

KP partners with Becoming Independent on new café

When Kaiser Permanente needed a concessionaire to run the café at the new Mercury Way Medical Offices, they turned to a community partner – [Becoming Independent](#).

Santa Rosa-based Becoming Independent was founded to assist those with intellectual and developmental disabilities live meaningful and productive lives. The organization serves about 1,000 people each year with varied interests and life objectives who share the common goal of realizing their abilities. Becoming Independent's programs are based on continued education, independent living support and employment.

The Mercury Way café, expected to open in mid-September., will serve “grab and go” sandwiches, salads and wraps, as well as coffee and pastries provided by local vendors like Andy's Produce, Taylor Lane Organic Coffee, and Redbird Bakery.

Social Enterprise Director JayJay Rico says the process developing the Mercury Way café has been an exciting one. “We're thrilled about what's to come and how we can continue to develop our partnership!” he says.

Becoming Independent isn't new to such partnerships: It has been the source of food and beverage sales for SMART since the beginning, and was on hand when SMART celebrated its first anniversary.

At Mercury Way, a couple of Becoming Independent staff members will run the café, with participants who have expressed a desire to work in the food and beverage industry. The café will serve as a vocational training site as well as an employment opportunity.

“We create a job-hunting environment just like anyone else would experience,” JayJay says. “Just because someone has different abilities doesn't mean they shouldn't have similar opportunities. We give this to participants – opportunities to reach their career and life goals.”

As an example of helping participants realize their potential, recent Volunteer of the Year Derek has been working with Becoming Independent to reach his ultimate dream: to one day work as a cashier. In an effort to reach his career goal, Derek has been doing restaurant preparation at Mary's Pizza Shack and volunteering as a cashier at Catholic Charities ReStyle Marketplace.

The Mercury Way café will help Becoming Independent raise much-needed money and allows participants like Derek to reach their goals. But it also provides an invaluable service to the community as a whole.

“Partnerships like the one with Kaiser Permanente offer our participants the opportunity for social interaction, which also helps dispel stigmas about people with different abilities,” JayJay says.