Healthy Relationships

By: Desiree Boykin

SCLARC’s CAC members Karen and Eugene Washington, Quinshay Gradley, and Alyssa Jackson made a presentation on the topic relationships, friendship, dating and marriage at the Self -Advocacy Board, Los Angeles County Area Board 10, on April 6, 2013. Approximately twenty people attended this free workshop in Glendale.

These are among the points stated during the presentation:

- One should demonstrate mutual kindness and respect prior to entering any relationship.
- No matter who we are or what disability we have, relationships are needed.
- Everyone needs a circle of support.
- There are opportunities –family members, current friends, classmates, and co-workers—or places (work, day program, activities/events, church) to meet a real friend or sentimental partner.
- Communication is essential.
- There are issues to be aware of during online dating.
- It is important to get to know your partner.
- There are qualities that make a marriage strong.

Quinshay Gradley, a second time presenter, stated that she really enjoyed her participation and learned a great deal herself about relationships. “There were so many questions from the audience,” she said. “I met really nice people.” Many participants were concerned about being stressed out by other family members. Quinshay, Alyssa, Karen and Eugene all responded to their questions.

After each slideshow, the audience commented. One couple shared their experience. They had been friends for years. Then, one of them became ill. The other stayed by the sick friend’s bedside, showing care and compassion. In time, this couple convinced both sets of parents that they were, indeed, ready for marriage. They have now been happily married for three years. Another disabled person stated, “Just because we are disabled doesn’t mean we can’t find love; someone will love us.”

Not only did the SCLARC CAC members enjoy presenting to the group, they also enjoyed working with one another. Quinshay stated, “I really like working with Karen, Eugene, and Alyssa. I want to do it all over again.” Karen said that during the presentation, she even had a chance to speak about the challenges of being in her own marriage. She was pleased with the results of the presentation. “My husband Eugene, Quinshay and Alyssa did a great job in answering the questions and sharing their experiences,” Karen said. These enthusiastic CAC members are eager to do this presentation again.
My Thoughts on The Relationship Workshop
Saturday 4/6/2013
By Alyssa Jackson, CAC Member and College Student

My experience with the workshop went well. I never went to Glendale before and it was my first time out there. I noticed that the place I went to is just like SCLARC. I saw that there were people that have the same thing that I have, meaning all of us have a disability whether our challenges are physical or intellectual. As I was doing the presentation with Karen, Eugene and Quinshay, others gave their opinions, meaning their thoughts and experiences about relationships. Some of the things about Relationships as we were reading along, turned into a little debate. I even learned more about Relationships after doing the presentation for a second time. I shared my experiences with them as well. For instance, I told them about my previous relationship and he didn't treat me to almost anything like when we go to the movies or go out to eat. I had to either pay myself or I had to pay for both of us. I didn't mention this in my experience while I was there, but every time he either comes over to my house (when I was living with my parents at the time) or go out, he asked me for gas money. He had two jobs and he was making excuses not to pay for me. Like every guy would say, I have bills to pay. News flash, everyone has bills to pay! Why can't he pay for me? I can't think about it anymore. I'm glad I'm not in that previous relationship anymore. He's not worth it.

Back to my experience, I also listened to Karen and Eugene's experience with marriage since they too have been married for a long time. What both of them said about marriage made me think about how it would be when I get married and live with my spouse someday. Before we got to the marriage part of the presentation, there was a discussion about inner beauty.

This one guy (I forgot his name) sitting in the front told us about his current relationship and his partner, who accepts him for who he is not the outer beauty. While I was listening to him, it seems as though she (his partner) is a good woman to him. He also said he's engaged to her. It was so wonderful to hear the news. I'm really happy for him. He found the one that loves him whether he has good times or bad times. I realized it's not what the person looks like or how they are based on disability. It's about accepting and loving that person for him or her despite their challenges. The guy's story touched me. Someday, I want someone to treat me the same way his fiancé is treating him. There was also talk about meeting someone online and social networks like Facebook for instance. Others gave their opinions about it as well.

Overall, my experience was fantastic. I'm glad I get to do the presentation again with the help from Quinshay, Karen, and Eugene. This presentation inspired me. It has taught me a lesson on relationships. I struggle with relationships and I need to improve them. I learned everyone needs to be treated equal and everyone can have a relationship rather we're facing challenges or not. We may have a physical or intellectual disability, but we are not imprudent. We are just as brilliant as other people.
Be Aware: Break The Cube!

By Diana Ugalde, CAC Member

Refusing a dull destiny encourages me to say: "Break the cube!" It's a slogan to make society aware of people with disabilities. Our overprotecting and anticipating attitude creates an invisible crystal cube trapping people with disabilities. This drawing gives us a visual concept of this reality. In most cases, we see a person with disabilities and assume that that individual cannot do anything for himself; thus, we think we need to overprotect and think for him. This wrong assumption strengthens the cube! When we overprotect as well as stereotype disabled children and adults, we take away their opportunities to learn and nurture their ability to be independent in their own unique way.

