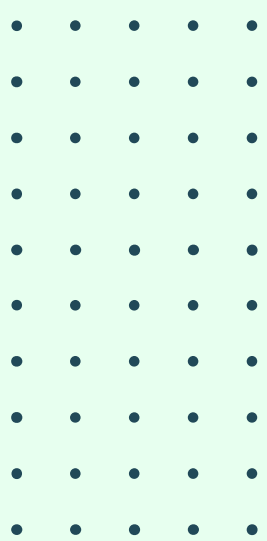
The Role of Centers for Independent Living in Transition Service Delivery: Context, Innovation, and Recommendations for Collaboration

Charlie Walters, Makenzie Allison, Joe Michener, Troy Hall, and Lindsay Miller



Today's Presenters

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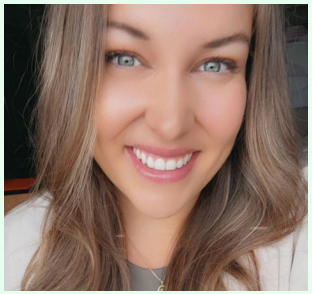

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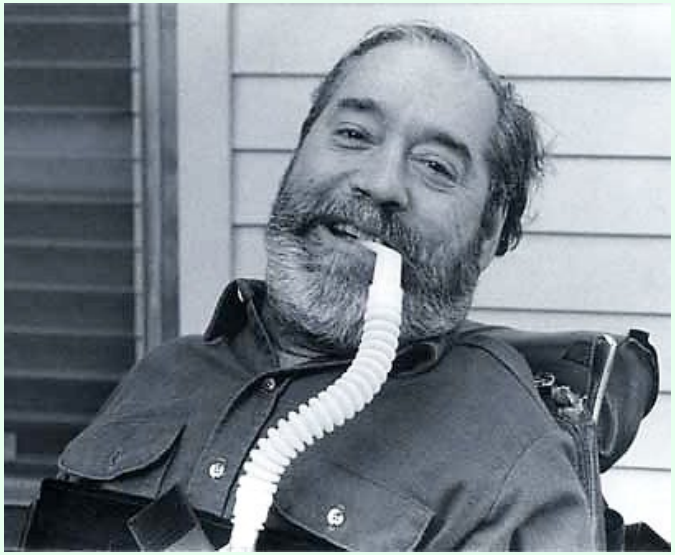
Learning Objectives

- To increase knowledge of:
  - CIL history, philosophy/values, and core services
  - The importance of bringing CILs to the table in transition service delivery
  - Ideas for innovative CIL approaches to youth transition programs
  - Recommendations for collaboration with CILs

The Guiding Principles of CILs

"People come to you and expect to be told what to do. It's your job to place that power back into their hands. You are there to help them find out what they want to do – not to decide what you think is best for them."

Ed Roberts



Nothing About Us Without Us

- CIL Purpose: to promote a philosophy of independent living [...] to maximize the
  - leadership,
  - empowerment,
  - independence, and
  - productivity of individuals with disabilities, and the
  - integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American society (29 USC § 796(1))
- Grassroots, disability-led mutual aid organizations
- Disability representation in staff, board, and leadership

Consumer Control, Cross Disability, Community-Based

- Consumer control: Consumer self-direction in all aspects of service delivery
- Cross disability: Services provided regardless of specific diagnostic criteria (or age)
- Community based: Community integration through services provided in the communities of consumers

The Core Services of CILs

CIL Core Services

- Information and Referral
- IL Skills Training
- Peer Mentoring
- Services that facilitate the transition from nursing homes and other institutions to the community, provide assistance to those at risk of entering institutions, and facilitate the transition of youth to postsecondary life (Administration for Community Living, 2024)

CIL Core Services (cont'd)

- Core service: Individual *and* Systems Advocacy
- "You can't provide independent living services without advocating for social change" – Phil Draper

CILs and the Transition Service Delivery System

Core Services ARE Youth Transition Services

- IL services are transition services
- CILs around the country have added additional youth-focused services:
    - e.g., Work-based learning programs for youth Pre-ETS delivery in schools, youth peer mentoring groups, and youth leadership development initiatives
- Implications of disability-led service delivery in transition

