

Lehigh Valley **Center for Independent Living** **Newsletter**

LVCIL Newsletter

Summer, 2024



**A Special Message
from Executive
Director Amy Beck**

New LVCIL Programs

**A Groovy Night to
Remember**

Table of Contents

LVCIL Newsletter: Summer 2024

<u>Amy's Announcement</u>	1.
LVCIL and the Future
<u>The CARP Corner</u>	3.
In the Community
<u>Community Inclusion</u>	5.
A New Program for Young Children
<u>Supported Decision Making</u>	7.
Decide Your Future
<u>Valentine's Day</u>	9.
The LVCIL Way
<u>Flowerheads</u>	11.
Grooving for a Good Cause
<u>Thank You</u>	13.
For All You Do
<u>Community Stories</u>	15.
Caring for Consumers
<u>Join the Team</u>	16.
Now Hiring

Who We Are

LVCIL is a non-profit organization based in Allentown, PA that provides services and support to people with all types of disabilities.

At LVCIL, we believe that every individual has the right to live a healthy, happy, and productive life in a community that is free from all barriers. We can help you achieve or maintain your independence through many of our supportive services and programs.

The Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL) is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that serves people with disabilities, and their family members, living in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

What We Do

LVCIL offers a many services and programs. But like all Centers for Independent Living we offer our 5 core services.

Information and Referral

Information and referral can help you find the programs, services, and support you need to live independently.

Advocacy

To put it simply, advocacy is standing up for your rights and what you believe in.

Peer Support

If you feel like no one understands you, or that people treat you differently because of your disability, LVCIL's peer support can help.

Independent Living Skills

We can help you achieve independence by providing you with the information, support, and education you need to live independently and remain independent.

Where To Find Us

713 North 13th Street, Allentown, PA 18102

By appointment only

Contact Us

610-770-9781 - info@lvcil.org

“My role at LVCIL has been the greatest professional honor of my career.”

- Amy Beck

After 25 years of dedicated service to LVCIL and its consumers - Executive Director Amy Beck will be retiring in August, 2024.



When Amy Beck began her role, LVCIL had seven staff members and a budget under \$300,000 a year.

LVCIL now has over 50 staff and an operating budget of over \$4,000,000. During her tenure, LVCIL has maintained its vigorous focus on its mission through

its Core services and expanded services to meet the needs of people with disabilities in the Lehigh Valley and beyond. Additional services and programs included a Sign Language Interpreter Referral Service (SLIRS), housing guidance services, support for Veterans, waiver supports coordination, transition and employment services for youth, accessibility services, assistive technology support, and dozens of other services.

"We've seen significant changes over the past 25 years. People with disabilities now have much more access and awareness. Our world is becoming more accepting of disabilities as a normal occurrence. We're everywhere now, and people with disabilities are expecting more for themselves - full lives with options and variety." - Amy Beck

Throughout her tenure, Amy has been a steadfast advocate for the Independent Living philosophy, ensuring that consumer control remains central to LVCIL's work. Her approach, characterized by calm leadership and an ability to find common ground with everyone, has been instrumental in advancing disability rights and awareness in the Lehigh Valley, and beyond.

Throughout it all, Beck has been a cornerstone of the agency, ensuring that consumer control and the Independent Living philosophy remain central to everything LVCIL does. In addition to directly supporting thousands of consumers, she has mentored her staff and leaders to ensure the agency focuses on its consumers above all else.

Tony Swartz, President of the LVCIL Board of Directors, notes:

“The Board wishes to express its appreciation, admiration, and longtime confidence in Beck’s leadership skills.”

While Beck is retiring in August, she will continue to provide consultation to the agency. The value of her continuing support cannot be estimated, as the agency will be able to depend on her insight, wisdom, and dedication.

LVCIL, its Board and staff, thank Beck for her years of exceptional service and leadership during the past 25 years. As one staff member said, **“She was and is the best boss I’ve ever had.”** We know LVCIL’s staff and consumers will miss her daily presence immensely.



While Amy appreciates all the care and congratulations she has been receiving, she has asks anyone who may wish to send gifts to instead donate to LVCIL.

A fundraiser honoring Amy’s work and vision of LVCIL’s future is soon to launch to the public, so please keep an eye on LVCIL’s website for more details.

Visit LVCIL.org, or lvcil.org/donate.



