



## **The Philosophy of Independent Living**

Disability touches the lives of almost everyone: 49 million Americans have disabilities. Formerly, people with disabilities were viewed as objects of pity and shunned socially. But as other minority groups have succeeded in entering the mainstream of American society, people with disabilities have begun asserting their right to live as full and equal members of their communities. They want what everyone else wants: to enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers, have a rewarding family life, and enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational life of contemporary America. They have been working for full rights in employment, education, transportation, communications, and access to public facilities and programs. Disabled people don't want charity—they want rights!

But the disability rights movement isn't just about civil rights; it's about making sure that every person, regardless of ability or disability, can participate fully in the life of the community; so that everyone can contribute, everyone can make a difference. It's about celebrating diversity, about enriching the community we all live in.

## Ten Principles for Independent Living

**Civil rights:** Equal rights and opportunities for all; no segregation by disability type or stereotype.

**Consumerism:** The person using or buying a service or product decides what is best for himself or herself.

**De-institutionalization:** No person should be institutionalized simply because he or she has a disability.

**De-medicalization:** Individuals with disabilities are not “sick” and should not have to rely on a medical model or certified medical professionals for assistance with activities of daily life.

**Self-help:** People learn and grow from discussing their needs, concerns, and issues with other people who have had similar experiences. They do not need “professional” help to do this.

**Barrier removal:** Most of the problems disabled people face are due to barriers—architectural, communication, and attitudinal. In order for people to live independently, these barriers must be removed.

**Advocacy:** Barrier removal is possible only through major social change. Active, long-term, and strategic systems advocacy is necessary to accomplish change of this magnitude.

**Consumer control:** The organizations best suited to supporting and assisting people with disabilities are those that are governed, managed, and staffed by disabled individuals.

**Peer role models:** Disabled people learn leadership skills best from other disabled people—not from parents, service providers, or “professionals.”

**Cross-disability:** The barriers that impede people with disabilities affect all. People with different disabilities must work together to dismantle them for the benefit of all disabled people.

## **Excerpt from the Rehabilitation Act**

Sec. 2 (a) Findings. - Congress finds that

- (1) Millions of Americans have one or more physical or mental disabilities and the number of Americans with such disabilities is increasing;
- (2) Individuals with disabilities constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in society;
- (3) Disability is a natural part of human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to -
  - (a) live independently;
  - (b) enjoy self- determination;
  - (c) make choices;
  - (d) contribute to society;
  - (e) pursue meaningful careers; and
  - (f) enjoy full inclusion and integration in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society;
- (4) Increased employment of individuals with disabilities can be achieved through the provision of individualized training, independent living services, educational and support services, and meaningful opportunities for employment in integrated work settings through the provision of reasonable accommodations;
- (5) Individuals with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination in such critical areas as employment, housing, public accommodations, education, transportation,

communication, recreation, institutionalization, health services, voting, and public services; and

(6) The goals of the Nation properly include the goals of providing individuals with disabilities with the tools necessary to

(a) make informed choices and decisions; and

(b) achieve equality of opportunity, full inclusion and integration in society, employment, independent living and economic and social self-sufficiency, for such individuals.