

## IN THIS ISSUE



new kitchen and library



inclusion makes a difference



a story of two brothers

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## LOOKING DISASTER IN THE FACE

By Cami Weaver, CEO

No one, no matter your politics, can be happy with what's happening in Sacramento. And, as of this writing, we have no clear idea what kind of financial challenges Becoming Independent will be facing if and when Gov. Brown and the State Legislature produce a budget for the next fiscal year. **There is no good news to report.**

The Legislature and Governor have passed and signed \$11 billion worth of cuts and some of that will come out of the State Department of Developmental Services budget which funds programs like BI. But there remains another \$14 billion in cuts that Gov. Brown says are needed and no agreement on possible tax remedies to provide those funds. Already, lawsuits are being filed to challenge proposed cuts.

So, there you have it. Worst case scenario, as far as we know now, BI and other agencies that serve people with disabilities will be delivered cuts in fees of as much as 20 percent – a \$2.5 million cut in BI's operating budget. And if there is no agreement on a budget by July 1 we could be operating on IOUs. Both are possible. Neither is acceptable.

**We don't deal with IOUs at BI. We deal with people who need our services, and IOUs just don't cut it.**

It would be disastrous for the 1,300 men and women engaged in our programs in Sonoma, Napa and Solano counties. Accordingly, we are treating this latest state budget impasse as a disaster no less devastating than a massive earthquake, flood or fire. And for the foreseeable future, BI staff, participants, families and friends must be on disaster alert. This is not going to be over soon. The last two state budgets produced 4.25 percent in fee cuts to BI. Nevertheless, we've managed to continue to operate our programs relatively unscathed.

We've recently received accolades for our wellness program and Sonoma County has certified BI as a Green Business for implementing measures to reduce waste, conserve energy and water and prevent pollution. However, the desperate measures proposed by Gov. Brown in January to balance the state budget command our attention, and BI and our colleague agencies are pushing back.

We made a lot of noise in February when BI staff and participants along with our colleagues in other Sonoma and Marin agencies took our budget protest to the gates of San Quentin Prison in San Rafael where the state is proposing to embark on a \$400 million expansion of Death Row at the same time it is proposing to cut the State Department of Developmental Services – which pays our fees for services – by as much as \$750 million. Our message: this is no time to be spending money to expand or remodel.

And we continued to make noise using various mediums and following a strategy developed by the California Disabilities Services Association, our collective lobbying voice in Sacramento and in which I am your representative.

LOOKING DISASTER IN THE FACE  
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### OUR VOICES WERE HEARD!

Right before this BI News went to press — Governor Brown decided it would 'be unconscionable to earmark \$356 million for a new death row while making severe cuts to programs that serve the most vulnerable among us.'



BI protesters picket budget cuts at the gates of San Quentin

Sometimes we've been very loud. Most of the time we're quietly making ourselves heard. All the time we're organizing.

We sent two groups of BI delegates – staff, board members and participants – to Sacramento to testify at Senate hearings. We've paid visits to all our North Bay members of the Assembly and Senate. We've engaged our constituents, the families and participants who use BI programs to provide education, job, art, independent living and other opportunities to people with disabilities. We've encouraged letter-writing campaigns by participants here at BI and their friends, families, employers and other supporters. We've written thousands. Our board members have voiced their concerns in newspaper Letters to the Editor columns. Board member Jerry Fabiano produced a video that went out on YouTube and was emailed to friends and supporters in which he along with other families explained the huge impact disastrous budget cuts would have on their families and the whole community.

The BI Board of Directors organized under our CARD (Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters) system that was developed for agencies like ours after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake here in California. The state budget cuts proposed under Gov. Brown and the inability of the Legislature, so far, to provide revenues to balance the budget represents a disaster of earthquake proportions. Our board is organized to try to head that off and, in the worst case deal with it.

It's been an eye-opening experience as we organize our community in the face of this pending disaster. And it's been empowering. Testifying in front of the Legislature is empowering. Demonstrating on the street is empowering. Organizing our families is empowering. Writing letters is empowering. We're focused, and we'll keep you informed. We must not give up fighting in Sacramento and beyond.

Our folks said it best. Why is the Governor picking on us?



Marking the opening of the Celebrate Community Library, from left, Nubia Padilla, BI Director of Family Service; Cami Weaver, BI CEO; Bonnie Burrell, Celebrate Community Partner through Winzler & Kelly and BI Board Member; Bruce Kyse, Press Democrat Publisher; Teejay Lowe, G&G Supermarket; Lolly Petroni, Press Democrat Celebrate Community Program Manager, and Sybil Halloran, BI FRAC Service Manager.



