



ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL CENTER AGENCIES

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**Position Statement
in response to Keep Our Families Together (KOFT) Proposal**

January 2007

The Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA) coordinates services and advocates on behalf of California's over 210,000 persons with developmental disabilities and their families through the regional center service system and our non-profit vendor agencies. The public-private contractual partnership between the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and regional centers results in the provision of services and supports for persons residing in both developmental centers and in the community.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the November 2006 Keep Our Families Together (KOFT) proposal.

The planning process to prepare for the closure of Agnews Developmental Center (Agnews) has not been an abbreviated one. The Bay Area Plan (Plan) is the product of countless hours of time over the past several years with hundreds of stakeholder group meetings throughout the region. Legislative staff and personnel from the Department of Developmental Services have carefully reviewed proposals and ideas before integrating the best of concepts into the final plan. *Through the budget and legislative process, the Bay Area Plan was accepted. Other proposals, including elements suggested by KOFT, were not included in the final version.*

Upon final approval of the Plan, it was our understanding that some parents, families, and other groups had sought out an alternate proposal to moving forward with the closure of Agnews. After dropping vociferous opposition to the closure, the alternative has been the development of a living option that is similar to the existing Agnews model. While we recognize the concern of some of the parents and families of the residents remaining at Agnews, the KOFT proposal is not the answer.

While we continue to have serious reservations regarding the KOFT proposal, it should be noted that the three Bay Area regional centers most intimately involved with the closure of Agnews (Regional Center of the East Bay, Golden Gate and San Andreas Regional Centers) have worked closely with the members of KOFT and AMRA (formerly Association for the Mentally Retarded at Agnews), the group representing the parents of Agnews residents.

In the spring of 2006, Vast Horizons, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation, was formed by KOFT/AMRA and retained a management contract with Elwyn to develop and operate nine community homes for medically fragile residents moving out of Agnews. This latest development and new relationship with Elwyn, a Pennsylvania-based direct service provider agency will make Vast Horizons one of the largest providers in both the Unified Plan and the Regional Center of the East Bay and San Andreas Regional Center service areas. The new partnership with the regional centers demonstrates the active role both KOFT and AMRA seek to play in the provision of services. The leadership team of Vast Horizons is comprised of many of the same individuals who serve on the KOFT board.

We believe the KOFT proposal hopes to maintain a center-based environment rather than encouraging former residents to go into the community and beyond the confines of the state developmental center. The community-based model encourages people with developmental disabilities to live among people without disabilities and to expand their horizons, educating people without disabilities along the way. The Bay Area Plan takes into account the fact that people with disabilities are more vulnerable than the general population, however we do not believe this should be a reason to prevent people with moving among the non-disabled population. The KOFT model is a protective model that insulates people with developmental disabilities and shields them from the potential benefits that come from living in an integrated community setting.

Throughout the closure process, our primary concern was and continues to be the health, safety, and welfare of the residents who currently reside at Agnews. In no way would we support a plan that would jeopardize the lives of individuals. It is also important to note that in no way do we seek to separate or categorize the residents of Agnews from individuals currently residing in the community. Another value that we embrace is that each person served by the regional center (including those currently living in state developmental centers) should have the opportunity to lead full, inclusive lives.

The KOFT proposal looks to preserve many of the same elements that exist on the Agnews campus in hopes that this new plan will draw those without disabilities in. It is our fear that this proposal will merely be another scaled-down version of life within a developmental center. Creating an all-inclusive community like the one described in the KOFT plan does not necessarily guarantee that people without disabilities will be attracted to interaction with “residents” of this new model.

The KOFT proposal is likening this proposal to those similar to master-planned community designed to serve the recreational needs to seniors. We believe this is a poor comparison due to the fact that these individuals have already had the opportunity of living fully integrated lives within their respective communities and are now choosing to live within a segregated community with individuals with similar interests. That is a lifestyle choice.

The idea of a service hub or “center of excellence” to maintain access to specialty doctors, dentists and other health care providers is generally accepted to ensure that necessary medical services remain available, but we do not believe this support should not be connected to any residential options.

We will continue working closely with system stakeholders and other interested parties, including KOFT to ensure that we transition each resident safely into the most appropriate setting where their medical, health, and other service needs are met.

People, adults with developmental disabilities should be given the opportunity to experience life beyond the Agnews campus. While we recognize that not each individual will be able to live independently, the DDS and regional centers are fully committed to supporting persons with developmental disabilities and ensuring quality service options are available to people in the community.