



Best Practice Update

Independent Living Centers in North Dakota

This Update reviews the activities of the ND Independent Living Centers and highlights the Dakota Center for Independent Living in Bismarck, ND.

Transition

The independent living (IL) concept, model, and methodology were initially developed for persons with severe disabilities. The term independent living is one that emphasizes direct consumer control, choice and community based services. The purpose of independent living services is to eliminate barriers and provide assistance to individuals with disabilities so they can live and work more independently in their homes and communities. Services include: independent living skills training, identifying accessible housing, transportation assistance, social and recreational activities, community awareness and education, self and systems advocacy, peer counseling, information and referral, community education, technical assistance to businesses and local governments, and other services as appropriate.

The concept of independent living began during the 1960s when rehabilitation veered from changing the person with a disability to changing the person's environment. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 expanded services and in 1978, the National Council on Disability recommended policy changes to Congress. Independent living programs were created through Title VII in the 1978 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and federal funding for IL services materialized in 1986. The first services offered by IL programs were those that allowed people to live in community residences rather than institutions.

Putting the independent living concept into practice requires three ingredients: community option development, consumer services, and management. Community option development is achieved through public awareness, technical assistance, and advocacy at all levels. The byproducts are instruction and example to consumers who can go on to develop their own options. The second ingredient, consumer service, includes peer counseling, advocacy, information and referral, skills training, and general assistance.

Centers for independent living also provide services for particular consumer needs: housing assistance, transportation, personal care management; benefit acquisition; employment assistance. Lastly, CIL's typically hire staff with disabilities. Research shows that centers with substantial number of staff members with disabilities produced higher levels of consumer outcomes. Management also has a tendency to analyze its own services and the community environment for faults rather than a consumer who is not.

Centers for independent living are an existing network designed to help people with disabilities live more independently and contribute to their communities. These nonresidential, community-based programs emphasize consumer control, the use of peer role models, a cross-disability focus, and self advocacy to solve problems. Significant research on IL has been spearheaded by German DeJong, who in the late 1970's introduced the IL model (which works to change the environment and society attitudes) in comparison to the medical rehabilitation model (which tries to "fix" the individual).

In North Dakota, the existing independent living centers include:

Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc.
Fargo, North Dakota (1-800-450-0459)

Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living
East Grand Forks, Minnesota (1-800-726-3692)

Independence, Inc.
Minot, North Dakota (1-800-377-5114)

Dakota Center for Independent Living
Bismarck, North Dakota (1-800-489-5013)

Core Services of all Independent Living Centers

- **Information and Referral:** This services informs and guides individuals with disabilities to search out, identify, and make use of various resources, social services, local, state and federal programs that are of individual interest.
- **Peer Support:** Designed to promote positive coping skills not only in the person who just acquired a disability but in the peer supporter as well. Each person shares the impact of their disability and how they are adjusting and offer a training session that prepares people to become Peer Supporters.

- **Individual & Systems Advocacy:** Individual advocacy means working with people who have disabilities to support them and safeguard their civil rights. Systems advocacy deals with promoting change in local, state & federal legislation that directly affect the way people with disabilities live.
- **Independent Living Skills Training:** Daily living skills training is provided to teach people with disabilities the skills they will need to attain &/or maintain independent life styles.

The majority of funding for independent living centers is from the US Office of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Title VII. Additional funding is received from the ND Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation budget.

North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation has the charge to put in place a Governor appointed advisory committee, the IL Council, who has responsibility to assure active consumer input into the joint development of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's Independent Living Program in order to establish and expand Independent Living services that meet the needs of people with disabilities throughout North Dakota. The board membership of 16 must include 51 percent of disabled individuals or parents of the disabled. The IL Council meets four times a year to promote the IL philosophy, evaluate resources, prepare for legislation, and provide training and network on behalf of individuals with disabilities.

There is no fee for core services for consumers. Consumers can be any individual (usually not less than 16-17 years of age) with a disability needing services or support. The process for referral is by direct contact to the independent living center nearest the consumer. Critical services important for the transition process include 1) attending the IEP meeting to provide information and support, and 2) IL assessment and training

A goal of the IL Council is to create outreach offices in North Dakota. The plan is for Minot to expand to provide services to the Williston area, Grand Forks to expand to provide services to the Devils Lake area, Fargo to expand to provide services to the Jamestown area, and Bismarck to expand to provide services to the Dickinson area.

The Dakota Center for Independent Living
(Bismarck, North Dakota)

Mission Statement:

DCIL believes in self-determination for people with disabilities and creates the environment in which it is achieved.

DCIL not only provides the 4 core services identified above, but also a wide range of other services, some of which include:

- **Representative Payee Services:** This services is provided in collaboration with the Social Security Administration to assist people receiving SSI &/or SSDI to help manage their finances.

- **ADA Assessments**: DCIL provides accessibility & ADA assessments for businesses, schools, recreational sites and living quarters. Assessments are done to help provide greater independent mobility (independence) throughout the community and other aspects of life.
- **Partners in Policymaking**: This is an internationally known program that has successfully trained thousands of people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities to play a leadership role in policy development and advocating. Selected participants attend eight 2-day training sessions about today's disability issues.
- **Senior Companion Program**: This service is a collaborative effort with Lutheran Social Services. The companions are stipend volunteers who are low income, age 60 or older and their assistance helps elderly people with disabilities maintain independent living.
- **Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program**: Telephone equipment made available through the State of North Dakota for individuals who have who have hearing, speech and/or physical disabilities.

The Dakota Center for Independent Living advocates for state and federal legislation that directly affect people with disabilities to include:

- issues related to the Olmstead decision
- Medicaid buy-ins
- reauthorization of IDEA
- the Americans with Disabilities Act

The Dakota Center for Independent Living also operates a satellite office in Dickinson, North Dakota (40 1st Avenue West – Suite 203, Park Square Mall, 701/483-4363)