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The Independent Living Institute is a policy development center specializing in consumer-driven policies for disabled peoples' self-determination, self-respect and dignity.

The Independent Living Institute is a policy development center specializing in consumer-driven policies for disabled peoples' freedom of choice, self-determination, self-respect and dignity. Our ultimate goal is to promote disabled people's personal and political power. Towards this end we provide information, training materials and develop solutions for services for persons with extensive disabilities in Sweden and internationally. We are experts in designing and implementing direct payment schemes for personal assistance, mainstream taxi and assistive technology.

We are a not-for-profit private foundation run and controlled by persons with disabilities. With roots in the Swedish and international Independent Living movement the Institute is a duly Swedish registered not-for-profit foundation. The majority of our employees has a disability.

We run a virtual library and interactive services for persons with extensive disabilities. We are experts in designing and implementing direct payment schemes for personal assistance services, mainstream taxi and assistive technology.

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 every-day 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.

Checklist for Organizing Independent Living Events

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In this checklist the author covers the steps of planning, event format, event contents and media work which are crucial to the success of a workshop, training session, seminar or conference on Independent Living.

The notes are intended to serve as a checklist for planning training sessions, seminars, workshops or conferences on Independent Living.

Planning process

One of the important principles of Independent Living is the concept of cross-disability, meaning that disabled people are not to be grouped into medical diagnoses or sorted by the nature or extent of their disability. Instead, regardless of whether we are blind, sight-impaired, deaf, hearing-impaired or mobility-impaired, consumers of mental health care, intellectually disabled or have substance sensitivities, we need to see ourselves as one group.

Diagnoses serve to separate and, sometimes, to pit us against each other. The Independent Living movement emphasizes that our common history and experience of oppression, exclusion and discrimination should help us see disability not as a medical, technical or humanitarian problem but foremost as a problem of lack of political power. Only by organizing ourselves and speaking with one voice we can effectively improve our position in society.

Cross-disability requires that IL events are open to persons with all disabilities. For this to happen we need to involve persons with different types of disabilities in planning and organizing events in order to ensure that people with different disabilities

- will be reached by your information about and invitation to the event through the appropriate media (printed, audio, Braille, etc.) and through the proper channels (general media, disability magazines, mailing lists, word of mouth, etc.)
- will be able to attend your event which requires that date, time of the day, location is accessible to people with different types of disability. Do not see access only as a question of avoiding steps and stairs at the entrance but also as an issue of the size, equipment and number of toilets, use of induction loops and sign language interpreters, avoidance of perfume and tobacco smoke, etc.

Ask those who plan to attend to inform you about their needs.

Event format

Starting late in the morning, say 9:30 a.m. or later, will enable more people with extensive disabilities to participate who often need more time for their morning routine and transportation.

Frequent breaks are not only a necessity, if you try to enable many disabled people to come. Many and long breaks give people a chance to get to know each other, exchange views and plan actions.

Do not overload the program with many or long presentations. Less is better: people will not get tired and learn more, if you have shorter and fewer program points.

Allow question and answer periods after each presentation. This gives the presenter the opportunity of further explaining and illustrating important points. For a 20 min presentation a 10 min question and answer session might be appropriate.

Schedule discussions but limit questions or comments from the floor to 1 min at a time.

Discussions involving people from the floor need a strict moderator to stay focused. The moderator should allow people to address only the point currently under discussion. The alternative that is often used is to let participants raise questions or make statements in the order they ask for the microphone. This will often prevent a deeper and more fruitful exploration, because each new speaker can change the subject by taking up a new topic whether or not it is related to the current discussion.

If you have presentations in a foreign language and need interpretation, the economical solution is consecutive or sentence-by-sentence translation as opposed to simultaneous interpretation. If you have a 30 min presentation, for example, reserve a time slot of at least 60 min for presentation plus translation. Usually, consecutive translation is more appreciated by the audience, because it leaves more time for understanding. It is also less demanding on the skills and energies of the translator.

Interpreters and translators should be prepared by the organizers for their job. Best results are achieved by giving them the written papers a few days in advance of the event and by pointing out important concepts which may not always be easily understood and translated. For example, some languages lack a non-medical term for “disability” that is compatible with the image of dignity and citizenship which the IL movement wants to propagate. Sometimes, the commonly used word for “disabled” implies that we are persons of lesser value. You want a term to be used which does not sabotage your intended message.

Event contents

While there is much theoretical literature about Independent Living, the Independent Living approach – how to put the principles into practice – can be presented in down-to-earth and easily understood language. A vivid example of good practice presented by a disabled person with first-hand experience of the subject is more effective than an abstract scholarly lecture by a non-disabled person.

Personal experiences will be better remembered. Personal is always political - if the speaker not only deplores a situation but also analyzes it and outlines actions towards solutions. This will help counteract our image as victims of thoughtless, careless or obnoxious people.

Victimization weakens us, since it makes other people responsible for our situation and, in doing so, puts them in control of the situation and reduces us to passive objects of their actions. Empowerment means to help people see themselves in the driver's seat.

Invite disabled people as presenters. Show the participants that we are the foremost experts on our needs and their solutions. Remember, “nothing about us without us!”

Make sure to invite presenters whose work you know well. If your message is “rights not charity”, for example, you do not want presenters who make the audience cry with pity.

Media work

In order to get the most out of your efforts, you need to spend time and energy on media work before, during and after the event. Disability Awareness in Action (DAA) have an excellent kit on media work on their website at www.daa.uk.org or at www.independentliving.org/docs2/daakit1.html.