



Our start:

The roots of Becoming Independent go back over 40 years, when a group of parents banded together, determined to create an alternative to institutionalization for their children with developmental disabilities.

In 1969, the State Legislature passed the Lanterman Act, affirming that people with disabilities had the same rights as all other people and that the government was responsible for ensuring that those rights are achieved. That set the stage for establishing community-based support services to assist and advocate for people with disabilities.

Over the next decade, additional programs were established in Sonoma County to provide adult activities, independent living support services, and advocacy for people with disabilities. In January 1980, this group of programs incorporated under the name of Becoming Independent, which has evolved into the organization it is today.

What we do:

Becoming Independent (BI) is Sonoma Valley's one-stop shop for adults with disabilities, offering supportive services that include employment, independent living, life skills, and meaningful engagement with the community. Our longevity in the Valley (20+ years) has enabled us to create a footprint that is deep and wide. Those who participate in the program know that their abilities are recognized and appreciated. In turn, they add richness and diversity to the Valley.

A single story:

James came to Becoming Independent in 1990, when he was 20 years old. Job coaching and support enabled James to land his dream job at Mary's Pizza, where he has been employed for 20 years. He works with a crew for two hours each morning (Monday-Friday) to ready the business for opening. His job includes wiping and setting tables, folding boxes, rolling silverware into napkins, and filling condiment shakers.

James likes earning a paycheck and having the option to move among the Boyes Hot Springs, Plaza, and Napa restaurant sites. While at the Springs site, he and Mary's CEO, Vince Albano, developed a strong friendship. They enjoy the camaraderie of talking about their favorite sports teams (football and baseball). Everyone appreciates James' work and his positive can-do attitude.

During this past year, James also became active in BI's Community Integrated Services program, which provides opportunities to give back to the community. A natural pet lover, James found his niche volunteering to socialize animals at Pets Lifeline. He explains his volunteer job as "treating the dogs and loving the cats" to get them ready for a new home. He feels that he is "giving something back to the new dog or cat owner by providing this important interaction and socialization." James delights in the time he spends with the animals and feels a great sense of pride in being among the many Sonoma Valley residents who contribute through volunteerism.



Impact100 Sonoma

has awarded two
Community Grants to

Becoming Independent: \$5,000 in support of Healthy Living classes (2013) and \$15,000 to purchase a new vehicle (2015).

Our future:

The alarming rise in the number of young people with autism convinced us of the critical need to build a specialized program to meet this population's unique needs. We will be launching such a program at our Sonoma site in early 2015.