

Cynde Soto is a native Californian born with Arthrogryposis, a connective tissue disorder that significantly limits her physical movement. Then 17 years ago she sustained a traumatic spinal cord injury which has left her completely paralyzed below her shoulders. After graduating from California State University, Long Beach with a BFA in Art, she became an employee of the Independent Living Center in Long Beach. She also began to volunteer time with Long Beach Transit on their Accessibility Advisory Committee and participated in sensitivity training for bus operators.

Currently, she works as our Systems Change Coordinator. Cynde states, "My job enables me to work for positive policy change concerning people with disabilities. It is important to increase civic participation through community organizing, education and advocacy around issues that affect our daily lives. Leadership development is also a crucial element of Systems Change by working with consumers of our Center."

Cynde's two primary advocacy interests are the accessibility of public transportation and homecare. Consequently, she has served on several councils for LA Metro and has worked with Long Beach Transit on accessibility issues. Currently, Cynde is Board Chair of the Personal Assistance Services Council (PASC) for LA County.

Before becoming paralyzed one of her many interests included producing artwork made of "found objects". Found object art has a long history in the fine arts world. I've been asked "why collect broken junk?" Well, I can relate to these broken and discarded objects as a person with a disability. Someone has decided that the objects I find are no longer useful because they don't look or function like they used to or should. I, on the other hand, can see their innate beauty and usefulness. Much of society has decided that people with disabilities are dispensable and useless, so I feel compelled, driven even to collect broken and discarded objects to organize them into beautiful and much useful artwork.