

## IN THIS ISSUE



## Heart and Soul

### Meet Anita Cherney: She's Free

By Bob Klose

The story of Anita Cherney is the story of a life lost and a life found.

Anita perches on her couch in the living room of her Rohnert Park apartment where she lives independently with the support of Becoming Independent's supported living program.

She produces photos, documents and school work she keeps within arms reach to explain who this 80-year-old woman used to be and who she is now.

With her big-screen Toshiba TV turned on the soaps, she greets a visitor with evidence of the life she lives now, a sheet of math problems for which she got an "A" at an educational program BI offers on Saturdays.

Then, she goes to a past life, carefully unfolding a fading, brittle computer printout that in 1984 freed her from nearly 50 years in the custody of New York State institutions and group homes for people with developmental disabilities.

Back to the present, you see walls and shelves filled with photos of the nieces and nephews and others who welcomed Anita into their Sonoma County family after she moved to California 26 years ago. [HEART AND SOUL cont. pg 3](#)

*Anita holding a photo of her and cousin Eddie - taken right before she was put into the care of New York State.*



### GALLERY UPDATE

The Gallery of Sea and Heaven, 312 South A Street, in the downtown Santa Rosa Arts District, re-opens on August 21, from 5 to 8 pm with a gala exhibit. Included will be staff from Rileystreet, The Frame Up, and Jeremiah's Photo Corner. The new gallery includes updated electrical systems and building modifications as per city requirements. We are most appreciative to the building owners, Lee and Carolanne Montgomery for their support and ongoing enthusiasm while making sure we have a successful return.



Check our website for future news & events: [www.becomingindependent.org](http://www.becomingindependent.org)



# The fight for people with disabilities is our collective and personal responsibility

## Loud & clear: no more cuts!

By Cami Weaver, CEO

The first six months of 2010 at Becoming Independent seemed a lot like last year as the California Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger considered more cuts to programs for people with disabilities to solve the state budget crisis.

As a result, grassroots advocacy again commands a lot of our attention while BI continues to serve 1,300 men, women, children and families in the North Bay. And it will for some time.

You may have read about it in the newspaper. If not, check out our new web page for press coverage. But here at BI the people who are most directly affected will not quietly accept more revenue reductions.

That was stated loud and clear in May when about 350 members of the BI community – participants and their families, staff and board members, and allies and representatives from other North Bay agencies serving people with disabilities – rallied in front of the State Building in Santa Rosa.

We were pretty noisy. People expressed their disapproval, some by taking the bullhorn to express personal opinions and all joining together in chants demanding their rights not be infringed.

We were heard. Aides to our North Bay legislators promised to take our message to their bosses. And we promised to return to make our point. No more cuts.

Not all of our advocacy played out on the street.

In March, Carin Lawrence, Chief of Services, and I were in Sacramento to carry the same message to our representatives. We had a frank talk with Assembly Member Jared Huffman, and we met with the aides of Senators Pat Wiggins and Mark Leno and Assembly Members Noreen Evans and Wes Chesbro.

In April, we co-facilitated the annual Legislative Breakfast where BI board member Diane Hobaugh and her daughter, Hannah, demonstrated how “early intervention” for children with developmental disabilities produces successful kids who in turn produce successful adults, and, ultimately, require fewer financial resources.

Hannah is a child with Down syndrome. She received help very early in her life and now is a fully included first grader in the Rincon Valley School District where she is top reader in her class and plays the ukulele.

The good news to report during these very challenging times is that our legislators and their staffs are sympathetic and well educated about the need for services for people with disabilities.

The reality, however, is that we can’t take anything for granted. Grassroots advocacy is hard work. We can’t let down. We can’t fail. The fight for people with disabilities is our collective and personal responsibility. We ask ourselves: If not us, then who?

Our resolve is helped by the support and enthusiasm we get from our community and the people we serve.

### CLS Awards Ceremony

On May 12, we marked the 18th annual CLS Awards Ceremony, a long-standing tradition started by our Community Living Supports program when it was called TRACE (Transitional Residential Assistance in Community Experience). The purpose of the awards ceremony is to recognize struggles and achievements; celebrate connections made in the community; and to honor individuals, businesses, and services that support the CLS program.

