

‘Independent Living enables us as disabled people to achieve our own goals and live our own lives in the way that we choose for ourselves’

# An Introduction to Independent Living

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**Independent Living** is an idea that helps us to understand the barriers that we face as disabled people in our everyday lives. It gives us a structure for tackling the many different issues that prevent us from having the same choices, opportunities, access and control of our lives that non-disabled people have. It shows what needs to be done to enable us to be valued and treated with the same respect as other citizens.

**The Social Model of Disability** reminds us that we are disabled by the social, institutional, environmental and attitudinal barriers that prevent us from being able to fully participate in society on an equal basis. Independent Living builds on this by providing practical solutions for removing the barriers of disability.

The concept of Independent Living has been developed by the disabled people's movement over the past forty years and is based on four main ideas:

- that all human life is of equal value
- that everyone, whatever their impairment, is capable of making informed choices about their life
- that disabled people have the right to be in control of all aspects of their lives, in the same way as non-disabled people
- that disabled people have the right to be fully included as active participants in society on an equal basis with non-disabled people.

**Independent Living** does not mean that as disabled people we should have to live in isolation, do everything for ourselves or be completely independent of services. It means:

- removing the barriers that prevent our full social and economic participation in mainstream society
- having the same freedom, choice, dignity, control and opportunities as any other citizen – at home, at work and in the community
- being able to live our own lives in the way that we choose for ourselves
- being fully included and heard in all assessment, planning and decision making processes
- having control of the resources that we need to achieve our full potential
- being valued and respected for the unique individuals that we are.

‘The involvement and support of disabled people is vital to enabling Disability Wales to achieve its goals’

There are practical solutions, such as Direct Payments and Citizen Directed Support, that help to make Independent Living, disability equality and social inclusion a reality. However, we need to organise and work for political change if these goals are to be achieved.

**Centres for Independent Living (CILs)** have been developed by disabled people to campaign for service improvements based on the right to Independent Living. CILs are grassroots organisations that are run and controlled by disabled people, and which adopt the principles of the Social Model of Disability.

CILs provide a range of services that promote Independent Living, often including disability equality training, Direct Payments support, personal assistance, information and independent advocacy. CILs can also provide support for effective representation, participation and involvement in local policy development and service improvement.

**Direct Payments** enable service users to receive a cash payment and arrange their own support instead of being dependent on services provided by the local authority.

**Citizen Directed Support** gives service users control of an individual budget following supported self assessment. Funding can be used in creative ways to achieve agreed outcomes, either in the form of a Direct Payment, as direct service provision, or as a mixture of both.

**Disability Wales** is working at national and local levels to:

- secure resources for the development and support of CILs in Wales
- increase access to Direct Payments and Citizen Directed Support for all disabled people
- have a right to Independent Living enshrined in law.