



INDEPENDENT LIVING SCHEME
INFORMATION FOR
PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS USED IN THIS INFORMATION

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE-the help provided to a disabled person
PERSONAL ASSISTANT (PA)-people who provide help to disabled people
PA USER-people who use ILA's service

INTRODUCTION

Independent Living Alternatives (ILA) was established in May 1989. There was a need for an organisation dedicated to independence and freedom for disabled people; an organisation managed by people who use the services provided by the organisation.

ILA is an organisation which promotes independence and freedom for disabled people. ILA aims to enable people who need personal assistance to be able to live independently in the community and take full control of their lives and thereby have individuality and spontaneity. ILA recruits personal assistants and establishes the personal assistance as a direct part of an individual's life in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and interdependency.

ILA provides Personal Assistants (PAs) to people who need personal assistance in day-to-day living; people generally classified by society as having 'severe disabilities' and who need a constant and high level of personal assistance. ILA does not work with people who are ill, but people who have physical limitations in their lives.

Within society it is taken for granted that, as adults, we make our own decisions. It is natural that we decide when we get up or go to bed, when we have a bath or go to the toilet, whether we work or play, whether we have a night on the town or stay in and watch television; However, this right is denied to many disabled people. Even today for some disabled people who need personal assistance, the options for existence are limited. They may be "looked after" by ageing parents or live in institution or struggle to survive with limited support in their home. For these people basic freedom and rights are denied, their aspirations are stilted and their potential is unfulfilled. Disabled people are often sentenced to being second-class citizens and viewed by society as being in-valid.

Disabled people do not have to live like this, there are practical options for independence. A distinction must be made between disability and society. The majority of problems faced by disabled people are socially constructed and do not

have to exist. For example, stairs, buses and shops can be physical barriers for people who use wheelchairs. Disability must be seen as a part of an individual and accepted in a positive manner and not be seen as something abnormal, it must be accepted in the same way as race and gender. ILA is showing that with the right support disabled people do live independent lives.



Ms Smith has a muscular disability which means that she has a general weakness in her muscles. She doesn't walk and uses an electric wheelchair. She needs help to get dressed, go to the toilet and have a bath. She also needs help at work with lifting books and someone to drive her to meetings. During the night she needs someone to help her change her sleeping position.

Mr Jones has cerebral palsy and as a result has little control over his arms and legs. He is often seen as being stupid because he has a speech impairment, but he is actually studying for a degree in sociology. He needs help to get dressed and to do the cooking and housework. He needs someone to push his wheelchair and to take notes at university.

ILA PA users live ordinary lives in the community. They interact with and contribute to society as do non-disabled people. They have the responsibilities and commitments considered as being 'correct' for their age and status. Yet in their lives they have all experienced denial of freedom and still face prejudice and discrimination. They have a strong sense of commitment to their own rights and self-acceptance which is fuelled by a determination to develop themselves within society. With the right support there is no reason why a disabled person cannot live independently and develop their own potential.

VOLUNTARY PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

This information is designed to help potential personal assistants to decide if they would like to work for ILA. Although each placement is unique and very much about individuals there are many common features and shared experiences.



ILA places a personal assistant (PA) with a disabled person needing personal assistance. A PA becomes part of someone's life for four months or more providing personal, physical and practical assistance when necessary, in an atmosphere of equality and mutual acceptance; not as a 'carer' or 'facilitator'. There are no particular qualifications needed to be a PA except an open mind and an empathy with the philosophy of the

organisation and the disability rights movement.

The role of a Personal Assistant is to provide personal assistance to disabled people to enable a PA user to live independently. The relationship between PA user and Personal Assistant is complex and unique. Both PA users and Personal Assistants are dependent on each other, as fundamentally one cannot survive without the other. Within this relationship both PA user and Personal Assistant can expect to be treated with respect and equality. The most essential criterion to enable a successful placement is communication between both PA user and Personal Assistant.

PAs provide personal assistance to people to assist in every day living. They help to do simple things like getting dressed, going to the toilet, washing, dressing, cooking, driving, shopping, etc. PAs do not need any experience as all the training is provided by the PA user with regular support from ILA staff.

A placement is about equality, mutual acceptance, flexibility and interaction. However, because ILA is working with individuals there are no hard and fast rules and no fully defined roles. You will to a great extent have the freedom to be yourself and directly contribute your individuality to a placement.