**Winners included:** Aaron Reid (*Jim Sutton Adventurous Spirit Award*); Sally Jimenez and Shelly Conrad (*Making Healthy Choices*); John & Susan Henderson and Hortencia O. (*Living Together Successfully*); Timmy Crew (*A Spirit of Volunteerism*); Lisa Cataloni (*Friend of CLS*); Amy Vercoutere and Graig Fanucchi (*Personal Growth Award*); Rick Freha, Hugh Crawford, Ken Stewart, and Dallas Miletello (*On-going Success in Living Independently*); Lucille Ross and Sandra Madsen (*Uplifting/Positive Attitude*); Rick Freiha and Lynn Giles (*Achieving Financial Success*); Rita Allen and Lisa Von Kliest (*Courage in the Face of Adversity*); Brooke Smith (*Good Advice/Peer Support*); Owen and Tom Cate, David Ruprecht, Andrew Schochet, Linda Smalley, and Jenny Schultz (*Michael Pasquini Pioneers in Self-Advocacy*); Diane Scafidi and Jeanette Hannan (*Outstanding Tenants*); Christie Martignoli of Medicine Shoppe, Jan Harris, Dr. Goch, Sequoia Florist, Angelina Gabaldon of Wheelcare Express, and Yulahlia Hernandez (*Outstanding Service to People with Disabilities*).



Anie Perez, who won the Steve Aldrich Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievement in Independent Living.

## HEART AND SOUL cont. from pg 1

On a coffee table is something from an earlier family, a photo taken of Anita, the little girl, standing next to her cousin Eddie. Anita believes the photo was taken when she was 6, in the Bronx in 1935, the year, she says, her father Louis Cherney gave her up to the New York State system for caring for people with disabilities, where she remained in institutions and group homes for almost 50 years.

“Dad felt he couldn’t care for her,” said Shiah Cherney, Anita Cherney’s half-brother who was born to their father’s second wife in 1941.

“Anita was not on my radar screen,” said Cherney a retired chemical engineer in Petaluma. “I have no memory of seeing her when I was growing up and they didn’t talk about these things.”

Anita and Shiah are the children of Jewish immigrants – the Chernyatskaya family of 12 children – who fled their home near Odessa to escape anti-Semitic pogroms under Imperial Russian Tsar Nicholas II.

The father, whose first name is not known, traveled to New York first with his four eldest children. The mother, Grandma Feiga “Baba” Chernyatskaya, followed in 1912 with the rest. One of them was Leib, then 16, who in America became Louis Cherney of the Bronx and would grow up and marry and have a baby daughter, Anita, in 1929.

Anita’s mother died the same year, in a fire according to Anita, and the child was raised by Louis’ sister, Aunt Rose, and Baba, the grandmother, until 1935 when Louis put her in the state’s custody where she spent nearly a half-century in institutions and group homes.

Anita’s memories are mixed. Group homes were better. But when there was a change she would be sent to Letchworth Village Development Center near Thiells, New York.

“It wasn’t a pleasant place. A bad place. That’s why the government closed it up,” she said, describing conditions in which some people had no clothes, residents were often washed with kerosene and then put into a shower, and then there was abuse. “I almost got raped,” she said.

The world began to change for Anita and others like herself when broadcast journalist Geraldo Rivera won a Peabody Award for a 1972 report on conditions at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island. Rivera’s revelations led to a major overhaul of New York’s system for caring for people with disabilities and empowered people like Anita. Major progress has been made in institutionalized settings today.

In 1984, Anita contacted her long-lost cousin Eddie who in turn contacted Shiah Cherney in Sonoma County.

“Anita wanted someone to get her out of there,” said Shiah Cherney who recalls getting a call out of the blue.

At the time he learned of his half sister he was married to his wife, Cheryl, and raising four children. He flew to New York a bit scared, not knowing what this would mean to his life and his family. But, he said, when he met Anita in a group home he decided immediately that he had to get her out.

“It was a totally amazing event. I made arrangements for her to come to California. She flew out by herself a month or so later,” he said.

Once in Sonoma County, he connected Anita to programs now operated by BI.

