

HISTORY

The roots of the Independent Living Movement as a cross-disability concept are entwined with the social activism movements of the 1960's and 1970's. The civil rights movement, the consumer movement, the wellness model of health care, and the trend toward deinstitutionalization caused people with disabilities to view themselves more positively. They began to tell their caretakers that it is individuals with disabilities who know best what they are capable of and what they need in order to live full and productive lives with dignity.

A new sense of community identity emerged among the various disability groups. The barriers between groups created by traditional service agencies, along with institutionalization and internalized social biases, began to fall. For the first time, disability groups began to work together for their common good.

One of the first significant legislative accomplishments of this new coalition of disability groups was passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It not only contained Section 504, landmark civil rights legislation assuring basic human rights of people with disabilities, but, as amended in 1978, provided for establishment and operation of Centers for Independent Living under Title VII, Part C (formerly Part B), of the Act.

Title VII, Part C, funding for operation of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) first became available in 1979. Since then, seven CILs have been established in Missouri, four of which use Title VII, Part C, money through the discretionary grant method. The seven existing CILs are: Disabled Citizens Alliance for Independence (DCAI) in Viburnum, Services for Independent Living (SIL) in Columbia, Paraquad in St. Louis, The Whole Person in Kansas City, Southwest Center for Independent Living (SCIL) in Springfield, Rural Advocates for Independent Living (RAIL) in Kirksville, and SEMO Alliance for Disability Independence (SADI) in Cape Girardeau.

Part B of the Act--Comprehensive Services for Independent Living-- describes ways states may use federal funds for comprehensive independent living services designed to meet the current and future needs of individuals whose disabilities are so severe that they do not presently have the potential for employment, but could benefit from independent living rehabilitation services, enabling them to live and function independently in the community. Part B funds have been used to establish the three centers; SCIL in Springfield, RAIL in Kirksville, and SADI in Cape Girardeau.

Chapter II of Title VII provides for independent living services for blind individuals 55 years of age or older. The services should be designed to help eligible individuals adjust to their blindness by becoming more able to care for their own individual needs.

Title I, Part B makes general provision for (1) vocational rehabilitation protection and advocacy, i.e., the client assistance program that protects the rights of VR consumers, and (2) employment of disabled individuals.

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 gave new impetus to securing basic civil rights for people with disabilities. It has become increasingly clear, for example, that employment need not always be a distant dream for people with severe disabilities. The consumer and independent living movements continue to help give many people with disabilities encouragement, support, and confidence. It is therefore critical that people who themselves have achieved independent living objectives assume and maintain leadership roles throughout the spectrum of disability-related activities in Missouri. The Independent Living Council can play a significant role in helping make this happen, and thus help assure that people with all types of disabilities will be empowered to live more independently and have control over their lives.