Building Capacity to Promote Full Community Participation for People with Disabilities

Centers for independent living (CILs) have been at the forefront of creating changes to make community participation more accessible to people with disabilities. This project is designed to expand the capacity of CILs to help change community conditions so that their consumers can engage more fully in their communities.

Training CILS to Use Tools for Change
People with disabilities are the largest and fastest growing minority population in the U.S. Yet despite progress toward deinstitutionalization and the increased availability of support services for independent living, people with disabilities still encounter barriers to participating in their communities.

To make participation easier, changes are needed in systems, programs, policies and practices. In this project, staff members from collaborating CILs received training and technical assistance designed to strengthen their efforts to bring about changes that support increased community participation.

“Participation” includes activities such as volunteering, working, taking advantage of educational opportunities, advocating for community change and participating on boards of non-profit organizations.

First, participants received training in six core competency areas to enhance their ability to make community changes. (See box.) The training curriculum is based on the Community Tool Box (ctb.ku.edu), an internationally known online resource that provides information on essential skills for building healthy communities.

Then they used a tool that helps community groups document their work and provides them with real-time data to guide their efforts for change.

That tool is the Online Documentation and Support System (ODSS), which was developed by the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas through more than 20 years of participatory research experience.

The ODSS has been used since 1990 to help local, state and national initiatives. This project is the first time the ODSS has been used to help disability organizations improve community conditions for consumers.

Core Competencies
Staff at centers for independent living (CILs) have enhanced their ability to make changes in their communities by learning more about these topics:

- Analyzing Problems and Goals
- Developing Strategic and Action Plans
- Developing an Intervention
- Increasing Participation and Membership
- Advocating for Change
Our CIL Partners
Staff members at 11 CILs in Federal RSAs 6 and 7 are working with us to test this program. They are documenting accomplishments to benefit consumers in these areas: Services provided, community actions and community changes.

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- Independent Living Resource Center, Wichita, KS
- Resource Center for Independent Living, Osage City, KS
- Prairie Independent Living Resource Center, Hutchinson, KS
- Heartland Independent Living Center, Owensville, MO
- Southwest Center for Independent Living, Springfield, MO
- The Whole Person, Kansas City, MO
- League of Human Dignity, Council Bluffs, IA
- Mainstream Independent Living Center, Little Rock, AR
- Spa Area Independent Living Services, Hot Springs, AR
- SOURCES for Community Independent Living Services, Fayetteville, AR
- A Resource Center for Independent Living, Austin, TX

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