

WEST LIMERICK INDEPENDENT LIVING

Handbook



**Developing good working
relationships between Service
Users (Leaders) and Personal
Assistants.**

WEST LIMERICK INDEPENDENT LIVING

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West Limerick Independent Living (CIL) Handbook

INTRODUCTION

CIL is an organisation of, and for people with physical and sensory disabilities who pursue Independent Living through the provision of services such as Personal Assistant services. CIL strive to promote these services, as well as projecting positive images and perceptions of people with disabilities.

Definitions;

The philosophy of Independent Living promotes the idea of individuals living in an independent manner regardless of their position in society. This refers to circumstances from person to person, and encourages them to live as they wish, regardless of barriers, which are imposed by society.

Personal Assistants:

A Personal Assistant (generally referred to as a PA) provides assistance with both personal care and household tasks, and assist people outside the home environment to continue living within their local community by attending work or education and going to social activities such as pubs, clubs, cinema, theatre, sporting events, holidays, etc. The activities of the PA are directed by the person with the disability themselves. Their primary function is to facilitate a person with a disability to lead an independent life.

Service User (Leader):

The person with the disability is sometimes referred to as the Leader since the activities of the Personal Assistant (PA) are directed by the person with the disability. For instance, the person with the disability may instruct their PA to clean the bathroom, if they so require, however, the PA would not undertake this task unless directed to do so by the Leader, or without some sort of input from the leader.

AS A SERVICE USER YOU SHOULD BE “SELF-DIRECTING” IN THAT YOU

- Understand how your disability impacts on your life
- Are aware of the nature and level of your assistance/ needs
- Are capable of scheduling Personal Assistants (PA)
- Are capable of training, supervising, instructing and communicating with PA's
- Understand and execute your responsibilities as a Leader (Service User)
- Manage timesheets, etc., and documents as required by CIL
- Evaluate the service you receive and communicate this evaluation to CIL.

INDUCTION

At the onset of employment problems can be avoided or minimised if it is made clear what the job involves. Induction is basically a programme of information, training, and work, planned. It conveys to the PA and Service User exactly what is required of them.

Induction should never be delegated to others, an induction programme helps build an effective working relationship and makes it clear, who to go to for advice and information. It provides the opportunity for Service User and PA to get to know more about each other: their likes and dislikes, ideas, what drives PA to do the job and so on. Take the time and do it now, it will pay off in the long run.

Responsibilities of Service User

Typical duties

- To understand what it means to engage in independent living.
- To direct their PA's so that the Leader can achieve independent living.
- To gain an understanding of what is involved in your role.
- To have in-depth knowledge of this manual and to participate in training.
- To process within the required time, paperwork such as timesheets etc.
- To ensure that each PA works the actual number of hours entered on their timesheet, and mediate all payroll/personnel problems.

Typical duties of a Leader as a trainer

- To ensure the PA has a clear understanding of what it means to engage in independent living.
- To provide the PA with direction and support during their training and to manage training schedules.
- To participate in training to gain an understanding of what is involved in taking on the role of trainer.

The main areas to consider are:

- Personal area - transfers from, and to, wheelchair, personal care instruction, eating, etc.
- Domestic area - laundry, shopping, meal preparation, driving, wheelchair maintenance, etc.
- Social area - going out to the pub/concerts, meetings, etc.
- Also - if you are in employment or education, consider the assistance you may require in these areas as well.

Why is it useful to keep a work record?

- It helps you find out about your different needs
- It helps you determine how many hours you need personal assistance
- It helps to organise your work schedule by drawing up a job description.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Make good use of your PA's time, presumably the number of hours of assistance you receive is limited.

Ask yourself the following questions;

- What do I need assistance with, and need doing – all you're different needs.
- Where do the tasks need to be done – at home, at work, getting around?
- At what time does the task need doing – morning, afternoon, evening, night.
- How long does each task take – two minutes, thirty minutes, longer?
- How often do you need the task to be done – three times daily, twice weekly, once monthly?
- Think about how you use your PA's time
- Make a task list or talk through with your PA, necessary tasks, at the beginning of the day
- Prioritise tasks
- Give precise, non-confusing instructions
- Delegate – allow PA to make decisions on when and how some tasks should be carried out.
- Be realistic about the time needed to carry out tasks
- Ensure your PA is aware of how you require specific tasks done
- Expect the unexpected

WORKING RELATIONSHIP

Leader/PA relationship is a very complex one. In most cases it is a one-to-one relationship, which on occasions, can become intense and personal. You need to consider the vulnerability of both parties in order to guard against any upsets that may occur and to establish professional boundaries. If both parties understand exactly what their responsibilities are then problems are less likely to materialise.

Personality clashes can occur in the relationship between Leader and PA. It can be particularly difficult when you have been with someone for a long time, and because of the nature of the relationship you may have become quite friendly. If clashes arise it is important that there is a set procedure with which the problem can be settled amicably without destroying the relationship.

It is important that the Leader and PA are able to communicate openly with each other in an understanding and acceptable manner. Problems and misunderstandings are more likely to occur if there is lack of proper communication, and duties are misunderstood. Clear guidelines help to prevent or eliminate problems.

CONFLICT

Conflicts are usually best tackled head-on. If you don't express your annoyance or anger at a situation it is likely to fester into long-term resentment that is much harder to deal

with. In speaking about a conflict, remember to describe the ‘behaviour’, or the ‘issue’, NOT their personality. Instead of saying ‘you are lazy’, try saying something like ‘I’m furious that the washing up hasn’t been done today!’ This describes the behaviour and leaves room for improvement.

If there is a persistent problem that is threatening your long-term relationship, try problem-solving together, if you are nervous of doing it yourself then contact CIL for further advice.

