Jonathan Stuppin is a detail person, so working at the Sonoma County Museum suits him well. He keeps display cases immaculately clean. His work space is a marvel of organization. His attention to detail when archiving photos or other historic artifacts makes him a valued member of the staff.

But Jonathan has other reasons to say, “I love my job.”

“This is a wonderful museum,” says the shy and handsome 31-year-old. “Its themes of discovery and uniqueness really fit who I am.”

Jonathan has been an active participant at Becoming Independent for a little more than two years. He lives on his own in Santa Rosa with the assistance of BI’s Community Living Support services. At his home in the Sherwood Forest neighborhood, he enjoys cooking meals such as healthy soups and spaghetti and meatballs, and baking desserts such as brownies.

(Continued on Page 7)
BI is Facing Some Hard Realities

By Luana Vaetoe, Chief Executive Officer

In springtime, our thoughts turn to new life and growth. But in this Spring of 2014, it is clearly apparent to those of us here at BI that we’re going to have to look elsewhere for “water and sunshine” if our “garden” is going to survive in the future.

As an agency that relies heavily on the State of California for funding, we often look to Sacramento for help. But on a recent visit to the Capitol, I was hit with a sobering reality: Legislators face a sea of worthy causes like ours every day, and even with a “surplus” there isn’t enough money to go around.

The cold, hard fact is that our state funding is based on a cost structure that was last updated in the early 1990s. In other words, we are being reimbursed for our work at rates based on the cost of business 20 years ago.

Could your business survive that?

We will always require that state funding. But, right now, the need for community partners and family involvement by those who are served in our programs has never been more critical. In response, we are launching “Humans Serving Humans,” a campaign focused on raising money to provide better pay to our employees – the dedicated humans who serve their fellow humans here at BI each and every day.

This is a critical initiative for BI. The average salary of a direct-care staff person at BI is $12 per hour, with no retirement benefits and no increase in wages in almost 6 years. With a turnover rate of more than 27 percent, BI’s most valuable resource to serve our population is eroding as our employees leave for better paying jobs – such as a barista. With that resource goes the institutional knowledge and committed dedication that not many are able to provide.

At the same time we are seeing high employee turnover, we also face a greater demand for services. The demand for programs such as competitive employment, the group that helps Jonathan work at the museum every week (see Page 1), is still working with a 10-percent reduction in fees from the state that has lasted over 5 years. Meanwhile, that program alone has a waiting list of more than 20 ready and able participants. Given our restricted resources, we are currently unable to assist.

We also face growing needs in autism services. The latest statistic from the CDC shows 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, a 10-fold increase over the last 40 years. There is currently no additional state funding to create, support and sustain a program dedicated to this population. The responsibility is laid in the laps of BI and the community that values our services and those who receive them. We have made vast improvements over the past 6 months developing dedicated space, with a gracious grant from the Celebrate Community Partnership, but there is so much more to be done.

How can you help? In the short term, with a donation to Humans Serving Humans. For the long term, you can help ensure BI’s resources are here for decades to come by becoming a member of our Legacy Circle. We are so grateful to those supporters in our community who have made, or are thinking about making, a legacy gift. When your gift arrives, we’ll add it to our endowment to provide program funding for future generations. Please see page 5 for more information.

The state will continue to be our largest funder, but it is increasingly up to our community to make sure BI is able to offer a robust and responsive list of services and programs to our participants and their families. Please go to www.becomingindependent.org to get involved or phone me directly: (707) 524-6607.
Brand Your Business with a great cause!

Becoming Independent’s Vehicle Adoption Program continues to be a great advertising opportunity for businesses and organizations. Our vehicles travel over 2,000 miles in the North Bay every day! Choose from three full color, professionally designed sizes that will advertise your product or business for 18 months.

To sign up, call Jacqui Salyer at (707) 524-6606 or e-mail at jsalyer@becomingindependent.org

Vehicle Adoption Program
Sign Up Today!

The BIG Room was full for BI’s annual Board of Directors meeting on March 6th. An audience composed of staff, friends, supporters and participants enjoyed an afternoon of laughs, tears, and accolades for the many people who make this such a great organization.

Several awards were given for special contributions to BI and our participants:

• June Waite Spirit of Philanthropy Award: Leo & Adele Barclay have supported BI in any way possible since their son Eric became a participant. They donate, get their friends involved and volunteer. Leo served two terms on our Board of Directors and Adele’s volunteer contributions for Dinner Under the Stars are vast.

• Volunteer of the Year: Carmen Taylor, whose daughter Dayne is a participant, played an instrumental role in launching and staffing the Celebrate Community Library at BI’s Santa Rosa campus.

• Employer of the Year: Agilent Technologies has been an active partner with BI for several years. In addition to contracting with our participants, Agilent employs a landscaping crew that takes care of their headquarters property at Fountaingrove.

