



 Becoming
Independent

Promoting community inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities
ANNUAL REPORT 2008 - 2009

Dear Friends and Supporters,



Here at Becoming Independent, we will remember 2008-09 as the fiscal year when life went on under some dark clouds and, as always for BI, optimism and hope prevail. Like the rest of our country, we had to tighten our belts and make personal sacrifices. The State of California reduced our revenues by 3 percent. Our arts program suffered a major setback when the Gallery of Sea and Heaven was shuttered because of building structural deficiencies. And we joined the people we serve to fight some old fights about dignity and choice.

Thanks to excellent fiscal oversight by BI's management team, I'm proud to report that Becoming Independent closes out 2008-09 on a solid footing. We've become a friend and partner with our Gallery of Sea and Heaven landlord and together we are working to re-open our downtown Santa Rosa gallery in the months ahead. And we've developed a spirit of activism, and a bit of attitude, for dealing with those who would treat people with disabilities disrespectfully. We've met all these challenges, never let down the men and women we serve, and now enter fiscal year 2009-10 smarter and feeling prepared for whatever difficulties lay ahead.

There is much good to report about the BI family this past year, both collectively and individually. Even the negative side had a silver lining. Our fiscal year began with news that Carin Lawrence, our Chief of Services, was named Volunteer of the Decade by Special Olympics Sonoma Valley. Then in March, Becoming Independent was one of five recipients of the Jefferson Awards, Sonoma County's 37 year-old-program for recognizing individuals and organizations for their achievements and contributions through public and community service. Our board member and BI participant Cindy White, who also sits on the Consumer Advisory Committee of the state Department of Developmental Services, broke through traditional barriers to full community inclusion when she got what she views as her first "real job" hired as a state employee at Sonoma Development Center. BI weighed in at a public hearing and successfully encouraged the Rohnert Park City Council to drop a proposal to discontinue employing people with disabilities for park maintenance and janitorial services. We had a very successful Dinner Under the Stars in June that provided much welcome revenue and celebrated our mission. And we spoke up when people with disabilities were treated unfairly by the media. BI was heard loudly when we protested abusive and demeaning language about disabled people in Hollywood films. And we joined a successful campaign to force the removal of an insensitive Facebook quiz from the internet. The silver lining? The people of BI demonstrated to the public at large that they have the power to say "NO" to this kind of backward and hurtful social behavior and that such abuses will not go unchallenged.

Those are some of the highlights. Meanwhile we worked and played, and we're getting healthier. Becoming Independent workers continued to prove their employment value. They held down jobs within BI's service centers and out in the mainstream, earning more than \$1 million in wages and increasing the number of hours actively engaged in our community. Our employment program underwent change, however. A long time employer, Flowmaster, discontinued using BI workers after going through a period of automation and other business changes. After a short period we found new job opportunities. Our Family Resource and Advocacy Center continues to provide valuable assistance to families of children facing lifelong challenges associated with developmental disabilities. It seems every week a new family with special needs comes to us and expresses the relief and comfort they feel when they meet our staff and other families in comparable situations who speak their language, know the challenges they face, and answer their calls for help. Our morning stretch and fitness programs are now increasingly routine. Staff along with our folks are engaged in exercise. Many participate in the magical art of Qigong which BI instructor Michael Rinaldini has generously taught for eight years. Some of our people pump iron. We are one of the first organizations in Sonoma County to embrace the iWALK physical activity program, and we now have five iWALK groups to encourage staff and participants to regularly walk together for exercise. Our staff also fields two softball teams and two volleyball teams.

I can't tell you how proud I am of everyone associated with BI. All of our accomplishments and activities occurred under that cloud of fiscal uncertainty I mentioned above. It was a very stressful period during which our staff faced new challenges here at BI and sometimes personal losses. What kept us all sane and focused was our devotion to the people who have chosen BI programs. As staff in service we know how to park our issues at the door and be present and available for the people who need us the most. Finally, we learned. Fiscal year 2008-09 was the beginning of the great recession. It taught us to stay ahead of events and plan for contingencies. We made it through this past year, and now we're prepared for 2009-10. We truly appreciate and rely on your support and as a united force we will undoubtedly stay on track to be the best service provider in the State of California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cami Weaver". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C".

Cami Weaver, CEO
Becoming Independent

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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Jim Kirkbride, *Secretary*
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Diane Hobough
Richard Johnson
Josef Keller
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Nubia Padilla
Director of Family Services

Lea Ronald
Director of Sonoma Valley

Susan Heskett
Director of Employment Services

Robert Brown
Director of Transportation

Lisa Folsom-Ernst
Resource Development Director

Jacqui Salyer
Resource Development Manager
Volunteer/Special Events Coordinator

SERVICE LOCATIONS

Becoming Independent provides services throughout Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties for men, women and children with disabilities.

