



CFI

CENTERS FOR
INDEPENDENCE

2022



Annual Report

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CFI
CENTERS FOR
INDEPENDENCE

Our Board of Directors

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- Robin Reese, Vice Chair
- Heidi Chada, CFI President & CEO
- Steven M. DeVougas, Secretary, VP of Legal & Compliance

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- | | |
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From Our CEO



Dear Friends,

2025 was a year of growth, reflection and deep connection at Centers of Independence (CFI). As our clients' needs continue to evolve, we've taken important steps to evolve with them.

This evolution includes updating our mission, vision and values—a process that helped us reconnect with who we are today and who we're becoming. Our new values: **Collaboration, Community, Equity, Excellence and Innovation**, guide us in a way that is true to our roots and aligned with the future we're building. (See more on page 5.)

We took action to further strengthen and safeguard crucial services for the people we serve. We launched phase one of our three-year strategic plan by making vital investments in our

people, programs and infrastructure. A stronger foundation allows us to deepen our community engagement and further our impact. These investments are already taking shape through expanded services, which enhance our continuum of care and unique service delivery model.

The year brought challenges as well. Reduced support for underserved communities, funding cuts and the suspension of SNAP benefits during the government shutdown created real strain for many of the people we serve. We responded as we always do: We continued to put people first and provide expert guidance, support and connection. These moments tested us and are reminders why our work matters so deeply.

As we have for nearly 90 years, we serve our community centered on our values, with resilience and heart, and while holding ourselves to the highest standards of excellence. With your continued support, we're ready to take bold next steps for the 25,000+ people who depend on CFI. The future is bright, and I'm grateful to lead CFI into this next chapter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Heidi Chada".

Heidi Chada

President & CEO
Centers for Independence

About CFI

Health. Hope. Inclusion.

For 87 years, **Centers for Independence** has been a lifeline for individuals and families navigating disabilities, behavioral health needs and life's most complex challenges. We believe that all people deserve the chance to live healthy, hopeful and inclusive lives.

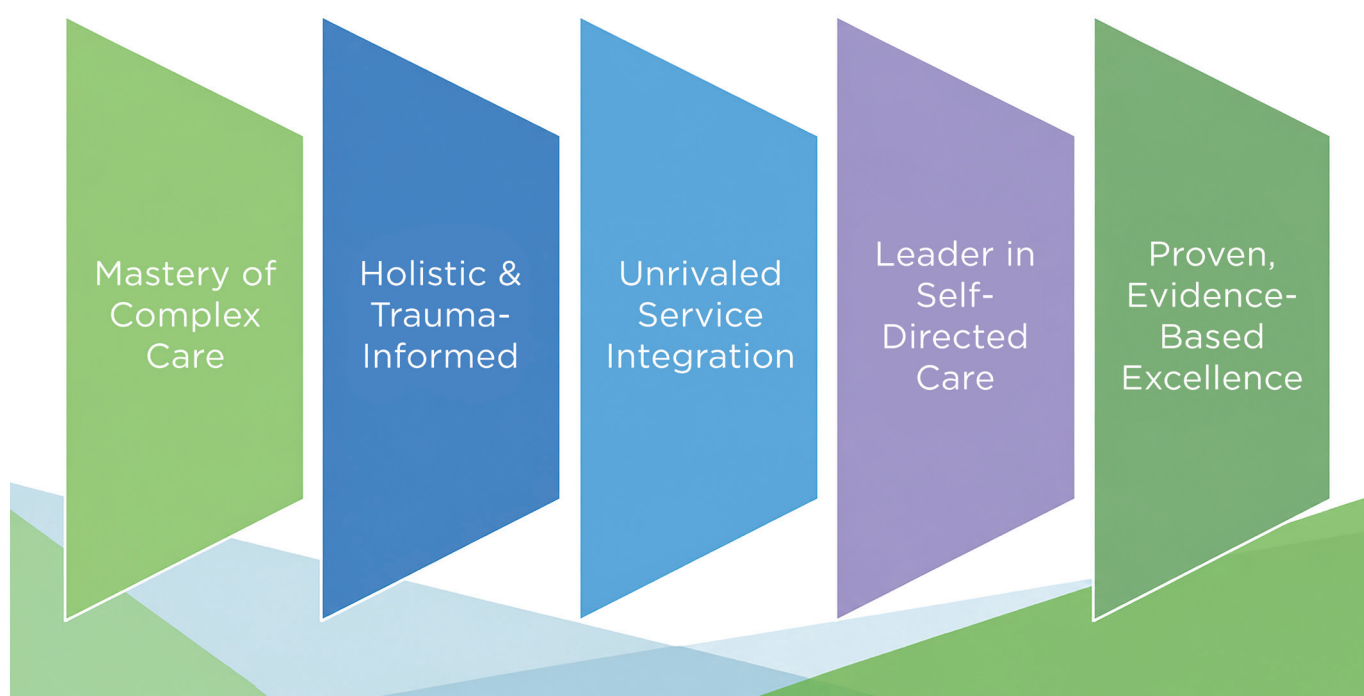
Through the years, we've built a model of self-directed, long-term care that empowers individuals to shape their own futures—a fundamental human right. To put it simply, few nonprofits have the breadth of services needed to serve people with such diverse and complex needs.