Updates and Stories from the Community Accessibility and Related Programs (CARP) at LVCIL

By Fatima Nabavian, M.Ed.

Well, it's hard to believe 2023 has come and passed, with lots of successes for LVCIL's CARP team!

Bob Amelio, Ashley Patete and Fatima Nabavian were out conducting a site survey of accessibility features and accessibility needs at Palmer Township parks in late fall. We appreciate the dedication to accessibility that Palmer municipal workers demonstrated in their enthusiasm for the project. We are excited to see all of the progress that will occur in the next few years as a result of the work done by LVCIL's CARP team Fee For Service program AccessCheck.

On any given day, our team members are active throughout the building, working with these amazing pieces of technology designed to enhance individuals' ability to access and control their environments. Our tasks range from fulfilling requests for our free donated medical equipment and assistive technology, to demonstrating

equipment and explaining new technologies to consumers. Beyond individual demonstrations, we also train and present to groups, constantly updating our knowledge and resources to serve the community better and collaborate with other professionals in the field!

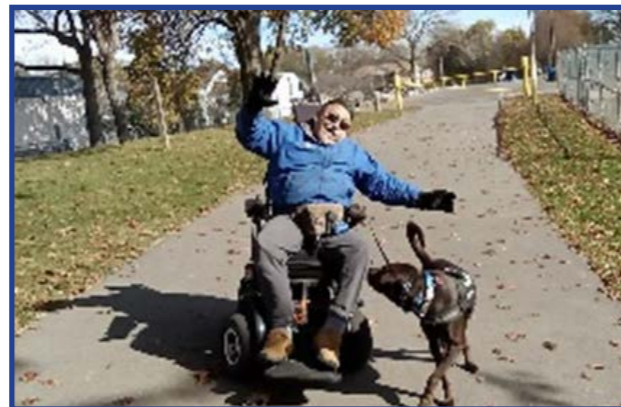


Image: Bob Amelio and Service Dog Ruger working as members of the AccessCheck team on a Site Survey at Palmer's Fairview Park

All of these activities are made possible by LVCIL's partnerships with both Temple University's Institute on Disabilities' TechOwl Program and Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF).

So Much to Offer

In addition to offering opportunities to learn about Assistive Technology, we offer additional services such as:

- Onsite reused equipment program,
- TechOwl's Free Special Phones Program (TDDP)
- iCanConnect: A service for those with both hearing and vision related disabilities, offering free equipment to individuals who cannot otherwise afford or access these.



Image: Consumer Diana showing off what she can now do on her free iPhone to support her low vision thanks to the help of TechOwl programs

The impact of all of these activities is enormous. In just 4 months' time, LVCIL and TechOwl's Reused Equipment Exchange Program have saved Pennsylvanians in this region close to \$20,000, offering mobility equipment and daily living devices to individuals who are unable to obtain them through other means. In the same amount of time, we have supported around 200 individuals in finding the resources needed to pursue and achieve independence, for themselves or a loved one.

This includes offering funding assistance and zero fee, no and low interest loan opportunities with PATF in addition to their free, informative webinars that can be found recorded on their

website. Tune into the most recent webinar in the "Money Talks" series entitled "Identity Theft and Scams: What Everyone Needs to Know."

For more information about CARP happenings, follow LVCIL on social media. Visit us at lvcil.org/assistive-tech and learn about even more free resources offered at techowlpa.org and patf.us.





Community Inclusion for Young Children

Towards a world that embraces all people with disabilities, even its youngest ones

What We Do

Parent Support Group Meetings for monthly trainings in English and Spanish

One on One Coaching from trained LVCIL Staff to provide information, resources and support.

Peer Mentorship from other parents who have lived through similar experiences.

Community Inclusion for Young Children (CIFYC) envisions a world that embraces all people with disabilities, even its youngest ones. Through our services at LVCIL, we can help you create an inclusive world for your child, where they can live, learn, and play without barriers. With our monthly parent support group, one on one coaching, and peer support, CIFYC is here to empower you to become an informed advocate for your young child!

CIFYC is one of the newer programs here at LVCIL, and while it's just getting started, the impact it's already making is promising. While young adults have always been a large focus for the CIL's programming, from our School 2 Life program, independent living skills, and transition and employment services, this new program gave us an opportunity to start with the ones just starting on their life journey.