Santa Rosa
Central Office
1425 Corporate Center Parkway
Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Phone: (707) 524-6600 Fax: (707) 527-1206

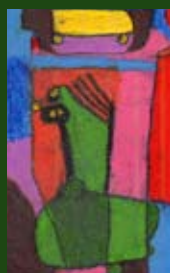
Sonoma Valley
355 West Napa Street
Sonoma, CA 95476
Phone: (707) 996-5988 Fax: (707) 935-7861

Healdsburg
625 Center Street
Healdsburg, CA 95448
Phone: (707) 431-1345 Fax: (707) 431-8136

Napa/Solano
1832 Soscol Avenue, Suite 101
Napa, CA 94559
Phone: (707) 252-9288 Fax: (707) 252-0682

BI ARTWORKS

The Gallery of Sea and Heaven



Fiscal 2008-09 was to be Becoming Independent's first full year in possession of our own BI ArtWorks Gallery of Sea and Heaven. The gallery, formerly the A Street Gallery in downtown Santa Rosa, came under BI's control in spring 2008. We had a long schedule of programs and shows planned through 2008-09 featuring works produced by BI artists as well as artists from outside the BI program. We produced five exhibits, including *Where the Wild Things Are*, a photo show in conjunction with Santa Rosa High School

Art Quest, and *Holiday Lights*, held in tandem with the art neighborhood's annual Winterblast event.

Our schedule was cut short, however, when the gallery was closed for structural issues determined by the City of Santa Rosa. It was a huge disappointment, but now we're hopeful. We've found a friend in the building owners, Lee and Carolanne Montgomery, who have embraced the BI mission and are working with city officials to bring the structure up to adequate standards. Our good friends at Winzler & Kelly have also played a critical role. They provided early guidance to Lee and Carolanne, and created designs for remodel in accordance with city standards.

We're optimistic we'll be back in the Gallery in early 2010. Meanwhile our BI artists continue to turn out award-winning art at our BI service centers.

Who are the people at Becoming Independent?

They are the largest and most diverse minority in the world. They are all ages, genders, religions and ethnicities. They come from all socioeconomic levels and sexual orientations. And they are people with different disabilities.*

Autism

Down syndrome

Learning and physical disabilities

Mental health conditions

And they are like everyone. They want to be free, happy, independent and respected full members of the community.

They are people.

*Adapted from "People First Language," by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com; and used with permission.

More than 1,300 men, women and children, all living with a variety of disabilities, seek their own paths to personal fulfillment and independence with the help of programs and opportunities made available at Becoming Independent.

Developing since BI was established in 1967, our programs provide instruction in activities and skills essential to successful everyday living. The skills are wide ranging and include the most basic and incidental, to the very sophisticated and personal. BI provides individualized programs for each person served, promoting personal choice based on areas of interest and passions.

As the North Bay's largest nonprofit human services organization dedicated to people with developmental disabilities, BI services are available in Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties. We are dedicated to "promoting community inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities."

PROGRAMS

Community Living Supports (CLS)

This service is a major asset for hundreds of people at Becoming Independent who choose to live a life of independence and freedom with the support of staff and volunteers at BI. The program provides a customized array of community-based services to individuals and their families including in home support, day and overnight trips, evening classes in a variety of areas, and self advocacy groups. Community Living Supports services are available to anyone who wishes to live in a home of their own and chooses to collaborate with Becoming Independent to achieve those goals. Programs are designed to enable people with disabilities to live independently and to share the same rewards and responsibilities of

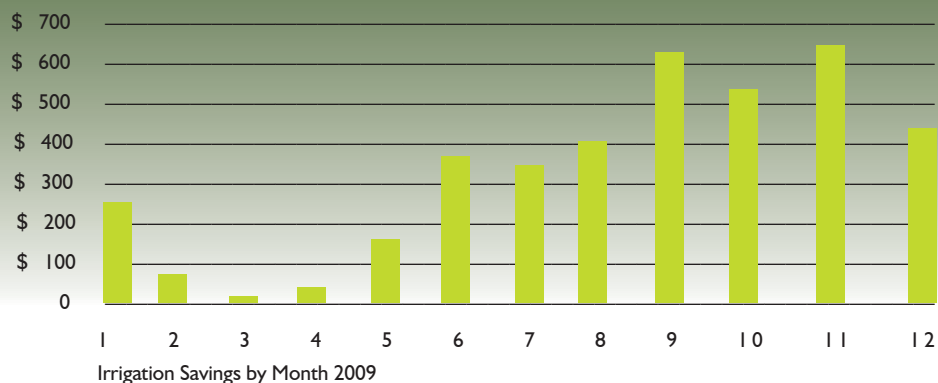
others in the community. Supports include instruction in home and money management tasks, health and safety, self-advocacy, accessing community resources, and other life skills. Services are individualized with support hours ranging from weekly to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Assessments are completed prior to starting the program so goals and needs are identified in advance. CLS participants are homeowners, parents, advocates, volunteers, athletes and world travelers.

