

# EAST BAY INNOVATIONS

The INSIGHT

Spring 2023

## MOVING FORWARD

It's well known that individuals with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce, and for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities, we know the employment rate is even more dismal.

We're also aware that the child care sector today is in need of well-trained, reliable employees, and that its workforce is ten percent smaller now than it was before the pandemic, when agencies were already struggling to hire workers. So it made sense to us to find a way to match clients interested in working with young children with local preschools seeking staff.

But there were obstacles. In California, completion of college courses in Early Childhood Education/Child Development is a requirement for employment in preschools. We understood that it can be daunting to enroll in college, take fast-paced classes with extensive reading, and at the end of a semester be expected to demonstrate knowledge of core competencies on final exams. But we believed that with accommodations, tutoring, and teachers committed to presenting material in ways that would be accessible to different types of learners, our motivated clients could succeed.



Jeanna, pictured with her parents, is an example of someone who was looking for a career path and knew, from her part-time job at the Oakland A's Stomper Fun Zone, that she liked working with children. But to work in a preschool environment, she needed to pass four community colleges classes. With involved parents who helped her enroll in courses, provided ongoing tutoring, prepared study guides to help her get ready for exams, and offered moral support all along the way, Jeanna successfully completed her classes and launched her career in a Montessori preschool. More than ten years later and still employed at this preschool, she values the connections she makes with the children and their families. She likes her routine duties – helping with meals, outside play, and nap time. The best part of the job, she says, is watching the 12 preschoolers assigned to her learn and grow, and happily perform dances they create together.



Funded with a grant from the Department of Rehabilitation's Demand Side Employment Initiative, EBI is developing an adapted Early Childhood Education Training Program in partnership with the YMCA and Berkeley City College. Beginning this summer with a cohort of ten students who are Regional Center/Department of Rehabilitation clients, the program will provide academic guidance, free tuition, textbooks, and tutoring for the adapted early childhood education classes offered to this cohort. In the fall, students will be placed in paid internships at local preschools, where they'll receive job-coaching, in addition to onsite mentoring. EBI, the YMCA, and Berkeley City College are confident that with the right support, participants will master the competencies needed to begin their careers in early childhood education.

We're moving forward!

**If you'd like more information about this program, or are interested in learning about a future cohort, please contact: [childcare@eastbayinnovations.org](mailto:childcare@eastbayinnovations.org).**

## EAST BAY INNOVATIONS

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## Cathy Nielsen



In multiple roles with EBI for more than two decades, Cathy Nielsen provided leadership on our board of directors, used cutting edge strategies to match clients with jobs, created internships and identified new employment opportunities, trained East Bay service providers to develop programs leading to jobs for individuals with disabilities, and even consulted on the production of four videos that advanced employment efforts statewide. And as a loyal donor to EBI, Cathy's generosity continues to benefit the community we serve.

Early on, Cathy worked alongside Lori Kotsonas, EBI's Director of Employment at the time, to secure employment for jobseekers with disabilities by reaching out to business leaders and elected officials. Together, they identified strategic tasks that could create valued jobs that would save money, promote revenue, ensure quality, and maximize productivity for businesses. Addressing challenges as they arose, they crafted innovative solutions to make job training and placements possible for many more clients at higher rates of pay in business industries typically not accessible to employees with disabilities. The advances in employment services that were made then still open doors today in, for example, health care settings, public sector jobs, law enforcement agencies, and recently, residential care for older adults.

Now fully retired, Cathy has the opportunity to travel with her family and this past year cruised to Greece, Italy, and Turkey. Denmark and Alaska are next on her list of destinations. When she's home, she's paddling a dragon boat in the Alameda Estuary five days a week. She's enjoying a busy, well-deserved retirement.

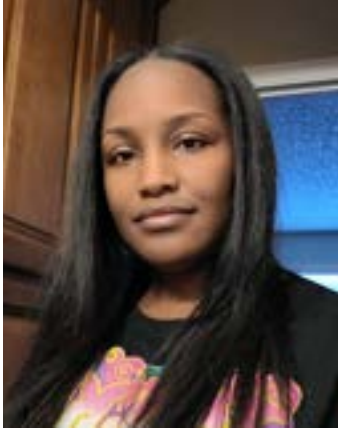


When asked what compels her to donate to EBI, Cathy talked about trust. She's confident that her gifts will be used to benefit clients and to effect real change, and she believes in EBI's viability as a non-profit organization, having demonstrated stability as well as innovation for almost 30 years. Cathy sees the agency's leaders as visionary, just as she did in 1994, when EBI was founded.

**Thank you, Cathy, for the wonderful work you've done to create inroads to employment for individuals with disabilities and for the many ways you've supported EBI.**

### *Meet Tiffini Neal*

Meet Tiffini Neal, Senior Assistant Director in EBI's Transitional Care/Case Management (TCCM) department. Eight years ago she was handling billing, coding, and insurance at a mental health outpatient program and,



ready to move from a back office role to direct work with clients, she applied for and was hired for a position at EBI.

Now, with a B.A. in Sociology from California State University East Bay and years of case management experience, Tiffini is part of a team launching a pilot program serving Alameda Alliance for Health members with complex care needs and who are at risk of institutionalization. The best part of her job, Tiffini says, is getting to know and

understand her clients. When they're comfortable with her, they'll tell her about themselves. By identifying their strengths and recognizing barriers to independence, she can best support them to remain in the community. With extensive knowledge of resources and public benefits, strong organizational skills, and a background of providing intensive case management, Tiffini is well-prepared to take on the challenges of this new program.

Tiffini's interest in people's unique stories extends beyond her workday. Curious about her ancestry, she's been exploring -- combing through birth records and obituaries, connecting with distant relatives, and building a family tree dating back to the Emancipation period. Her grandfather, she learned, vividly remembered the experience of hiding in a hole as a young boy when he saw the Ku Klux Klan coming by on horses.

Tiffini's research has prompted previously unknown relatives to reach out to her with their own recollections and links to even more family.



Born in Oakland and raised in Hayward, home to Tiffini has always been the Bay Area. When she's not working or researching her family's genealogy, she's spending time with her son and daughter, exploring local trails with her hiking group, or reading.

A fun fact about Tiffini.... She loves the uniqueness of her name, having never met another person whose name shares that spelling.

**Thank you, Tiffini, for your steadfast commitment to supporting individuals with complex health care and service needs.**

### THANK YOU!

**To the many individuals who so generously support EBI with monthly and periodic gifts, annual contributions, car donations, and workplace giving.**

### THANK YOU!

**To the funders, businesses, and foundations making our work possible.**

- Alameda Alliance for Health
- Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
- Alameda County Housing and Community Development
- Bay Area News Group & East Bay Times "Share the Spirit" Fund
- Beard Realty Team
- Brooks-Mathews Foundation
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- Pacific Diversified Insurance
- Regional Center of the East Bay
- Safeway Foundation
- Social Security Ticket to Work Program
- Vital Link Medical Alert Systems
- Wells Family Foundation

## WHO WE ARE

Established in 1994, East Bay Innovations (EBI) today supports more than 500 individuals with disabilities to live as independently as possible in their own homes, to be successfully employed, and to feel a sense of membership in their community.



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Visit our website at [www.eastbayinnovations.org](http://www.eastbayinnovations.org)

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