

Independent Living

What is Independent Living?

“Being independent” is usually seen as “doing things for yourself” – no matter how easy or difficult that is. No one is independent in this way – do we make our own electricity? Do we grow our own food? No, most of us do not.

The Disabled People’s Movement sees “independence” as having the chance to control our own lives, and make our own choices about life. For example: the person who uses a piece of equipment, or tells a personal assistant to assist him/her to make a meal is as independent as the person who makes a meal without these. The choice about what to eat and how to cook it is the same.

The seven needs of independent living:

- Information
- Peer support
- Housing
- Equipment
- Personal Assistance
- Transport
- Accessible environment

The 7 Needs of Independent Living

A list of what disabled people need to be independent (have choice and control over our own lives) was developed in the 1980s by the Disabled People’s Movement:

1. **Information.** To be able to make choices, we need to know what we can choose between. Information needs to be accessible to us, for example available on audio tape, Braille, by British Sign Language video, on computer disc, in large print, in symbols, or being told to us by a person.
2. **Peer Support.** Once we have information, we need to meet other disabled people to share knowledge and experience – this is peer support.
3. **Housing** is a basic need for everyone. For disabled people our housing needs to be accessible to us – that is to suit our needs. For example, level access or wider doors, calming or contrasting colours, etc.

4. **Equipment**, or aids and adaptations. For example: flashing door/smoke alarm, kettle tipper, liquid level indicator, hoist, adaptive computer equipment/software, adjustable height desk, etc.
5. **Personal Assistance**. As often equipment is not the answer, many disabled people employ someone to assist them. This enables people to be in control of how and when the assistance is given. It also prevents reliance on informal support such as family and friends.
6. **Accessible transport**. This includes: buses, trains, trams, taxis, planes and cars.
7. **Accessible environment**. That is roads, paths, buildings, parks, theatres, schools, colleges, train stations, airports, shops, places to work, basically everywhere being designed in a way that disabled people can use them as easily as non-disabled people.

Access is not only physical (wider doors, lifts, ramps, appropriate furniture). It also includes spoken communication, appropriate language (whether British Sign Language, plain English or other), and suitable written communication, such as large print, Braille, etc.

However, even if the built environment is made fully accessible, attitudinal barriers may impact on Independent Living. While there is a negative attitude towards disabled people, and while disabled people are not equally welcome in shops, restaurants, pubs, the workplace, etc, then disabled people will not have full access to opportunities.

Disabled people are not asking for more than non-disabled people. If the 7 basic Needs of Independent Living are in place disabled people will have the same life chances and choices as non-disabled people.

This information sheet has been produced by Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People. © GMCDP January 2012

This information sheet is also available in a variety of formats including: large prints, Braille, audio and electronically.

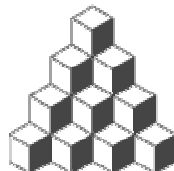
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