



# Bridging Gaps, Building Trust: The SHArp Approach

Specialty Health Ambassador (SHA) Program Update

*Presented to the Developmental Disabilities Council*

*Nicola Ifill Fraser, Program Director*

*Lisa Ribitch, Workforce Essential Skill Training Instructor*

*Tyler Bohon, Senior SHA*



# SHArp

SHArp stands for **Specialty Health Ambassador Resource Personnel** - trained individuals with lived experience of IDD who connect underserved community members to critical services, support, and health education



Bridging Gaps



Education



Lived Experiences



*"I didn't even know services like this existed until SHA explained it step by step." — Senior SHA Tyler*

# The SHArp Model

## What Makes the SHArp Model Unique?

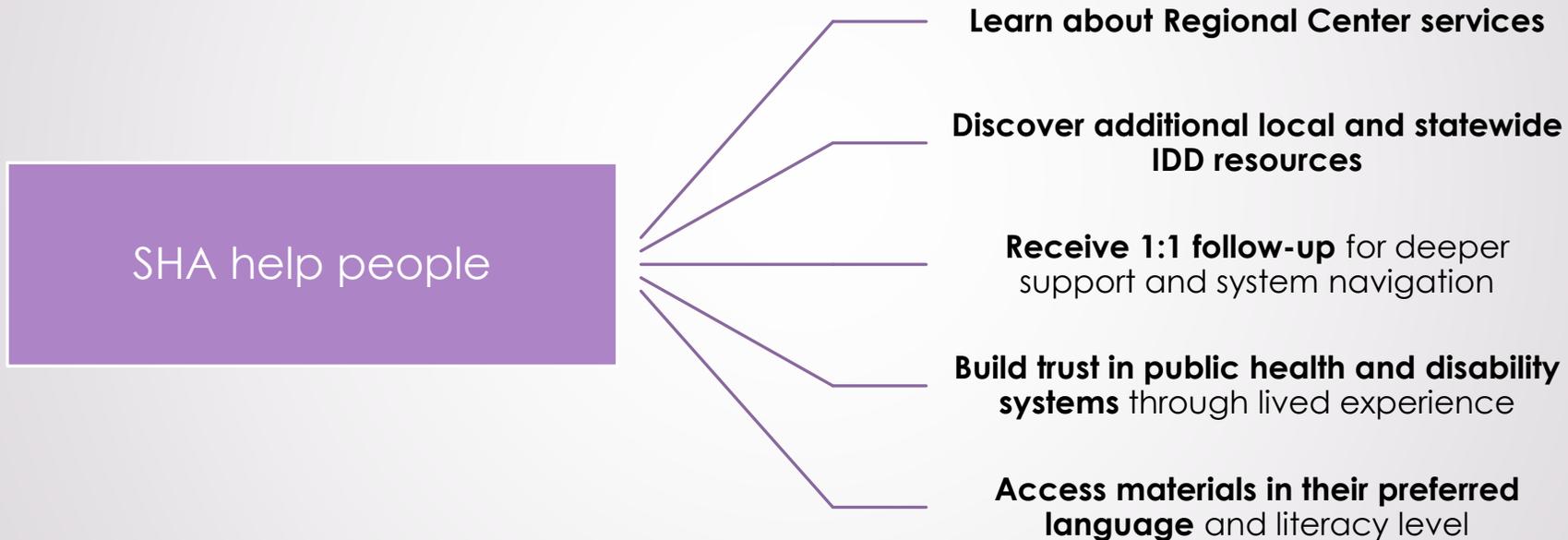
- Grounded in **lived experience**
- **Culturally responsive** and community-based
- **Accessible outreach** using plain language, visuals, and translation
- **Connection beyond the flyer**
- Ongoing **training and wellness support** for Ambassadors



*“Because I’ve been through it, I know how to explain things in a way people understand. That’s why they trust me.”*  
— SHA Ambassador

# Program Overview

The SHA Program bridges the gap between underserved communities and disability services.



