



## The Power of the Collective

Independent Living is practiced by individuals but, most importantly, it is rooted in the power of the collective.

### User-led

The Independent Living (IL) movement is led by us, as people with disabilities, and operates through our own action and organisation. We are an active network, focused on working together and supporting each other to overcome the barriers we face as individuals.

For example, when Government cut funding to our Personal Assistant (PA) services in 2012, we actively campaigned collectively to ensure that our voices were heard. We met and talked with our politicians to ensure that the decision was reversed.

Another example comes with the many groups of people with disabilities who work together with their local representatives to make buildings and services accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

The barriers we encounter as people with disabilities are caused by inflexible structures and practices that discriminate against us. They are not caused by our

disability or impairment. For example, barriers still exist which prevent people with disabilities from entering employment. Currently, if a person with a disability works more than twenty hours per week, they lose their Disability Allowance and other essential entitlements, such as the medical card. As well as this, many people do not have access to accessible public transport to travel to and from work, or the support of a PA to assist them in the workplace.

The world around us, its structures and the official systems in our communities reduce our capacity for independence. Therefore, the goal of IL is to advocate for the civil and human rights of people with disabilities. Together, we can foster genuine empowerment, achieve personal self-determination, and live in a society that strives for equal opportunities for everyone.

## Peer Support

Everyone who lives with disability is an individual and this should never be forgotten. At the same time, as citizens who live with disability, whether we were born with our disability or we acquired it, we share common experiences.

Peer support involves sharing our lived experience of disability with our peers. It provides us with the tools to support, encourage, challenge and motivate others. It helps to reduce isolation, and it increases our confidence in our rights and abilities. Sometimes, it can lead to working together to make known or remove common barriers.

All people can be fearful of change. For Áiseanna Tacaíochta (ÁT) Leaders, taking responsibility of our own services is sometimes frightening. We begin to doubt our own abilities, and we might be afraid to ask for help because we do not want to be seen as lacking the ability to cope and manage our own services.

This is why peer support is central to ÁT's support structure. Through the sharing of our personal and professional experience, ÁT Leaders support one another to manage our PA service in a responsible and clear way.