

For Immediate Release



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**BECOMING INDEPENDENT OPENS DECEMBER 5 IN SAN RAFAEL,
EXPANDS SERVICE TO MARIN COUNTY**

Becoming Independent creates opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to live meaningful and productive lives, has made lasting mark in North Bay for more than 53 years

Santa Rosa, Calif. (November 14, 2019) – [Becoming Independent](#) (BI), the Sonoma County based non-profit social impact organization that supports adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), is launching a new location at 777 Grand Avenue, Suite 101, in San Rafael with a community open-house event on December 5. The new 1,945 square foot location will allow BI to extend its day services to clients in Marin County beginning in early December.

“For years, people in San Rafael have been asking us to bring Becoming Independent’s services further south,” said **Luana Vaetoe**, CEO of Becoming Independent. “We look forward to becoming an important part of the Marin community.”

Note to media: A ribbon-cutting ceremony will take place at 4 p.m. on December 5, with an open house immediately following from 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. The public is invited to attend. Media preview tour available at 3:30 p.m.

Making a difference for more than five decades

With one in four American adults living with some sort of disability, the need for help is overwhelming. BI’s mission is to give those who need assistance the opportunity to live as engaged and independent members of our community. Established in 1967 by a small but committed group of parents with a vision, BI set out to offer a viable alternative to institutionalizing their adult children with disabilities.

Becoming Independent annually serves approximately 1,000 adults who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. Developmental disabilities are on the rise, with one in six American



children ages 3 to 17 diagnosed with a developmental disability. Becoming Independent also serves nearly 200 companies and organizations each year by providing volunteers, employees and services.

Becoming Independent has earned its well-deserved reputation as a game-changer by following a philosophy of adaptability coupled with a willingness to challenge the status quo. It constantly reinvents the type of support for adults with disabilities. Becoming Independent's statement of purpose reflects this philosophy which is both precise and powerful. Vaetoe, explains, "Becoming Independent believes in the innate value of every human being. When every one of us can exercise our right to live a life of dignity, integrity and independence to the best of our abilities, the whole community is elevated and benefits."

As California's progressive leader in helping adults with IDD, Becoming Independent fields a staff of more than 230 and has an annual operating budget of \$14 million. It is a 10-time winner of 'Best Places to Work in the North Bay,' as honored by the North Bay Business Journal. BI's services include job training, employment and independent living based on best practices in the field. BI now has multiple locations in Sonoma County in addition to its new Marin County location.

Education and training

Education is one of Becoming Independent's strategic focus areas. BI offers a variety of educational opportunities to its clients and to key community members, both at BI's facilities and throughout the community. Individuals served by BI have access to classes in life skills, including pedestrian safety, budgeting, health and wellness, nutrition, cooking, art and self-advocacy.

In the pioneering spirit of the families who founded Becoming Independent, BI opened a specialized program in 2014 to better meet the immediate needs of the region's rapidly expanding population of young adults with autism and autism-like characteristics. Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the nation and region.

Employment and volunteering

Becoming Independent has built an extensive network of community partner organizations, served by BI participants as volunteers and workers. Beyond job opportunities, these programs offer clients a chance to work shoulder-to-shoulder with other community members, gain valuable work experience, earn an income and learn skills. Through its network of partner companies, BI provides work opportunities for individuals served and entire staffing teams that enable such organizations to fulfill their own needs.

"BI continues to break barriers for people with disabilities," said Vaetoe. "Our creative implementation of social enterprises that create community employment partnerships, while

Fast facts about Becoming Independent's volunteerism:

- Total hours annually spent volunteering by clients: approximately 14,000 hours in 2019
- Number of Council on Aging's "Meals on Wheels" delivery routes per week: up to 26
- Total number of meals served per year to homebound seniors through "Meals on Wheels": 20,000 (~400 p/ week)
- Number of North Bay non-profits with BI volunteers: 18

generating much-needed revenue, firmly establishes BI as a cutting-edge model of not-for-profit leadership.”

Social Enterprise Division

The drive to connect BI participants and partners to the community at large has led them to significantly expand a vital and engaging Social Enterprise Division (SED). This allows BI to bridge both a need and a want in the community with a need and a want of those that they serve:

- Thanks to a partnership with Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART Train), BI has been operating the concession services aboard the entire fleet since 2017.
- The SED also led to the creation of the Buzz Café at Kaiser Permanente's Mercury Way Medical Office Building in Santa Rosa, staffed in part by adults with disabilities.
- BI has operated a successful document-shredding business for decades, employing adults with disabilities in every aspect of the service. BI acquired a mobile document destruction truck in 2019 that features enhanced security and additional training that allows the needs of a growing customer base to be met, accepting contracts from Sonoma County and other businesses in the North Bay.

Brief history of BI

Becoming Independent's founders were parents who had been dealt an unfamiliar hand when their children were born with an intellectual or developmental disability. At that time, more than half a century ago, the known approach to supporting adult children was to cloister them away in an institution. The prevailing assumption was that they would be "safe" there, outside of mainstream activities.

BI's founders believed that such an alternative was insufficient. They instead wanted their children to enjoy the liberties that most people take for granted – having the freedom to live as independently as possible with dignity, the rewards of satisfying work and loving relationships.

They built the foundation of what was to become one of the largest and most successful service providers of its kind in California.

Becoming Independent is launching a campaign in 2020 to ensure its health and sustainability, to serve its neighbors, friends and family members with intellectual and developmental disabilities for the next 50 years.

“Turning challenges into opportunities has always been central to who we are as a Becoming Independent community,” said Vaetoe. “Whether it’s working with individuals to create adaptive devices that allow them to achieve their goal of living independently, or conjuring up dynamic new business models, we are willing and able to think outside the box creatively and effectively. Often, those rewards are bigger and more profound than we could have even imagined.”

About Becoming Independent

Becoming Independent (BI) is one of the North Bay’s strongest nonprofit organizations serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Established more than 50 years ago by a group of parents determined to create an alternative to institutionalization for their adult children with disabilities, BI helps people live meaningful and productive lives as engaged and productive members of their community. Additionally, BI has been recognized for program innovations such as developing a cutting edge program for adults with autism, as well as creating three social enterprise businesses that offer competitive employment opportunities for clients, exposure for people with disabilities in the business community, and income that helps supplement BI’s budget.

For information on enrollment in BI’s new San Rafael day services, please contact BI at info@becomingindependent.org or 707.524.6600. Learn more at <http://becomingindependent.org>.

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