*“Before this job, I never thought I could speak in front of a crowd. Now I present in front of large crowds.”*  
— Nora, SHA Ambassador

## SHA Voices – “Meet an Ambassador”



*“Lived experience isn't just relevant—it's transformational” — SHA Ambassador*

# WEST Curriculum – Workforce Development

**The WEST curriculum builds real-world job and life skills.**

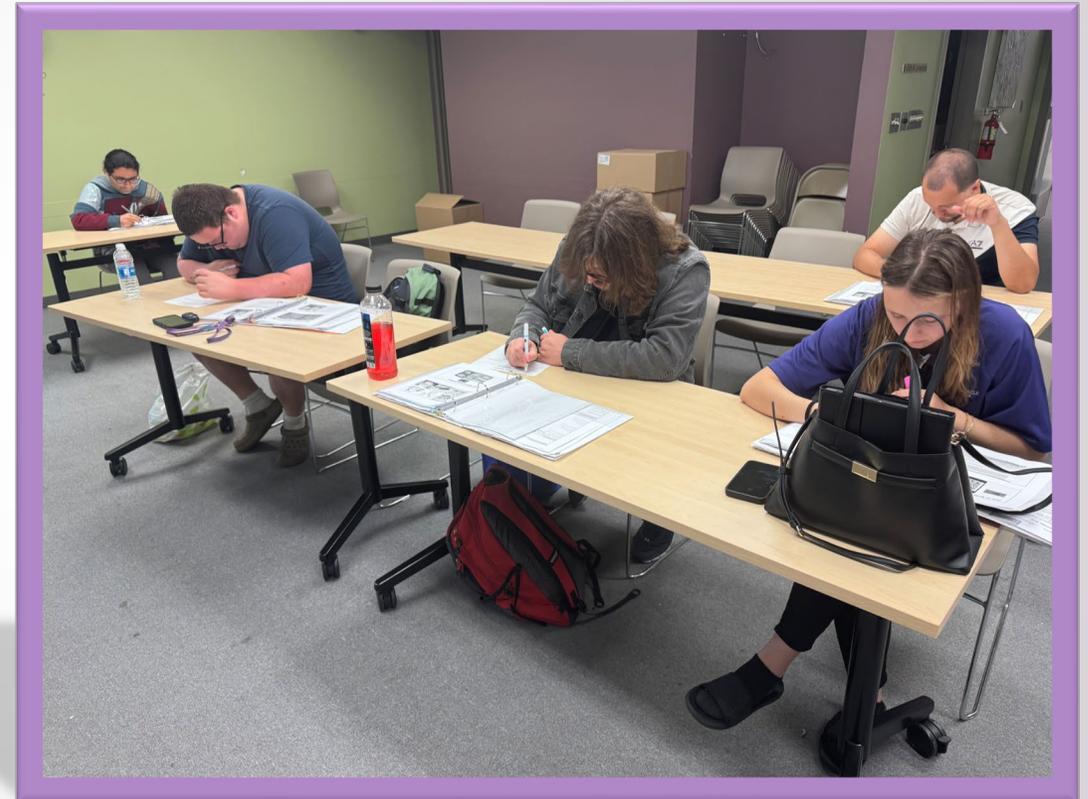
SHA participate in bi-weekly training

**Topics Include:**

- Communication & public speaking
- Conflict resolution & professionalism
- Workplace etiquette & community safety

**We've Seen:**

- Growth in confidence, independence, and leadership
- Measurable gains through pre- and post-assessments
- Ambassadors using skills to apply for jobs, internships, and further education



*“Thanks to the WEST classes, I speak more clearly and confidently. I even practiced how to introduce myself at a job fair—and it worked!” — SHA Ambassador*

# Community Engagement Impact

**SHA Ambassadors are actively embedded in the communities they serve.**

**In the 2 past year, we have:**

- Reached nearly **6,500 individuals**
- Participated in **259+ events**: health fairs, disability conferences, school functions
- Focused outreach on **African American** and **Spanish-speaking communities**
- Offered **1:1 support** to help families connect to services for persons with IDD

## **Why It Matters:**

Outreach is more effective when it's done by people who reflect the community, speak their language, and share their lived experience.