### Celebrate Our New Library

Becoming Independent has a new library, open to all the public, as a resource to provide information to parents and families of children with disabilities, their siblings and the entire community of the North Bay. Grand opening was held on April 1.

The library, which is located at BI's headquarters location on Corporate Center Parkway in Santa Rosa, was made possible by a \$10,000 contribution by partners in The Press Democrat's Celebrate Community program supporting nonprofit groups and community events. It is operated by the staff and volunteers of our Family Resource and Advocacy Center. The donated funds helped BI turn a portion of our campus into a friendly and comfortable spot and home for hundreds of reference books where people can obtain help online, check out reference materials on issues facing people with disabilities, sit quietly and read or meet with others.

"We're very grateful to The Press Democrat and Celebrate Community for helping us provide this new addition to our services for our families and the community at large," said CEO Cami Weaver. "This is a valuable resource for the entire community. Everyone is welcome to use it."

Library Hours of operations:

Monday, 9 a.m.-1 pm. Wednesday, 10 a.m.- 2 p.m. Friday, Noon-3 p.m.

Or by appointment. Call 707-524-6725.



## MISSION IN MOTION

### YMCA Camp Inclusion

By Carin Lawrence, Chief of Services

The world of children with disabilities in the North Bay made a huge breakthrough this past December when the Sonoma County Family YMCA welcomed four boys diagnosed with conditions associated with the autism spectrum into its Christmastime day camp – the first time that a camp opportunity was made fully

inclusive for Becoming Independent families.

Nubia Padilla, BI's Director of Family Services, said the two-week camp experience was the culmination of three years of discussions with the YMCA on how to make everyday after-school and day camp opportunities that are available to most kids also open to kids with special challenges.

Launching the inclusive camp was not without its challenges. Nubia said it was hard work and an eye-opening experience both for the YMCA and BI staff. Preparation and planning is essential to educate staff on how to support a child with special needs. But the experience goes a long way toward BI fulfilling its primary mission, to promote community inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities, including young children.

"We established that it can be done, and the YMCA invited the kids to return for their regular after-school program," Nubia said. "We'd like to see four children with disabilities in each of the YMCA's after-school and summer camp programs throughout the county." The inaugural camp was held the final two weeks of December at Schaefer School on San Miguel Avenue in Santa Rosa. The school is part of the Piner-Olivet Union School District.

The four BI children joined about 25 other kids in the program. Two BI staffers provided counseling support for the BI youngsters. YMCA staff underwent the first segment of a four-part block of training for providing support to children with disabilities at BI's location in Santa Rosa, two hours of instruction on "opening the door for inclusion."

Nubia said the number of BI children enrolled in the camp was limited to four to encourage them to join the program, not overwhelm the program. "We wanted our children to be perceived as part of the whole group," she said. Nubia said there was some apprehension among some of the parents about how their children would respond to the new experience.

"One mom was especially worried and didn't leave the area after she dropped off her son," she said. "She waited in her car expecting to be called to take her child after an outburst. **But at the end of the two weeks, her son was outside in the play yard, playing along side the other children** and the mom was dropping him off and leaving for the day." "For a person with a disability, this was absolutely huge."

BI and the YMCA are now looking forward to expanding the day camp and after school opportunities for other children with disabilities. Nubia said that the "Y" staff is now eager to take the whole block of instruction on best practices for counseling youngsters with special needs, and the BI staff is looking for financial support to enable all families to participate in the camps and day care programs.

The cost for enrolling four children with special needs in a two-week session is about \$2200, half of which is paid by parents.

"It can be done if the community works together and makes it happen. It's the right thing to do," Nubia said. The ultimate goal, she said, is for children with disabilities to routinely be included in such programs and become the norm. "Then it will be successful," she said.



## ARTWORKS CALENDAR

### PORTRAITS

Through June 18: "You're Perfect," exhibition of portraits of BI and community artists with familiar faces, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### CONVERSATION

June 26, 2-4 pm: Sunday Salon featuring a panel in conversation about raw, intuitive, outsider art, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### LANDSCAPES

July 9 – Sept. 3: Landscape Exhibit, exhibition of BI and community artists Opening Reception, Saturday, July 9, 5-7 pm, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### OPEN STUDIO

Aug. 6 & 7, 10 am – 5 pm, SOFA Open Studio Tour, SOFA (South of A) Arts District and The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### HOME & GARDEN

