

2021 – 2022 Peer Services Profile & Success Stories

Independent Living Resources
Center for Independent Living
Portland, Oregon

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Staff Majority Are People with Disabilities

ILR has a high percentage of staff members who experience a disability and serve effectively as peer role models. Of ILR's 8.65 FTE consumer direct-service providers, 6.85 FTE are filled by staff members who identify as a person with a disability. Each of these people serve as a peer role model to both staff and consumers served.

Expressions of peer role modeling are made one on one with consumers working on Independent Living Plan Goals, and are also offered by staff members with disabilities who facilitate and/or lead consumer group activities. ILR peer staff members lead by example, and at times share their personal experience with disabilities and navigating the social safety net system in order to further a consumer's understanding of resources and ability to self-advocate. ILR continues to incorporate the value of fostering peer relationships and peer role models in all that the agency does, in keeping with the IL philosophy. This is done in a number of ways:

Training & Program Development

ILR continues to offer staff training opportunities through ILRU, The State Unit on Aging: ADRC, and through The Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Livings/AOCIL, as well as through AIRS, and by bringing community partners on-site for staff trainings.

Staff and Board Recruitment

In keeping with IL requirements, at least 51% of ILR's Board Members are people with significant disabilities, while a majority of ILR's Staff Members are people with disabilities. This ratio ensures that consumers receiving services from ILR have service providers who are themselves people with disabilities and that the agency is consumer-directed, consumer-controlled.

Pandemic Services

ILR was quick to adopt remote services policies as the pandemic was anticipated and discussed with the board of directors and staff during January and February 2020. ILR went to remote working from home plans by late March 2020 with a few staff members offering face to face in person appointments at outside settings in the community while utilizing masks and social distancing. These policies have been effective in managing services for ILR. For October 2021 - September 2022, ILR continued to offer remote pandemic peer counseling services via phone and RingCentral video conferencing. Some staff members also continued meeting face to face with consumers at outdoor

venues, ranging from picnic tables we have outside of ILR's main offices to public park spaces. Overall, the extension of the pandemic provided the challenge of ongoing remote services, however, we have also found that many consumers have settled into the remote service routine. Overall, consumers are being served more frequently while the number of consumers served annually has expanded a bit this past year.

Consumer Success Stories

ILR's work with consumers often involves a series of steps that move consumers from Crisis to Stability (Creating Opportunities), from Stability to Peer Support and New Skills (Encouraging Choices), and from Peer Support to New Levels of Community Integration (Advancing Equal Access). While consumers enter Independent Living Services from unique places, they often move through common phases. Our success stories relate back to this dynamic movement. The following examples of success stories relate to these three experiences for consumers.

From Crisis to Stability (Creating Opportunities)

Often the first step for someone in crisis is to work to achieve stability. For someone with no income and at-risk of homelessness, a first step will often involve accessing emergency resources, as well as applying for SSI or SSDI, when suitable. Accessing shelter and food services and then gaining some type of disability assistance often allows consumers in crisis to see for the first time in a long while that they have choices for themselves in life. ILR's Mission is "Creating Opportunities for Consumers."

From Stability to Peer Support & New Skills (Encouraging Choices)

Once life stabilizes, consumers are open to visualizing the benefits of skills training and peer support either from individual Independent Living Specialists or from Peer Support Groups. The second element of ILR's Mission is "Encouraging Choices."

Peer Support & New Skills to Community Integration (Advancing Equal Access)

Skills training and peer interactions can often lead to the development of self-advocacy skills that allow for reintegration into broader society and at times successful pursuit of employment. The third element of ILR's Mission is "Advancing Equal Access."

ILR also continued the service priority system started in 2017. This is a product of dialogue among the seven Oregon CILs as a part of the SPIL Development Process. ILR and the other six CILs are allocating staff time in order to express a commitment to systems advocacy both in our service area and across the State of Oregon. As a result, ILR is implementing a "55/25/20" Service Model. When building work plans for IL Staff, 55% of staff time will be directed to the Core Services that focus on peer supports, i.e., direct, often one-one and small group work.

Each IL Staff Member will also have a work plan that allocates 25% of time towards Systems Advocacy. Examples of Systems Advocacy that will express this priority include ILR Staff Members serving as System Advocacy Liaisons on: 1) County

Disability Service Advisory Councils, 2) Public Transportation Committees on Accessible Transportation, 3) The Interfaith Disabilities Network of Oregon, 4) Affordable Housing Alliances, 5) Partnering with Disability Rights Oregon and other advocacy stakeholders to initiate interventions to promote accessible communities.

One example of recent systems advocacy activities was the 2017 Federal Class Action Lawsuit brought by The Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living (AOCIL) and individuals with disabilities against The Oregon Department of Transportation for failure to comply with ADA requirements to add curb cuts when improving state highways. We continue to monitor settlement progress over 15 years with 2023 marking the first major 5 year milestone in achieving settlement deliverables.

Each ILR staff member's position profile allocates 20% of the person's time for time spent outside of the two above priorities, generally encompassing staff meetings, supervision, trainings and other time that is not directly spent on behalf of individual consumers or systems advocacy priorities. Below are examples first of systemic and then of individual success stories as a result of direct work with ILR consumers.