Early education and awareness about disability can make a large impact on one's long-term health, happiness, and self-esteem. That's why CIYC is here: to support parents of young children with disabilities. We aim to build a community where parents can feel confident and ready to navigate both the joys and challenges of raising their child to be as independent and confident as possible.



Image: Team member's Julianna (left) and Meaghan (right), tableting at a convention for LVCIL's Community Inclusion for Young children.

“What if I don't know for sure if my child has a disability yet?”

CIFYC is open to all parents and their children - not just those with an official diagnosis. The fact is that an official diagnosis can be a long and complicated process, and each child (Disabled or not) is different. Regardless of the results, anyone finding themselves in that situation could benefit from the community and support we offer, and there is never harm nor risk in learning more.

“Are there other people who are going through a similar situation?”

While our team is always ready to help, one of the cornerstone elements of our program our Peer Mentorship: This unique aspect stems from the understanding that only parents of children with disabilities can truly understand what that unique journey is like. This understanding and lived experience are the foundation of CIFYC peer mentorship program. Here, parents

who have navigated similar paths become guides and friends, offering perspectives only they can. The old saying “It takes a village to raise a child” is more than just a cute phrase for us; it's the heart that defines our program. Community is not just a term in our title; it is the principle that underpins everything we do.

“How do I learn more?”

You can subscribe to our newsletter, follow us on social media, and contact us directly with any questions. CIFYC organizes monthly Parent Support Group Meetings, available in both English and Spanish. These gatherings are not only a great opportunity to learn more about our program but also a chance to make strong community connections. Additionally, our meetings often host special guests and topics related to disability and parenthood.

A special thanks to the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council for funding this project and their continued support of LVCIL.



Decide Your Future

SDM PA believes decision making is a fundamental human right.

How do you make decisions? Do you rely solely on your own experiences? What if you don't know something? How do you weigh your options or even decide what questions to ask? For many people with disabilities, these questions can be particularly challenging - often leading others to think they can't make those decisions for themselves, and need to be placed under guardianship.

Unfortunately, this misconception has led to numerous cases of unnecessary guardianships for young adults with disabilities, stripping them of their right to make their own choices. This is where Supported Decision Making Pennsylvania (SDMPA) comes in.

We're excited to introduce our new initiative, created to address this critical issue. SDMPA is a partnership between Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL) and Jewish Family Service

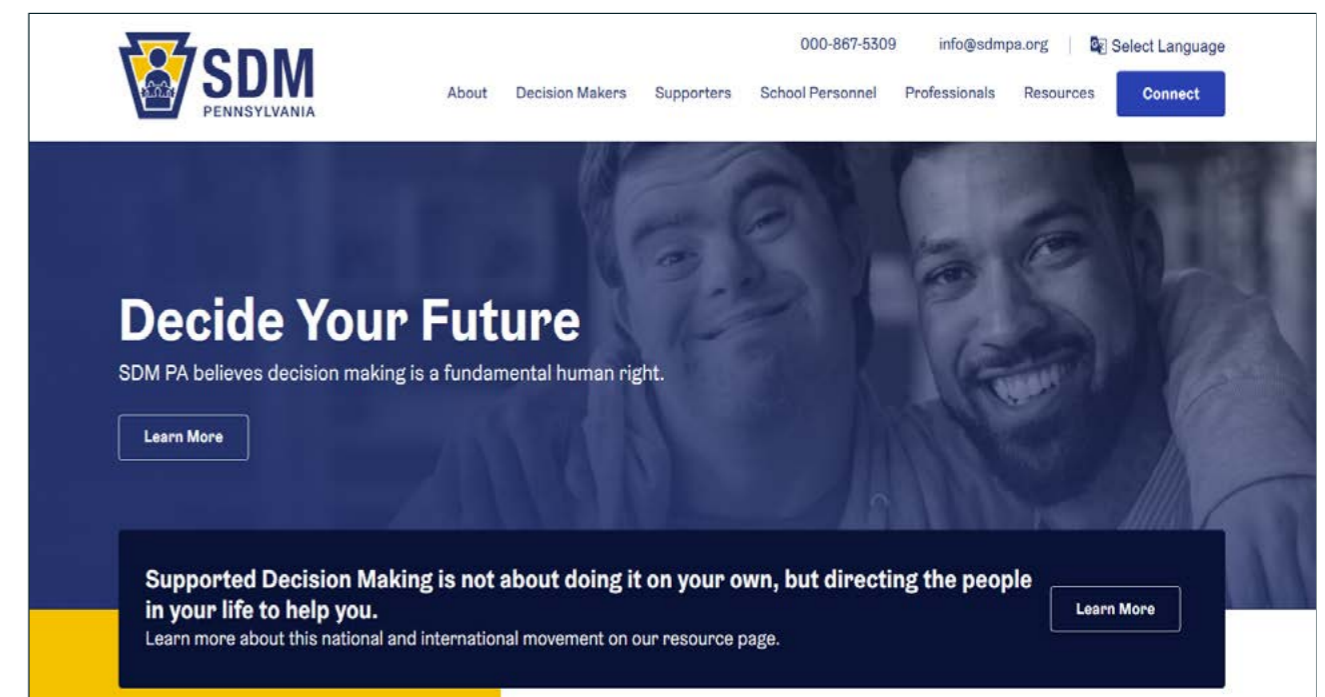
of the Lehigh Valley (JFSLV), funded by the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council. Our mission:

