

I'm Here

**Making your community
a more inclusive place for
everyone**





What's in store...

Increasingly, supports are being put in place to build up inclusive communities for men, women and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

An IDD is a substantial disability originating before the age of 18 that can include autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, cognitive impairment and similar conditions.

And although inclusion in schools, work and community has proven to narrow achievement gaps and improve the quality of life, further progress is needed.

- **Teacher and aid shortages in schools place excessive burdens on special education programs**
- **High cost of Bay Area housing often prevents adults with developmental disabilities from moving into a home of their own**
- **Eight in 10 people with IDD are without competitive integrated work (even though the unemployment rate in California is low)**

Being a mentor, reshaping inclusive employment policies, supporting affordable housing and accessible transportation are ways all of us can contribute, reduce stigma and build communities that welcome us all.

Change You Can Create

Everyone can help make communities a more welcoming place

BY ZOE MANZANETTI

A generation ago, our communities looked much different. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities were segregated in separate classrooms and isolated residences, and often had no possibility for employment or social interaction. Today, California is moving away from these old concepts in favor of communities that champion inclusion, the mindset that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, with support, can be welcomed into their communities and everyday situations and given the same access to opportunity as everyone else. “Inclusion happens when individuals are welcome in the community where they live, and with needed services are engaged, active, and able to contribute” said David Grady, manager of the Central Coast Office of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD).

The Bay Area, like many other communities across California, is embracing the idea of inclusion. That’s because inclusion is everyone’s right, and as SCDD sees it, makes sense.

“People with disabilities are social with thoughts and feelings just like anyone,” Grady said. An important aspect of inclusion is to make sure all community members have their needs met and access to programs and services that will help with any challenges being faced. That’s where SCDD becomes involved.

“SCDD is a state agency with federal funding that works within a community to provide the necessary tools to encourage collaboration and quality improvement,” Grady explained. “It coordinates services and supports to promote equal access. Often services for people with disabilities and their families are difficult to find and hard to navigate.”

For instance, individuals and families can receive support acquiring skills, education, and housing services through SCDD’s partners, a broad network of providers, school special education programs, and San Andreas and Golden Gate Regional Centers. SCDD also works with other organizations to advocate for change in legislative policy. But inclusion can be more personal, too — starting with small changes in behavior from everyone in the community.

“Invite a family that has a child with disabilities over for dinner, or have them over for a play date, because a child with autism still wants to play and have friends!”

Grady said. “Be careful about language, avoid blame and stigma. Get to know the person and their family. Find out how to support a family on a personal level.”

Grady said changes like these are the easiest way to be a better neighbor to someone with a developmental disability. “We want to change attitudes,” said Grady. “So ... the question we ask when with a person with a disability is, ‘How can I support this person?’

Instead of the dismissive ‘Someone else needs to take care of that person.’”

“Get to know the person and their family.”

DAVID GRADY
Manager, Central Coast
Office, State Council
on Developmental
Disabilities



Inclusion Starts in the Classroom

Early development programs give children skills to reach their full potential

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

Tito Mateo Hernandez has always been special. He was born in the back of an SUV during morning rush hour traffic on the freeway after deciding to make his appearance 10 days earlier than expected. His father, Henry, tried to make it to the hospital in time, but Tito — affectionately called “Teo” by his family — was faster.

“For some reason Teo could not wait,” Marie Famacion-Hernandez, his mother, said. He weighed 6 pounds, 14 ounces.

Three years later, Teo travels with his mom twice a week along that same freeway to the Gatepath therapy center in Burlingame. Teo was born with Down syndrome. At Gatepath, he receives Early Intervention services both individually and with other children with special needs in a fun, colorful classroom. Learning and playing alongside other children his age is critical to helping him reach his full potential.

“He loves Gatepath,” his mother said. “Every time we pull into its parking lot, he babbles and signs the words ‘friends’ and ‘school.’ He’s very aware of where he is.”

Teo was first introduced to Gatepath at his own home, when he was just four months old. His therapists visited him to undergo Early Intervention infant/toddler development activities and later started him in physical therapy. After two years of in-home sessions, Teo joined his peers at the center, where he quickly became a popular boy.

Teo spends six hours a week at Gatepath. He still undergoes physical therapy, and also learns other important motor and cognitive skills by socializing with other children through song, playing and creating art.