Our origin story began humbly in 1938 as refugees fleeing Europe arrived in Milwaukee. The new immigrants brought with them determination and hope; however, they lacked basic needs such as housing, education and jobs. They also needed care and support to work through unspeakable traumas experienced from WWII and displacement.

Jewish Vocational Services, precursor to Milwaukee Center for Independence, now CFI, was founded to address these complex needs. The agency has evolved through the years, expanding to provide support and advocacy for people with disabilities, behavioral health and crisis services for adults, programs for children's health and well-being, and services to assess needs and coordinate benefits and care.

Our mission is powered not only by our dedicated team, but by the partnership of people who share our belief that a stronger community begins with opportunity for all.

The CFI Difference: Why We Succeed



Built to Serve: Our Mission, Vision & Values

For nearly 90 years, CFI has evolved alongside the communities we serve—adapting our programs, expanding our reach and strengthening our role as a trusted partner in health and human services. Always forward-looking, we refined the mission, vision and core values that guide our work.

These changes reflect both who we are and who we strive to be: an organization that works across the continuum of care, listens deeply to lived experience, and leads with integrity, creativity and purpose.

Vision: We envision healthy, hopeful and inclusive communities where all people with disabilities and behavioral health needs thrive.

Mission: We support and advocate for people with disabilities and behavioral health needs.

Our new core values **Collaboration, Community, Equity, Excellence and Innovation** underscore our commitment and ground our efforts to advance total health in Milwaukee and beyond. They ensure that every decision, partnership and investment moves us closer to a more equitable and thriving future for all.

Core Values How We Show Up

Collaboration

We are a resource for individuals, families and communities in the continuum of care, and fervently collaborate with other like-minded institutions. We leverage partnerships, research and data to influence and advocate for policies that provide those we serve equal opportunities for achieving total health.

Community

While we are an organization with a focus across local, regional, state and national levels, we are rooted in and deeply committed to improving outcomes in Milwaukee. We seek and prioritize input from individuals with lived experience to reimagine our approach.

Equity

We respect, value and are committed to all people and their experience of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We align all our practices, actions and decisions accordingly.

Excellence

We do whatever it takes to help the people we serve, their families and our employees achieve success and well-being, holding ourselves to the highest ethical and professional standards. We are committed to building a service-focused infrastructure and ensuring a strong financial position.

Innovation

We are creative, open to new ideas and drive transformative innovation. We are committed to being a leader in health equity for the populations we serve.

Our Continuum of Care Serves the Most Critical Behavioral Health Needs

As one of the largest mental health care providers in southeast Wisconsin, CFI's behavioral health services operate within a comprehensive continuum of care—an integrated network of prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis response and long-term recovery supports. This approach ensures that individuals and families can get the care and guidance that best matches their needs.

This coordinated approach removes barriers, strengthens outcomes and helps people remain connected to support throughout their care journey. For the people we serve, it means convenient, client-centered care and better long-term outcomes.

CFI's continuum of care ensures that you have...

- **no wrong door to get support.** Wherever you enter the system, we'll offer guidance to the level of help that fits your unique situation.
- **someone to guide you.** It can feel overwhelming to navigate various resources and health systems. Our experts walk with you every step of the way, including coordinating with partner agencies to ensure smooth transitions and continuous support.
- **care that adjusts with you over time.** From early prevention and screening, to outpatient therapy, to crisis support, to long-term recovery services, we are here for you as your needs evolve and change.
- **control of your care.** With CFI, you self-direct care tailored to your specific needs. You're in the driver's seat; we'll help you navigate.

