



Consumer Welcome Packet

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About accessABILITY

Mission: To empower our peers with disabilities to lead and control independent lives fully included in community life.

History: In 1987, a group of disability self-advocates and members of the independent living movement came together to form a disability rights organization called the Indianapolis Resource Center for Independent Living (IRCIL), now known as accessABILITY.

Today: accessABILITY advocates on behalf of all people with disabilities to exercise their rights to establish and maintain control over their lives. We are a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting people with disabilities in their own personal journey to independence. As a disability led organization, we know that no two journeys are ever the same. Our peer support model means that we employ people with disabilities to share their experiences and expertise to help others in their journey to independence.

We work with any person with a disability who lives in Central Indiana. We have no age minimum or limit for services, so we work with infants and senior citizens and everyone in between.

Unlike other organizations who serve people with specific disabilities, we serve ALL people with disabilities. This means that we work with people who have physical, emotional/mental, cognitive, hearing, and visual disabilities as well as with individuals who have multiple disabilities.

As a nonprofit organization, **all of our services are provided FREE of charge**. Despite being called a “Center,” we work primarily with people in their own homes and communities to help them achieve the level of independence and community access that they want.

We also advocate on behalf of people with disabilities to exercise their rights to establish and maintain control over their lives. We work with “systems” like government and business to ensure equal access to the community for people with disabilities, too.

Our service area is primarily in Central Indiana. The eight counties we serve are Boone, Johnson, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Marion, Morgan and Shelby. We do provide some services in other counties based on the requirements of our funding sources.

Eligibility for Services: You must be determined eligible for the Independent Living Program. The following federal guidelines are used to determine your eligibility:

1. **You must be a person with a disability**. This means that you have a significant physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory impairment that substantially limits your ability to function independently in your family or community, or to obtain, maintain or advance in employment.
2. **The provision of services increases your independence** by helping you improve your ability to function, continue functioning, or move toward functioning independently in your family or community or to continue in your employment.

Equal Access: The eligibility criteria and our provision of services are applied without regard to race, national origin, religion, gender, age or type of disability.

Independent Living Plans or Waivers: Consumers have the right to have services provided under an Independent Living Plan (ILP). An ILP is an additional piece of paperwork that serves as a formal written plan that states the goals and services the consumer will receive. A new ILP MUST be filled and signed by both the consumer and a staff member of accessABILITY EVERY time there is an adjustment made to an existing goal, when a new goal is added, and at least once annually.

Consumers also have the right to waive the ILP. If the consumer waives the ILP, the requirement of an additional signature every time a consumer wishes to make changes to their goals is removed. The advocate instead keeps track of changes to the consumer's goals and services in a secure database. The consumer can request a copy of their active goals and services in the database at any time.

Services

accessABILITY provides five core services: Information and Referral, Independent Living Skills Training, Peer Support, Advocacy, and Transition Services. We also work to extend other services based on community need, including virtual support groups.

Consumer Services

Information and Referral: The “go-to” source for answers to your question. We provide connections and information on our services, civil rights, community resources, and any other issues affecting people with disabilities.

Independent Living Skills Training: We teach skills needed for independent living through personalized training and real work practice for those who are adapting to a new disability, experiencing independent living for the first time, or adjusting to change. We work with individuals in their environment, setting and achieving goals for living as independently as possible

Peer Support: Our staff and volunteers are people with disabilities who work with our consumers to explore options, solve problems, and create a space of understanding. Because of their own experiences, staff and volunteers provide unique, creative, and personal perspectives for others living with disabilities, creating an environment of true peer support.

Advocacy: accessABILITY advocates for people with disabilities on both a personalized level, working with individuals in exercising their rights to establish and maintain control over their lives, and on a systemic level, educating businesses, governmental agencies, and the public on the capabilities and needs of people with disabilities.

Adult and Senior Transition: accessABILITY facilitates the transition of people with disabilities from nursing homes and other institutions to home and community-based living environments. We also provide activism and support to those at risk of entering such facilities.

Youth Transition: accessABILITY works with young adults and their families in planning for life after high school. We help youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to attain independence, while also providing community based experiences and access to supports to ensure a successful transition into adult life.

