



Corona Public Library 650 S Main St Corona, CA 92882
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THEMES FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH CORONA'S ADULT SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNITY

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Over nine months in 2017 the Corona Public Library engaged 46 adults with developmental disabilities, their families and caregivers in open ended conversations about the kind of community they want, the concerns and issues they have in regard to creating this kind of community, actions they feel would make a difference in their lives, and who they would trust to take action on these things. Here is what we learned.

ASPIRATIONS FOR CORONA

In talking with the members of this community within Corona, we found the following topics arising again and again:

- Participants across the conversations said they want **local activities and resources**, instead of needing to leave Corona. People would like to have local college courses, including life skills, sports and other activities. They also talked about wanting partnerships for jobs, and a variety of jobs for different skill levels. *“Everyone likes to feel needed. If there’s a job for someone, it makes them feel involved . . .”*
- Another desire heard at every meeting was to have **one central source of information** regarding activities and opportunities for parents of adults and children with special needs. *“New parents to children with disabilities may feel overwhelmed and unsure of where to go or who to turn to. If they knew about other parents and groups who are already involved with the special needs community, they would have people to talk to and get help from.”*
- Throughout the series of conversations, **inclusivity in the greater community** for adults with special needs was commonly heard as an aspiration. This would provide opportunities to socialize more, both with each other and with the neuro-typical general public.
- The wish for a **safe and secure city** was also expressed at every community conversation, including educating police and the general public on the special safety concerns for this population.

PRIMARY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

People in these conversations also shared the problems and barriers they feel are keeping their aspirations from being realized:

- Currently ***it is necessary to leave Corona*** for much of what they need or want. There is not enough to do here. There are life skills continuing education classes in Fullerton and Norco, but not in Corona.
- In order to take advantage of available resources, they also stressed the need for ***better transportation options*** for people with special needs, even to attend activities within the city limits, much less farther afield. As one young woman said, “***I get so bored because I can’t get anywhere to do anything fun!***” Most special needs adults are unable to drive themselves. They often are too nervous to ask for help, and parents/caregivers can’t do it all due to costs and “burnout.”
- ***No one knows what activities are already available*** for adults with special needs – even the city offerings. The different groups need a place to consolidate everything. “***Knowing about events is solely through word of mouth, and there is always the same group of people because they’re the only ones who know about the events.***”
- Adults with special needs often have ***limited interaction with the general public***. This limits their social development and opportunities for teaching others about themselves. Some religious organizations have very active adaptive programs, but not everyone belongs to these groups, so it’s difficult for many to be integrated into the community as a whole.
- A specific concern of this group is to ***increase awareness of special safety issues*** for special needs adults, such as vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse. One caregiver told of a case where an adult in a special needs foster home was allowed to leave the house at all hours, and it was learned that she was “***providing sexual favors for food and soda.***”

ACTIONS THAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Some of the things that could (or should) be done to start creating change include the following:

- People in the special needs community would like ***city, business, and community leaders to be informed of their needs, and to be involved with improvements.***
- ***Follow up with the families involved in these conversations*** so they will know their opinions count, and that the time they spent talking with us wasn’t wasted.
- The primary desired action across this community is to ***get the word out about activities throughout the city***, e.g. create a link on the library page and notify the

various groups to submit events and check the site. “[Showing photos and giving ‘feel good stories’ could incentivize events.](#)” After hosting Community Conversations, having the library as the central repository for this information would show “[initiative from the city and could be the start of what could be great!](#)”

- Part of this last aspiration included finding avenues for marketing the activities and resources to the special needs community, as well as educating the general public about people with disabilities. People want to see more ***opportunities for connections between support groups***. This would allow community members to ***identify partnerships for developing new programs***.
- Members of this community would also like help ***promoting opportunities for independence***, which also allows respite for caregivers.

WHO WOULD THEY TRUST?

In order to start making positive change, it’s necessary to identify people and groups who the community members feel will have their best interests at heart. From our conversations, we learned that the following individuals or organizations are considered trustworthy:

- Above all others, the special needs community trusts ***other parents and caregivers*** who already have experience, and may have new connections.
- ***Library & Recreation staff*** are well-regarded and could play an important role.
- There are many ***non-profit advocacy organizations*** such as United Cerebral Palsy which represent people with different types of disabilities and have great resources.
- Since many already have an established relationship with ***educators and the school district***, the families would continue to trust them.
- ***Properly vetted volunteers*** are a great benefit to the community. This includes teen volunteers because “[it’s good to have volunteers the same age as some of the participants at events.](#)”
- ***Staff from Corona businesses and Norco College***, for example, who have shown knowledge of and sensitivity to people with special needs could add whole new dimensions to the provision of services.
- The special needs adults themselves also trust ***their peers***.