**NOW, ALMOST 26 YEARS LATER,** Anita is well ensconced in her own home. She’s growing vegetables in the apartment house garden. Attends classes on Saturday. Watches the soaps religiously. She’s a member of the Cherney family and is said to raise a ruckus when things don’t go right.

She’s free, and Shiah Cherney credits his sister for rescuing herself.

“Anita’s a model for self advocacy. She was the driving force,” he said. “She’s a survivor.”

But Shiah Cherney also has warm words of appreciation for the help his sister received the past 25 years from Becoming Independent.

“The biggest help we found for Anita was through Becoming Independent, and I’m really grateful that BI was here for her,” he said.



Anita with her half-brother, Shiah Cherney.



Give at No Cost to You

eScrip is an easy way to give to Becoming Independent at no cost to you. All you have to do is register your credit, debit/ATM, or grocery loyalty cards at [www.eScrip.com](http://www.eScrip.com). Participating businesses will contribute a percentage of your purchase to Becoming Independent when you use one of your registered cards.

# People First: It's a long time coming... but coming

## Mission in Motion

By Carin Lawrence, Chief of Services



People First, the most recognized effort encouraging self advocacy by and for people with disabilities, has been around a long time.

Rooted in the U.S.

Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, People First is based on the proposition that if people with disabilities are given the chance to take more control of their own lives they will become more capable, independent, successful, and happier.

The establishment of a People First organization in California was launched in the 1980s.

Here at Becoming Independent, efforts began in 2006 to establish a self advocacy approach to services by forming support groups as a starting point. One of these support groups quickly led to a People First chapter in Sonoma Valley, but the process was not without major lessons. During this process we realized a couple of truths, such as:

**First**, for people with disabilities, learning how to take control of their lives is hard.

**And second**, for people, like the staff at BI, learning to support people with disabilities to take control of their lives is hard.

We had to re-think the whole process, and now four years later we want to report that we are changing the way we are supporting people with disabilities.

We have started at the beginning by encouraging BI participants to organize support

groups to find a common voice, feel empowered and begin the process of taking charge of their lives.

It's a tricky thing, encouraging people who depend on your support to organize so that they don't have to depend on your support. They begin the process of charting new territory by not turning to staff for answers or direction and, rather, doing it themselves.

**BI is embracing new models of support that encourage self-advocacy**

But that's only half the battle. At the same time, staff, supporters, and often times leaders of BI participants have to learn to get out of the way. It's as basic as "sink or swim."

For our part, then, we are engaged in a program to deconstruct professional mind-sets and develop a whole new model of support for the people BI exists for.

Part of my job this past year has been devoted to training all our staff on how to let go of the old models of care and

embrace new ones that encourage self-advocacy.

New employees will under go the same training.

Meanwhile, our Sonoma Valley People First group is actively pursuing more control of their lives. We have seven support groups involving about 75 BI participants. There are two groups in Sonoma Valley, four in Santa Rosa, and one developing in Healdsburg.

One could argue the process is taking too long. Consider, however, the many changes over the past 2,000 years during which people with disabilities were considered a punishment from God, treated as incapable, abandoned and locked up in asylums, and continue to be segregated.

By historical standards, we're making rapid progress.

But for the people we serve at BI there is no time to waste. People First is their civil rights movement. We are making every effort to help them on their way and then get out of their way.

*This article is dedicated to Holly Callaghan whose persistence & passion for advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities has been an inspiration to us all.*



Winners of the 2010 Michael Pasquini Pioneers in Self-Advocacy Award: Linda Smalley, Andrew Schochet, Owen Cate, Jenny Schultz, Tom Cate, and David Ruprecht.



## Each gift plays a critical role in bolstering our bottom line during these challenging times

### RESOURCE DEVELOPMENTS

## Answering the call for their families and Becoming Independent

In our fall issue I spoke of growing up on the grounds of mental hospitals with activist parents who instilled in me a passion for the mission of organizations like Becoming Independent. My mother Geneva, now 87, joined us for the rally in Santa Rosa. It was great to hear her spirited voice demanding that the state budget not be balanced on the backs of people with disabilities, but it was troubling to realize that collectively we must still fight to keep from being thrown back into the shadows.