*“People actually listen because we’ve been through it too. That’s what makes us different.”*  
— Tyler, SHA Ambassador

# Community Engagement Impact

**SHA Ambassadors are actively embedded in the communities they serve.**

**In the 2 past year, we have:**

- Reached nearly **6,500 individuals**
- Participated in **259+ events**: health fairs, disability conferences, school functions
- Focused outreach on **African American** and **Spanish-speaking communities**
- Offered **1:1 support** to help families connect to services for persons with IDD

## **Why It Matters:**

Outreach is more effective when it's done by people who reflect the community, speak their language, and share their lived experience.

*“People actually listen because we’ve been through it too. That’s what makes us different.”*  
— Tyler, SHA Ambassador



# SHA in Action – Tabling Video

**Video Title:** SHA in Action: Community Outreach

*“At first, I didn’t think I had anything to offer. Now I see the difference I make every time we table.” — SHA Ambassador*

# Lessons Learned

Over the past two years, we've learned a great deal

Community  
Trust Takes Time

Ambassadors  
Needed Time  
to Grow

Paperwork is a  
Barrier

Representation  
Matters



*"What I've learned isn't just for the job—it's made me a better communicator, advocate, and teammate."*  
— SHA Ambassador

# Best Practices



Hire from within the communities serve



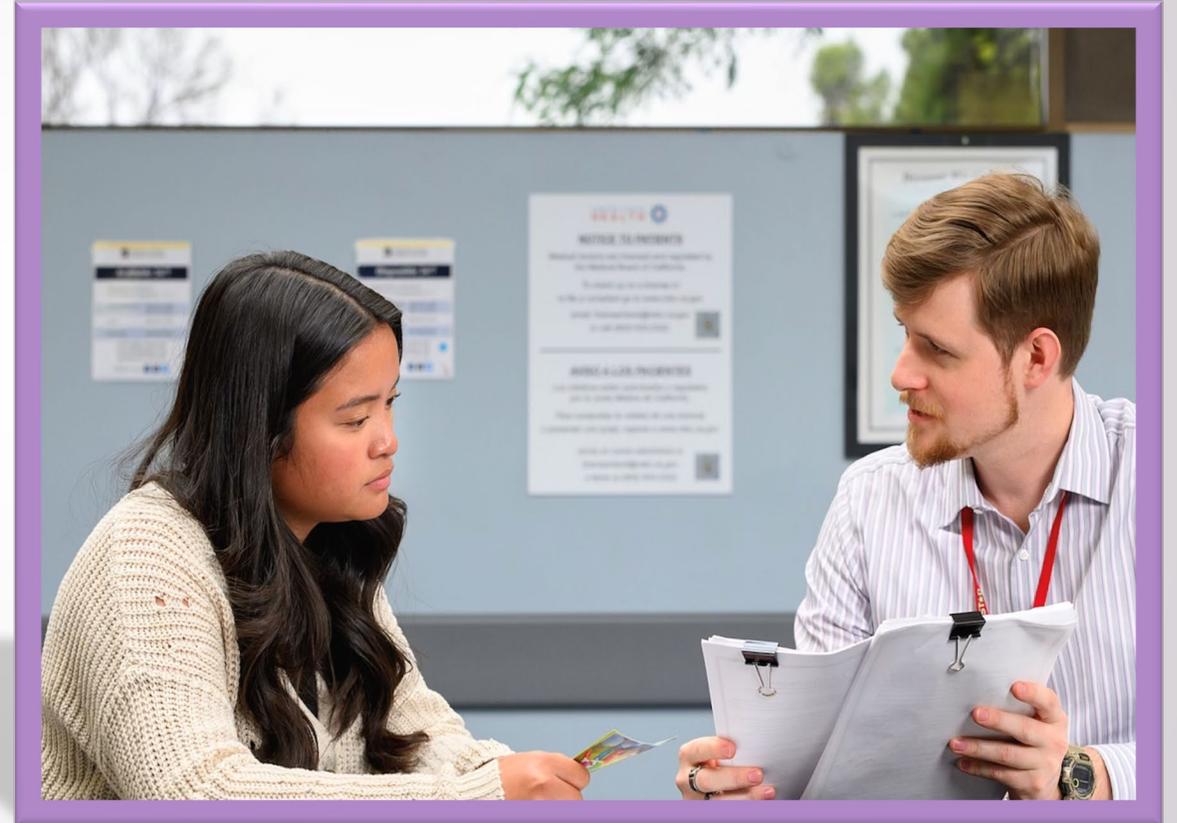
Pair outreach with skill-building and professional development



