

WHAT IS INDEPENDENT LIVING

by Adolf Ratzka, PhD

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 everyday 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.

Since we are the best experts on our needs, we need to show the solutions we want, need to be in charge of our lives, think and speak for ourselves - just as everybody else. To this end we must support and learn from each other, organize ourselves and work for political changes that lead to the legal protection of our human and civil rights.

We are profoundly ordinary people sharing the same need to feel included, recognized and loved.

As long as we regard our disabilities as tragedies, we will be pitied.
As long as we feel ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded as useless.
As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do.

Adolf Ratzka is the founder and director of the Independent Living Institute, Sweden. He is a user of personal assistance, ventilator and motorised wheel chair. He is married and has one daughter.