

INDEPENDENT LIVING

“People with disabilities have been a hidden, misunderstood minority, often routinely deprived of the basic life choices that event he most disadvantaged take for granted. In the last twenty to thirty years, little noticed alongside the struggles of African-Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and other minorities, another movement has slowly taken shape to demand for disabled people the fundamental rights that have already been granted to all other Americans”.

This passage is from No Pity, by Joseph Shapiro, which chronicles the history of the Disability Rights movement in the United States. It is a movement that developed in the early 1970’s when people with disabilities began questioning their status as second class citizens. A group of twelve severely disabled students at the Berkeley campus of the University of California felt that “the system” only offered rehabilitation, but what they needed and wanted was adequate and accessible housing, transportation, and attendant care services in order to be able to live in the community. This group, calling themselves The Rolling Quads, and led by Ed Roberts (considered the Father of the IL movement), watched and learned from the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights movements, the Free Speech movement and the anti-Vietnam War protesters. They questioned the medicalization of their lives, and instead pioneered a self-help model program for student and other people with disabilities in the Berkeley community that would redefine the notion of independence and lay the foundation for the Independent Living movement and the development of centers for independent living.

What is Independent Living?

Independent living is about being able to exercise control over one’s life. It is based on a philosophy that says:

- people with disabilities, better than anyone else, know what they want, and what services are needed to achieve their goals;
- that the problem does not lie within the individual with a disability, but rather in the community, with its attitudinal and architectural barriers;
- that with adequate services and supports, a person with a disability can participate fully in all aspect of community life; and,
- that these services and supports should be in the community where the individual resides or wishes, and not only in large cities or institutions.

As a service delivery system, independent living programs embody consumer direction, advocacy, peer support, and the removal of both physical and attitudinal barriers as the means to integration. This contrasts directly to the traditional medical model service delivery system which defines the person’s disability as a problem to be fixed, and measures independence by tasks that can be performed unassisted rather than by the quality of that person’s life with help and support. Independent living services are those which promote the activities of everyday life:

eating, dressing, personal hygiene, shopping, homemaking, participating in community events and recreational/social activities, housing assistance, and financial management.

What are Independent Living Centers?

Since the late 1970's, the federal government has been funding independent living centers (ILC's) in the United States, modeled after the first center at Berkeley. An ILC must be:

- consumer-controlled-directed, managed, and staffed predominately by people with disabilities;
- community-based-located within the community in which the consumers of its services reside; and
- community-responsive-designed to address the disability-related needs of the community, and identifying service gaps and barriers which limit the independence of people with disabilities within their community.

An ILC is non-residential; rather, it provides a locus of activity from which to promote the independent living philosophy. There are four core services provided by an ILC:

1. Peer support - peer counselors provide support to consumers by drawing on their own life experience with disability and negotiating the system.
2. Information and referral - assists individual in identifying and accessing services and supports, benefits, assistive technology, housing, personal assistance services, or any other resources to enhance independent living.
3. Individual and systems advocacy - assisting consumers to secure the supports and services needed to maximize their independence. Advocacy on a systems level challenges the barriers which can stigmatize and exclude people with disabilities from full community participation.
4. Independent living skills training - training in activities of daily living and the skills needed to make community living as full and rich as possible. Examples of skills training are management and recruitment of PCA's, financial management, utilizing community resources, locating housing, consumer rights and responsibilities.

Connecticut has five ILC's providing independent living services and assistance:

The Disability Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC)

107 Route 32

North Franklin, CT 06254

Tel: (860) 823-1898 V/ TDD/Fax: (860) 886-2316

dnec@snet.net <http://www.tiac.net/users/richer/dnec.html>

Independence Unlimited (IU)

151 New Park Ave., Suite D

Hartford, CT 06106

Tel: (860) 523-5021 V: (860) 529-0436 TDD/ Fax: (860) 523-5603

indunl@aol.com

The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County (DRCFC)

80 Ferry Blvd.

Stratford, CT 06615

Tel: (203) 378-6977 V: (203) 375-3248 TTY/TDD: (203) 378-3248

Fax: (203) 375-2748

drcfc@drcfc.org

<http://www.drcfc.org>

Independent Northwest (IN)

Route 63 Professional Center

1183 New Haven Road - Suite 200

Naugatuck, CT 06770

Tel: (203) 729-3299 V: (203) 729-1281 TDD/Fax: (203) 729-2839

indvw@aol.com

<http://members.aol.com/indnw>

Greater New Haven Disabilities Rights Advocates/Center for Independence and Access

One Long Wharf, Suite 225

New Haven, CT 06511

Tel and V: (203) 562-3924 TDD: (203) 624-5320 Fax: (203) 934-7078

gnhdracial@aol.com

Connecticut's ILC's are cross-disability. They provide a single point of access to services for all people regardless of the nature or type of disability.

Complied with assistance from:

- The Research and Training Center for Accessible Housing at North Carolina State University School of Design.
- Home Modifications - Resource manual by Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
- A Blueprint for Action: A resource for promoting home modifications. Developed by the National Home Modifications Action Council.
- A Consumer's Guide to Home Adaptation. The Adaptive Environments Center, Boston, MA.
- Opening Doors - A Housing Publication for the disability community.