Provide 1:1 follow-up and trust-building



Use feedback from Ambassadors and the community to guide growth



*“My experience as a SHA gave me the opportunity to share resources with people who might not know they exist. It’s helped me grow—and I’ve developed better communication and social skills along the way.”*

— Seth, SHA Ambassador



# Ambassador Spotlight: Mateo

## Milestone Internship – HERU

**Our first SHA internship proves how individuals with IDD can shape inclusive systems.**

- Mateo interned with the Health Emergency Response Unit (HERU), helping plan for emergencies that impact vulnerable groups—including people with IDD and AFN.
- He managed inventory, assisted in preparedness plans, and served as a community liaison at safety fairs.
- Mateo used his lived experience to help improve systems that support people like himself.

*“The SHA program helped me become more social. I used to be very shy and would stutter, but now I communicate better—especially while out in the workforce.”*

— Mateo, SHA Ambassador

# The First Cohort Prepares to Exit

The first group of Specialty Health Ambassadors is completing their journey.

## 👏 2 Years of Impact

- Over **100 community events**
- Linked families to IDD services
- Gained confidence in **public speaking**
- Built **job readiness**: training, resumes.

## 🎯 Current Focus

- Supporting each Ambassador's next step:
  - Jobs, education or new opportunities



*"I have financial independence now. I don't have to depend on my parents for money. I pay my rent, buy my own food, and even saved up for an Apple Watch!"— Troy, SHA Ambassador*

# New Cohort Incoming



## What's New

- Streamlined onboarding based on Cohort 1 feedback
- Targeted outreach for individuals with:
  - Lived experience
  - Cultural fluency
  - Passion for service

This next cohort will carry forward the mission with **new energy, diverse voices,** and a **strong foundation to build upon**

*"Before SHA, I didn't think I could do something like this. Now I'm helping people and getting paid for it."— SHA Ambassador*



# WE ARE HIRING!

SPECIALTY HEALTH AMBASSADORS

- ☀️ Do you have an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) and are passionate about helping others?
- 🌍 Want to make a difference in your community?

**Join a team that supports individuals with IDD!**

## We Are Looking For:

- ✓ Individuals with experience or interest in presenting at community events
- ✓ People who advocate for themselves or others
- ✓ Regional Center Clients ready to make an impact

## Details

- ✓ Hiring for the Next Two-Year Program Cycle!
- 📅 Program Starts: July 2025
- ✓ Application Period: May - June 2025
- ✓ Part-time, approximately 20 hours per week
- ✓ Competitive hourly wages

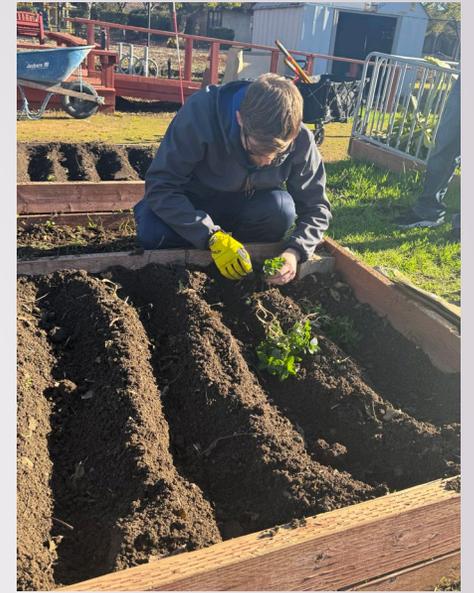
**APPLY NOW**

✉️ Email your resume today!