Visually Impaired and Blind Experience: accessABILITY works with people who are visually impaired and blind to maintain and remain independent in their own environments. Staff work to identify and overcome barriers through supports from assistive technology, peer counseling, community programs, and more.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivor Supports: We provide confidential support and resources for survivors of violence and sexual assault

Housing Information: accessABILITY provides information and training to assist people with disabilities in searching for affordable and accessible housing.

Benefits Assistance: We assist people with the skills needed to navigate the complex government disability programs and laws in Indiana.

Virtual Consumer Support Group Services

Please see current groups available by visiting our Events page on our website: www.abilityindiana.org

Principles and Philosophy

accessABILITY was founded upon the Principles of Independent Living, and we hold ourselves to these core standards in all areas of practice. We work with consumers, the board, and our staff to continuously monitor every aspect of our performance against these standards.

Empowerment, Autonomy, and Independence

- People with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs and should take the lead on all decisions that affect their lives.
- The goal of working with individuals should not be to solve their problems, but rather to teach the skills and self-reliance that allows individuals to reach goals for themselves.

Disability Lead

- People learn and grow by discussing their needs, concerns, and issues with people who have had similar experiences.
- The organizations best suited to support and assist individuals with disabilities are governed and operated by individuals with disabilities.
- People with disabilities should be front in discussions that impact their lives and community.

Access and Inclusion

- No person should be institutionalized or medicated solely on the basis of a disability.
- There should be no barriers to independence or inclusion. People with disabilities should be integrated in environments of leadership, education, transportation, employment, housing, etc.
- Systemic cross-disability advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that people with disabilities benefit from all that society has to offer.

Equity

- We advocate for equitable rights and access, not special treatment.
- Equal opportunities and rights are for ALL. There should be no segregation by disability or stereotype.
- We treat everyone as an individual, with respect, dignity and decency, regardless of your sexual orientation, race, religion/belief, gender, disability, age, marital and civil partnership status, and pregnancy.

Disability Pride

- We work with individuals to not just accept one's disability, but proudly incorporating it as a part of one's identity.
- "Disability" is not a negative word. It means we are more adaptable. We are proud of who we are; the barriers we have overcome have only made us stronger.
- The IL Movement is founded on the belief that people with disabilities, regardless of form, have a common history and a shared struggle, and that we are a community and a culture that will advance further banded together.

Consumer Service Standards

All individuals receiving services from accessABILITY Center for Independent Living, Inc. can expect us to:

- Greet you courteously and professionally.
- Respect your privacy and confidentiality.
- Listen effectively to your requests and take the necessary actions to support them.
- Inform you of any unexpected delays.
- Provide information in ways that you find easy to understand.
- Respond to calls, emails, and website inquiries within 2 business days, Monday through Friday.
- Schedule appointments that are convenient to you.
- Keep timely appointments and inform you as soon as possible if the appointment needs to be rescheduled.
- Maintain awareness of the cultural diversity of our communities and provide services in a fair and equitable way.
- Ensure accessibility to all.
- Continuously work to improve our services.

Consumer Responsibilities

Hate Speech—Zero Tolerance Policy

We are committed to combating abuse motivated by hatred, prejudice, or intolerance, particularly abuse that seeks to silence the voices of those who are currently and have been historically marginalized. To achieve equity, we must respond to hateful actions in a socially just manner. Therefore, we have a zero-tolerance policy for “hate speech” and **will refuse services to those who engage in this type of expression.**

Definition of “hate speech”: We define “hate speech” as all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote, or attempt to justify any forms of hatred based on intolerance. This includes expression that offends, insults, intimidates, or threatens an individual or group based on race, ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. Hate speech is not tied to intent. While someone may not intend to incite, promote, or attempt to justify hatred, they may still succeed in doing so.

Failure to meet your responsibilities may result in your removal from one or more of the services accessABILITY is providing.

You have the responsibility to:

1. Tell us your needs

- Help us understand your needs so that we can give you the best possible supports. You can do this by talking to our staff and participating in the goals you set.
- Provide information that enables us to provide advice and support.
- Provide all information regarding your goals to the best of your knowledge.

2. Tell us if things change for you

- Tell us if there are changes we should know about--for example, changes to your contact details.
- Tell us of changes that may impact your eligibility for other community services and supports.

3. Tell other agencies that you are involved with us

- Inform staff of other agencies that you are working with accessABILITY.
- Report wrongdoing or fraud to the appropriate authorities.

