

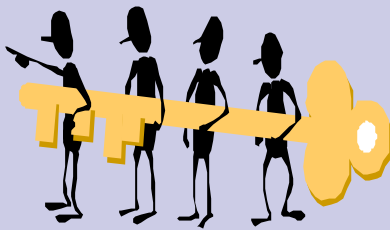


# Independent Living Briefing Paper

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## Understanding Independent Living

Independent Living proposes that all people have the right to exercise self determination and autonomy in the life choices they make. The Independent Living Movement evolved in the United States in the 1970s as disabled people responded to their historic experience of exclusion and discrimination.



Drawing on the experience of other groups who had successfully used civil rights legislation to counter racial and gender discrimination, Centers for Independent Living (CILs) became successful in championing legislation and other policies and advancing supports for disabled people to access education, transport and employment.

This represented a radical shift in how disabled people's needs were met. Previously, limited resources were directed at segregated services, to provide minimal education, training and employment opportunities and people were dependant on family or lived in institutional residential settings. People's needs were largely seen as relating to a medical assessment of who they were.

The Independent Living philosophy promoted a social model of disability, which held that people with disabilities have a right to actively participate in and contribute to society as equals without dependence on family or institutions. The social model recognised that people with disabilities were prevented from achieving their full potential by society. This was reflected in attitudes and/or environmental restrictions in accessing public transport, entertainment, public places, education and employment.

The social model focus is on changing society and the environment, in order to make it accessible and include disabled people as customers and citizens with rights - as opposed to patients needing cure or care.

## Independent Living in Ireland

The Independent Living Movement, commenced in Ireland in 1992, with the first Centre for Independent Living (CIL) established in Carmichael House. There are now 24 CILs working with disabled people in their communities throughout Ireland.

Over the past two decades the Independent Living philosophy has provided an approach to remove other barriers that have restricted and denied the participation of Irish disabled people. It also provides a framework for the provision of equality of opportunity for disabled people to participate in employment, education, social, recreational and cultural opportunities.

As in the US, the CILs in Ireland initially focused on the development of Personal Assistance Programmes, drawing on emerging policies and support from the EU to provide disabled people (known as Leaders), with programmes supporting them to employ people to meet their personal care and other needs. These programmes were critical to the involvement of disabled people in the Independent Living movement and the emerging rights movement of disabled people, which sought to bring about change in legislation, policies, attitudes and how Irish society perceived disabled people.

## Some Key Features of Independent Living Philosophy in Action

Consultation with disabled people in the design and implementation of supports to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled people's participation in employment, education, social and recreational life

Removal of barriers like inaccessible environments, information, technology and services that restrict the participation of disabled people and do not meet their needs

Provision of specific supports to ensure people can enjoy equality of opportunity to participate in education and employment, or access transport, personal assistance programmes and individual and representative advocacy

## The Philosophy of Independent Living finds expression in:



The Disability Act 2005 and Department  
Disability Sectoral Plans

The Citizens Information Act 2007

The Employment Equality and Equal  
Status Acts

The Education Act (for Disabled Children)  
2003

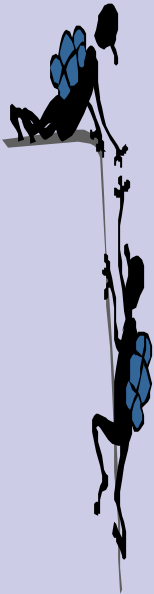
The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with  
Disabilities

## New Challenges and Opportunities

The legislative and policy changes that have occurred in respect of disabled people provide greater scope for disabled people to use the Independent Living philosophy as well as scope to enjoy equal opportunities and greater participation in Irish life. As with other social movements which have worked to achieve greater participation, the Independent Living Movement now finds itself moving from a period of activism (where the challenges were named) to a new phase, where disabled people coming to Independent Living require support to avail of the opportunities. Equally organisations seeking to engage with their responsibilities under legislative and policy change require support, information and guidance to incorporate Independent Living approaches towards disabled people as employees, customers and citizens.



### This will require:



Support for disabled people to actively participate in the design, delivery and implementation of Independent Living supports and develop a clear understanding of IL philosophy in the emerging CIL network and Leader Forums.

Development of analysis on what models of Independent Living will work at local and national level.

Development of strategic partnerships with a broad spectrum of statutory and non governmental actors to provide solutions and responses based on Independent Living at community regional and national level

## **The National Advisory Group on Independent Living**

The National Advisory Group (NAG) on Independent Living, initiated in 2004/5 brings together disabled people, statutory agencies and non-Governmental groupings interested in promoting and developing Independent Living as a philosophy and a model available to a diversity of organisations committed to the participation of disabled people.

NAG operates as a resource and support, drawing on disabled people's experience, international best practice and emerging trends, to develop Independent Living as a strategic approach for:

- Local Government organisations
- Statutory agencies
- Not for profit and business groups
- Community groups and local partnerships
- Organisations involved in the provision of education and employment opportunities

### **NAG works to ensure that:**

Independent Living is reflected in all aspects of how services are designed, developed and implemented. Initiated in 2005 NAG agreed a strategic plan which sets out four specific goals to advance Independent Living in Ireland, taking full opportunity from the legislative changes and focusing on four specific goals:

1. PROMOTE THE PHILOSOPHY OF INDEPENDENT LIVING BY LEARNING, PRACTICING AND SHARING
2. SUPPORT CILS TO ACHIEVE AIMS AT LOCAL LEVEL
3. EFFECT CHANGE IN POLICIES AND ACTIONS OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS
4. STRENGTHEN, SUPPORT AND PROMOTE SOLIDARITY

A more detailed outline of NAG's Strategic Goals is seen in its Strategic Plan 2005-2008.

**For more information on National Advisory Group on Independent Living, copy of the Strategic Plan 2005-2008 or more leaflets please contact Center for Independent Living Carmichael House — 01/8730455, [info@dublincil.org](mailto:info@dublincil.org).**