PROXY PARENT FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE 33

Who Will Care When You're Not There?



Written by: Belisa Davis, MS, APCC, Manager, Partner Engagement, Orange County United Way

211 is more than a call center- it is a lifeline and a community resource hub connecting Orange County residents to needed community-based programs and essential services. A free, confidential, 24/7 helpline providing immediate connections to healthcare, housing assistance, food support, education programs, volunteer opportunities, and more. Callers can reach help any time via phone (dial 211), text (text zip code to 898211) web search (www.211oc.org).

The 2-1-1 Orange County (211OC) GetHelpOC Network brings together thousands of local health and human services providers to meet residents' needs through a whole-person approach to care. Whether someone is seeking food, housing, mental health services, or job support, the network helps address multiple needs at once—empowering individuals to make lasting, meaningful improvements in their lives.

How it Works

Service providers in the network use our innovative closed-loop referral system, powered by our GetHelpOC™ technology platform, to securely and consensually share client information across organizations. This means individuals don't have to retell their story each time they seek help—reducing emotional strain and minimizing trauma.

For service providers, this streamlined process improves care coordination, cuts down on duplicate data collection, and frees up more time for focused, compassionate case management.

We are here to serve all of Orange County's residents and connect them to the resources that can best meet their needs.

Inside This Issue...

- 2-1-1 OC
- Podcast on Autism
- Message from the Executive Director
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- Board Member Spotlight
- John Henry Foundation Intern Program

Proxy Parent Foundation is now registered with 2-1-1 OC and in the near future with 2-1-1 LA, Inland Empire, and San Francisco.



Podcast on Autism and Proxy Parent Foundation with Carol Larkin



We're thrilled to share an exciting collaboration highlighting our commitment to supporting the autism community. Carol Larkin, our Director of Client Relations, has been actively leading outreach efforts in this space—work that is especially meaningful to her as the mother of a five-year-old son with autism.

This summer, she attended a resource fair in Orange County hosted by Ausome Sauce, where she connected with Karla Chinen, founder of Empathy for Autism California. Karla's organization is dedicated to empowering caregivers of children with disabilities through shared knowledge, resources, and emotional support.

Following their connection, Carol was honored to present two sessions for parents—one in English and one in Spanish—and was invited to be a guest on Voices Beyond the Spectrum, Karla's podcast.

We're excited to share the episode with you when it airs! In it, Carol discusses her personal journey as a parent and how it has shaped her work at Proxy Parent Foundation. Stay tuned!

Message from the Executive Director...



The past three months have been a whirlwind of activity for our small but mighty team of four. We've been hard at work on important internal projects while also making our presence felt in the community—both in person and online. From road trips to virtual presentations, we've been sharing the mission and impact of Proxy everywhere we go.

Thanks to the overwhelming response to our Spring Newsletter, we're excited to share that we'll now be publishing **four newsletters a year**. Communication is essential, and we want to ensure our community stays informed and connected year-round. Mark your calendars—we'll be at the NAMI Convention in October, and I hope you'll stop by and say hello if you're attending.

A special thank-you goes to the **Cowe Marketing** team for helping us create cohesive branding and fresh new materials—including brochures (one now available in Spanish!), updated colors, a new logo, and even branded shirts for community events. We're truly "freshening up."

One of my greatest privileges over these past months has been meeting many of our clients and beneficiaries. I'm committed to continuing these connections, introducing myself, and most importantly—listening to your stories and feedback. Your experiences help us share the value of a Special Needs Trust more effectively in the community.

Behind the scenes, we're also working on process improvements to make Proxy even stronger. Guided by your feedback and our own observations, we're streamlining operations to ensure transparency and a seamless experience for everyone we serve. We've updated some job responsibilities and titles to better reflect our work, and you'll find our new staff organization chart included.

I hope this summer newsletter offers the information and insight you're looking for—and know that we will continue to evolve and improve with each edition.

With gratitude,

Carmen Bowen, MBA
Executive Director



What's Happening in the Proxy World



I'm thrilled to share that Carol Larkin now has the title of Director of Client Relations! This new title truly reflects the heart of the work she has been doing—serving and supporting our clients with dedication, care, and expertise.

In this role, Carol will continue leading efforts to enhance communication, elevate service, and foster growth within our Proxy community. You can expect to see even more of her thoughtful guidance, innovative ideas, and client-focused initiatives in the months ahead.

We're excited for the wonderful things Carol will accomplish in this role and the lasting impact she will continue to make for the Proxy Parent Foundation.

NAMI Conference Sacramento

We'll be there. Stop by our table and say Hello!











Community Education:

Where we have been:

- Conejo Valley Resource Fair (Thousand Oaks)
- Ausome Sauce Resource Fair (Orange County)
- Special Olympics - SoCal (Long Beach)
- John Henry Foundation - Family Presentation (Orange County)
- Parents Helping Parents Resource Fair / Special Olympics - NorCal (Santa Clara)
- Kind Fest 2025 (Santa Barbara Zoo)
- Meeting of the Minds
- CalABLE (Virtual Presentation)
- 2-1-1 OC (Virtual Presentation)
- NAMI OC Presentation - Oasis Senior Center



Where We are Going:

- CA NAMI Annual Convention (Sacramento)
- Brain Injury Center of Ventura County (Podcast Aug 20 & 27)
- CalABLE Webinar
- Many more in the works...