The continuum of care reflects our commitment to meeting people where they are and walking alongside them as their needs evolve. In 2025, we rose to meet community need by adding autism screening and diagnosis, and re-opening our Crisis Resource Center-North located on the north side of Milwaukee.



Next Step Clinic: Helping Families Navigate Autism

Autism impacts 1 in 36 children, and many families in Milwaukee have difficulty accessing critical services. Most area autism clinics have a waitlist of 6 months to 2 years, which is why in April of 2025, CFI began offering autism screening, diagnosis and family navigation services at our Next Step Clinic.

Our family navigators help parents who have concerns about their children's mental and developmental health. They conduct screenings and develop family care plans to assess needs and potential barriers to care. They are committed advocates who assist families navigating Milwaukee's complex mental and developmental health service systems.

Additionally, the clinic offers screening, evaluation and the medical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) for children—one of few clinics in Milwaukee that diagnose autism without needing to be the family's therapy provider. The clinic offers in-person and telehealth appointments and aims to make services accessible for all.

Next Step Clinic also improves the autism workforce through a graduate-level practicum and community trainings, ensuring future mental health professionals (clinical and school psychology, social work), nurses, and medical providers can offer autism services. The practicum is offered through Next Step's community-centered, community-academic partnership with Marquette University and UW-Milwaukee.

Who We Serve

Next Step Clinic serves families with children ages 15 months to 10 years with a focus on early identification and intervention, as well as removing barriers to care. The goal is to make services accessible to all, including families who rely on public assistance.



Reopening a Behavioral Health Lifeline in Milwaukee

The pandemic reshaped Milwaukee's mental health landscape in deep and lasting ways. Illness, isolation and uncertainty created widespread stress and fear, intensifying existing mental health challenges and making it increasingly challenging to provide services safely. Staffing shortages and distancing requirements forced us to close one of our Crisis Resource Centers (CRC-North)—a loss felt across the community.

As we've moved forward, we've worked to rebuild capacity and respond to the long-term effects of the pandemic with greater coordination and flexibility. The need for immediate, compassionate crisis support has only grown.

In early 2025, we reopened CRC-North on Milwaukee's north side. Within 24 hours, someone walked in seeking help—a clear sign of how essential this emergency mental health resource is. Since then, CRC-North has remained steadily busy, offering stabilization, support and connection to ongoing care for people in crisis.

Reopening CRC-North reflects CFI's resilience, bolsters our continuum of care and underscores our commitment to ensuring that Milwaukee residents have access to urgent mental health care when they need it most.

Why CFI's Model Matters for Milwaukee

CFI is built to meet people where they are and connect them to the care they need without barriers, delays or dead ends. Our Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model ensures broad access, 24/7 crisis response, strong care coordination and a commitment to serving anyone who walks through our doors.

Paired with our full continuum of care, this model allows us to support individuals and families through every stage of their behavioral health journey. From autism screening and diagnosis, to outpatient therapy, to crisis stabilization, to long-term recovery support, our services work together as one connected system.

This approach positions CFI as a leader in Milwaukee's behavioral health landscape. We are responsive, comprehensive and equipped to meet the community's evolving needs with compassion and expertise.

About CFI's Crisis Resource Centers

Our Crisis Resource Centers (CRCs) are a vital part of the communities they serve. They are safe, welcoming places where people can turn in moments of mental health or substance-use crisis, as well as important community hubs where people call or stop by to connect and take part in supportive groups. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, CRCs are more than an alternative to the emergency room or inpatient hospitalization—they provide assessment, stabilization, peer support and pathways to ongoing care for roughly 400 people each year.

