

INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS AT A GLANCE

A Fact Sheet From the National Council of Independent Living

What are Independent Living Centers?

Independent Living Centers (ILCs) help people with disabilities achieve or maintain more self-sufficient and productive lives in their communities. People with disabilities are assisted in exploring alternatives to institutionalization and are encouraged to make their own decisions about how they will live. ILCs directly provide or coordinate through referral those services which assist people in increasing their abilities to exercise control over their lives. Control over one's life means having a choice of acceptable options that minimize reliance on others in making decisions and performing every day activities. This includes managing one's own affairs, participating in day-to-day community life and fulfilling a range of social roles.

How are ILCs Unique?

Within the Independent Living Movement, there is a strong belief that peer-conducted services are essential to assisting a person with a disability. Therefore, in ILCs, 51% or more of the staff and Board of Directors are people with disabilities who have personally experienced attitudinal, physical and communication barriers. Their experiences have resulted in unique commitments to assist others with disabilities achieve lives of dignity. Staff serve as role models, demonstrating that it is both possible and desirable for people with disabilities to be productive and independent. The understanding, guidance and support provided through ILCs give others the confidence to take the first steps toward their own independence.

ILCs provide community advocacy as well as direct services to individuals with disabilities. ILCs advocate for the improvement of the quality of life for all people with disabilities, seeking to eliminate society's attitudinal, environmental, social, psychological and economic barriers to equal opportunities. Responsible, self-reliant and productive people with disabilities can provide the best public relations and most effective advice for both individual service and community change.

Unlike many agencies which only serve people with a specific disability, ILCs offer a broad range of community-based services for people with a variety of disabilities in all age groups. Whether one is very young or very old, services are available throughout the life of a person with a disability. ILCs are also unique in that ILCs do not restrict or limit services to vocational or job-related goals.

The language used within the Independent Living Movement is also unique. It is a language in which expressions like "crippled," "patient," "wheelchair-bound," and "confined to a wheelchair" are actively discouraged. It is only from the perspective of a person without a disability that equipment such as a wheelchair is actually a confinement or that a disability is seen before the person is seen.

Why were ILCs Created?

Before ILCs, services for people with disabilities were often non-existent or extremely fragmented. Many individuals were denied opportunities that would allow them to maximize their potentials. They were often forced into costly institutions. People were literally being warehoused, wasting enormous human resources at a huge expense to the taxpayer.

The development and growth of ILCs and the Independent Living Movement has been significantly influenced by a social and civil rights movement that viewed the continuation of discriminatory, patronizing and unjust treatment of people with disabilities as intolerable. This movement is not unlike the movement of other people seeking independence. It is a struggle by those of us with disabilities to control our own lives, to have equal access to the decision-making process in our communities, states and nation, to be protected from discrimination under the law, and to be seen as equals and fully human by society.

What Services do ILCs Offer?

Assistance can range from a several minute phone call to a one-time only visit to several months and sometimes years of independent living skills training and counseling. Services typically offered by all ILCs include:

- Information and Referral (I&R)
- Assistance in Locating Accessible/Affordable Housing
- Personal Care Attendant Recruitment and Placement
- Individual, Systems and Civil Rights Advocacy
- Peer Counseling
- Independent Living Skills Training

Other services provided by an ILC might include:

- Career Development, Training and Placement
- Financial Benefits Counseling
- Legal Advocacy
- Wheelchair Accessible Van Transportation
- Wheelchair Repair
- Equipment Loan and Repair
- Specific services for specific disability groups, such as those with head injuries, hearing impairments, or visual disabilities
- Social and Recreational Activities
- Community Education, Consultation and Training

How are ILCs Funded?

Funding for ILCs comes from a variety of sources. One major source is federal funding under Title VII Part B of the Rehabilitation Act. Additional funds come from all levels of government, foundations, corporations, United Ways and private contributions. Some ILCs offer services at no cost while others collect fees, based upon a sliding scale, from consumers or from third party payers such as state agencies, private insurance companies or Medicaid/Medicare. People are not turned away because of an inability to pay.

FACTS ABOUT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT LIVING

What is the National Council of Independent Living?

The National Council of Independent Living (NCIL) is the nationwide voice and communication network for the Independent Living Movement and its supporters. NCIL promotes the growth and development of community-based, consumer-managed Independent Living Centers whose philosophy demands the integration of individuals with disabilities into all aspects of society.

What does NCIL do?

- provides technical assistance to new Independent Living Centers (ILCs) and its own members
- increases communication and cooperation among member ILCs
- networks and coordinates activities with other national disability organizations and groups
- develops public and private funding sources for member ILCs
- develops leadership potential of people with disabilities
- promotes public awareness of the needs and rights of all people with disabilities

What makes NCIL unique?

NCIL provides the link between ILCs throughout the nation. Its annually elected Governing Board is composed of leaders of the Independent Living Movement who are providing all of their volunteer efforts for NCIL in addition to full time jobs in their respective ILCs. At this time, NCIL has ~~two~~ paid staff of its own. Its voting membership is composed of representatives from ILCs from across the United States. NCIL is an advocate for people in the disability community by promoting the independent living philosophy with government, service agencies, institutions, and individuals who are disabled and non-disabled.

When was NCIL formed?

NCIL was formed in 1982 when a group of ILC directors saw a need to begin working together on regional and national levels. The organization officially incorporated in 1983.

Who are NCIL's members?

- voting members are Independent Living Centers meeting criteria established in NCIL's by-laws for active membership.
- associate members are organizations which support the independent living philosophy and annual goals of NCIL.
- individual members are people who are actively involved in or supportive of the disability rights movement and the role that ILCs play in that movement.

Need additional information about NCIL?

For more specific information about NCIL, write to: Ms. Marca Bristo, President, c/o Access Living, 815 W. Van Buren, Suite 525, Chicago, Illinois, 60607, 312/226-5900 (Voice) or 312/226-1687 (TTY/TDD).

How Can an ILC be Located?

There are now approximately 100 ILCs across the country, most of which are controlled by people with disabilities. The Independent Living Movement is still relatively young and thus ILCs are not listed under "Independent Living Centers" in local phone books. This sometimes makes locating one a real challenge as every ILC has its own name. In your local community, it may prove helpful to ask for assistance in locating an ILC from an information and referral service, a state agency which serves people with disabilities or a hospital with a rehabilitation department. A current computerized registry of all ILCs and similar programs is available for \$10 from: Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU), The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research, P. O. Box 20095, Houston, Texas, 77225. Make checks payable to ILRU.

What Impact Have ILCs Had?

The efficacy of the Independent Living Movement and its concepts are being proven daily by more and more people with severe disabilities as they choose to assume the responsibilities of directing their own lives and as they become active, contributing participants in the mainstream of their communities. As the Movement has gained momentum, the public is becoming more aware of the abilities of people with disabilities and more supportive of the services needed to maximize those abilities.

ILCs have kept thousands of people out of institutions and have changed the status of many people with disabilities from unemployed to employed. As long as ILCs exist, there will be a centralized catalyst acting to facilitate the movement of people with disabilities from institutions to living and functioning independently in the community.

For more information in the North Texas area contact:

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