Family Testimonial

Our Story... Martin & Judy Krasnov



We are newcomers to the Proxy Parent Foundation For three decades we have navigated, along with our son, his challenges living with schizophrenia. During this span of time we have engaged many professionals, enlisted in programs, and chosen Board & Care residences. Yet the final decision 'what to do next' rested on our shoulders. Yes, there were long stretches where all went well but many a crisis left us numb, angry, often frightened and frustrated when we hit a wall.

My wife and I split our year between Allentown, PA. and La Quinta, CA. Having had a business career, now retired, I've always gravitated to seek professional advice and guidance in areas my business needed help. Early on in our son's journey we certainly needed help and for that matter ever since. Our son qualified for Medicare and SSDI entitlements in his early twenties whereupon we were advised to set up a Special Needs Trust (SNT) protecting these entitlements. Fortunately, we had the means to do so and through competent third party investments this original SNT has grown, keeping pace with the market over many years, and it will serve as the funding source to the PLAN of California Master Pooled Trust for years to come.

Trusts manage the Finances but do not manage the Disability. Now well into our senior years our concerns for our son's future increasingly became a major priority. We did not want to put that burden on our other son nor any other family member. We needed answers. Although we provided financial security early in his journey, questions remained. Who will take over evaluating options & choices when we no longer can? Who best can navigate within the mental health community? Who is dependable and professionally reliable? Staff come and go so long term we must depend on an active, well qualified and motivated Board of Directors, the Fiduciaries of an organization, to perpetuate its mission at the highest level.

We learned about Proxy Parent Foundation a few years ago. After an extended vetting process we decided It Was Time while we are still healthy and alert to observe PPF in real time. Being new ourselves we were pleased the Board recently hired an Executive Director who can devote much of her time to both growing its client base and promoting charitable gifts to help support PPF's endeavors. Because of our son's on-going need for a personal support component we are pleased a Director of Social Services was also recently engaged, charged with devoting her full time with oversight and advocating for clients using these services. We feel the Board acted very responsibly recognizing the need to enlist full time career personnel for each important area of expertise.

We are hopeful that the thread that binds many of us together, my wife & I can soon begin to think of PPF as a Proxy Parent 'Family' in its most meaningful way.

Marty Krasnov



Board Member Spotlight

Armida Colmenares-Stafford



A Leader Who Makes Things Happen with Grace, Intellect, and Heart

If you don't know Armida Colmenares-Stafford personally, you're truly missing out. As a Board Member of Proxy Parent Foundation, she brings decades of experience, deep community ties, and a servant-leader spirit that truly uplifts our mission. Her guidance on the Business Committee and contributions to our organizational strategy reflect the impact and importance of board leadership in shaping the future of nonprofits like ours.

Professionally, Armida serves as First Vice President and Senior Relationship Manager at Pacific Premier Bank, bringing over 30 years of commercial banking experience. But it's what she does beyond the office that makes her extraordinary—a fact that has been recognized three consecutive years by the San Fernando Valley Business Journal, naming her to their Valley 200 Most Influential Leaders list in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

How long have you served on the Board, and what brought you to our organization?
"I've been on the Board for three years, but my relationship with the organization goes back much further—I was part of Proxy Parent's Business Committee for 15 years prior to joining the board. Tom Stevens and I met back in 2008 when we were both working on starting up a local community bank, and he introduced me to the organization."

What drives your commitment to serving on boards like Proxy Parent Foundation and the Valley Economic Alliance?
"I have a disabled sister at home and have seen firsthand the concerns of parents fearful about who will be there for their disabled child if something were to happen to them. Proxy Parent Foundation eases their mind. The Valley Economic Alliance offers services focused on helping our local underserved market and our small business community, which is the economic engine of America."

This personal connection to disability advocacy runs deep in Armida's work. Currently serving as Board President of the Valley Economic Alliance, she leads regional economic initiatives and co-chairs the DEI Committee alongside our very own Executive Director, Carmen Bowen. Her previous trailblazing role as the first Latina President of the United Chambers of Commerce—a coalition of 32 business organizations—set a precedent for diverse and inclusive leadership across the Valley.

With leadership roles in several influential organizations, how do you choose where to serve?
"I choose organizations based on both personal and professional experiences to determine where I can add the most value. Proxy Parent Foundation is because my sister is disabled—I understand the financial difficulties that can arise, so I wanted to help others. The Valley Economic Alliance to share my expertise as a banker to help small and medium businesses grow."

Continued on the next page...