Along with advocacy, we're focused on fund raising. We've made some solid progress toward the \$1.2 million we must raise in order to mitigate this year's state funding cuts, but much remains to be done. We're initiating a grants program with a 2010 focus on Family Resource and Advocacy Center, the future of our services. New and creative special events are increasing. And, importantly, we're reaching out to BI families who understand intimately the value of our work.

Our fall family gatherings resulted in 23 new memberships for the BIG Club, our monthly pledge system. Combined, these memberships added \$12,900 to our annual BIG Club contributions. Others prefer to simply write a check. During the past year individual gifts have been received ranging from \$10 to \$50,000. Each gift plays a critical role in bolstering our bottom line during these challenging times and we are grateful.

Shiah Cherney, featured with his sister in this issue's Heart and Soul column, is one of the people who has answered the call for BI family participation. When we met near the end of 2009, Shiah shared his gratitude for the decades of support that BI has provided Anita as well as his desire to help when and where he can. He made a generous year-end gift and began the New Year with another. We're now in the process of securing a second matching gift from Shiah's employer, Chevron.

Since our fall newsletter, we've become organizational partners with Community Foundation Sonoma County (CFSC), and it is working for BI in two very special ways.

**First**, one unanticipated outcome is that this fall the CFSC offices will be filled with BI art. CFSC's very own J Mullineaux is drawing on his extensive arts background and is the exhibition's curator.

**And second**, with the support of CFSC we're launching a legacy program. The size, reach and impact that BI has made for thousands of people over multiple decades makes us a perfect fit for planned gifts. Initial conversations have been very encouraging. When we ask committed supporters if they would like to extend their partnership beyond their lifetimes, they say "Of course." We'll be sharing their stories in the days ahead.

Lisa Folsom-Ernst  
Resource Development Director



### Meet Bonds

Allow us to introduce Bonds, our Facility Dog. He joined the BI team in 2009, shortly after graduating from Canine Companions for Independence.

Bonds comes to work everyday with his handler Peggy, Service Manager in Employment Services. Bonds can perform dozens of commands designed to motivate and inspire BI participants. For some, he encourages feelings of calm and security. For others, he can help engage them in activities and classes.

Want to find out about all the happenings at BI through our four-legged ambassador? Visit Bonds' blog at [www.bibonds.blogspot.com](http://www.bibonds.blogspot.com)



## BI is finding new, innovative ways to continue to provide the very best services

### VOLUNTEERS/SPECIAL EVENTS

## Volunteers are shining stars

Volunteer opportunities at BI lead to shining stars.

Kathy Benziger of Benziger Family Winery volunteered her time once again as BI's event chair for our annual fund raiser: Dinner Under the Stars – *Let the Good Times Roll*. As event chair Kathy has spent hundreds of hours ensuring that this year's event is another success. Not only has she volunteered to help coordinate the event, she asked some of her close friends to join her auction committee. Together they developed quite an exciting line-up of live auction lots for Saturday, June 19, 2010 at the Imagery Winery in Glen Ellen.

Not only are the Benzigers fully involved in Dinner Under the Stars, they like to help paint. In February, the family gave up their Saturday to help Sonoma Valley staff paint. Over 10 family members improved the look of the Sonoma Valley location. The following Monday everyone was delighted with the crisp clean new look.

BI enjoys sharing information about the many programs we offer individuals with disabilities. With presentation requests on the rise BI saw the perfect opportunity to develop a Speakers Bureau. Jerry Fabiano, parent of a BI participant and a new BI Board Member, is playing a key volunteer role.

A parent-led support group, Power for Parents, is thriving thanks to the volunteer leadership of Jayne Hamel.

Do you enjoy lending a helping hand? Are you interested in sharing your talents? If so, please contact Jacqui at 707-524-6606 or [jsalyer@becomingindependent.org](mailto:jsalyer@becomingindependent.org).

Jacqui Salyer  
Resource Development Manager

### BI LANDS

## Focus on Sonoma

### Tough times won't keep us down

These tough economic times have been rough for lots of organizations, but Becoming Independent isn't letting that get us down! In light of major budget cuts, BI is finding new, innovative ways to continue to provide the very best services. One way to do that is to collaborate with other local non-profits in Sonoma Valley. Two such groups are Giant Steps and the Sonoma Mentoring Alliance.