A placement with ILA is a useful, enjoyable and interesting experience. Whether you are taking time off from studying, changing jobs or simply wanting a new experience. ILA gives people the space and time to do so. At the same time personal assistants gain new skills, meet new people, get to know London and have a direct

insight into disability. Many PAs use the experience to work or study in a related profession in the future.

Working for ILA has given me an understanding of the problems faced by disabled people and an insight into myself working in a one-to-one situation.

Joe

I found I was part of the PA user's life and was able to increase my experience and knowledge on modern issues regarding disability. There were also benefits like flexible working hours and plenty of time off to see London. I now work as a support worker with people with learning disabilities.

Liz

I really enjoyed the benefits of working for a non-exploitative and PA user orientated voluntary organisation. I am now going to start a course in social work.

Jan

Starting a new placement is usually stressful for PA users and personal assistants. People are always apprehensive and it takes time to get to know each other and to learn what is involved in the placement. As a Personal Assistant, at first, you will no doubt find providing personal assistance a little daunting and possibly frustrating. This is a common experience, but you will quickly overcome it. You will be learning many new techniques, from how to dress someone, to how to charge a wheelchair battery, from using a hoist to emptying a urine bag.

The only aspect of the physical support which really bothered me was helping the PA user go to the loo. Helping someone go to toilet is one of society's strongest taboos, but like all the other things, I quickly got used to it.

Pete

A personal assistant is not provided as a servant or a master and nor is the PA user. Respect and accept the PA user for what s/he is and the PA user will accept you for what you are. Be free to be yourself, say what you feel, but try not to judge, impose or control. Also remember you have your own time to live your life, a PA user is always dependent on having someone to assist in their daily life.

You will see a PA user's life with all its rough edges. There are few secrets and as the placement progresses you will learn much about each other, bear in mind that there are things which happen in a placement which are confidential. PAs share a PA user's

ups and downs, successes and failures, you will be interacting with a PA user's friends, family, colleagues and lovers: Some people you will like and others you will not.

People need their own space, always remember that you both need space and you will not always be needed: understand that sometimes, particularly in the case of close relationships, three people can be a crowd. Good communication is the essence of a successful placement. If you feel bored and feel you could be doing something else, say so!

When you are working, in most cases, you will live in the PA user's home. On your time off you will live in separate accommodation usually with other PAs near to the PA user's home. The PA accommodation is your home whilst you work with ILA and you can treat it as such and also with respect. Within reason all of the expenses on the accommodation are paid by ILA.

CONDITIONS OF A PLACEMENT

EXPENSES

£63.50 per week (£23.50 living expenses; £15 travel; £25 food)

Expenses are paid per calendar month by bank transfer on the first Monday of each month. A lending fund is available for the first month in cases of severe hardship.

THE HOUSEHOLD FUND

Each PA room in "time-off" accommodation is allocated £5.00 per month to contribute to the cost of household items such as toilet rolls and washing up liquid. To claim PAs must submit shop itemised receipts to ILA by 21st of each month. The amount will then be reimbursed to the PA.

TRAVELLING EXPENSES

PAs receive one third of their travelling expenses to attend an interview. Full expenses up to £100 are reimbursed to attend an interview with a PA user, to commence a placement, for holidays and to leave a placement. Travel must be by the most appropriate means.

Expenses are reimbursed to commence a placement, for holidays and to leave a placement. Travelling expenses are only payable up to a sum of £100 if a receipt is provided and the travel is by the most appropriate means.

TIME OFF

PAs have a minimum of 2 full days off per week. There are no fixed working hours, but most volunteers work 48-hour shifts; rotas are decided by PA users and PAs on each individual placement. In the event of illness or holiday, PAs may be asked to work extra shifts and will receive time off in lieu.

ILLNESS

In the case of illness PAs are expected to cover for up to a period of six consecutive days and receive time off in lieu.

The nature of ILA means that it cannot function without PAs. Therefore if a PA cannot work because of sickness for more than two weeks, the placement will finish. In this situation a PA is welcome to reapply to ILA when they are fully recuperated.

HOLIDAYS

PAs are entitled to a holiday of 1 week at 4 months (if staying for 6 months); 4 and 8 months (if staying 10 months) and 4, 8 and 10 (if staying 12 months). Travel

expenses are paid up to £100. Holidays must be negotiated with the other PA/s and the PA user to arrange cover.

