

**Silicon Valley Independent Living Center (SVILC)**  
**Values, Vision and Mission**  
**Final Document**  
**March 19, 2010**

**Overview**

As part of its strategic planning process, SVILC established a committee to update SVILC's values, vision and mission.

Committee members included: Amy Selders (Director of Programs); Sharon Kelleher (Board Member); Tricia Kokes (Board Member and Consumer); Pamela Lin (Board Member); Doug Micetich (Network Administrator); Gil Selders (Interim Development and Communications Associate); Norma Callender (Board Member); and Sarah Triano (Executive Director). The committee worked with facilitator Lisa Hoffman to create this working document.

This document builds on ideas from previous staff/board/community member retreats; was updated based on committee meetings; and incorporates suggestions from the staff/board retreat on February 13, 2010. Much of the document was also informed/inspired by the work and ideas of the Disability Activist Collective. A final committee meeting was held on March 8, 2010 to incorporate suggestions and determine next steps. SVILC's Youth Team revised the document to make it clearer, more "youth-friendly" and accessible in terms of language. Words that are highlighted in bold italics are those that have further explanation (both in the document itself and in a glossary at the end of the document). Ten board and staff members (including two members of the Executive Committee) provided additional input and revisions, which have been incorporated into the document. It was sent to our Strategic Planning Consultants for inclusion into the final 2010-2014 Strategic Plan, and approved by the Board on March 31, 2010.

## PART ONE: SVILC Values / What We Believe

Values are beliefs about what is important for SVILC. These values guide our day-to-day interactions with each other, with the people we serve, and with other members of our community. Many of these values are interconnected and mutually reinforcing: they work together to create a **safe space** (an environment, culture, atmosphere, and place that embodies these values, is open and accepting, and does not tolerate harassment, discrimination, or violence).

In this document, we list each value with a brief description of what we mean by that value.

We developed these values because:

- These values are our foundation: knowing our values helps us to remain stable during times of change.
- Values help us focus and make decisions about what to do or not to do with our resources, time and energy.
- We each have the individual and collective ability to make choices based on these values.
- Reflecting on our values allows us to go through deep philosophical and personal transformation, to be true to ourselves and each other. By stating these values, we model to **community members** (formerly called “consumers”) and others how to say: “this is what is important to us” or “this is aligned with our goals and actions.”
- Making sure we are clear on our values is an important part of doing intergenerational, community-based work. All generations challenge us to create new visions and values based on fresh ideas, experience, and historical perspective.
- These values help to counter the misperception that Centers for Independent Living are medical facilities where people live.
- These values will continue to evolve as we grow and change. We will review these values annually and make sure that we are living by them.

## Positive Disability Identity, Culture and Pride

**“As long as we regard our disabilities as tragedies, we will be pitied. As long as we feel ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded as useless. As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do.” Adolf Ratzka**

We are proud to express publicly and privately our belief that disability is a natural and beautiful part of human diversity that should be celebrated (not fixed, cured, or “normalized.”)

As people with disabilities, we are part of a larger community and a shared experience that is based not only on a mutual history of **social oppression** (mistreatment supported by society), but also on our strategies for coping and thriving, our emerging art and humor, our sense of connection with one another, and an almost **defiant celebration** (“in your face” celebration despite criticism) of our differences.<sup>1</sup> We celebrate and support the visionaries who give us music, dance, poetry, film, laughter, tears, spirit, and new ways of seeing ourselves and our world.<sup>2</sup>

We reject the notion that our differences are wrong or bad in any way. We build internal strength through consciousness-raising around **disability identity** (accepting yourself and your disability), acknowledging **privilege** (unearned power, advantages, and assets that allies of the disability movement have), and **deconstructing internalized oppression** (getting rid of bad feelings and negative stereotypes you believe about yourself and your disability). We work actively with our allies to change **power dynamics** (the things that create power or have power; fluid social hierarchy) within our organization and movement.

We transform ourselves from victims, “service providers,” and members of an identity struggle to “pioneers in creating a new, more humane society for all.”<sup>3</sup> We change our language from “overcoming” a disability or doing something “in spite of” our disability to having a stronger disability identity and **pride** (*know, accept, and like who we are*).