“We’re grateful,” Famacion-Hernandez said, noting that Teo has made great strides through the nonprofit’s free services. “With the physical therapy, Teo has a little muscle tone. He walks and is working on running and jumping.”



“We’re grateful.”

MARIE FAMACION-HERNANDEZ
Mother

Tito Mateo Hernandez was born with Down syndrome and his life is full of opportunity, thanks to early development programs.

PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

Teo is able to vocalize words like “mom,” “father,” “hello,” and “bye!”

His parents are also continuing to teach him American Sign Language, so he can better communicate with his family.

Teo, who has two older siblings, is “a social butterfly,” his mother said.

“Everywhere we go, he waves at everyone and blows everybody kisses,” Famacion-Hernandez said. “He gets along with his brother and sister.”

After graduating from Gatepath on his third birthday, Teo will likely begin special education in a local school district. Thanks to the services available at places like Gatepath, his mother knows Teo is on the right track to being as independent as possible.

Working Together for Inclusive Childhood Development

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“Inclusion is about recognizing that each unique individual brings value to our community.”

It is important that we set an example to current and future generations about the significance of inclusion. We must intentionally and actively involve and empower everyone to participate as equal members of our community.”

JAVIER ZALDIVAR
Executive Director, San Andreas Regional Center

Organizations with Child Development Programs



Able to Succeed

Including students in the classroom helps them achieve greater possibilities

BY ZOE MANZANETTI

When Alfiya Raboye lived in Ethiopia, it was very difficult for her to attend school and get an education. That's because students who have a developmental disability, like Alfiya, aren't accepted into the same classes as all the other students so their opportunities to learn are significantly lessened. When Alfiya immigrated to the United States in 2017, all of that changed.

A new resident of Santa Clara County, Alfiya became determined to finish her education. Thankfully, her experience with the South Bay Consortium for Adult Education (SBCAE), which is made up of five adult schools and four community colleges in Santa Clara County, was the total opposite of the experiences she'd had in her home country. Alfiya began her new educational journey at one of their adult schools, Campbell Adult and Community Education (CACE). It was at CACE where she was included in the classroom alongside her peers and given any support she needed.

"Learning with students that are from different backgrounds and different capabilities makes me more productive," Alfiya said. "It also makes me feel like I'm equal to everybody. So I really feel empowered to learn when I'm with people who have different abilities from me."

In the short time since she's been here, Alfiya has been able to pass her high school equivalency test, thanks to the help of the SBCAE, CACE and two of SBCAE's community partners — Silicon Valley Independent Living Center and the Department of Rehabilitation.

"Learning with students ... makes me more productive."

ALFIYA RABOYE
Student

"My experience at CACE was great," said Alfiya. "The teachers were good and they were very supportive. I would say they are the backbone of my achievements." Furthermore, with the help of the SBCAE's Transition Specialists, she also was accepted into one of their community college members, San Jose City College (SJCC).

Alfiya's experience is an example of how inclusion is vital for academic success. Without the collaboration of organizations like the SBCAE, its adult school and community college members, and its community partners, Alfiya may have never gotten to experience an inclusive classroom and been given the opportunities she craved.

"All the support I got from school and my family made it easier for me to focus on my school and made me more committed," Alfiya said.

That commitment has paid off. Alfiya recently just finished her first semester at SJCC with confidence. "It was kind of hard at the beginning, but with the help of the teachers and the tutoring center I managed to finish those classes with good grades," she said.

Alfiya hopes to one day become a doctor to help other people with disabilities, while also spreading awareness of their capabilities and possibilities.

"There are so many resources for people with disabilities. It is my privilege to be able to use those resources in achieving my goals," Alfiya said. "Educating people with disabilities ... is very empowering. Identifying the needs of a person based on their ability is very important."



If Alfiya Raboye hadn't been included in Santa Clara County classrooms, she may not be on the path to becoming a doctor, like she is today.

Working Together for Inclusive Education

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Hope Services benefits from long standing collaborations with local colleges whose staff provide educational and vocational enrichment to individuals

participating in the Employment, Media and Community Connections programs. College staff are an integral part of the EMCC programs, teaching classes to advance the personal and employment goals of individuals served. Educational partners include De Anza, Gavilan and Monterey Peninsula Community Colleges and California State University Monterey Bay."