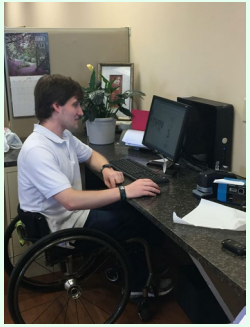
Values Driving CIL Youth Transition Service Delivery

- Value-based principles drive practice (Plotner & Walters, 2023)
- Services that are:
  - Empowerment-, autonomy-, and independence-based,
  - Youth-led and individualized,
  - Strengths-based and goal-driven,
  - Peer-based and disability-pride-driven, and
  - Available and accessible

Innovative Transition Programs

Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL)

- **School 2 Life (S2L) and TreatS2Love (T2L):** social and independent living skills group with a micro business
- **Living Independently for Everyone (LIFE):** school-based, customized services based on IEP goals
- **Person-Centered Planning (PCP):** Formal goal planning through a MAPS/PATH model
- **Transition Assessment:** Formal assessment for students



Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL) Cont.

- **Vocational Independence Program (VIP):** group school-based services embedded St. Luke's Hospital
- **LCTI Bridge Program (LBP):** group paid work experience embedded at Advanced Auto Distribution & Marriott Delta
- **Community Work Initiative (CWI):** group paid work experience at Crooked Row Farm and multiple other locations
- **My Work Initiative (MWI):** group paid work experience embedded at St. Luke's Hospital and Cedarbrook Senior Care
- **Real World Lehigh Valley (RWLV):** group summer program embedded at Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom

Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL)...

- **Career Path:** Supported Employment for individuals
- **Adaptations:** social and peer support group
- **LCCC SEED:** college-based services onsite at a local community college

Able South Carolina (Able SC)

Career BOOST!: In partnership with VR, we deliver engaging and accessible Pre-ETS lessons to eligible in-school youth facilitated by young professionals with disabilities.

- Self-Advocacy:
  - Disabilities and Accommodations
  - Student-Led IEPs
- Work Readiness:
  - Soft Skills
  - Promotion & Personal Leadership
  - Life Skills
  - Money Management
  - Financial Risk and Protection
- Post Secondary Exploration:
  - Planning a Future
- Peer Mentoring Goal Planning

Able SC (cont'd)

Equip: A South Carolina Developmental Disabilities Council funded peer-mentoring program where youth with disabilities teach self-advocacy skills to other youth with disabilities in the community.

- Monthly "Hangouts"
- Virtual "Hangouts"
- Community Activities
- In School Equip Club
- 1:1 Peer Mentoring
- Equip Leadership Retreat
- Pre-ETS Goal Setting

Able SC...

SC Youth Leadership Forum: In partnership with other CILs and the South Carolina Developmental Disabilities Council, selected delegates stay on a college campus for three nights to learn about independent living and advocacy while building relationships with other young adults from around the state.

- Community Advocacy Projects
- Community Partner Speakers
- Skill Building Workshops
- Evening Activities
- Resource Fair

Key Recommendations for Collaboration with CILs

Recommendations for Practice: LVCIL

- Consumer control
- Youth led, youth driven
- Community-based
- Partnerships
- Systems change
- Flexibility

Recommendations for Practice: Able SC

- Focus on Disability History
- Disability Identity
- Disability Justice
- Accommodations as Rights
- Dignity of Risk
- Combating Ableism and Learned Helplessness

Recommendations for Practice: AbleSC (cont'd)

- Ground all lessons in building self-advocacy skills and fostering disability pride.
- Universal Design for Learning Framework
- Prioritize accessibility to ensure students with all disabilities can meaningfully engage.

Recommendations for Practice: Center for Transition and Career Innovation

- Learn about IL history and how your CIL supports consumers
- Understand CILs as advocacy *and* service organizations
- Get involved with disability-led initiatives and challenge the “professional knows best” norm
- Work collaboratively with a CIL to identify and address transition service gaps
    - Delegation can feel more efficient but has drawbacks
    - Funding matters: Understand opportunities and limitations
- Think big!