Locations

CRC - North

**5409 W. Villard Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53218
414-539-4024**

CRC - South

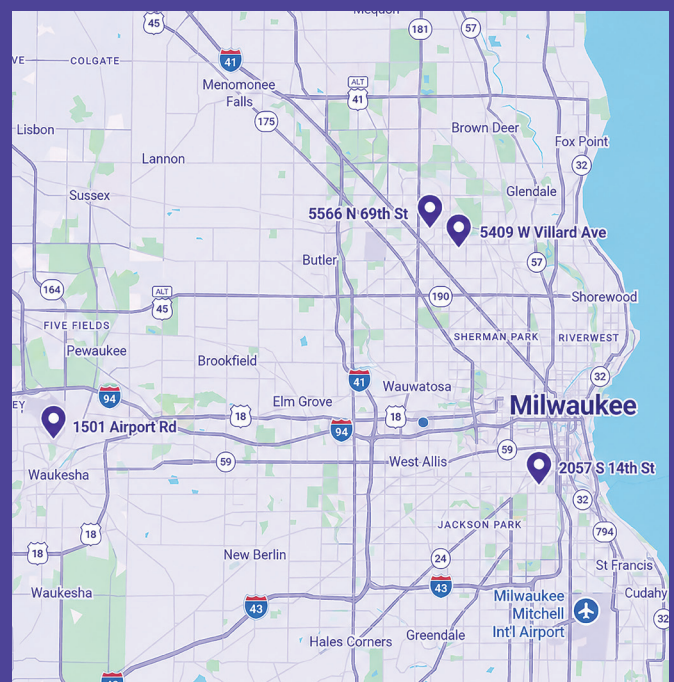
**2057 S. 14th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53204
414-643-8778**

CRC - West

**5566 N. 69th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53218
414-290-9730**

CRC - Waukesha County

**1501 Airport Road
Waukesha, WI 53188
262-896-8589**



Where Good Food Meets Good Work Rising to Serve Hungry Kids

Summer vacation is a welcome break for many school children, but for too many, it's a time when they go hungry. An estimated 1 in 4 kids experience food insecurity in our community—a problem that gets worse when school breakfast and lunch programs pause for the summer.

For over 25 years, CFI has helped close this gap by proudly sponsoring the region's Summer Meals Program, which provides free meals to children during the summer months. In partnership with Hunger Task Force and other community organizations, meals are served in parks, recreation centers and other neighborhood sites from June through August, meeting the kids where they are. What began as a small effort reaching a few hundred children at 10 sites has grown into a critical regional resource.

In 2025, CFI served more than 163,000 meals at over 100 sites across southeast Wisconsin, including expanded service to Racine County.

Beyond Summer Meals, CFI's Food & Nutrition Services support children's health, learning and community connection by providing safe, nutritious meals to kids in 120+ K-12 education and community settings. We specialize in feeding kids who live in food deserts (i.e., areas with limited access to affordable nutritious food). The meals we serve are funded through the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the National School Lunch Program, which focus on feeding children in underserved communities who are at risk for obesity, chronic disease and cognitive, behavioral and emotional challenges.

CFI also provides specialized training for school food and nutrition service teams, along with nutrition and wellness education that supports lifelong healthy habits. As the prevalence and impact of food deserts continue to grow, CFI will continue to step in to support the region's children—one meal at a time.



To celebrate the end of the season, we came together with Hunger Task Force, Sargento and the Milwaukee Brewers at the Summer Sizzle, where kids enjoyed a free meal, games, face painting and even went home with new baseball gloves. CFI's Food & Nutrition Services team served lunches and samples of jicama and mango. For many children, these were new flavors, and many said they tasted better with a sprinkle of Tajin. (See photos above.)

Workplace, Workforce & Community Impact

Building a strong culture of inclusion and belonging is no accident. In 2025, we provided numerous opportunities for team members to connect and deepen their understanding and appreciation for each other, our clients and the incredible work we do. The activities below provide a glimpse into many of the ways we enriched our workforce and workplace.

- Monthly team member spotlights to celebrate staff who provide exceptional service, live our values and represent distinct perspectives
- Employee resource groups (open to all team members)
- Pop-up food pantry for clients and staff during government shutdown and SNAP FoodShare benefits delay
- Monthly features highlighting our programs, departments and initiatives
- *Meet the Experts* panel discussion for Mental Health Awareness Month
- Wellness incentives and programming for body, mind and spirit
- Leadership development workshop on neurodiversity, communication and creating environments where all team members can succeed
- Quarterly *What's Going On?* critical conversations about stress, burnout, work-life balance and belonging
- Annual ethics, compliance and cultural competence training
- Employee Appreciation Day

The majority of our work happens in the community — outside the walls of our buildings. 2025 was a year of true connection where we partnered with others, took part in public events and leveraged community platforms to share information, build trust and support health and well-being.