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from C. Gill

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Grace Lee Boggs

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change

## Transforming Ourselves and Each Other

**“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” Gandhi**

**“We must focus not only on what we have a right to, but also on what we are responsible for.” Naomi Ortiz**

We are committed to personal, organizational, movement, and social change where we model the relationships and world we are trying to create: a place where all bodies, minds and people are accepted and respected.

On a personal level, we provide a **safe space** for **intergenerational** (between people of all ages) dialogue and reflection to transform ourselves and our relationships with one another, our institutions, and the Earth. We consciously engage in social change and personal transformation at the same time because we cannot change injustices in the world without also confronting injustices, and the role of **privilege**, in our own practices. We practice **self-care** (taking care of ourselves/well-being) and encourage others to also take care of themselves.

On an organizational level, we create programs that transform and empower participants. We challenge ourselves and each other to treat everyone with respect, even when we have different beliefs. We create **safe spaces** for people to have discussions about power, economics, race, and other difficult topics, and to share stories and hopes as we develop new ways of thinking and being together. We support our allies to do their own work around power and privilege. We give and receive training and support regarding disability pride, culture, history, and other social issues.

On a movement level, we challenge and partner with other advocates and organizations to think critically about our movement and move beyond disability rights to **disability justice** (focusing not only on what we have a right to, but also on what we are responsible for); beyond **“4 core services”** (information and referral, peer support, independent living skills training, and advocacy) to **“4 core transformations”** (changes on a personal, organizational, movement, and societal level). We focus on **community-driven economic self-sufficiency** (our community is the source of our own strength financially) and a **common vision of transformation, not just reform** (e.g. not just *“including” Disabled students in an education system that is bad for everyone, but committing to restructuring the system for all*).

On a community level, we organize **actions** (anything that has the purpose of changing something) that benefit the entire community. We work to transform our society into a radically inclusive, accessible, diverse, supportive, informed, and just place that encourages everyone to come to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a human being.

## **Equal Access**

**“Other people can no longer set the timetable for others’ freedom.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**“504...is ... a platform that guarantees to each person with a disability in this country that they are equal in the eyes of the law and that they will have equal access to educational institutions, hospitals, to the institutions in our society which serve us all.” Ed Roberts**

If everyone can't participate, no one can.

Accessibility is not a special “add-on” but rather a natural part of everything we do: we find the time and resources necessary to support the participation of every person who would like to participate. When access is part of everyone's mindset -- second nature -- it leads to equal participation, regardless of one's disability, culture, language, identity, or other **status** (a person's position or standing in society).

We work to redistribute political power, funds and other resources in ways that benefit all people, including those who have historically been denied access. Creating access may mean changing our beliefs, attitudes and behaviors to be open to people with experiences and identities that are different from our own. We recognize that there are solutions we don't have and use creative ideas to come up with alternatives.

## **Equality and Social Justice**

**“To be free is not merely to strip off one’s chains; it comes from *respecting* the freedom of others.” Nelson Mandela**

We support the equality of all people. This includes ***empowering*** (to give power or authority to) people to know that they have rights to economic, political, and social equality, opportunities, and ***responsibilities*** (*tasks expected of them*). ***Equality starts from within*** (we must first believe we are equal before we expect others to). We are committed to disability justice and to larger ***social justice*** (all groups and individuals are entitled equally to important rights, fair treatment, and an equitable share of the benefits of society) work.

We must respect each person’s needs to allow full and equal access and participation. We value the equality of people with different types of disabilities. We reject the notion that some disabilities are more acceptable or valuable than others and that some people are “not disabled enough” to be in our community.

Recognizing that we cannot address all of society’s problems on our own, we partner with other social justice organizations working on problems of homelessness, poverty, hunger, violence, police brutality, jails, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other issues to better understand the ***intersections of oppressions*** (how different types of oppression can affect someone in the same way as someone else) and work together towards justice and equality.

## **Self-determination and Advocacy**

### **“Nothing about us without us!” South African Disability Rights Movement**

**“We have three top priorities: advocacy, advocacy, advocacy.” Ed Roberts**

We believe all people should have choice and control in every aspect of their lives. This allows people to benefit from all the opportunities that society has to offer and to ***meet all the responsibilities that society requires*** (a duty to help others). This requires dedicated, effective, creative, innovative, and daring systems advocacy – making long-term changes in organizations and institutions – to make things better not only for ourselves, but for everyone.