To provide an empowering alternative to guardianship that respects the rights and abilities of individuals with disabilities to make their own decisions.

Supported Decision Making is a powerful approach that puts individuals with disabilities in control of their lives. It recognizes that while someone might need help understanding options or communicating decisions, they still have the right and ability to be the final decision maker in their life. This approach is crucial because it promotes independence, fosters self-determination, and ultimately leads to happier, healthier, and more satisfied lives.

We're committed to providing Pennsylvanians with the insights and tools needed to make informed choices. From healthcare and education to community planning, our resources aim to simplify complex decisions. SDMPA serves transition-age youth with disabilities and their families throughout Pennsylvania, but our reach extends beyond.

At the heart of our initiative is SDMPA.org, a comprehensive, self-guided resource designed to empower individuals and their support networks. The website features four main toolkits, each tailored to a specific group: decision makers (individuals with disabilities), supporters (family and friends), school personnel, and service professionals. These toolkits include information, worksheets, and practical guides to help navigate the supported decision making process.



In addition to the toolkits, SDMPA.org offers a variety of other resources, including educational materials, frequently asked questions, and links to further support. Whether you're an individual looking to take charge of your decisions, a family member wanting to provide support, or a professional advocating for alternatives to guardianship, you'll find valuable information to guide you through the process.

Supported Decision Making is adaptable and customizable to individual needs. It's a flexible process that can be used throughout life, growing and changing as the person does. At SDMPA, we envision a world where people with disabilities reach their full potential of independence. We invite you to explore SDMPA.org and join us in making that vision a reality - because it's your life, and your choice.

To find our more information, please visit our website at: [SDMPA.org](https://sdmpa.org)



The Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL) recently hosted a Valentine's Day dance that brought together young adults from our S2L (School to Life) and Adaptations programs for an evening of fun, community, and celebration. The Disability community is built off that mutual love, care, and respect for one another – so what better day to celebrate that connection than Valentines Day.

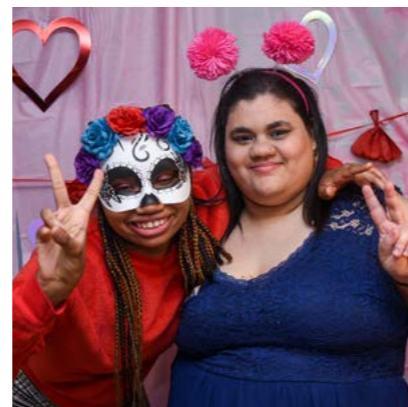
Valentine's Day the LVCIL Way

LVCIL's building was transformed for the night into the coolest place to be in Allentown: Valentine's Day decorations, lighting and music by DJ Damian Righi, and more food than you can imagine.

Despite it being a chilly February night, about 40 to 50 young adults braved the weather to get together and have an awesome night.

The dance floor was alive and filled with energy as our consumers let loose and started to party! And party they did! One of the awesome things about our young adult groups is their confidence in themselves, and their acceptance of one another.

Some chose to be right in the middle of the action – dancing and singing along with almost unending energy, while others were having just as much fun moving at their own pace a bit farther off or hanging out at their tables.