My cerebral palsy, which keeps me from talking and walking, puts me in that cube. My unique perspective allows me to point out the problems, and offer clear solutions for society to start breaking the cube. This crystal box lies in our hands, but the tools to vanish the cube are also in our hands. The decision is up to us to continue reinforcing the box’s transparent walls, or increasing its cracks.

My intentions are to expand this campaign and invite others to join me and make people aware of this trapping cube. Encouraging our society to take action is the key to break the cube. We must also help the ones who either cannot, nor don’t know how, to break free.

We must see that overprotection is the first factor of this isolation! This is how its domino-effect starts:

1) it keeps children with special needs from experiencing vital lessons;
2) nurtures disabled children’s limitations fostering vulnerable adults; and
3) if physically and intellectually challenged adults can’t make decisions or solve problems for themselves, they’re destined to be just another case number without ever having the opportunity to succeed.

Using my communication device, I have created a series of trainings which include PowerPoint presentations and verbal explanations to reach parents, professionals, and students. My trainings are: "Overprotection", "Education Is Our Shield," and "Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC): My Tool To Break The Cube!" So far my trainings have been at John Glenn High School in Norwalk, Lazzaraga Elementary School in Los Angeles, an in-service at The Center for Applied Rehabilitation Technology (CART) - Rancho Los Amigos - with an audience of more than 60 people, several times at SCLARC, and my “Overprotection” presentation was part of an educational tour for USC OT students also at CART.

In addition to making others aware of this situation, my ultimate goals are to become a motivational speaker to earn an income, start my own graphic designing business and move to my own place. I actually am taking firm steps towards these goals because my presentations, as of right now, represent my way of publicity. I also started my graphic sample book which includes photo art, photo-invites for every event, and high quality personal and promotional business cards.

My invisible cube exists in every activity and any step I take towards my daily goals, but attaining my objectives cracks it and impedes its complete reconstitution. Stereotyping motivates me to break it and help others see beyond my cerebral palsy. My "Break The Cube" concept is to motivate you, the able-bodied and disabled, to use the tools which are: don’t overprotect or stereotype, take the time to look for cues, and see beyond the disability. Developing a strong will is an extremely important character trait for physically challenged people. Expanding their education represents another essential tool. In addition, parents of intellectually challenged individuals must teach their youngsters how to be independent and differentiate between right and wrong.

Keep in mind this concept, and next time you see a person with disabilities help him/her break the cube. Not only do they carry invisible cubes, when we say "I cannot do it" we unconsciously build our own cube whether or not we have physical or intellectual disabilities.
Consumers Advocates have been reaching out to each other as they work to share the accomplishments of their CAC groups in assisting consumers. SCLARC’s Consumer Advocate met with Harbor’s CAC group in November. Westside met at SCLARC’s March 25, 2013 CAC meeting. Client Advocate Linda Butler, CAC President Esther Kelsey, and Peer Advocate Russell Tanner were guests at the SCLARC CAC meeting. There were two topics: an update on the Health Fair, scheduled for May 16, 2013, and the use of one’s disability as a tool to help others and not as a reason to feel sorry for oneself because of being born with an intellectual or developmental disability. Members are prepared to be the torch for the next generation.

CAC members shared what they do to improve themselves and help others in the community—Advocates agreed to attend one another’s CAC meetings when possible. Both SCLARC and Westside enjoyed each other’s friendliness, as they shook hands and gave hugs.

CAC members, like Alyssa Jackson, enthusiastically shared the significance of their attendance at the SCLARC CAC meetings. She stated, “I really enjoy coming to the CAC meetings on a monthly basis. I am learning so much. This year, I will attend the self-advocacy conference for the first time, and I am excited about going.” CAC members Christopher Smith stated, “I attend Santa Monica College (SMC) and I attend the CAC meeting when I can.” Quinshay Gradley stated that she is also a member the CAC and attends EL Camino College. “I’ve also gone to the Self Advocacy Conference this past June.”

The numbers of members attending SCLARC’s consumer meetings grow monthly as more and more consumers show interest in learning about advocacy and their rights. At the end of the March meeting, SCLARC and Westside took a group picture. A few days later, this really nice e-mail was received from Linda Butler, Westside Client-Advocate:

Hi Desiree,

Russell Ester and I want to Thank You and Phyllis for inviting us to Your CAC meeting yesterday. We had a very nice visit. You Phyllis and your CAC are so warm and kind. We are very impressed with the way your CAC does things. You and your family have a Happy Easter.

Linda Butler