• Also honored at the meeting were 22 staff members who celebrated milestones that spanned between 10-35 years of dedication to BI. Pictured on the left are Jean Levine receiving a painting from BI Artist Bob Best and Lauren Meiklejohn, surrounded by her husband and 2 daughters, receiving a painting from BI Artist Frances Reese, to commemorate their many years of dedication to BI.

Raymond, a participant from Life Skills, celebrated his portrait on the cover of the annual report (pictured on front cover) by doing one of his signature dances, and made an emotional appearance with his grandfather at the podium. Once again, the annual meeting provided countless success stories and heartfelt testaments by our Board of Directors about how BI staff positively impacts the lives of others.
When BI participant Lisa steers her electric wheelchair into the warehouse of the Redwood Empire Food Bank, she’s there with the same goal that hundreds of other Sonoma County residents volunteer for every day:

Ending hunger in Sonoma County.

“BI participants do the same job as all of our volunteers, whether they’re the CEO of Morgan Stanley or a student from Rincon Valley Middle School,” says Jen Oberti, manager of the volunteer program at the Food Bank. “And they’re doing it very well.”

On a drizzly day in March, Lisa and a half dozen other BI participants were turning several big bins of onions into many dozens of small bags of onions, working alongside other volunteers from throughout the community. Lisa said the only way the job could be better would be “if I could do it more.”

“I like it because it helps kids,” she said.

According to Food Bank statistics, one in six Sonoma County residents struggles with hunger, and almost half of those 78,000 people are children. The work that BI volunteers are doing to repackage produce in family-sized portions is part of an effort to provide healthy food to those in need.

“It’s a simple task, but it’s critical to our efforts,” Oberti says.

Not coincidentally, it’s also critical to BI’s mission of community inclusion for our participants. Volunteering – whether delivering Meals on Wheels or cataloging materials at the Sonoma County Library or packaging food for the hungry – connects our participants to the wider community in a positive way that instills pride and a sense of accomplishment.

“Our experience with BI has been beyond positive,” says Oberti, who runs one of Sonoma County’s most robust volunteer programs. “Your participants bring a breath of fresh air. You can tell they really enjoy doing something that’s important and productive and helps others.”

Volunteer groups from BI’s Life Skills and Leisure Services are at the Food Bank five days per week. In addition to working hard, they enjoy a state-of-the-art facility that includes full handicapped access. During breaks, you can find them socializing with other volunteers from throughout the community.

James Cox, manager of Community Integrated Services, says, “I have had a number of our volunteers tell me how much they enjoy their work at the Food Bank. Participants engaged in this activity are realizing a true sense of giving back to their community and it is having a positive impact on their self-esteem. This is further exemplified in the reduction of some individuals’ behavior challenges. Family members are thrilled we have cultivated this partnership and they are excited that their loved one is actively involved in such a meaningful cause, a cause to end hunger in our community.”

*Pictured on the cover are Paco, Tina and Heather.
Grip & Grin - Employment Success!

Joe has been a participant at BI since 2005, and he repeatedly said that his “dream job” would be a courtesy clerk at his local Raley’s on Fulton Road in Santa Rosa. With a little help from Employment Services on resume and interview skills, Joe made his dream come true last August. Joe doesn’t talk much, but his smile speaks volumes. His co-workers and customers love having Joe on the job about 16-20 hours a week, and he keeps track of that time with a pictorial “time clock” designed by BI staff to help him use Raley’s complicated system. It works so well, other employees use it, too!

Miguel has been with BI since 2001. When the BI team carved out a janitorial job for him at Amy’s Kitchen in Petaluma, everything clicked. He started last September, working a couple of hours a week cleaning the staff lounge areas. Though Miguel has many challenges with verbal communication, it didn’t take long for his Amy’s co-workers to recognize his great work ethic, excellent cleaning skills and personal charm. They lobbied their bosses on Miguel’s behalf, and now Miguel is scheduled five days a week, three hours a day for janitorial work, events and other special projects such as mailings.

Lisa has been with BI through Production Services since 2008 and CLS since 1989, and she has always expressed interest in finding a job doing office work. As it turns out, Employment Services found itself in need of an office assistant, and Lisa was to be the perfect solution. She started in January, working 10 hours a week doing copying and collating and learning what Program Manager Hollie Tracy describes as “our extremely complicated filing system.” Lisa is a great addition to the team, Hollie says, and she’s learning skills that will serve her well when she chooses to find work in the community.

Why Do BI Supporters Create Legacy Gifts?

The answer may seem obvious to you. So that we can further promote inclusion and participation for people with developmental disabilities. However, it’s often more complicated.

Some supporters want to help sustain an organization that has become a significant part of their lives. Others want to memorialize a loved one. Still others see BI as serving the broader community of all those in need throughout the region.

But wait, there are even more answers. A family may begin with one or more of the above values, and then decide to make this gift as an example for future generations. Or maybe BI has served them or a loved one in a very special way and they want to express appreciation. Some achieve a reduction in taxes through careful financial, estate and charitable planning.