CHARLES "CHIP" HUGGINS
President/CEO, Hope Services

Organizations with Education Programs



A Place to Call Home

How having a place of their own leads to priceless independence

BY ZOE MANZANETTI

It's no secret that finding affordable housing in the Bay Area is hard. But that struggle can become even greater for people with developmental disabilities who may need certain supports or accommodations. That's why it's important to have more places like 1585 Studios and Cypress Home in Santa Clara County, so everyone has a great place to live.

"The number of Santa Clara County adults with developmental disabilities who live at home with aging parents has more than doubled in the past decade and will continue to grow in the years ahead," explained Jan Stokley, executive director of Housing Choices. "We need more affordable housing partnerships like 1585 Studios to meet this growing housing need and create a truly inclusive community."

With 26 apartments, 1585 Studios in Mountain View is one of Housing Choices' 18 partner properties, each attuned to residents' needs.

"In the beginning, to be honest, [living on my own] was a crazy fantasy that I never thought would become



"This place, it's changed my whole life."

RONNIE ARRELLANO
Resident, Cypress Home

a reality," said Per Maresca, a 1585 Studios tenant. "But now I have my own place, and I am able to take the bus to work and every day is a new challenge!"

Maresca participates in some of the on-site programs that 1585 Studios arranges, and finds them very helpful.

"It's important for people [with disabilities] to learn to be independent and learn how to use [our] own skills for cooking, cleaning and independent grocery shopping," Maresca said.

Without a diversity of housing options, it is extremely difficult for people with developmental disabilities in Santa Clara County to make the transition to housing a home of their own.

Ronnie Arrellano has been living in Life Services Alternatives' Cypress Home for almost six years. He previously lived in a space that wasn't amenable to his needs.



Ronnie Arrellano, left, and Per Maresca enjoy living independently.
PHOTOS BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR

"But this place, it's changed my whole life," Arrellano said.

To better serve the unique needs and personalities of its residents, Cypress Home offers programs that teach residents how to live on their own.

"[It's not just a place to live. I have great roommates and the staff helps us to learn, grow and stay safe]," Arrellano said. "They'll teach us how to do [cooking and cleaning, for example]."

From natural disaster safety — such as, what to do when there's a fire or earthquake — to how to apply for jobs or perform well in an interview, the Cypress Home at Life Services Alternatives wants to ensure that its residents have all the skills they need to live as independently as they can.

"This is like a stepping stone for us to become independent and learn everything," Arrellano said. "[For now,] I'm just taking one thing at a time."

Working Together for Inclusive Housing

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The Kim Richman Team believes inclusive housing for people with disabilities is beneficial for our communities because it fosters independence and growth for our more vulnerable community members. We feel there should be no barrier to keep people from finding their place in the world and a place to call home.”

Organizations with Housing Programs



Thanks to Neurodiversity Pathways' targeted support and training, Daniel Fiaccone is doing important work for a supportive employer.

PHOTO BY MARK GRAHAM

Purpose Found

Neurodiversity Pathways, a program of Goodwill of Silicon Valley, helps neurodiverse adults secure rewarding and sustained employment



BY THEA MARIE ROOD

A job is more than just a paycheck. It provides an identity, a sense of self-worth and a daily purpose.

But for people who have developmental disabilities, a good job can be hard to find: Only 19% of adults with disabilities are employed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

In fact, Daniel Fiaccone traveled all the way to Santa Clara County in order to land a job in his hometown of Dallas, Texas.

"I'd had an internship with Capital One here in Dallas," he said. "And I decided I liked working in offices with spreadsheets [and] coding, but the internship ended and ... the opportunities seemed to be in California."

So Daniel enrolled in Neurodiversity Pathways' Workplace Readiness Program, a program for neurodiverse adults with college degrees experiencing barriers to sustained employment. Based in San Jose and part of Goodwill of Silicon Valley, the program begins with a six-week course that empowers neurodiverse individuals — including those diagnosed with autism, ADHD, and Asperger's — to succeed in today's workplace.

Participants learn and practice key skills essential for searching and securing a job that matches their education and interests. Each participant is also

assigned a career coach who helps with the job search, employment on-boarding and workplace assimilation.

In Daniel's case, this led to some surprising news. Through Neurodiversity Pathways' network of local and national employment allies, an opening at Ernst & Young in Dallas was identified. Daniel flew back home and was offered the position.

Two years later, Daniel is successfully navigating daily office life, as well as writing code that will, for example, arrange conference and meeting attendees as diversely as possible.

