



BOSTON CENTER FOR *INDEPENDENT LIVING*



*Promoting Independence
for People with Disabilities*

Our Mission

The Boston Center for Independent Living is a frontline civil rights organization led by people with disabilities that advocates to eliminate discrimination, isolation and segregation by providing advocacy, information and referral, peer support, skills training, and PCA services in order to enhance the independence of people with disabilities.



BCIL is a 501(c)(3) organization that has provided services to people with disabilities since the organization's founding in 1974, when it became the second independent living center in the country. The organization was created by people with disabilities seeking full integration into society by empowering its members and constituents to take control over their lives and become active members of the communities in which they live. BCIL works to promote the civil rights of all people with disabilities and responds with programs and services to the needs of people of all ages with a wide range of disabilities.



BCIL concentrates its efforts in two areas:

- Empowering people with disabilities with the practical skills and self-confidence to freely determine their own life choices in the community.
- Promoting access and change within society, making full and equal participation by individuals with disabilities a reality.

BCIL provides the four "core services" of independent living centers: peer mentoring, skills training, information and referral, and advocacy. Over 5,500 people annually receive these services and BCIL is active in a number of areas critical to people with disabilities, including housing, healthcare, employment, long-term care, transportation, adaptive technology, communications, civil rights law, and education. We assist individuals in finding a Personal Care Attendant (PCA). BCIL also has initiatives targeting youth with disabilities and has developed alliances with senior organizations as well. A high majority of both our staff and board are people with disabilities. We comprehend and bring personal and professional experience to our work to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in Greater Boston and across Massachusetts.

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Direct Services

Information and Referral, Skills Training and Peer Mentoring are the backbone of Direct Services. The majority of Direct Service staff at BCIL has disabilities and through their experiences a consumer is able to understand independent living from an individual who knows what it takes to live in a world laced with barriers. Much of BCIL's success comes from individual interactions between staff and people using our services – consumers who become empowered as active, participating members of their community.

SKILLS TRAINING, PEER MENTORING

Empowering a person means to assist that individual to take control of his or her life in all areas, regardless of what his or her disability may be. Our skills training and peer mentoring staff can help you develop an Independent Living Plan by providing the education, technical assistance and confidence-building necessary for an individual to develop the ability to become independent and self-sufficient. Specialists can also offer important information about disability rights to help consumers learn to advocate for themselves. In addition, they can direct you to our Transition to Adulthood Program for young people, or to a general adult skills specialist, or to a skills trainer from our Personal Care Attendant Program. Our outreach coordinator can arrange to have a BCIL representative come talk with you, or your school, hospital or agency about any of our programs, special projects and services.



INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Our Information and Referral specialists are often a consumer's first point of contact with BCIL, providing information on disability issues and referring consumers to the appropriate people at BCIL, or other agencies, for assistance with the hundreds of concerns they may have, including:

- Learning options you may have for personal care and in-home support as you plan to leave a nursing home or hospital
- Finding affordable and accessible housing
- Learning how you can acquire assistive technology and communication equipment
- Planning your child's education plan, particularly as he or she nears high school graduation
- Obtaining and directing PCA services
- Finding out about accessible transportation services
- Obtaining and maximizing benefits
- Setting career goals in a current or future job, or finding employment
- Addressing communication needs because of a language or communication barrier
- Understanding your civil rights under the ADA or Fair Housing law
- Helping people understand your disability and ways to accommodate disabilities
- Appealing a decision from a housing, educational or medical provider or an employer
- Increasing your access to necessary healthcare



Consumers become empowered as active, participating members of their community.



Personal Care Attendant Program



Personal Care Attendants (PCA) are vital for many disabled people to live independently. PCAs provide physical assistance with necessary daily living activities, or household tasks that would take an exceptionally long time for disabled individuals to do by themselves. The PCA Program is a consumer-directed service, funded through MassHealth, where a person with a disability hires, trains and supervises an attendant to assist the individual with various tasks so they can be as independent as possible. PCAs provide consumers with:

- Assistance with walking, transfers to and from wheelchairs and scooters, and using mobility equipment
- Assistance taking medications
- Help with dressing and grooming
- Aid with range-of-motion exercises
- Help with meal preparation, eating, and clean-up
- Performance of household services such as laundry, shopping and housekeeping

BCIL's PCA Program makes it possible for many individuals with disabilities to be a part of the work force, manage their daily lives, raise families and achieve maximum independence.

