

HCBS FINAL RULE GETS HOLLYWOOD TREATMENT

CALIFORNIA'S REGIONAL CENTER WORKS WITH "A" LIST TALENT TO CREATE ANIMATION "EXPLAINER" SERIES

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[Regional Center](#) (TCRC), one of the 21 independent non-profits responsible for implementing California's \$14B annual Lanterman Act services for the developmentally disabled, has partnered with a Hollywood studio to create a "Network quality" animation series for people served by the regional centers and vendors who provide services to them and their families. The result of this unique collaboration are 20 unique, funny, and charming five-minute shorts that explain the Home & Community Based Services (HCBS) Final Rule requirements to the people receiving Regional Center services, their families and the state's service provider community, together a population of over one million people.



"As the HCBS Final Rule affects so many people, we have to get creative in how we give the people we serve and our vendors support in understanding the regulations," says Diva Johnson, the Director of Community Services at TCRC. "In order to remain eligible for federal reimbursement all such services must meet the HCBS Final Rule enacted in 2014." Movie Producer and former owner of the Reading Rainbow brand Mark Wolfe, who also serves as President of the TCRC and statewide Association of Regional Center Agencies (ARCA) Board of

Directors was approached by Johnson. "My son is served by TCRC and I respect their desire to feature real stories, portrayed by people with disabilities to make the HCBS requirements widely available, so when Diva came to me with the request to find a way to produce these animated videos with Hollywood quality but the non-Hollywood budget available to a non-profit, it was an easy yes", said Wolfe.

"As the statewide association that represents all 21 regional centers, ARCA is excited for the release of this video series. It's critical everyone in our community, particularly the people we serve, understand the HCBS Final Rule requirements," said Amy Westling, Executive Director of ARCA. "It's vital that ARCA and all regional centers continue educating on how to comply with these regulations and continue improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities. We applaud Tri-Counties Regional Center for their leadership and commitment on this statewide project."

To produce the series, Wolfe brought on board Public Pixels Media headed up by Joe Sichta, an award-winning show runner for some of the most beloved animations including Scooby Doo, Thomas the Tank Engine and Muppet Babies. "The amazing work done by the Regional Centers for so many Californians made my yes to pulling in the best talent as my part in giving back," said Sichta. "Given the restraints of the budget, I chose the UPA style of animation which would bring these stories to life with a fun, snappy sense of design and color that would really pop and give us that charming appeal we were looking for without breaking the bank." The first-person cast was Breaking Bad's RJ Mitte, an international disability advocate to portray the voice of Lorenzo, the lead character who, like Mitte, has Cerebral Palsy. "I agreed to join this project because what the Regional Centers bring to people with disabilities is not just 'help' but real passion and success in supporting every individual's own idea of how to lead their best independent lives. They see people with disabilities as people first and 'with disabilities' as just another aspect of being complex humans as we all are."

Executive Producers, Johnson, Sichta and Wolfe brought in Ice Age's Mark Baldo as animation director and noted Mid-Grade book author ('Curious League of Detectives and Thieves') and former Reading Rainbow alum, Tom Phillips as the series writer. Brazil's Split Studio provided the Animation and Matthew Chapman (Legend of the Three Caballeros) joined as producer and editor, Helen Sanderson's Mary Beth Lepkowski brought technical advice as well as the learning management system component to the project. Chapman, who has no personal relationship to the disabilities community, added that "I had no idea that one in every hundred Californians are served by the RCs. It makes me very proud that California is the only state in the country to offer such a comprehensive array of entitlement services." Writer Tom Phillips who has an autistic family member said, "These stories are not about disabled people who happen to live together, but rather about people living together who happen to have disabilities." TCRC's Johnson added that "it was imperative that we used actors with disabilities to portray our characters, not simply because it brings authenticity to the project, but it's living the mandate of the HCBS Final Rule that we help find competitive integrated employment at market wages for the people we support." Director Mark Baldo added that "We auditioned all over the state and we struck gold."

The vast majority of the starring roles are portrayed by people with developmental disabilities, and this opportunity was made possible by the California Department of Developmental Services' Paid Internship Program that provides opportunities such as this throughout the state in any area of work interest for the people served by the Regional Centers."

Though originally intended to be a small project for one of the Regional Centers, the project's success has mushroomed its reach so that now all 21 Regional Centers have access to the shows in 20 unique languages spoken in California. From English and Spanish to Tagalog, Mixteco, ASL, Farsi, Japanese, Chinese and many more. Finally, Johnson, Sichta and Wolfe all realized that this project and more like it to come can benefit not just Californians but the developmentally disabled community and their service providers across the country. TCRC and ARCA will work to spread the word about these HCBS animated shorts and several more series in the works all focused on the wide ranging and vital services available to those with disabilities.

Learn about the video series:

[All 20 episodes can be seen here](#)

[The Behind the scenes "making of" video can be seen here](#)

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