We thank you for considering joining their ranks in our Legacy Circle. We honor members through invitations to special events and mention in publications. Anonymity is an option. No gift is too small or large.

Please contact Lisa Folsom-Ernst for more information: (707) 524-6751 or lfernst@becomingindependent.org.
Sharon Maiolini can’t imagine what life would be like for her daughter without BI, and BI can’t imagine what life would be like without Sharon Maiolini.

Now going into her sixth year as chair of BI’s annual fundraising gala Dinner Under the Stars, Sharon is a volunteer dynamo who takes a hands-on approach to almost every aspect of BI’s mission.

“It’s our nature,” she says of herself and her husband, Ken, who also has served on the Board of Directors. “We really believe in BI. We love what they’re doing. We want them to go on for another 40 years.”

The Maiolinis came to BI about 10 years ago, shortly after their daughter, Carla, graduated from high school.

“We walked in and immediately felt, ‘This is the place for her,’” Sharon says. “The openness, the cleanliness – it just felt great.”

Carla, now 32, lives with her parents in Sebastopol. When Sharon and Ken aren’t volunteering for BI, they own and operate Risk Management Services, an insurance firm that serves public agencies throughout California.

SAVE-THE-DATE – Becoming Independent’s 23rd annual fundraiser Dinner Under the Stars will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2015. Yes, we’re passing on 2014. No gambling going on here, just a little careful planning and consideration for everyone.

Over the last couple of years we’ve spun the roulette wheel and changed things up a bit. After an amazing 20 year partnership with the Benziger family and their beautiful Imagery Winery, we found we had outgrown their lovely venue. We looked for a new central location with a beautiful setting that could accommodate 224 of BI’s supporters and landed on Vintners Inn. During this transition we needed to move the month from June to August. Our supporters showed up strong, but feedback indicated preference for a spring event. After some careful consideration we landed on Saturday, April 25, 2015. We’re happy to say moving forward April will be the set month for our annual gala fundraiser.

We feel we hit the jackpot with this decision. Sharon Maiolini (featured below!) has once again stepped forward as our event chair and brought the winning Viva Las Vegas theme. Although we’re missing a calendar year, we won’t miss a fiscal year, meaning that annual DUTS proceeds will help BI continue to be #1 in the North Bay for people with developmental disabilities.

Come on out and help BI shoot a Lucky Seven Viva Las Vegas style on Saturday, April 25, 2015 from 5:00pm – 11:00pm at Vintners Inn in Santa Rosa.

SAVE THE DATE
Saturday
April 25th, 2015

Board Member Spotlight
Featuring Sharon Maiolini

Sharon Maiolini can’t imagine what life would be like for her daughter without BI, and BI can’t imagine what life would be like without Sharon Maiolini.

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and cakes. He uses the bus to get around town, socializing with other BI participants and traveling to work at the downtown museum five days a week.

He started there as a volunteer about a year ago, but soon earned a paid position. He now works 10 hours a week as a volunteer and 10 hours as paid staff and utilizes a job coach from BI. Jodi Porter, Jonathan’s job coach, provides 1:1 on and off-site training and guidance to ensure that Jonathan successfully learns the tasks and responsibilities of the job. His title, on the museum web site along with the curators, directors and trustees, is Curators Assistant. Jonathan talks with enthusiasm about his daily tasks, from sweeping and cleaning to scanning historical photos. But it’s clear that he not only likes the work, he also thoroughly enjoys the history.

“There’s a huge photo collection with the history of our county, our agriculture and people like the Hoen family – they named a street after them – and Mr. Luther Burbank,” Jonathan says. “There are haunting and scary photos of a very, very big fire at Rosenberg’s Department Store.”

“I like organizing things, but I’m also very lucky that a lot of it is also dramatic and pretty to look at.”

Jonathan graduated from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, and attended the Vancouver Film School for two years. His disability has presented him with “some challenges in his life,” says his father, West County artist Jack Stuppin. “BI has been really great” in helping Jonathan achieve greater independence, Jack says. “We couldn’t be more pleased with how it’s working out.”

That pleasure is written all over Jonathan’s face as he shows guests around the museum. He knows every inch of the historic building, from the basement where he has helped bring organization and order to the storage of paintings and artifacts to the galleries where he makes sure the cases are spotless and the lighting is perfect. Outside, he patrols the ground for trash and graffiti, on alert for anything that might be out of place.

“He has been outstanding as an employee,” says Eric Stanley, the Curator of History for the museum and Jonathan’s supervisor. “He has taken on quite a range of tasks, and he is extra helpful in helping us keep up with our gallery maintenance. He just shows a lot of enthusiasm in what he does.”
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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March 2014 – March 2015

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IN MEMORY . . .
Donations were made in memory of these friends:

‘The Gallery of Sea & Heaven’
on Facebook to stay current on art trips and updates.