- Convened a Community Health Care and Social Service Provider Summit
- WNOV Community Voice and public service announcements centered on behavioral health and crisis services
- Philippine Cultural, Civic Center Foundation and the Philippine Nurses Association of Wisconsin Health Fair
- MKE5K Men's Wellness Run
- Milwaukee's Juneteenth celebration



With Gratitude

We extend our sincerest appreciation to the following foundations and grant partners their generous support in 2025. Their investment in our infrastructure and programs has been instrumental in the continued success of our mission. We are honored by their trust and their commitment to institutional excellence.

Anonymous

Burton & Audrey Strnad Donor Advised Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation

Catherine and Walter Lindsay Foundation*

Clare M. Peters Charitable Trust

F. Thomas Ament Fund*

Gene and Ruth Posner Foundation

General Mills Foundation

Greater Milwaukee Foundation

Johnson Financial Group

Keith and Dee Miller Designated Fund*

Kelben Foundation

Kopmeier Family Fund*

Lawlis Family Fund*

Northwestern Mutual Foundation

Otto Bremer Trust Community Responsive Fund*

Samuel K. & Doris Hersh Chortek Fund*

Usinger Foundation

Waukesha State Bank

We Energies Foundation

Wispact Foundation

Zilber Family Foundation

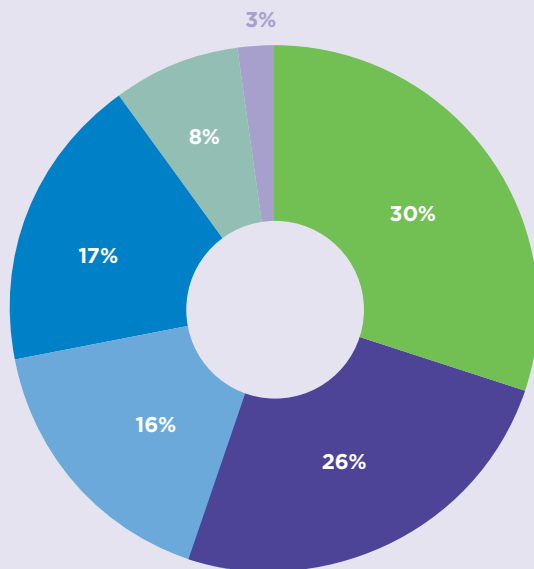


In addition to our institutional grantors, we wish to thank the private businesses, workplace giving partners and individual donors who contributed this year.

Whether through a corporate sponsorship, a payroll deduction or a personal gift, your collective generosity ensures our daily operations remain strong. You are the heartbeat of our community support, and we simply could not do this work without you.

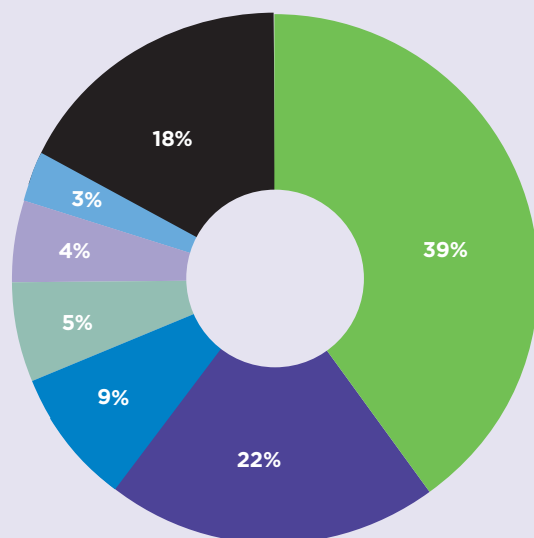
* Fund administered through the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

Financials



REVENUES

- GOVERNMENT FEE FOR SERVICES
- GOVERNMENT GRANTS
- INVESTMENT INCOME
- PRIVATE PAY
- PRIVATE INSURANCE
- MISCELLANEOUS



EXPENSES

- BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
- COMMERCIAL & EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
- FIRST PERSON CARE CONSULTANTS
- HOME CARE
- iLIFE
- LIFE SERVICES
- OTHER