Continuing Adult Education

Community outings, computer and video labs, gardening, physical fitness, exercise music and art programs all provide on-going training, recreation, and social opportunities for BI participants. The BI ArtWorks program, in particular, provides men and women opportunities to explore their own personal creativity resulting in intuitive artwork that receives wide recognition in the community. Art produced is featured at BI's own gallery, The Gallery of Sea and Heaven, and other galleries and businesses throughout Sonoma County. In addition to providing a sense of accomplishment and sometimes income, these programs highlight the unique abilities of each individual. They are artists, gardeners, fitness fanatics, musicians, and life long learners.

WE'RE GOING GREEN

BI is participating in the City of Santa Rosa's Cash for Grass Program and are enjoying substantial monthly savings on our irrigation bills. We've abandoned the grass landscaping encompassing our Santa Rosa location and installed drought tolerant plants and bark ground cover. So, we're sparing the city water and trimming our water bill. As our drought-tolerant plants become established, we expect our savings to increase in 2010. Also, BI has begun the process of making our service centers more efficient and "green." Green Teams are functioning at all BI sites. We're recycling and composting daily.



BI Sonoma Valley

BI Sonoma Valley, which serves more than 50 men and women with disabilities in the Sonoma Valley, has been around as long as there's been a Becoming Independent in the North Bay.

Located in the heart of the City of Sonoma, BI Sonoma Valley offers continuing adult education to assist people in gaining communication skills, mobility, social interaction and self advocacy. People are offered classes in computers, reading and writing, and assistive technology. They are involved in exercise and yoga classes, art classes and theater arts and are encouraged to participate in recreational and sporting events such as Special Olympics and the Giant Steps equestrian therapy program.

The folks at BI are engaged in the community. They regularly lunch with neighbors and elders at the nearby Vintage House. In conjunction with the Sonoma County Volunteer Center, they participated in the Human Race in Santa Rosa and raised \$1,723.41 that was used to purchase supplies for Disaster Preparedness.

Jasmine Marks, a former member of the BI Board of Directors and service recipient, has launched her own personal outreach program, fulfilling her dream to bridge the gaps separating people by speaking to students at El Molino High School in West Sonoma County. She's looking for more speaking engagements.

Work is critical at BI as a vehicle to personal independence. BI Sonoma Valley offers gainful employment in community-based jobs at our downtown location and out in the community. Jobs inside include shredding, mailing and other office tasks for clients including Morton Bassett Spices, the Chamber of Commerce, Depot Hotel, Herb Heil Realtor, Merrill Gardens and others. Outside, BI workers earn paychecks cleaning highways, local parks, the grounds of Benziger Family Winery and Arroyo Veterinary, and they provide building maintenance and janitorial services at First Congregational Church, The Parkpoint Club, and Sonoma Valley Conservatory.



One of our favorite employers is Mary's Pizza which employs BI workers throughout Sonoma County and Napa. In Sonoma Valley where the BI and Mary's relationship began, our people work at restaurants in Boyes Hot Springs and Sonoma Plaza and in Napa. A partner with BI Sonoma Valley for 20 years, Mary's Pizza and its owners have welcomed BI into their business family.

Our workers prepare the Mary's restaurants for business every day, folding pizza boxes, rolling silverware, filling cheese shakers and cleaning and setting tables.

In the course of performing their tasks, BI workers have earned the praise and warm friendship of Vince Albano, Mary's CEO.

Employment Services

At any time during the year, between 350 and 400 men and women are enrolled in BI's employment program. They hold down steady jobs, both within the BI organizational structure and outside in the business community. The annual payroll for BI workers during fiscal year 2008-09, like last fiscal year, was more than \$1 million. Providing valued services for more than 27 years, BI workers devote their days to performing assembly line tasks and product construction at most BI sites. Others are employed in vineyards, supermarkets, restaurants, landscaping companies, and other jobs. Employment is key for people with disabilities seeking to become independent, contributing members of the community. The value of the employment services cannot be overstated. Workers employed through BI are fierce in their determination to succeed. And, indeed they do succeed as evidenced by their employers who report that BI workers are loyal, committed, focused and valued members of the workforce.

Family Resource and Advocacy Center

This program provides information and assistance to families and children with special needs through education, support, and a variety of direct services. It provides educational opportunities, encourages information sharing in hosted support groups, and keeps parents informed of events and news relevant to their children through the Monday Update email, which is distributed weekly. A free lending library of books and videos on disability-related issues is available. This BI service offers local, current resource information about other support organizations, therapeutic programs, and more.