We promote ***self-determination*** (right to think for yourself and make your own decisions) and ***self-advocacy*** (being able to talk for yourself and get what’s best for you, and present yourself in the best light for who you truly are). As each of us practices making good decisions about our lives, we learn that “failure” is not the end of the world and that we can all try again.

We organize ***actions*** that do not attack others but rather demonstrate positive changes that will benefit the entire community.<sup>4</sup> We recognize the humanity in others, including perceived opponents, and see within them the possibility of change.<sup>5</sup> We believe everyone can contribute to these systems change efforts, and all efforts are valued and respected.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Grace Lee Boggs

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Disability Rights California.

## **Interdependence and CommUnity**

“Our community must be the sources of their own strength politically, economically, intellectually, and culturally in the struggle for human rights and dignity. Community is home and it is power.” Malcolm X, 1964

“Interdependency is both “you and I” and “we.” It is solidarity, in the best sense of the word. It is inscribing community on our skin over and over and over again... Because the truth is: we need each other. *We need each other.* And every time we turn away from each other, we turn away from ourselves. We know this. Let us not go around, but instead, courageously through.” Mia Mingus

While we honor each person’s need to make choices, we also recognize that we all need each other to thrive and that our lives are deeply connected. ***We give and receive support without shame*** (we are happy to help others and to accept it).

We are expanding our “independent living movement” to become an “interdependent community ***rEvolution***” (a revolution that is about evolving and changing ourselves for the better). We are committed to continually talking to and with one another to increase understanding, create shared experience, address problems, generate options and ignite change.

We believe in the interconnection and inherent value of all people. Each one of us is able to exercise our power to make principled choices in our daily lives that have an impact on ourselves and the world around us. We value building relationships that are based on respect and love, where people can count on each other to give and receive support. We reject the “myth of independence” which has been used to divide us, and embrace the power of ***interdependence*** (working with others to get things done).<sup>7</sup>

We create ***safe spaces*** and ***collectively interdependent communities*** (places where we can be independent while still depending on each other) where *all* people feel like they belong. We recognize that we already have many resources to support ourselves and each other. ***It’s not a begging thing -- it’s a joining thing*** (we want to join our communities, not beg from them). We are creating a world where people with disabilities can live and learn among family, friends, and loved ones in communities of our choosing.

We value people who don’t agree with us and approach them with love and genuine desire for understanding. We listen patiently and respectfully to one another, especially those with whom we disagree, because our aim is not to win arguments, but to create community.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Mia Mingus.

## **Inclusion and Diversity**

**“A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all.” Dan Wilkins**

We include people with all disabilities, both apparent and non-apparent, and those who do not openly identify as **Disabled**. We create spaces where it is safe to be different and people don't have an expectation of sameness. We are committed to including people who have historically been excluded, especially those living in diverse ethnic, language, and cultural communities. We listen to and respect all beliefs and thoughts.

We strive to model the world we want to become, a world that values acceptance and inclusion of all people. Practicing inclusion means making all environments more hospitable (livable, comfortable), open, and reflective of the type of community we all want to live in. We actively partner with other groups and individuals working with **marginalized** communities (groups of people who are excluded by wider society).

We honor diversity and are intentional about putting this value into practice throughout all levels of our organization. We do this by supporting intergenerational, multi-cultural leadership of people with all types of disabilities and experiences.

We “hold close to our hearts and minds the imagination, passion, and energy of young people.”<sup>8</sup> We honor the ideas of youth and also value our elder's wisdom and experience.

Valuing inclusion and diversity means asking ourselves, “What are we doing that's exclusionary? If someone is ‘invisible,’ do we even know who that person is? How can we reach those who don't feel included? Who is not at the table who needs to be here?” **Constructive dialogue** (discussing issues in order to encourage and inform) makes us all informed.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Grace Lee Boggs

## PART TWO: SVILC Vision / “Things to Come”

**“I call for solidarity among all who love justice, all who love life, to create a revolution that will empower every single human being to govern his or her life, to govern society, and to be fully productive of life quality for self and for all.” Justin Dart**

A vision is an image of the mission accomplished: the ideal future state.