More than just a Party

Events like this Valentine's Day dance play a crucial role in the lives of young adults with disabilities. They provide opportunities for social interaction and community building, which have been particularly challenging in the wake of the pandemic. LVCIL recognizes the lasting impact of social isolation on our consumers and is committed to creating these joyful, inclusive spaces.



Fashion, Fun, and lots of Food



While the DJ kept the music coming, the event offered more than just dancing. An impromptu photo booth, complete with fun costume pieces, gave everyone the chance to capture memories of the night. And fashion wasn't the only good taste our consumers had, as the food they brought to the potluck was out of this world: Dishes from so many cultures and traditions– including a big heart shaped box of assorted chocolates donated by Josh Early Candies!

On to Future Festivities

LVCIL can't wait to host more events like this in the future, continuing to support our consumers in living independent, meaningful, and enjoyable lives. After all, at LVCIL, we believe independence includes both overcoming challenges and enjoying what life has to offer.

Our Valentine's Day dance was more than just a nice event - it was a celebration of advocacy, love for our community, and the simple joy of having fun together.





LVCIL Presents: The Large Flowerheads

The rain pattered against the windows of the Schnecksville Fire Department on the chilly evening of April 19th, 2024, but inside, it was anything but cold and dreary. A sold-out show brought in a crowd of 275 attendees for a night of good food, groovy music, and great advocacy. The Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL), with the help of generous donors, brought together the Large Flowerheads, Red Robin's foodtruck, and a load of awesome people for an unforgettable night of music, dancing, and community.



As the Red Robin Foodtruck served up delicious meals of burgers and fries, included with each ticket, the popular local 60's and 70's cover band, The Large Flowerheads, took the stage. Their medley of classic hits had the crowd on their feet, dancing and singing along. The dance floor was alive with people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities moving and grooving together.

During a break in the band's performance, two of LVCIL's consumers, Nick and Teresa, stepped into the spotlight to share their personal stories. They spoke of how LVCIL had helped them achieve greater independence, work towards their goals, and lead more fulfilling lives. Being able to put those we serve up front and center to tell their stories and communicate what they think is important was, and continues to be, the best way we can show what LVCIL has to offer.



As the night continued, the sense of community only grew stronger - the line between those there to support LVCIL and those diehard fans of the Flowerheads faded away. A group of parents took a moment talk with one of our staff, noting how good it was to see young people both with and without disabilities enjoying themselves as equals, saying:

“That’s the real meaning of inclusion in there.”



While there was no doubt to how good of a time everyone had, we are also happy to say what a success the event was on all accounts. Not only did it raise a substantial amount of funding for LVCIL's programs, but also effectively

spreading awareness about the organization's vital work. The outpouring of support from attendees, both those who benefit directly from LVCIL's services and those who believe in its mission, was a testament to the positive impact the organization has on the lives of individuals with disabilities throughout the Lehigh Valley.

By the end of the night - everyone was asking the same question: *“When doing this again next year?”* to find out that answer, stay tuned in on our social media, mailing lists, and newsletter!

We would like to give a special thanks to the events sponsors who made this evening possible: Mass Mutual Eastern Pennsylvania SpecialCare, Red Robins, and an anonymous donor.

Our Thanks to You

LVCIL would not be who we are without the support and kindness of our community

As a Non-Profit organization, LVCIL exists and sustains itself through various grants, awards, and donations from our community. To the many who have, and continue to, give their time, attention, and financial resources to our organization - we can't thank you enough.

Apollo Grill's Charity Bash

This past February of 2024, The Apollo Grill of Bethlehem PA had made the generous decision to celebrate their 25th anniversary by putting together a Charity Anniversary Bash. The celebration ended up raising 53,000 dollars - to which all of it was split among three local Non-Profit organizations, one of them being the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living!

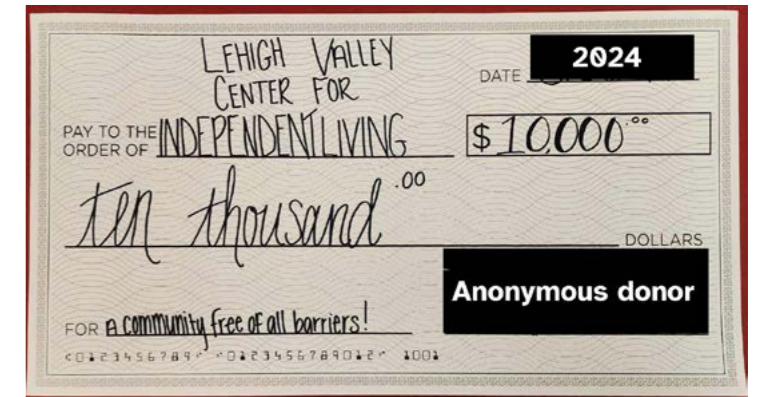
The portion graciously donated to us will go towards the life changing services LVCIL continues to provide to the disabled community of the Lehigh Valley and beyond. And that is all thanks to amazing community partners and supporters like the Apollo Grill!