Self-Advocacy groups for adults and youth with disabilities take place each week as well. In 2009 BI launched the Teen Zone After School program for young people 13 to 22 years old. Among a number of collaborative projects, BI sponsors the Sonoma County Down Syndrome Support Group, which raises funds at the annual Buddy Walk in Santa Rosa, and will soon sponsor the Predator Awareness Task Force, a collaboration of a variety of community organizations.

Transportation

For nearly 40 years BI has provided rides taking people to and from their homes and jobs, BI program sites and to community events in Sonoma County. The BI fleet has over 60 vehicles, many of which are equipped with wheelchair lifts.

An additional service, the BI-EXPRESS, provides a critical weekend and evening service for people with disabilities who don't have access to alternative transportation during those times. This after-hours service relies solely on donations from generous supporters.

Outcomes of BI Services

Success and progress experienced by individuals and families served by Becoming Independent are measured in real terms. BI tracks the number of people served, how many hours of service they receive from staff, the number of hours of work they perform and wages they earn, and their level of inclusion in mainstream community activities. BI also gauges overall satisfaction with the Becoming Independent experience.










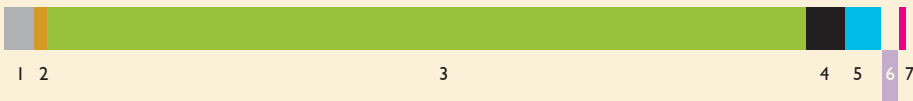
2008-09

Number of people served	1,335
Number of families served	400
Hours of Service	710,887
Hours of Work	169,514
Wages	\$1,001,131
Hours of Inclusion	313,598
Rate of Satisfaction	92 %



Support and Revenue

	1 Contributions	\$ 261,582	1.73	%
	2 Dinner Under the Stars Net Income	\$ 145,154	.96	%
	3 Service Fees	\$ 13,056,486	86.60	%
	4 Educational Subsidies	\$ 678,625	4.50	%
	5 Employment Income	\$ 677,713	4.49	%
	6 Investment Income	\$ (52,322)	-.35	%
	7 Other Income	\$ 29,734	.20	%
	Total Unrestricted Support & Revenue	\$ 14,796,972	98.13	%
	Net Assets Released From Restrictions	\$ 282,343	1.87	%
	Total Unrestricted Support, Revenue, And Assets Released from Restrictions	\$ 15,079,315	100	%



Expenses

 **1 Programs**

- Community Living Supports
- Continuing Adult Education
- Employment Services
- Family Resource and Advocacy Center
- Transportation Services

Total Program Services **\$ 12,266,272** **88.70 %**

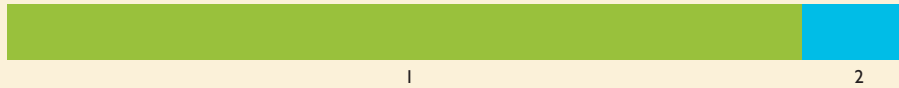
 **2 Supporting Services**

- Administration \$ 1,255,384
- Fundraising \$ 306,450

Total Supporting Services **\$ 1,561,834** **11.30 %**

Total Unrestricted Expenses **\$ 13,828,106** **100 %**

Increase in unrestricted net assets \$ 1,251,209



Becoming Independent's most recent audited financial statement and tax return are available at www.becomingindependent.org.



Becoming Independent thanks the following for their support and generous donations throughout the 2008 - 2009 fiscal year. Thank you so much!

711 MT-R Ranch • Aaron, Joe & Beth • Abate, Chas & Gail • Accountemps • Adams, Eileen • Adiego, Robert & Darlene • Ad-Vantage Marketing, Inc • Agilent Technologies • Akin, Elenora • ALBA • Albano, Vince • Alcaine, Carlos • Aldrich, Kate • Alioto & Baldwin Interiors • ALMA Consulting Group • Alpha Fire Suppression Systems, Inc. • Alternative Recreation Coalition • Amherd, Keven & Ayanakai • Amy's Kitchen • Anastas, Maria • Andersen, Barbara • Andersen, Joyce • Anderson, Eloise • Anderson, John & Lisa • Angell, Jennifer • Angell, Lynda • Angell Distributing of Lake & Mendocino, Inc. • Apolloni, Tony • Applebee's • Armstrong, Marion • Arrowwood Vineyards and Winery • Arruda, John & Ida • Artesa Winery • Arthur Hall Estate • Asmuth, Paul & Marilyn • Autumn Leaves • Avella, Michael & Ilene • Averill, Walt & Maire • Avery, Austin & Gloria • Avilla, Barney & Guia • Excel Fire Systems, Inc. • Azevedo, Marc • B.R. 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