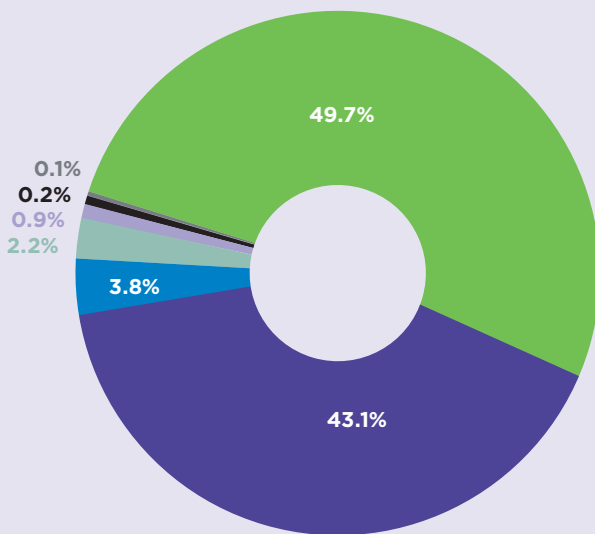


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By The Numbers

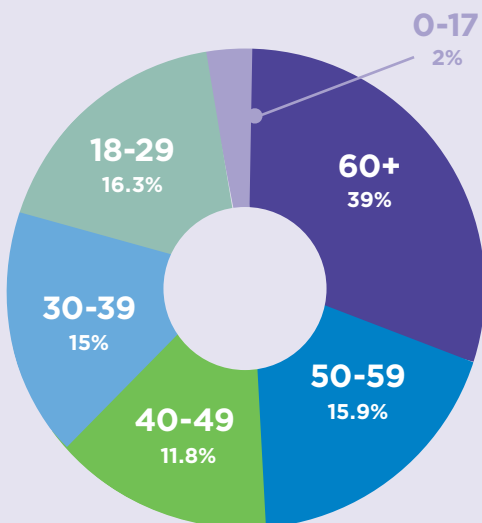
Client Demographics



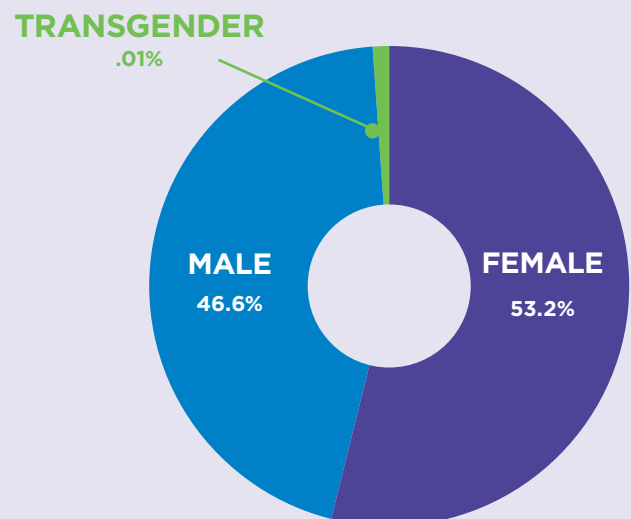
CFI CLIENT RACE/ETHNICITY

- WHITE
- BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN
- ASIAN
- HISPANIC OR LATINO
- NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER
- AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE
- MORE THAN ONE RACE

CFI CLIENT AGE



CFI CLIENT GENDER



What Our Clients Say



93%

The care I received improved my life

92%

I would refer a friend if they need help

93%

I trust CFI staff to help me

95%

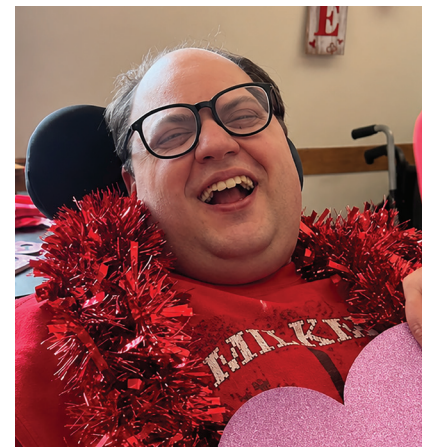
Staff respects me for who I am

95%

I have a say in my care or service

Join Our Mission

Our client satisfaction scores are testament to the deep and lasting impact of our work to strengthen and empower the people who rely on our critical services. **Find your fit at CFI.**



Feeling inspired?
Scan the code.



Centers for Independence Main Campus

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-  (414) 937-2020

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