

Introduction to Independent Living

ENIL Italia – Webinar, September 2020

I'm delighted to be with you at least electronically to share with you a few thoughts on IL.

Independent Living is a philosophy and a movement of people with disabilities who work for self-determination, equal opportunities and self-respect.

Independent Living does not mean that we want to do everything by ourselves and do not need anybody or that we want to live in isolation.

Independent Living means that we demand the same choices and control in our everyday lives that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted. We want to grow up in our families, go to the neighborhood school, use the same bus as our neighbors, work in jobs that are in line with our education and interests, and start families of our own.

Since we are the best experts on our needs, we need to show the solutions we want, need to be in charge of our lives, think and speak for ourselves - just as everybody else. To this end we must support and learn from each other, organize ourselves and work for political changes that lead to the legal protection of our human and civil rights.

As long as we regard our disabilities as tragedies, we will be pitied.

As long as we feel ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded as useless.

As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do.

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has a shorter definition: "Living independently and being included in the community with choices equal to others".

To reach the goal of Independent Living we need, among other things, Universal Design and Personal Assistance for everyone who requires it regardless of age, diagnosis, family situation, income. UD means that the human made environment such as buildings, modes of transport, devices, communications and the media are accessible and usable by everyone on equal terms.

That's the goal. To get there we have to do most of the work ourselves. We cannot rely on others. If we sit back and wait for our governments, for social workers, or service providers to fix our problems, we can wait forever. In the past, they've come up with solutions that meet **their** needs, not **our** needs.

In working for UD and PA we need to build strong organizations that are run by experts, that is, persons with disabilities who are accountable to persons with disabilities. Our movement needs members who are eager to work for our noble cause, who are committed to fight the discrimination we still face today, who do not tolerate this injustice that is unworthy of our countries. We need our best people work in our organizations, in politics, in the media, in research, business, in the arts.

But IL is much more than working at the national level, more than meeting with politicians, formulating arguments or initiating research. The most important work for our self-determination takes place at the individual level. Each and everyone of us, you and me, have an obligation to make the best of our own individual situation, to the best of our abilities. All of us can learn to take more responsibilities for our lives, to take on more duties within our families, to contribute more to our communities. To be useful, to contribute will make us feel better about ourselves, will increase our self-respect.

The more we can do for ourselves and others, the more other people can rely on us and the more we count in our families and communities. As you change the way you look at yourself, people around you will also look at you differently. When we respect ourselves more, other people will also respect us more and respect our rights more.

That's the plan. Let's work for it!