Sept. 10 - Nov. 5: Exhibition of BI and community artists featuring accessories for inside and outside the home and environs. Opening Reception, Saturday, Sept. 10, 5-7 pm, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### WINTERBLAST

Nov. 12, 4-9 pm: SOFA Winterblast! neighborhood and street festival of the arts on South A Street, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven

### HOLIDAYS

Dec. 9, 5-7 pm: "Holiday Lights" annual Becoming Independent ArtWorks exhibition and sale BI Studio and Gallery, 1455 Corporate Center Parkway, SR

Locations:

The Gallery of Sea and Heaven  
312 South S. St., Santa Rosa

BI Studio Gallery  
Becoming Independent,  
1455 Corporate Center Parkway,  
Santa Rosa



## DINNER UNDER THE STARS

BI's 20th annual Dinner Under the Stars – Stars in the Spotlight – is scheduled for Saturday, June 11 at the beautiful Imagery Winery in Glen Ellen. Although our fundraiser is sold out we have live auction lots available for purchase before the event. Check them out at [www.becomingindependent.org](http://www.becomingindependent.org)

## TOM & OWEN CATE - a story of two brothers

# Heart and Soul

**When people talk about People First and self advocacy** at Becoming Independent, the brothers Tom and Owen Cate always come to mind. “They were two of the original members one of the support groups that started in 2006,” said Carin Lawrence, Chief of Services.

**“They’ve both been dedicated members of that group.”** And they’ve led by example. Both live independently. Both have jobs in the community. Both are living the lives they have chosen for themselves.

However, for Tom and Owen, it hasn’t come easily.

Tom and Owen grew up in Sonoma County. Tom was born in 1955, Owen two years later. Their parents, Lester and Catherine Cate, were Santa Rosa natives and were married about the time that Lester joined the Army during the Korean War era. The marriage ended shortly after a little sister, Linda, was born in 1961. Lester was the custodial, single parent and children’s mother would drop from their lives. In 1965, the kids were just 10, 7 and 4 when Lester Cate was killed in a traffic accident on the Fourth of July. Wards of the court for about a week, the children were placed in the custody of an aunt and uncle, Thelma and Roy Wright. They attended schools in several districts in central Sonoma County, finally landing and graduating from Analy High School in Sebastopol.

Over the years Tom and Owen would come to understand they had some special challenges. Tom remembers being in special education classes. Owen remembers asking: “What is borderline?” Learning difficulties are what they were dealing with, the brothers now say.

Linda grew up and went out into the world, but Tom and Owen remained with their aunt and uncle. There were few opportunities for Tom and Owen to become engaged in the larger, adult community. “Our aunt treated us like teenagers,” said Owen. “Auntie was over protective.” Then in 1994, Linda took steps to give her brothers a chance, taking them to the North Bay Regional Center where they found opportunities to get some help, jobs, a chance to live independently, a chance to get a life. Tom was then 39. Owen was 37.

Through North Bay Industries and Old Adobe Development Services they found work in recycling and landscaping. They found rooms in group homes and moved out of their aunt and uncle’s house. Owen later moved into a room through Becoming Independent in Rohnert Park. He got his own phone. Tom got his own place in 1997.

Owen, now 54, shares an apartment with his girlfriend, Kris Gospe. He works the front end of the Fourth Street Safeway in Santa Rosa, bagging groceries, retrieving shopping carts, doing whatever needs to be done to keep the store running smoothly. He’s worked there nine years. Tom, who turned 56 in April, has worked six years at Oliver’s supermarket on Montecito Boulevard in Rincon Valley. He cleans aisles. Both men are long-time employees and familiar faces at two prominent gathering places in Santa Rosa and seem to have reached their stride, bantering with colleagues and customers as they go about making a living and being their own persons.

**Both men are long-time employees and seem to have reached their stride, bantering with colleagues and customers as they go about making a living and being their own persons.**

The Cates’s support group no longer meets regularly at BI’s Corporate Center Parkway location in Santa Rosa. It went on hiatus last December. “They’ve decided to take a break, and it will only take a phone call to reconvene, a phone call that will be initiated by them, not us,” said Carin Lawrence. “It was a success. The members rode buses and walked to get to BI every week for four years to talk about life issues and how to take charge of their lives. They met because they chose to do that for themselves. And Tom and Owen were consistent members.”



