



DEFINITIONS, STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES CORE THEME AREAS

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Introduction

The following document is meant to be used as a guide for Independent Living Centres (IL Centres) as they provide ongoing supports and services in the four core theme areas. It is important to understand the philosophy and values on which the work is based.

Independent Living is premised on the philosophy that all people with disabilities have skills, determination, creativity and a passion for life, yet many are unable to fully participate in economic, political and cultural life because barriers to full citizenship persist in Canadian society. These include outdated attitudes, inflexible laws and regulations, and a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to everything from hiring, to housing, to public transportation. The IL movement and the philosophy on which it is based are not abstract concepts. Instead, IL is about a “way of living” for persons with disabilities who live in a society where many barriers remain.

The Canadian Independent Living Movement and IL Centres were founded on four principles. These four principles are: consumer control; cross-disability; full participation and integration of all people with disabilities; and community based. These values are the basis of the core theme areas outlined on the following page. This approach is referred to as the “IL lens”, an approach that is applicable to all supports and services that IL Centres provide. The broadness of the core theme areas recognizes that services and programs and methods of delivery are unique and responsive to the needs of local communities across Canada.

Core Theme: Information & Networking

Definition

Information is the key to having choices, making decisions, and learning to take risks. The Information & Networking core theme promotes the Independent Living (IL) philosophy to consumers, their families, friends and support networks, community and governments by providing clear, accurate and up to date information that meets individual needs. This process is interactive; a “two-way street” that creates positive impacts for consumers and builds ongoing relationships between IL Centres and organizations in the community through the provision of current information on cross-disability issues.

Principles for Information & Networking

- A response-orientated approach is required to answer community needs
- To empower the individual with information in order to make informed choices
- To work with an individual to reduce their isolation from the community, we can refer them to the appropriate resource to broaden their opportunities and horizons in the areas that **they** may choose

Note: Information & Networking is often the first introduction an individual has to the Centre and is frequently the gateway to other programs and services.

Standards for Information & Networking

- Maintain and update information to provide current and precise information on a diverse number of programs and services issues (i.e. employment, housing, disability supports, etc.)
- Information to be provided in a variety of ways (i.e. brochure racks, community bulletins, website links, etc.)
- This collection of information to be promoted and open to the public
- Centre staff support to be available to respond to general inquiries and requests from consumers
- Provide information in alternate formats and plain language upon request to enable consumers to access information in a variety of formats (i.e. hard copies, information exchange through meetings or

by phone, etc.) Responses are to be completed in a reasonable timeframe.

- Provide open access to at least one computer connected to the internet. Trained staff/volunteers must be available to support the consumer if assistance is required.
- Create and distribute a newsletter to the membership and larger community, as deemed appropriate by the Centre, to be available in hard copy and electronic formats. Newsletter to be distributed at a minimum of twice per year
- Demonstrated commitment to creating partnerships and networking in the community by
 - Staff/volunteer involvement in appropriate community based activities (i.e. committees, boards etc)
 - Information forms as a means of updating consumers on a variety of topics
 - Booth displays
- IL Centres ensure full accessibility through using alternate formats, plain language, discussion, peer exchange and by sharing knowledge and experience. Supports and services could include, but are not limited to, the following: IL resources; disability related services; technical aids information; community & social service resources; information on government programs; computer & literacy training options; sports and recreation programs; referral services; and resources as requested by consumers; and to be responsive to local needs.

Core Theme: Peer Support

Definition

The Peer Support core theme is designed to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to share their knowledge and lived experiences. We recognize a peer as an individual who has had a similar or common experience and who is willing to share the lessons learned” Peer Support also affords individuals the opportunity to reduce isolation, to develop leadership skills, and gives assistance to individuals in exercising their rights and responsibilities. Peer support can be offered individually or in a group, and can be provided on an ongoing and/or in a crisis-situation in an environment of mutual respect and trust.

Examples of peer support can include, but are not limited to, the following: self-help; problem solving; stress management; opportunities to join social activities (dinners' clubs, recreational groups); and as identified by consumers in local communities.

Principles for Peer Support

- Peer support is integral to the IL philosophy and is a methodology that is demonstrated throughout all Centre programs and services.
- Within a supportive peer environment an individual can gain skills and self-confidence needed to overcome barriers.
- To encourage people with disabilities to speak with others and to share their thoughts, concerns and hopes with each other, promoting exchanges and discussion between individuals who have lived the experience
- Centres are to provide support that promotes integration and participation in the larger community.
- To encourage people to face new and possibly challenging situations

Note: It is recognized that each Centre will be different in the degree of implementation as resources and the needs of the community are unique.