### **A Vision for Interdependent Living and Disability Justice**

Our vision is a world with intergenerational, informed, interdependent communities where:

- All difference is valued;
- People have authentic relationships and are able to challenge each other in loving, respectful ways;
- Disability is seen as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity;
- Disabled people embrace their whole selves; are **proud**, are powerful, and have the opportunities, equal rights, and resources needed to create positive change;
- People have a deep sense of shared values, **responsibility**, vigilance, choice, connection with others, and possibility for changing ourselves and society;
- Allies and their contributions are valued; and
- **The economic system doesn't define and drive the community** (where we have *community members*, not “consumers,” and our community is not based on the values of a capitalist system).

## **PART THREE: SVILC MISSION / Our Reason to Be**

**“We must transform ourselves and communities so that all may become awakened to the interconnection between mind, heart and body and between ourselves and all the other selves in our communities, country and in the world.” Grace Lee Boggs**

A mission statement defines the organization’s purpose. Who are we? Why do we exist? What do we do?

### **SVILC Mission**

SVILC is a cross-disability, intergenerational, and multicultural disability justice organization that creates fully inclusive communities that value the dignity, equality, freedom and worth of every human being. We do this by building disability identity, culture and pride; creating opportunities for personal and community transformation; and partnering with others to ensure that civil and human rights are protected.

### **SVILC Draft Tag Line**

SVILC is a disability justice organization that creates fully inclusive communities.

## SVILC Values/Vision/Mission Document Glossary

**Safe space:** an environment, culture, atmosphere, and place that embodies these values, is open and accepting, and does not tolerate harassment, discrimination, or violence.

**Community members:** formerly called “consumers.”

**Social oppression:** mistreatment supported by society.

**Defiant celebration:** “in your face” celebration despite criticism.

**Disability identity:** accepting yourself and your disability.

**Privilege:** unearned power, advantages, and assets that allies of the disability movement have.

**Deconstructing internalized oppression:** getting rid of bad feelings and negative stereotypes you believe about yourself and your disability.

**Power dynamics:** the things that create power or have power; fluid social hierarchy.

**Pride:** know, accept, and like who we are.

**Intergenerational:** between people of all ages.

**Self-care:** taking care of ourselves/well-being.

**Disability justice:** focusing not only on what we have a right to, but also on what we are responsible for.

**“4 core services”:** information and referral, peer support, independent living skills training, and advocacy.

**“4 core transformations”:** changes on a personal, organizational, movement, and societal level. When we offer services and not transformation, people come for service and leave still ashamed of their disability. They must leave knowing they count as equal human beings.

**Community-driven economic self-sufficiency:** our community is the source of our own strength financially.

**Common vision of transformation, not just reform:** e.g. not just “including” Disabled students in an education system that is bad for everyone, but committing to restructuring the system for all.

**Actions:** anything that has the purpose of changing something.

**Status:** a person’s position or standing in society.

**Empowering:** to give power or authority to.

**Responsibilities:** tasks expected of them.

**Equality starts from within:** we must first believe we are equal before we expect others to.

**Social justice:** all groups and individuals are entitled equally to important rights, fair treatment, and an equitable share of the benefits of society.

**Intersections of oppressions:** how different types of oppression can affect someone in the same way as someone else.

**Oppression:** discrimination against a group through an unjust use of force, authority, or societal norms.

**Society requires:** a duty to help others.

**Self-determination:** right to think for yourself and make your own decisions.

**Self-advocacy:** being able to talk for yourself and get what's best for you, and present yourself in the best light for who you truly are.

**We give and receive support without shame:** we are happy to help others and to accept it.

**rEvolution**": a revolution that is about evolving and changing ourselves for the better.

**Interdependence:** working with others to get things done.

**Collectively interdependent communities:** places where we can be independent while still depending on each other.

**It's not a begging thing -- it's a joining thing:** we want to join our communities, not beg from them.

**Disabled:** Borrowing from the Deaf community, generally, folks with "small d" disabilities do not associate with other members of the disability community, strive to identify themselves with non-disabled people, and regard their disabilities solely in medical terms. "Big D" Disabled people identify themselves as culturally disabled, and have a strong disability identity and pride.

**Marginalized communities:** groups of people who are excluded by wider society.

**Constructive dialogue:** discussing issues in order to encourage and inform.

**The economic system doesn't define and drive the community:** where we have community members, not "consumers," and our community is not based on the values of a capitalism system.