Always great service, and doing great services for the community. So next time you are looking for a place to go for a great time, consider visiting the Apollo Grill!



A gift without a name: Our gratitude to all our anonymous donors

While we are always happy to recognize and give a shout out to those who take the time and effort to donate or contribute to LVCIL - there are times where some, for reasons all their own, don't wish to be named.



Recently this year, one such organization chose to do just that. Hosting a fundraiser in honor of the late Jeffrey L. Drobil, LVCIL's previous board president, the anonymous group raised a significant amount of funding to help the CIL achieve its goals. We were thrilled when they told us of the night's achievement, presenting to us the customary giant check - reading 10,000\$. But what we couldn't have predicted was them informing us that that was not all. After the initial check had been written - even more generous people had come forward to donate, bringing their total gift to almost 18,000\$. We are truly honored and humbled when these things happen - and again, can not express our gratitude to all involved. The money, as always, will go to great use in funding our programs, services, and projects.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Community



At LVCIL, our work is made possible by the generosity of you, members of our community. While we're immensely grateful for major events and large donations, we want to celebrate every act of kindness, no matter the size.

Whether you've contributed financially, volunteered your time, donated equipment like wheelchairs or canes, or provided other supplies, your support directly improves the lives of our consumers. What might seem like a small gesture to you can be life-changing for someone else.

These acts of kindness, big and small, are the foundation of what we do at LVCIL. They remind us that our mission of fostering independent living is a shared one. To everyone who has supported LVCIL in any way: thank you. You are the heart of our organization, and the reason we can continue to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities in our community.

Tails from the Community

How small things can make a big impact in the lives of our community members

When people think about LVCIL's work, they often focus on major life events: finding housing, securing employment and advocacy. While these are crucial, sometimes it's the small things that can make the biggest difference in someone's life. Sally's story is a perfect example of this.

Sally, a long-time LVCIL consumer who is blind, once shared her home with a loving family: her husband Jack, his service dog Jake, and two beloved cats. After Jack's passing and the subsequent loss of her feline companions one by one, Sally confided in us how it felt like there was a void in her life now without them.



Pictured above: Sally with her fuzzy companions: Precious Baby, her new robotic cat, and Jake the Dog. Or as LVCIL's Debbie Rozear calls them, "PB and J".

While Jake stayed a faithful friend at her side, anyone who has owned cats understands the special place these furry creatures occupy in our hearts - and laps. Sally missed that familiar feeling of a warm cat curled up, purring happily. When LVCIL learned of her situation, we had an unexpected solution.

Thanks to a donation, we had a robotic cat designed for people like Sally who desire the comfort of a feline companion but, for various reasons, couldn't have a living one. We delivered this robotic companion to Sally, hoping it would bring some comfort.

Sally was delighted. She soon named her cat "Precious Baby," since that's what it was to her. It fit perfectly in her lap, purrs, meows, but never needs a litter box or a vet appointment - "It's all the pleasures without the responsibilities."

Through generous donations of all kinds, like Sally's new robo-kitty, LVCIL is always thrilled to be able to support our consumers. Sometimes, it's these seemingly small gestures that can bring the most joy and comfort to someone's life.

At LVCIL, we're committed to addressing all aspects of independent living - from the major milestones to the little things that make life a bit warmer and fuller.

Interested in being a part of LVCIL?

Check out our job postings for current positions, or visit our website to learn more about volunteer opportunities with us!

Volunteer

Volunteers are essential to any non-profit organization, including LVCIL! Our volunteers complete endless tasks that contribute to our success as an agency. They also help make our CIL a great place for people with disabilities. Volunteers are always welcome, and everything our volunteers do is much appreciated.

Please visit our website at: <https://lvcil.org/volunteer/> or scan the QR code below to find out more.