Standards for Peer Support

- Activities to be offered in a variety of forms (i.e. in person group, one-on-one, telephone network, online message boards, etc.) depending on consumer preference
- Offer personal growth workshops (i.e. communication skills, self-advocacy, etc.).
- Actively engage peers in planning, delivery, and evaluation of activities. (i.e. monthly group meetings, advisory committees, evaluations etc.).
- Develop groups of special interest to consumers based on the needs identified (i.e. parenting, women's groups etc.).
- It is strongly advised that an individual with a disability be in the position of coordinating peer support activities.
- Volunteers who are in mentoring relationships (i.e. one on one, board development, etc.) are trained to develop and demonstrate appropriate listening and sharing skills.

Core theme: II Skills Development

Definition

Communicating, negotiating, problem-solving and personal management are all important aspects of daily life. The IL Skills Development as a core theme assists individuals to advocate on their own behalf, supports their choices, respects their decisions, and affords individuals opportunities to take risks.

The program also provides learning opportunities for dealing with barriers and discrimination so that persons with disabilities can know their rights and responsibilities, and can access services and training opportunities to live and participate in society.

Principles for II Skills Development

- To support individuals in learning to manage, to coordinate and to negotiate a wide range of community resources
- To assist consumers to exercise their rights and to provide support to people in pursuit of their individual advocacy goals
- To work with consumers to enhance their problem solving skills
- To assist individuals in reaching their Independent Living goals by taking a pro-active, solutions-based approach to conflict and problem solving
- To provide tools, support and resources to create lasting positive change

Standards for II Skills Development

- Staff/time dedicated to facilitating with individuals to advocate on their own behalf
- Demonstrated commitment to provide opportunities for consumers to increase skills and/or self-advocacy opportunities as identified above. This can be accomplished by:
 - Skills building through one-on-one support or by holding workshops for consumers on rights and self-advocacy (i.e. housing, social assistance, human rights, etc.)
 - Creating opportunities for the development of tangible skills (i.e. computer training, pre-employment skills, etc.) through

- accessing local experts and/or persons with disabilities – or by providing in-house supports; and
- Creating partnerships in the community to refer consumers for training
- Let the individual lead the process and decide the level of support. When appropriate, staff or volunteer can accompany individuals to initial meetings with organizations and service providers as a means of support to expand their network and to develop skills without creating dependence.
- Consumers may also find support in a number of areas: literacy; technology; crisis intervention; peer leadership; and other issues that are identified locally.
- Strive to work with diverse groups of people with disabilities, from various backgrounds, etc.

Note: In some Centres, employment and volunteer recruitment opportunities are offered by a dedicated staff person or by other staff, while in others the IL Skills Development program takes on providing these supports.

Core Theme: Research & Community Development

Definition

This area focuses on demonstrating IL models of services and delivery. The Participatory Action Research model most used in IL recognizes that persons with disabilities have expertise in determining what works and what does not. Consumer tested and validated information is the key to developing programs and services that benefit the whole community. Partnerships formed with individuals, community organizations, governments, schools, universities and businesses support the realization of these goals. By working together, gaps in service can be determined and new options and solutions can be created.

Research & Community Development activities can include, but are not limited to: conducting research and demonstration projects; disability awareness training and facility/web accessibility audits; and crime prevention and abuse initiatives. They can also encompass developing new models of IL for various populations and environments in order to test

new solutions and to provide unique and responsive methods of support at the local, regional and national level.

Principles for Research & Community Development

- To respond rapidly and effectively to the unmet needs of the community
- Research will be conducted and/or participated in regarding a variety of issues that adhere to the IL philosophy and promote inclusion.
- Pilot projects must be done to identify unmet needs. Centres can then propose alternative service models.
- Research ethics must adhere to IL.

Standards for Research & Community Development

- IL Centres to develop and participate in community partnerships with other organizations/researchers, ensuring participatory action research
- Commitment to research and community development demonstrated by:
 - communications with other groups and agencies in the community
 - media releases and public speaking opportunities
 - drafting of funding proposals to conduct demonstration projects
- Demonstration projects/ initiatives must be developed responding to community needs and with an IL lens.
- IL Centres to offer disability awareness training sessions to the community
- IL Centre staff/board/consumers to participate in public speaking events
- IL Centre staff to facilitate media opportunities (print, radio, TV) to increase awareness of IL in larger community
- IL Centres to organize forums for individuals to identify unmet needs as they see them