Youth Programs

BCIL provides our four core services for youth consumers (14-22 years old) as well. We help young people with disabilities during these key transition years find housing, search for jobs, solve transportation issues, and obtain appropriate equipment. We work with them to develop skills such as resume and cover letter writing, budgeting, and checkbook balancing. BCIL provides guidance with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Transition Plan (ITP) processes and our peer mentoring helps young people sort through questions such as these:

- Do I disclose my disability when I first apply for a job?
- How do I deal with Internet dating?
- What are appropriate boundaries to establish between myself and my PCA?

BCIL has three staff people dedicated to working with young people and we've greatly increased the number served by forming relationships with several school systems and various agencies. We coordinate, along with Easter Seals, monthly Youth Forums where young people with disabilities get together to discuss issues unique to their age group and organize activities to address these issues. Our Youth Specialists also help our consumers publish a newsletter targeted to young people with disabilities.



We help young people with disabilities during key transition years.



Advocacy

BCIL believes that greater independence for people with disabilities is a social imperative and that people with disabilities must unite to speak out on larger issues that affect our lives such as housing, healthcare, and transportation access. We employ Community Organizers to foster civic engagement by developing leadership and advocacy skills within our burgeoning group of over 400 grassroots advocates, and by working with this group to advocate for specific programs for people with disabilities.

BCIL cultivates grassroots leaders by coordinating Neighborhood Action Groups, Monthly Leadership Development meetings and periodic Leadership Forums. We also organize an annual Advocates Summit to discuss and prioritize issues affecting the disability community. The result has been stronger, larger and more effective grassroots campaigns on behalf of people with disabilities.

Recent successes include:

Improving access to the MBTA. BCIL and its partner in T advocacy, Greater Boston Legal Services, settled a landmark class-action lawsuit against the T for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Public transportation service was essentially off limits to many people with disabilities, denying them reliable access to jobs, cultural offerings, educational opportunities and recreation around Greater Boston. \$310 million has been earmarked by the T to improve access to buses, subways, and stations, and MBTA management is demonstrating a commitment to overhaul how they serve customers with disabilities.





Protecting the PCA program and supporting affordable healthcare. PCA Quality Workforce Council legislation, drafted with 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and now enacted into law, establishes a registry of PCAs, making it easier for a disabled individual to find a PCA. The legislation also allows for collective bargaining and improved compensation for PCAs, enabling more people to stay with the job or be attracted to it, reducing turnover. More than 15,000 people utilize over 28,000 Personal Care Attendants each year in Massachusetts in order to maximize their independence, stay out of institutional settings, raise families, pursue jobs and continue schooling.

Promoting better municipal access. BCIL advocates, in conjunction with the Disability Law Center, for greater voter participation through improved access to Boston's polling locations. Our actions have led to the relocation of polling places to accessible sites. We also campaign for improved accessibility of other barriers around the city such as inaccessible buildings, pathways and sidewalks.

Housing. Housing continues to be the number-one issue for people calling BCIL for assistance. BCIL's advocacy efforts have generated millions of dollars for programs that support integrated, accessible, and affordable housing for people with disabilities, including the Home Modification Loan Program, the Community Based Housing Program, and the Alternative Housing Voucher Program.

MASSACHUSETTS EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

The program, administered and funded by Verizon, allows BCIL to distribute free telephones and low-cost equipment designed to assist individuals with disabilities. If you are a Massachusetts resident who has an analog phone line (not a cable connection through a cable provider) and meet certain disability and income guidelines, you may be eligible to receive a phone and related adapted equipment. Phones are provided for individuals who have physical or mobility disabilities, who are deaf and hard of hearing, or who are blind or visually impaired. Examples of available equipment include TTYs, hands-free phones, memory equipped phones, amplified phones, signalers, speech aids and large-print phones.

MASSACHUSETTS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LOAN PROGRAM

BCIL, in conjunction with Easter Seals, helps provide individuals with disabilities access to a low-interest loan for assistive technology. Loans can be used for adaptations to the home for physical access, adaptation to a vehicle for a lift or assistive driving device, and assistive technology for your home or office computer.





Donations

BCIL relies on donations from individuals, corporations and foundations to meet our obligations. We raise funds through the annual Marie Feltin Award Ceremony, our Construction Industry Night at the Boston Pops, BCIL Memberships and our Annual Appeal. Donation opportunities range from naming rights to planned gifts to supporting our various events throughout the year. We accept credit cards, checks and pledges.

Please contact our Director of External Relations to discuss ways you can help us continue to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Greater Boston and across Massachusetts.

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