Remember

Everybody makes mistakes sometimes, but some behaviour is totally unacceptable. If you are having problems it is always a good idea to talk about in confidence to a good friend to whom you can express your feelings. The staff of the CIL is very willing to discuss your problems with you.

INSTRUCTIG YOUR PA

Different PA’s will learn at different rates. Some may be able to carry out your task from your verbal description of how it should be done; others may need to be shown. When you are describing a task, explain the procedure step by step, explain it the same way each time to give consistency, and explain why it’s important to do it this way.

Don’t assume your PA will know how to do something without being told, even if they have worked for someone with a disability like your own. Different Leaders have different ways of doing the same thing; you must help your PA to learn what your preferences are. At the same time, consider any constructive suggestions your PA makes – they may think of something helpful that has not occurred to you.

The PA is answerable only to you or the person you designate – keep this firmly in your mind and help avoid confusion and conflict.

A problem for Leaders, particularly if they are new to the service is learning how to designate and tell PA’s what to do and what not to do. In many cases PA’s need to know what their responsibilities are without being told repeatedly. You don’t want to have to tell the PA to do the washing up after each meal. Therefore, for certain tasks you have to establish a routine. A written checklist of PA tasks and responsibilities can be extremely helpful. If routine tasks such as washing the dishes, washing floors, dusting, etc., are written down, your PA will know exactly what to do and when to do it.

For other daily tasks such as choice of meal, or clothing, the Leader will want direct control. Consequently, it is important for Leaders to decide when to delegate and when not to. It is also important that Leaders remember that PA’s need to be respected as people and told when they are doing a good job. Such considerations may strengthen and build a good working relationship.

APPRAISAL

Appraisal of your PA is important, by appraisal we mean a meeting, over a cup of tea and a biscuit every month or so, during which time you won't be disturbed. Look at how well your PA is performing, and any problems they may have. You may examine long-term issues, for example, training needs, routine, hours, wages, etc.

If your PA is not performing well, they may be just confused about what you expect of them. If your PA quits the job after a short period of employment because they are unhappy, examine your own methods carefully. If you have to recruit PA's on a regular basis it can be a frustrating and time-consuming process. Prepare by identifying what points you want to raise with your PA:

- Start with the positive – what are they doing well?
- Are there tasks you feel they are not doing well?
- Is there anything about their behaviour, which you don't like?
- Are you happy with their timekeeping?
- Does your PA need training on how to operate equipment?
- Does your PA need coaching in any task?
- Does their job description need to be revised or updated?
- Have your needs changed?

EXPRESSING YOUR NEEDS

Just as you can't read your PA's mind, they can't read yours. You have to learn to articulate your own needs. This may take practice, especially if you are used to being independent and don't have much experience of relying on others or asking them for help.

You may not want to share many of your feelings with your PA, but sometimes it's important to do this. If you are feeling generally irritable or under the weather it is helpful for the PA to know that they are not the specific cause of your mood, it may also help them meet your needs more appropriately.

Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is important. If you are trying to give negative feedback about something that you don't like, there are some simple guidelines you can follow to do this constructively.

- Give feedback as soon as possible after the incident has occurred.
- Don't give feedback in front of others.
- Describe the 'action' not the 'person.'
- Be specific and just give one short example.
- Don't bring up incidents from the past – stick with the present.
- Give feedback to provide information – not to criticise.

Remember positive feedback is important if your PA has done something well, tell them so – they need appreciation and encouragement like the rest of us.

ABUSE

You have the right to receive personal assistance without being taken advantage of sexually or financially, and to terminate explosive or abusive relationships. If you feel that your PA's behaviour is inappropriate towards you, talk to someone you can trust about the situation, or contact a CIL official. A second opinion can be helpful.

EXPENSES INCURRED BY PA

Out of pocket expense incurred by the PA while assisting you during socialising, hobbies, for instance, admission fees into cinemas, theatres, clubs, etc., is your responsibility. If you are requiring the assistance of your PA at a dinner function, for instance, you must pay for the PA's admission and meal, tell the PA well in advance exactly what you will be responsible for so there will be no confusion.

If a PA accompanies you on public transport, holidays, etc., you are responsible for reimbursing the PA for any expenses that they have incurred as a result of this. Get the facts straight at the commencement of employment exactly what expenses you will be responsible for and inform the PA of this.

If you have use of the PA's vehicle, you must pay them an agreed mileage rate. This applies when you ask the PA to take you on an errand, or when they go on an errand at your request. No matter how little the mileage incurred, if you authorised it then you must pay for it – it's as simple as that.

INSURANCE

You need to be aware of your responsibilities regarding insurance. The main areas of insurance are Public Liability and Employers Liability, which are covered by the employer (CIL). If a PA is using their own vehicle for work purposes they are required to indemnify their employer in their vehicle insurance policy. Any costs involved are a matter for the PA and Service User.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The recruitment process involves, drawing up a job description, advertising the position, drawing up selection criteria, interviews, Garda vetting, drawing up a contract of employment and code of conduct and drawing up disciplinary procedures. Some Leaders may find these tasks difficult to carry out, your local CIL are there to assist you.

JOB SATISFACTION

The position of PA is challenging, varied, and rewarding in the sense that through your abilities you are enabling a person with a disability to live a fuller life, to participate in the community etc., and to live independently.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

This issue affects everyone. When you have the services of a PA you both have to be extra conscious on health and safety matters. It is your responsibility to reduce or eliminate sources that could cause injury. Your PA should be told not to do anything that might endanger their or your safety. **Lifting, handling and moving training is mandatory.**

THIS GUIDE IS ISSUED ON CONDITION

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