PLACEMENTS

PAs are usually expected to offer a commitment of four months or more. There is a one-month probation period on all placements for both PAs and PA users. During this time either party may terminate the placement with one week's notice.

LEAVING DATE

PAs are expected to give six weeks notice of leaving.

PHILOSOPHY

PAs and PA users must work towards the aims of ILA, that is an atmosphere of mutual respect and interdependency between PAs and PA users.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

PAs and PA users must abide by ILA's equal opportunities policy.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

ILA is concerned for the health safety and welfare of all PAs working for the company, so far as is reasonably practicable under the terms of the Health and Safety Act.

INSURANCE

As a PA you are insured during the whole of your placement for any accident or injury occurring as a direct result of the work that you are doing.

ILA does not insure your personal possessions and you are strongly advised to have personal insurance if you intend to bring anything of any value with you.

COMMUNICATION

The essence of a good placement is communication. It is essential that if there are any problems people talk to each to resolve their differences and difficulties and bring these to the attention of ILA as soon as possible.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information that is learnt by either a PA or a PA user on a placement is confidential. This must be remembered particularly when mixing with other PA users and PAs.

TRAINING

The PA user provides all of the training required for a PA to work on a placement. If a PA has a specific training need, s/he must inform the PA user.

LIFTING

Any PA experiencing difficulty with lifting must report it to the PA user and to ILA immediately.

SUPPORT

ILA provides support in four ways:

- Direct support from PA users
- Individual support from ILA staff
- Peer support from other PAs
- Monthly Volunteer PA Forum

SPARE TIME

PAs have a reasonable amount of free time whilst with ILA. ILA has a range of information on the localities of placements.

REFERENCES

ILA will provide written references for anyone who works for the organisation.

AGREEMENTS

PA users agree to the same conditions as PAs. PA users are working towards an equality within the working relationship to enable their independence.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

RETURNING AN APPLICATION FORM



Applicants must complete an application form. The form is used to assess an applicant's suitability for working with ILA. The application form is also shown to PA users to enable them to decide if they feel an applicant is suitable to work with them.

Please complete the application form in black ink as it will be photocopied and include as much information as possible to assist ILA in deciding your suitability for working with the organisation. CVs and resumes are not considered.

PROVIDING REFERENCES

ILA will write to your referees and ask them to complete a form on your suitability to work with the organisation.

A referee must be an employer or a tutor. Your friends and family are not acceptable as referees.

INTERVIEW

You may be invited to ILA for an informal interview. This meeting is to explain further how ILA works and gives you an opportunity to ask questions about the organisation. It also for ILA to find out more about you and determine your suitability to work for the organisation.



Overseas applicants can complete an ILA taped and telephone interviews.

PA USERS

Application forms are passed to PA users so that they may select the applicants that they wish to interview.

2ND INTERVIEW

This interview is usually held in a PA user's home. A strong preference is given to applicants who are prepared to attend this interview in person, although it is possible to conduct this interview by phone or internet.

PLACEMENT

When both a PA user and an applicant are happy to work together an offer of a placement is made to the applicant. There is a one month probation period on all of ILA's placements.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

An individual who feels that s/he has been unfairly treated within a placement by the PA, PA User or ILA has the right to complain about the situation.

The procedure is as follows:

Any person who feels that s/he has been unfairly treated by a PA User, PA, staff member or ILA have the right to complain about the situation.

The procedure is as follows:

1 The person must firstly talk to the Director of ILA. A meeting will be arranged within 3 working days.

2 If this does not resolve the situation the person can request a meeting with a representative of the Management Committee: A meeting will be arranged with 5 working days by telephone conferencing.

2 If the person does not feel that the situation has been resolved a formal letter detailing the complaint can be sent to the Management Committee. A reply will be provided within 10 working days.

You are entitled to have an advocate of your choice present at the meeting and as far as is possible, any suitable representatives from ILA.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

Independent Living Alternatives clearly recognises that it is not only disabled people who face discrimination, prejudice and denial of basic human rights from a society, which breeds inequality. ILA provides its service on the basis of need and fills staff vacancies on the basis of suitability, qualification and ability and empathy with the aims and philosophy of the organisation.

ILA actively aims to publicise its services and vacancies as widely as possible and welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

ILA promotes a positive image of disability and feels that individual's who themselves have experienced prejudice and discrimination will be able to more readily accept ILA's concern to further the process of social equalisation for disabled people

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ILA is a registered charity number: 802198