"I really like this kind of work," he said. "It's taking simple tasks that a person can do, but they are tedious and boring and fraught with error. So why not let the computer do them?"

Daniel believes the circuitous route he took to find his job was well worth it.

He's grateful for Neurodiversity Pathways' innovative program which empowers neurodiverse individuals, and also appreciates the supportive work environment of Ernst & Young.

"I'm happy to be here and to skip the traditional interview process that excluded a lot of us," he said. "I finally have a job where I'm making a meaningful contribution to the best of my abilities."

"I'm making a meaningful contribution to the best of my abilities."

DANIEL FIACCONE
Associate, Ernst & Young
Neurodiversity Center of Excellence

Working Together for Inclusive Employment

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The impact of meaningful, rewarding and sustained employment is immeasurable to those who are neurodiverse. It makes possible their dreams and ambitions. It creates a sense of independence, reinforces self-worth and builds confidence. Working with enlightened employers, we're committed to creating inclusive workplaces where the full potential of neurodivergent talent is recognized and the self-agency of the individual is unlocked and realized."

TRISH DORSEY

Vice President Mission Services
Goodwill of Silicon Valley

Organizations with Employment Programs



Ryan and Lindsay Epidendio found happiness in togetherness.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

Finding That Special Someone

Two athletes share love of sports and each other

BY CHUCK GREEN



When it comes to characterizing his relationship with his wife Lindsay, it's obvious that Ryan Epidendio recognizes a good thing.

"Everyone wants someone in their life to love and make them feel special. Lindsay is that person in my life," said Ryan, 40. "She makes me happy. When I'm down, I can count on Lindsay to pick me up, and she can count on me to do the same when she's blue. I really worship the ground she walks on. We try to make sure we're both happy."

Well, right back at you, noted Lindsay, 36. "It makes me happy that I have Ryan in my life because I have someone to share everything with. We're lucky that we found each other."

Lindsay, who also embraces her job with the Santa Clara city clerk's office, added that she and her husband share a common interest. "I love sports," she said. "Ryan and I are Special Olympics athletes and being an athlete makes me happy."

In fact, Lindsay and Ryan both hope to someday go to an international competition.

Until then, from both a personal and practical standpoint, Lindsay said she and Ryan are right where they should be. They became friends two decades ago, started dating and tied the knot in 2013. "It's hard to find housing that we can afford, so we started sharing

a two-bedroom apartment 12 years ago," Lindsay said, adding they still have their same Sunnyvale apartment.

Meanwhile, Lindsay also credits their families for the couple's independence. "They worked hard to make sure we'd grow up to live independently," she said.

Their independent living skills counselors have also helped them not only realize their dream, but negotiate daily life, said Ryan. "We've learned to work through our problems by talking about them and compromising."

Added Lindsay: "We've really worked hard to be independent and able to live in our own home. We plan to always work toward that goal."

The couple also value their many friends, she added. "Ryan and I believe that to make a friend, you have to be a good friend. Our friendships are very important to us. We can have our friends over to our house to celebrate and have fun with each other."

Most of their friends also are athletes, she said. "So, we stay together through sports – both participating and watching our favorite teams. We love wrestling, so we have Pay Per View parties, and we love to dance, so we meet friends at dances that various organizations put on."

Even with their busy social life, the couple always make time for family, said Lindsay. "We see our families a lot because they live close by. We have lots of nieces and nephews."

"Everyone wants someone in their life to love and make them feel special."

RYAN EPIDENDIO
Husband and Special Olympian

Working Together for Inclusive Community Life

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Community Living Services includes both Supported Living and Independent Living programs.

Both help people to live in a home of his/her choice, by supporting and assisting them in all areas of life including but not limited to: employment, housing, medical monitoring, money management, socializing, and transportation. (Visit www.hopeservices.org for a detailed description of the services.) Hope's Quality of Life surveys have shown that participants in both of these programs score in the highest quality of life, particularly in the social inclusion domain. All activities start and end at the person's community."

CHARLES "CHIP" HUGGINS
President/CEO, Hope Services

Organizations with Community Programs





Hope Services believes inclusion for people with disabilities and mental health needs is important because the world is a better place when everyone is fully integrated and accepted in all aspects of our culture and community.

CHARLES "CHIP" HUGGINS, JD,
President/CEO



**Thank you to the following organizations
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