Board Member Spotlight



ARMIDA COLMENARES-STAFFORD
First Vice President, Senior Relationship Manager
Pacific Premier Bank

Colmenares-Stafford has held various senior management positions with national, regional, and community banks in the greater Los Angeles area. She joined Pacific Premier Bank in 2020 as the first vice president/senior relationship manager. In December, she took on the role of board chair for the Valley Economic Alliance, which engages and unites stakeholders to raise standards of living and enhance economic vitality across the San Fernando Valley. She was the first Latina chair of the United Chambers of Commerce. She currently serves as the board co-chair of the Annenberg School of Nursing, and she is also a member of the board and business committee of the Proxy Parent Foundation.

Her commitment to excellence has been recognized at the highest levels. In 2023, Armida was named a Fernando Award Finalist, a prestigious honor recognizing outstanding community service, with nominations from both the United Chambers and Valley Economic Alliance. Her professional achievements are equally impressive—she was once named Corporate Speaker of the Year at Security Pacific Bank for all of California, Oregon, and Washington state.

What is your mantra or quote you live by?
"My mother always told me: Be kind, have a good heart, share your gifts with others, and don't let anyone change who you are."

This philosophy clearly guides her work. When asked about recent community initiatives she's proud of, Armida highlights "the partnership with LA Jewish Health and AltaMed with Annenberg School of nursing program, that will provide vocational training in the East LA and underserved markets."

How do you balance such a full professional life with your impressive volunteer commitments?
"I could not do it without the support of my husband who is fully committed to volunteering and my kids who are always cheering me on."

What brings you the most joy in your work, both professionally and as a community leader?
"When I see the results that the work I am doing within our organizations are making a difference."

What legacy do you hope to leave through your community service and board work?
"To be a voice for others and make a difference in the lives of those in need."

Armida Colmenares-Stafford embodies the kind of leadership that transforms communities. Her three consecutive recognitions as one of the Valley's 200 Most Influential Leaders isn't just about her professional success—it's a testament to her unwavering commitment to lifting others up, breaking barriers, and creating lasting change. Through her work with Proxy Parent Foundation, the Valley Economic Alliance, and beyond, she continues to be that voice for others, making a tangible difference in the lives of those who need it most.

We are honored to have Armida's wisdom, experience, and heart guiding our mission at Proxy Parent Foundation.



Mental Health Champions

John Henry Foundation



Article Submitted by: Mary Ellen Stuart, Board President - John Henry Foundation

California faces a critical shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists, particularly those trained to manage severe mental health disorders. A report by the University of California, San Francisco, projects a 40% gap between the demand for psychologists and the available workforce by 2028. This shortage is compounded by a growing number of individuals requiring mental health services, with 1,243,000 adults in California reported to have a mental illness, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2021). Additionally, the World Health Organization has noted a 13% increase in severe mental health disorders over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, and social issues have further strained mental health resources, highlighting the urgent need for trained professionals. The John Henry Foundation's Psychology Intern Program and Psychiatry Residency Programs help to address this demand by training future psychologists and psychiatrists. Once their training is complete, they will be equipped to manage the complexities of serious and persistent mental illness. The on-site training educates future doctors to provide more coordinated, evidence-based, person-centered care, which leads to stability. They can take this knowledge with them as they go out to establish their medical practices, which will lead to better outcomes for people they will go on to treat.

The John Henry Foundation (JHF) has provided community-based housing and all wraparound mental health support services for adults with Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders since 1989. Through our Residential Community Program, we offer coordinated, evidence-based care to help individuals maintain medication compliance and build stability. JHF's Psychology Intern Program began in 2010 and the Psychiatry Residency program started a few years later. Both programs offer a unique, hands-on learning environment where future doctors interact closely with residents who live onsite. Under the guidance of JHF's Medical Director, Clinical Director and experienced staff clinicians, interns receive training in a variety of evidence-based therapeutic techniques, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Psychosis, Meta-Cognitive Processing, and Social Skills Training. They also gain proficiency in conducting comprehensive diagnostic assessments (psychological, cognitive, and personality) and develop an understanding of the legal and ethical aspects of the profession.

As a live-in facility, JHF provides interns/residents with unparalleled access to their patients, enabling them to offer services during optimal times and truly understand the day-to-day challenges faced by individuals with severe mental health disorders. This hands-on experience is further enhanced by individual and group supervision sessions, offering critical feedback and fostering professional development. The program's immersive nature, combined with its comprehensive curriculum, prepares the trainees for diverse careers in settings such as hospitals, private practices, community mental health services, and correctional facilities, effectively addressing the significant shortage of mental health professionals in California.

By increasing the number of well-trained mental health professionals, JHF's future doctors will help fill gaps in care and improve health outcomes for people with serious mental illness. CalOptima recently awarded the JHF a grant to support even more training of this kind. As the largest insurance provider in Orange County, they see this investment as an important part of strengthening the overall healthcare infrastructure, making it more resilient and better equipped to meet the evolving needs for Californians.

The Proxy Parent Foundation Board of Directors Want to Thank You for Your Support!



PROXY PARENT FOUNDATION

Support Our Mission

Give Today

https://www.proxyparentfoundation.org/donate

Thank You for Reading This Newsletter!

Look for our next edition in December 2025



If you have ideas, stories to share, or just want to say "hello." feel free to email me at cbowen@proxyparentfoundation.org

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