Tom Cate



Owen Cate



RESOURCE DEVELOPMENTS

POWER OF ONE AND MANY

By Lisa Folsom-Ernst, Resource Development Director

Here at BI, we've recently adopted Kay Sprinkle Grace's AAA fundraising framework. It's an approach that resonated with our board of directors, and they're leading by example in their roles as Ambassadors, Advocates and Askers. Ambassadors abound at BI, and our numbers are growing. In March, Advocates invited 9 thoughtfully chosen guests to attend our monthly board sponsored tour. Our guests met artists, assembly workers, and an activist who's working tirelessly to ensure that children born with disabilities are welcomed by a more compassionate world than he experienced. Meanwhile, my colleagues here at BI continue to amaze me. Living on modest salaries in a tough economy, many express their commitment to BI through membership in our monthly pledge program, the BIG Club.

Right behind advocating at the state level to preserve core funding for services to people with disabilities, we're doubling up our efforts to increase revenue from other sources. This is an empowering exercise because advancing widespread, grassroots philanthropy is within our control and is precisely what is called for at this juncture. These donations will never replace state funding, nor should they, but can they play a role in ensuring that Becoming Independent is here and healthy for the long haul? Absolutely! A top priority this year is to increase BI family giving from 42% to 100%.

Here's one of many examples of inspired BI family giving. Cindy took an initial tour of BI three years ago. She was "immediately struck by the positive spiritual energy" and shortly thereafter her brother began receiving services. Having just begun a spiritual services practice, Cindy determined to "pay it forward" and began gifting one-half of all of her professional fees to BI.

Recently, she has increased that amount to 100%. "I see myself as an advocate for BI. I realized when I toured that all of the consumers are just like my beloved brother. I believe with all the state funding cuts, BI needs all the money they can get. I'm trying to educate people." It's working. At the end of her sessions, when Cindy informs clients that their payment will go to BI, people often increase their payment. In addition to the multiple gifts that arrive thanks to her clients, Cindy and her husband have increased their personal giving ten-fold in the last three years. "We need more people to appreciate and understand the value of organizations like BI. I see a lot of people who are going to get left out and behind and end up transient and homeless. It's important that we know what we need and then pay the rest forward. We'll always be on board with BI and will work to help you."

Our number of supporters continues to grow thanks to many BI Ambassadors, Advocates and Askers. As grassroots philanthropy increases, so can our confidence that this precious and valuable community resource will be here to benefit many generations to come.



Legacy gifts: keeping BI strong today & tomorrow

With the partnership and support of Community Foundation Sonoma County, BI has launched a legacy program. We gratefully accept the full range of estate gifts. Please call Lisa Folsom-Ernst, Resource Development Director, at 707-524-6751 to discuss further.

Volunteers make a world of difference!

By Jacqui Salyer  
Resource Development Manager

Becoming Independent thanked our community volunteers with the 1st annual Cheers to Volunteers celebration on Jan. 11. Themed "Volunteers Make a World of Difference," the atmosphere was fun and the volunteers shared moving stories of why they volunteer at BI.

Here's what some had to say:

"There's a sense of authenticity among the participants that's deeply moving to me. I feel joy and learn a great deal each day."

"I fell in love with the selflessness and courage and bravery of the participants."

Those in attendance included members of our Board of Directors, Speakers Bureau and advisory groups, as well as art, garden and kitchen design volunteers. **Currently BI has 76 volunteers** from the community who generously give their time each month for more than 420 hours.

For information on how to volunteer at BI, call 707-524-6606 or email, [jsalyer@becomingindependent.org](mailto:jsalyer@becomingindependent.org)



GO GREEN!

You'll be seeing a new logo associated with Becoming Independent from now on. It's the Green Business logo indicating BI has been certified for implementing measures to reduce waste, conserve energy and water and prevent pollution. Our status as a Green Business was announced in the spring and followed several years of overhauling the BI operations to be more mindful of the environment. The changes undertaken in the greening of BI included replacing water-intensive landscaping and lawn with bark to cut water usage, increasing recycling policies, installing reflective roofs, new thermostats and power management software, neon lighting and air conditioning all of which combined to trim power consumption.

Our efforts were announced by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and we are members in good standing with a club of leading agencies and businesses, all dedicated to meeting the environmental and energy challenges of our time.



BI participant Laura Smith, front, receives her Christmas gifts from Santa and Mrs. Claus with assistance of BI Staffer Kim Coleman, far left.

Photo: Robbi Pengelly, Sonoma Index-Tribune

## IN THE KITCHEN



Friends of BI have given new life to the kitchen in our South Campus building at the Santa Rosa location. The kitchen was severely damaged by a grease fire last year. Fire insurance paid \$19,000 but we lacked a plan, know-how and the rest of the cash needed to produce a first-class kitchen for education programs and where food can be prepared for events.

