

The Independent Living Scheme provides full-time personal assistance that concentrates on providing a service to people is based on mutual respect, equality and acceptance of difference. ILA achieves this by recruiting and placing full-time support on a voluntary basis. In effect ILA establishes the necessary personal assistance as a direct part of an individual's life. ILA enables PA Users to determine their own actions and lifestyles by enabling self-definition of physical and practical support needs and directing a PA to achieve this. A PA is provided to enable a PA User to live the life s/he chooses within the remit of ILA's philosophy.

ILA places full-time PAs with an individual who has a physical disability. The PAs are provided with living expenses of £23.50 per week, free accommodation and a food and travel allowance. The rota system is flexible and is decided by everyone involved, that is the PA User and the PA; PAs must have a minimum of 2 consecutive days not working per week and also have time off during the day whilst working. The PAs become part of someone's life for four months or more providing personal assistance when necessary. The PAs provided are not qualified carers, usually they are either graduates who are looking for direct work experience or people from overseas who wish to improve their English and live in England for a time. ILA interviews all of the PAs before their application forms are passed to PA Users. PAs are recruited on the basis of having an open mind and an empathy with the philosophy of the organisation. Overseas applicants must all be able to speak English to a reasonable standard to be offered a placement.

PAs do things like assist with getting dressed, going to the toilet, washing, dressing, cooking, driving, shopping, etc. PAs will, within reason, carry out any physical task that is required by the PA User in their daily life. Usually, PAs do not have any experience of providing physical support and therefore the PA User provides all of the necessary training.

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. Starting a new placement is usually stressful for PA Users and PAs. People are always apprehensive and it takes time to get to know each other and to learn what is involved in the placement. A PA is not a servant or a master and nor is the PA User. Respect and accept the PA for what s/he is and the PA 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 a PA is there to do what you need them to do, but they are individuals, they have feelings and most of all, they get tired!

In most cases, a PA will live in the PA User's house when working. On their time off they will live in separate accommodation usually with other PAs near to the PA User's home. People need their own space; good communication is the essence of a successful placement. If you don't want or need your PA around, say so!

Independent Living Alternatives is not an agency in the traditional sense of the word. PA Users must have an empathy and understanding of the aims of the organisation and must agree to ILA's working practices.

ILA has a stringent application procedure for PAs. All PAs complete an application form and are interviewed by the organisation either in person or by audio. PAs must provide two references, plus a medical reference and a CRB. Once these stages have been passed successfully, application forms are forwarded to PA Users, who then have an opportunity to interview each applicant either in person or by phone. Following the short-listing a PA User and PA have a one-month probation period to ensure that the placement is working and that there are no difficulties. PAs usually work for 4 months and are asked to give 6 weeks notice of leaving.

ILA stresses that there is no such thing as a perfect PA. Each person is an individual and in such a close working relationship, both parties get to know each other from both a positive and negative side.

There are other criteria which need to be looked at when determining if ILA can meet your needs:

The role of an ILA Personal Assistant (voluntary) is to provide personal assistance to disabled people and to enable a PA User to live independently. The relationship between PA User and PA is complex and unique. Both PA Users and PAs are dependent on each other, as fundamentally one cannot survive without the other. Within this relationship both PA User and PA 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 PA.

- A PA is not provided solely for domiciliary support. A PA must be enabling a PA User to live an independent lifestyle whether that is to go to work, college, the cinema, shopping, etc.
- ILA's philosophy is based on mutual interdependency and equality between a PA User and a PA. All PA Users are expected to treat their working relationships as an interactive process and to be open about building a relationship.
- PA Users are responsible for the training of all PAs and in directing how a placement operates.
- PA Users must be able to provide a separate bedroom in their own homes for a PA to use whilst they are working unless the placement does not require PAs to live-in.
- The relationship between a PA User and a PA must be non-exploitative.
- Independent Living Alternatives provides PA User support as and when necessary. ILA believes that the essence of a good placement is communication. It is essential to talk to a PA and tell them if they are doing something wrong.
- ILA believes that no disabled person should be financially penalised for the additional cost of having a disability. ILA charges fees for the services provided, which should be paid either by the Local Authority or the Independent Living Fund.

- ILA is a self-financing non-profit making organisation and the fees realistically reflect the cost of the services provided.
- ILA is committed to ensuring that PA Users have the support of a PA at all times. ILA will negotiate emergency funding to use temporary workers in the event of a PA being ill or if a PA is unable to provide a service for whatever reason.
- The Company is managed by a voluntary Management Committee. Service (PA) Users are encouraged to take an active role in determining the development of the Company.
- During the year ILA organises PA User meetings to discuss issues relating specifically to using ILA PAs, physical support and related issues.
- PA Users must sign an agreement that they understand and accept the method of working by the organisation.