

Influential Women Spotlights Courtney Vargas: Advancing Independent Living For Adults With Intellectual Disabilities

SANTA ROSA, CA, UNITED STATES, July 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Founder Leverages Lived Experience, Professional Expertise, and Compassionate Leadership to Build Person-Centered Support Systems

Courtney Vargas, Founder and Director of Empower Independent Living Services, is redefining what independent living support looks like for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Through her organization, Vargas provides individualized, skills-based services designed to help clients build confidence, increase autonomy, and actively participate in their communities.



Empower Independent Living Services was established following her four years of experience working within a similar service organization that ultimately closed. Determined to continue serving individuals who rely on structured daily living support, she successfully navigated the rigorous year-long Regional Center vending process and began serving her first client in January of the following year. What began as a solo initiative has since grown into a developing organization, marked by her recent expansion efforts and the hiring of her first employee.

At the core of Empower Independent Living Services is a comprehensive Independent Living Services (ILS) model that emphasizes practical, hands-on skill development. Courtney works directly with clients to strengthen essential life skills such as cooking, cleaning, meal planning, organizing, and maintaining daily routines. In addition to daily living support, she assists individuals in navigating complex systems, including Social Security processes, housing applications such as Section 8, and accessing local community resources. Her services also focus

on reducing isolation by encouraging social engagement and helping clients build meaningful connections.

A skilled communicator proficient in American Sign Language (ASL), she brings a diverse professional background that includes education management, administrative support, customer service, clerical operations, and accounting. This combination of technical ability and interpersonal skill allows her to deliver highly personalized, goal-oriented support tailored to each client's unique abilities and needs. Her approach is rooted in empowerment rather than dependency, ensuring that individuals are not only supported but actively taught the skills necessary to make independent decisions.

Before founding Empower, Courtney gained experience across multiple fields that shaped her client-centered philosophy. After earning a Bachelor's degree in Business Finance from Southern New Hampshire University, along with an Associate of Arts degree in Psychology and Humanities from Santa Rosa Junior College, she initially pursued bookkeeping. While the role provided valuable professional experience, she ultimately realized it did not align with her personal values or long-term goals. This realization became a pivotal moment in her career, reinforcing the importance of self-awareness and purpose-driven work.

She later served as a behavioral aide supporting children with autism, a position she describes as deeply meaningful. Although the role was part-time and financially unsustainable, the experience strengthened her passion for direct support services and significantly influenced her future direction. Today, those experiences inform her leadership style and deepen her understanding of the individuals she serves.

Courtney's journey is also shaped by her personal experience living with spinal muscular atrophy type 3, diagnosed in adulthood. This life change further strengthened her empathy and commitment to disability advocacy and support services. During this period, she sought connection and community through digital platforms, including creating a YouTube channel focused on muscle disease and fitness, as well as engaging in online support communities. These experiences reinforced her belief in the importance of reducing isolation and fostering belonging for individuals facing physical and developmental challenges.

Beyond her direct service work, she is a contributing author to Built With Purpose, where she shares insights on purpose-driven entrepreneurship and meaningful service. She also develops educational resources that promote independent living and personal growth, including practical worksheets available through her Teachers Pay Teachers store. Through her writing, educational materials, and advocacy, Courtney encourages authenticity in career development, emphasizing that lasting fulfillment comes from aligning one's work with personal values rather than conforming to conventional expectations.

Looking ahead, Courtney plans to expand Empower Independent Living Services over the next three to five years, with long-term aspirations of developing a nonprofit organization to address

gaps in community-based disability support. Her vision includes expanding her team, broadening service capacity, and increasing access to individualized independent living support.

“At the heart of this work is dignity, choice, and empowerment.” Her philosophy is reflected in her organization’s mission. “Every individual deserves the opportunity to build a life defined by their own goals, not limitations.”

Through her leadership, lived experience, and commitment to service, Courtney Vargas continues to build a growing organization centered on inclusion, independence, and meaningful personal growth for the individuals she supports.

Learn More about Courtney Vargas:

Through her Influential Women profile, <https://influentialwomen.com/connect/courtney-vargas> or through Empower ILS, <https://www.empowerils.com/>

[Youtube.com/CourtneyFrazer](https://www.youtube.com/CourtneyFrazer)

Teachers Pay Teachers: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Healthy-Boundaries-Life-Skills-Worksheet-for-Teens-and-Adults-16694386>

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