Then came Ric Andre of Richard Andre Associates, a Santa Rosa contractor. Ric is no stranger to BI. Along with JR's Concrete, he provided 16 dump-truck loads of bark to help complete our water-wise landscaping plan. He left his card behind and an offer to help another time.

Penny Hartman, BI Facilities Manager, asked if he did kitchens. Thousands, he said. The project got under way. Ric drafted a plan and design, called in six associates to help with the work and appliances, and produced a finished kitchen in February. The project cost came in at about \$40,000, less about \$20,000 in donated labor and materials from Rick and friends. Bottom line: BI paid just about what the fire insurance covered.

Ric knows about BI through his good friends Jack Wright and Jack's son, Scotty, a member of BI's family of participants. "I do it because I do it, to help people who may be less fortunate than me. **If we all did more like that we'd have a better planet.**"

Others who participated in the project were Ric's employee, Mark Mattos, John Borg Plumbing, Conceptual Technology, the electrician, Tee Vax Home Appliance and Kitchen Center, Sweetwater Custom Cabinets, Duracite Countertops, and McCoy Fire Protection.



Scotty Wright inspects the new appliances in the remodeled South Campus kitchen.

## BI LANDS Focus on Sonoma

For the 55 participants in BI's Sonoma Valley program, Christmastime is always a good time thanks to participant Nicole Gibbons' family.

There's Grandma Monica Simmons, Nicole's mother, Pat Valim, Nicole's sister, Jackie Gibbons, who is a member of BI's staff, Nicole's Aunt Justine Brocco, and her cousin, Audra Spaletta, and many others who are either extended kin or dear friends and on board every December to provide some holiday cheer for this big BI family.

Lea Ronald, Program Director, said for many years participants at BI Sonoma Valley would receive Christmas presents through the Giving Tree, a little extra something for people who are sometimes overlooked during the season. About five years ago, the number of gifts started to decline, she said, so Nicole's family took over and hosted a Christmas Party every year since.

This past year it was at the First Congregational Church. Roger Rhoten performed magic. Mary's Pizza Shack served lunch. Paul and Pam Grant performed the Santa and Mrs. Claus duties. And gifts were presented to each participant – candy, toiletries, clothing like socks or sweatshirts or scarves, and \$10 cash.

For the past two years, Pat Valim's colleagues at PG&E have joined the party, providing some additional gifts. This past year that included backpacks and some jewelry.

"The participants, they love it," said Ronald.



Damon Blackwell, a BI participant employed through our Employment Program, was honored in person and on the cover of the 2009-10 BI Annual Report that was unveiled at BI's annual board meeting in March.



### No stopping Cindy White

You just can't keep Cindy White down. Cindy, a member of BI's Board of Directors and two state agencies serving people with disabilities, was nearly killed last September when she was struck by a hit-run driver while walking to the bus to go to work at the Sonoma Developmental Center in Sonoma Valley.

She suffered head and shoulder injuries and a badly broken left foot. She was hospitalized for 30 days and had two surgeries before she was sent home for a long recovery. But she's kept busy. In February she was reelected chairperson of the Consumer Advisory Board of the state Department of Developmental Disability Services. And she has a seat on the Employment First Committee of the state's Council on Developmental Disability for Employment. Both posts take her regularly to Sacramento for meetings.

The Employment First Committee is dedicated to finding full-time, full-benefits jobs for people with disabilities, a personal goal Cindy achieved when she was hired two years ago to work as a clerk at First Impressions clothing store on the SDC campus in Eldridge. Cindy was headed back to work, part time at first, in May.



1425 Corporate Center Parkway  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

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### OUR MISSION

To promote community inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities.

### OUR VISION

An improved quality of life – meaningful work, recreation and support of family, friends and the community.

Becoming Independent  
Phone (707) 524-6600  
Fax (707) 527-1206  
info@becomingindependent.org  
www.becomingindependent.org



### IN MEMORY . . .

Donations were made in memory of these friends:

Rick Anderson, Holly Callaghan, Maria Del Negro, Olga Dmitriew, Pat Erickson, Ann Joergenson, John Jones Jr., Peg Lightfoot, Bernabe Meza, Jack Morehouse, Gregory Neils, Edie Rasmason, Debra Rodriguez, Jean Seddon, Hugh and Evelyn Smith, Christopher Stone, John Wright, Kenneth Neary.

A special thanks to the estate of June Waite.

### BECOMING INDEPENDENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS March 2010 – March 2011

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