4. Partner with us

- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy.
- Participate in the activities, services, and supports.
- Be as involved as possible in creating and accomplishing your goals.
- Keep your appointments unless something unexpected happens. Notify staff if cancellation or rescheduling is needed.
- Respect the privacy of others you may encounter at accessABILITY.

5. Keep Everyone Safe

- Comply with instructions when provided to keep you and our staff safe and out of harm.
- Inform staff of environmental concerns during direct services in your home, such as, but not limited to:
 - Mold
 - Bedbugs
 - Weapons
 - Drug Use
- Never engage in intentional physical attacks or intimidating behavior
 - Hitting, pushing, or scratching
 - Bullying, harassment and/or sexual assault
 - Damaging the organization's, or another person's property
 - Using or distributing drugs while on the premises
 - Threats with a weapon or object

6. Tell us how we are doing

- If something happens that you like or do not like about our service, please let us know in a way that suits you. We want to ensure your issues are heard.
- Complete surveys about your experience.

Confidentiality

All personal and program information gathered by aA is confidential. Providing requested information is voluntary. However, if information essential to the provision of services is not provided, it may be impossible for aA to determine if you are eligible for services or provide you with adequate and appropriate services.

aA may also obtain personal information about you from other service providers and cooperating agencies. This information is used to provide you with IL services or to administer the IL program under which services are provided. This information will not be further divulged except as stated below:

1. To provide you with appropriate and adequate IL services
2. To assist in the administration of the IL program under which services are provided
3. To demonstrate that aA is in compliance with the regulations in Title VII, Chapter I of the Rehabilitation Act as amended
4. To provide other granting agencies with demographic information about the type of people who are served by aA for the purpose of receiving additional funds.

Appeals/Complaints

All consumers of the *accessABILITY* Center for Independent Living, Inc. have the right to appeal or complain about any decisions made by staff. The first level of appeals is the **Administrative Review**. The second level is an impartial **Hearing of the Executive Committee**.

The Executive Director or his/her designee, with other staff present at the request of the consumer, if appropriate, will conduct the Administrative Review. The consumer may attend the Administrative Review with a family member, friend or advocate, if needed. The Executive Director may ask other staff to be present but will notify the consumer of any other individuals who will be present in advance. The date and time of the Administrative Review will fall within twenty (20) business days of receiving your appeal.

You will be provided at least five (5) business days advance notice of the Administrative Review. Such notice will be in writing and will address the following:

1. The date, time, place and who will preside over the Administrative Review, the way it will be conducted and the issues to be decided.
2. The opportunity to withdraw the request for an Administrative Review, in writing, before the date of the review.
3. Each party may, for a good reason, request the Administrative Review to be rescheduled, but the Administrative Reviews must be rescheduled within ten (10) business days from the date of that request.
4. The chance to change/amend the appeal/complaint prior to the date of the review.
5. The right to choose someone to assist or represent you if you want/think you need it.
6. The chance to present witnesses and/or documentary evidence (information in writing).
7. The chance to have produced records or documents relevant to the issues, if not excluded by your own need to maintain confidentiality.

A written decision will be forwarded to you by the Executive Director within fifteen (15) business days following the completion of the Administrative Review and will include:

5. The reason(s) for the decision.

6. A copy of the Appeals/Complaint Action steps.
7. Notice of the opportunity to request an impartial hearing with the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the *accessABILITY* Center for Independent Living.

If you are unhappy/dissatisfied with the decision resulting from the Administrative Review, you may within ten (10) business days of your receipt of the decision, request an impartial hearing of the Executive Committee. The steps leading to the impartial hearing, as well as the manner in which it is conducted, will be the same as those followed with regard to the Administrative Review with the following exceptions:

1. The impartial hearing will be presided over by the President or his/her designee of the Board of Directors and two additional members of the Board of Directors of *accessABILITY*, who will be responsible for making the final decision.
2. You will receive the decision of the Impartial Hearing Committee within twenty (20) business days following the end/conclusion of the hearing.

Client Assistance Program at Indiana Disability Rights

If at any time you are dissatisfied with the services provided by *accessABILITY* Center for Independent Living, you may contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) through Indiana Disability Rights.

Toll Free: (800) 622-4845
Toll Free TTY/TTD: (800) 383-1131
Local: (317) 722-5555
Local TTY/TTD: (317) 722-5563

Client Assistance Program (CAP)
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