, your original booster shot is continuing to provide you with good protection from being hospitalized or dying. If you haven’t had a first booster yet, now is a good time to get one.

The updated guidance for who can get a second booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine has been issued and includes the following groups who received their first booster dose at least 4 months ago:

- People 50 and older
- People 12 and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised
- People 18 to 49 who received the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine and the first booster dose.

The FDA and CDC will continue to evaluate the data on the benefit of another booster dose for additional populations and will provide updates as additional findings become available.

Visit myturn.ca.gov or call 1-833-422-4255 if you have questions or want to find a vaccination site near you.

Children and the Covid-19 Vaccine—is it safe?

You may feel nervous about getting a Covid-19 vaccine for your child. It can feel scary to get your child vaccinated, but vaccines can stop you and your child from getting very sick or dying from Covid-19.

To safely go about our daily lives, we need to keep taking steps to prevent the spread.

Any child in California age 5 and up, can get vaccinated for free, and it is recommended.

The vaccine helps prevent kids from getting Covid-19. Kids infected with Covid-19 can get severe lung infections, become very sick and require hospitalization. They can also develop multisystem inflammatory syndrome that may require intensive care or long-lasting symptoms that affect their health and well-being. Covid-19 can also cause death in children.

The vaccine helps prevent or reduce the spread of Covid-19. Children can transmit Covid-19 to others if they’re infected, even when they have no symptoms. Getting the Covid-19 vaccine can protect children and others, reducing the chance they transmit the virus to others, including family member and friends who may be more susceptible to severe consequences of the infection.

Getting vaccinated helps stop other variants from emerging. Cases of Covid-19 are increasing among children. Reducing viral transmission by getting vaccinated also reduces the virus’ chance of mutating into new variants that may be more dangerous. The virus can transmit easily between unvaccinated children and adults, giving new variants a chance to emerge.
Covid-19 could revolutionize work opportunities for persons with disabilities

Working from home has become the “new normal” for many of us during the Covid-19 pandemic. While this clearly has its downsides, one group may benefit a great deal: people with disabilities.

This is important because people with disabilities are often at a significant disadvantage in the workplace. Research shows people with disabilities often face negative stereotypes and attitudes from able-bodied colleagues and are at greater risk of being laid off in a crisis like the one we have been through with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ability to work from home is an accommodation that may especially benefit those with mobility impairments who find it difficult or costly to travel outside the home or those who need flexibility to handle frequent breaks from work, for example for medical or therapy appointments.

The pandemic, which has made working from home common for a large share of the workforce, can be seen as a massive test of employers’ ability and willingness to accommodate workers.

Working from home may be a legally enforceable “reasonable accommodation” under the Americans with disabilities Act (ADA), though that depends on the job tasks and other circumstances. Yet some employers have been resistant to any accommodations for workers with disabilities.

Today, many employers are readily willing to accommodate all workers regardless of disability due to the crisis has frustrated some people with disabilities who have previously been denied such accommodations.

Employed people with disabilities—especially those with mobility impairments—are already 20% more likely to work from home, but with less than a third of working-age people with disabilities employed in 2019, it’s very possible that millions more would be able to work if more employers offered this accommodation.

Allowing more home-based work does not excuse employers from creating more welcoming and accessible workplaces. But it could cause them to see what workers with disabilities are able to accomplish when given a telecommuting accommodation—rather than trying to pigeonhole them in a traditional workspace. This may help ensure their pay levels and raises are determined more by actual job performance rather than irrelevant stereotypes and office dynamics which can be a disadvantage to workers with disabilities.

This is not to ignore the cataclysmic loss of millions of jobs in the current crisis, which is likely hitting people with disabilities especially hard. Without minimizing the current devastation, it is worth considering how the structure of work may change when the crisis is past, and the economy eventually recovers.

So, after the pandemic subsides, will employers return to a pre-crisis way of thinking about working from home? Or will more of them recognize working from home can benefit both employees and the company—and it’s a reasonable accommodation to make for employees with disabilities?

Stay informed and connected. Follow RICV on Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/resourcesforindependence/
**New Actions by White House Administration**

The following are the key steps to ensure individuals with disabilities have equitable access with the promise to:

- **Equip** schools with guidance and support to keep vulnerable students safe and learning in-person.
- **Expand** the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Community Living’s Disability Information and Access Line to support people with disabilities who face difficulty using or cannot use a self-test.

The Disability Information and Access Line is available by dialing: **1-888-677-1199**.

- **Launch** new Covid-19 testing guidance in American Sign Language and review all existing Covid-19 guidance to confirm accessibility for all individuals with disabilities.
- **Execute** a new effort to develop at-home Covid-19 tests that are accessible for all.
- **Incentivize** all at-home test manufacturers to prioritize accessibility of at-home tests.
- **Incentivize** all at-home test manufacturers to prioritize accessibility of at-home tests.
- **Request** accessible instructions from manufacturers who have received a Food and Drug Administration Emergency Use Authorization.
- **Distribute** masks to individuals with disabilities through community-based organizations and jurisdictions.

Independent living is about making my own choices about where to live and how to best live my life safely and responsibly. It comes with rights and responsibilities different from other living situations.

**I HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE:**

**Where I want to live.**

- I can choose what neighborhood I want to live in. I can choose what kind of home I want to live in—within my price range—like an apartment or a house.

**Who I interact with.**

- Living in my own place doesn’t mean I’ll be living alone! I choose who I want to support me and how much help I’ll need. I can choose to live alone or with roommates, who can visit me, and when I want to see my friends and family.

**How to live my life.**

- I choose my own hobbies and schedule. I work with my staff to decide what activities I need help with and what things I can do myself, like housekeeping, planning meals, and paying bills.
RICV unites the entire Central Valley disability community with a truly memorable and impactful free event celebrating inclusion and empowering all persons with disabilities.

For information and sponsorship opportunities email: smanuel@ricv.org

www.ricv.org