[SHA@fullcircleofchoices.org](mailto:SHA@fullcircleofchoices.org)

**More Information:** (925) 326 0089





**Fun Fact -  
We have a Community Garden!**

# Sustaining & Expanding the SHA Program

**We're seeking continued funding to sustain and grow.**

## Identified Need

Many people with IDD qualify for services but don't complete the application process due to:

- Complex forms
- Language barriers
- Lack of support navigating the system

## Our Expansion Goal

Launch a new series to provide **hands-on application assistance**, led by trained staff.

This is not currently offered by SHAs—but the need is clear.

*"There are so many more people out there who need this kind of help. We've just scratched the surface."— SHA Ambassador*

# What's Next



**Expand the SHA  
Program**



**Build New  
Partnerships**



**Innovate for  
Impact**



**Improve  
Ambassador  
Experience**



**Secure Sustained  
Funding**

*“Now that I know what's possible, I want to keep learning and keep giving back.”— SHA Ambassador*

# Fun Fact! Hard Skills

- ▶ All the ambassadors are **First Aid/CPR certified**
- ▶ Some are certified/ and or trained in
- ▶ **Stop The Bleed**
- ▶ **Fire Extinguisher Training** ,
- ▶ **County CWS Alert System** and **Three Steps to Disaster Preparedness**
- ▶ Two are **Instructors for Basic Life Support (CPR and AED)**



# What the Community is Saying

## Quote from Community members testimonials

*"The Ambassadors didn't just hand me a flyer—they explained the resources and followed up. That made a huge difference."*

*"I already had some services, but SHA helped me understand what was really available—like CalABLE and asking for more respite hours."*

*"There are so many things Regional Center offers that I didn't know about—especially for when my son gets older. SHA helped me think ahead."*

*"Thanks to you, I now know my child won't be left behind at 18. You helped me see that Regional can continue to support him through every stage."*

*"Nobody else sat down with me and walked through the programs like that. It wasn't rushed—it was personal."*

*"If it wasn't for you all, I wouldn't have known about CalABLE. That alone was an A+ blessing for my family."*

*"You made me feel like a real adult, capable and informed. That means everything when you're raising a child with special needs."*

# Stay Connected

Let's continue the conversation and explore ways to partner or support the next phase of SHA.

 **Nicola Ifill Fraser**

[Nicola@fullcircleofchoices.org](mailto:Nicola@fullcircleofchoices.org)

 925-326-0089

➤ [SHA@fullcircleofchoices.org](mailto:SHA@fullcircleofchoices.org)

- Presenting at events
- Collaborating on funding and program development



## Specialty Health Ambassador Program



The Specialty Health Ambassador Program is a grant-funded initiative supported by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the Regional Center of the East Bay (RCEB), designed to:

- Educate the community about intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- Connect individuals with IDD to critical resources and services, such as Regional Center support.
- Provide professional development opportunities for Ambassadors to lead and inspire.

### What we do

#### For The Community



Host educational presentations on IDD awareness.



Bridge gaps between families and available resources.



Participate in outreach events to connect underserved populations to services.

#### For The Ambassadors



Offer training in communication, advocacy, and public health skills.



Provide career development and leadership opportunities.



Create pathways for personal growth and community impact.

### Why it matters

The Specialty Health Ambassador Program:

- Promotes inclusion and empowerment for individuals with IDD.
- Increases awareness of community resources.
- Supports underserved populations in navigating systems of care.