### Giant Steps

is a therapeutic equestrian center that has been working with several BI participants since October 2009. Riders benefit from improved balance, focus, core strength, and social skills. According to Carin Lawrence, Chief of Services at Becoming Independent, riders already seem "stronger and more confident."



Shiloh hugs Mr. B

**Sonoma Valley Mentoring Alliance** teamed up with BI for a very special art project. This non-profit matches adults with at-risk school children in need of academic and social support. Janey Mulas taught mentors, mentees, and BI artists how to make mosaic stepping-stones in early May. Mentees benefited from the community service, and BI benefited from the community inclusion. We look forward to other collaborative projects in the future!

### Family Resource & Advocacy Center



In the summer of 2009, the Family Resource & Advocacy Center received a grant from Community Action Partnership for \$11,333 to build a children's playroom at BI's Santa Rosa campus. The new playroom offers a space for childcare while parents attend support groups, workshops, and educational meetings. Parents can observe their children while attending meetings via a two-way mirror that will also enable psychologists or experts to work with parents to understand their child's behaviors and needs.



Ali and Bridget were busy harvesting beets in Becoming Independent's new garden in April. The beets were later used in a cooking class.

May 5, 2010: Over 350 individuals gathered outside the State Building in Downtown Santa Rosa to protest additional state budget cuts to programs like Becoming Independent.



### KTVU Covers Closure-Days at BI

March 31, 2010: Rita Williams from KTVU Channel 2 News interviewed Jim Kirkbride, Board of Director, Cami Weaver, CEO, and Lisa Von Kleist for a follow-up segment on state-mandated closure days. Becoming Independent has had 3 closure days so far, resulting in a loss of revenue of \$150,000.



March 4, 2010: BI's Annual Meeting was overflowing with attendees who came to celebrate BI and several award winners. Mary's Pizza Shack took home the Business Sponsor of the Year award. Bill & M-L Reinking were honored as Philanthropists of the Year, and Sue Brady won Volunteer of the Year. We regretfully said good-bye to three amazing Board members, Bill Reinking, Josef Keller, and Nancy Garcia, but welcomed new members, Jerry Fabiano and Ellie Rowland.



Recently retired BI Board Member, Josef Keller and his wife, Jill decided to close Josef's Restaurant after 18 years in Historic Railroad Square. To celebrate, Josef and Jill threw a retirement party on April 17, 2010 benefiting Becoming Independent. The event raised \$2,000, and the evening's art sales tipped \$900.

### ArtWorks Calendar

**MARY'S PIZZA SHACK**  
Boyes Hot Springs location  
Through July 19  
18636 Sonoma Hwy, Sonoma

#### Ongoing Exhibits:

**SONOMA BANK**  
801 4th Street, Santa Rosa

#### By Appointment:

**BI GALLERY**  
1425 Corporate Center Pkwy, Santa Rosa

**NORTH BAY REGIONAL CENTER**  
2351 Mendocino Ave, Santa Rosa

**WINZLER & KELLY**  
495 Tesconi Circle, Santa Rosa

#### Tentative:

**GALLERY OF SEA & HEAVEN**  
Grand Re-opening  
August 21, 5 to 8 pm  
312 South A Street, Santa Rosa

[Check out our web site for more events](#)



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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.

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**IN MEMORY . . .**

Donations were made in memory of these friends:

Andrea Adams; Rick Anderson; One David Brunk; Maria Del Negro; Olga Dmitriew; Alice Douglas; James Erbacher; Dan Gallagher; Thomas Quigley Hewes; Ann Joergenson; George Koenigshofer; Martha Morton; Greg Neils; Martha Norton; Sue Ramando; Edie Rasmason; Debra Rodriguez; Lolita Seguin; Ben Thornton; June Waite.

*With the partnership and support of Community Foundation Sonoma County, BI is launching a legacy program in 2010. The full range of estate gifts are gladly accepted. Please call Lisa Folsom-Ernst, Resource Development Director at (707) 524-6751 to discuss in greater detail.*