Systemic Successes

1. ILR worked with two graduate students who were placed here for about 5-6 months to complete field work assignments in pursuit of their MSWs.
2. ILR continued to partner with the Oregon Commission for the Blind to offer work experiences. We had one Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) young adult participant working with us for about 20 hours a week during the month of July 2022.
3. ILR continued to work with consumers who have previously applied for safety net benefits, especially through the SSI and SSDI programs.
4. ILR's WIN Program worked with 80+ consumers who were in the process of returning to work and wishing to coordinate work incentives during trial work periods. Some of these were youth and young adults transitioning into more independent living situations.
5. ILR's Traumatic Brain Injury Support Group (10-15) continued to meet this past year, while Rent Well (20+), Cooking Matters (15+) and Apple Users Group (3-4) were on Pandemic pause during the year. Each group in their own way assisted consumers in developing skills to more effectively live independently in the community. Some of these skills involved better management of anxiety and stress, others self-advocacy and self-reliance with housing and activities of daily living.

Individual Success Stories

1. A long-term consumer has had a lot of difficulties with goal attainment due to her disabilities recently got a phone. She has also been able to begin to address some of her emotional challenges in relationships with other service providers by acknowledging some things that made her anxious for many years and creating barriers to connecting with other agencies. We are working together on how she may best use the phone and

other technology to help her. This has been an extremely slow process, as this consumer takes a long time to develop trust and actually talk about what she is experiencing in terms of the daily difficulties she faces. Because of her long-term history with the agency, we were able to place these difficulties in context and she has agreed to begin working on the issues mentioned above.

2. A consumer was recently approved and is now in the queue for OERAP assistance after ILR provided a letter of support on her behalf. We explained the complexities of her housing situation as a low-income senior with significant disabilities renting rooms to other low-income individuals with disabilities.

3. A consumer recently found out she was selected in the HCV lottery for Washington County. She credits ILR for helping her understand the affordable housing system better and not missing an opportunity for getting subsidized rent in the future.

4. A consumer was able to leave Blanchet House (which he described as abusive and toxic), stabilize at a local mental health facility and reconnect with his family members. He is now planning on moving to CA to live with his father and they are working out the details. He is looking forward to making the most of this new opportunity, even with all the trauma he has experienced. He thanked ILR for being a safe, trusted constant in a confusing system during a vulnerable time in his life.

5. A consumer was able to secure home repair assistance from Catalyst Partners NW after ILR helped her complete their application. They are going to repair her kitchen and bathroom sinks and many other issues for free. Other employees and volunteers of CPNW have also stepped up to offer new furniture, further cleaning services, etc. based on the narrative provided on the application regarding the consumer's situation. ILR has been essential in coordinating a complex web of services to ensure the consumer is able to remain in her community and not be institutionalized against her wishes.

6. ILR helped a consumer who had never had a cell phone before. She was feeling extremely isolated and had always had significant cognitive issues in combination with emotional challenges, which made it very difficult for her to connect with others at times. She also doubted her own ability to locate and go into a store during the pandemic. She was, however, able to purchase the phone by asking me multiple times for directions to the store. She also had to learn to trust our agency even though she had been with us for some time and remains an active consumer. Even with all of these challenges, she was able to get a phone through ILR's CARES Act fund, which greatly increases her ability to connect with people and engage with the community, increasing her sense of personal safety and access to emergency services.

7. A consumer came to us houseless without any Oregon benefits as he came here from Washington. He did have a part-time job which had ended due to COVID. While working with ILR he found shared housing, his part-time job started back up at the Moda Center, and he is receiving Medicaid and Snap food benefits for the first time. He is also in a sobriety support group and receives individual mental health counseling.

8. A consumer with significant cognitive issues lost his Oregon ID card. He had been trying to get an appointment with the DMV for months to replace his ID card. Because of his disability, he wasn't able to utilize computer options and needed an in-person appointment. ILR assisted him in writing a request to the DMV and he got an appointment within a day of filling out the online form.

9. An ILR consumer with physical disabilities was approved for long-term care hours after being denied previously. She worked with her IL specialist to create a detailed functional ability document and used this in her successful assessment.

10. A consumer successfully explored her final goals. ILR helped finalize her connection to Northstar (Peer Mental Health) Clubhouse by having one of our Options Counselors attend a followup meetings there. She feels much better about closing services with ILR now that she is connected with more specialized Mental Health peer support services.

11. A consumer now has working sinks in both her bathroom and kitchen for the first time in many years. She also had her home cleaned by a professional cleaning service. She is on her way to finalizing the refinance of her mortgage and getting some home care help.

12. A consumer successfully located a one-bedroom apartment within his search perimeters. He credits ILR with providing the support needed to locate affordable and independent housing.

13. A woman who was repeatedly calling ILR from a nursing facility asking for help 'moving' and expressed concern her voice was not being respected. ILR was able to successfully refer this situation to Adult Protective Services and the Long Term Care Ombudsman's Office who conducted an abuse/neglect investigation.

14. With ILR's information and encouragement, a consumer was able to receive a Covid rental assistance extension - stabilizing housing until June 2022.

15. With ILR's support a consumer and her grandmother were approved for \$2,000 in deposit assistance from the Safety Net program. This will allow them to move to a larger and more accessible unit.

16. A counselor had a consumer who bought a laptop. The laptop broke. He was going to buy a new one, but through a discussion with the counselor he realized his old laptop was under warranty. The counselor guided him on how to reconnect with the reseller to get the laptop replaced. He wasn't able to navigate this process entirely independently due to his disability. This assistance is still on-going because the return process is complex. When successful, the agency will have saved the consumer over \$1,100 as compared to the cost of a new laptop.

17. A counselor helped a consumer with language to add to her medical chart regarding the nature of her communication disability and how medical staff could assist her in putting her most salient points regarding medical encounters in a fixed place in her chart, rather than asking her to verbally explain what she needed and why she was

coming in that day, which is not easy given the nature of her disability. When implemented, this accommodation should streamline communications with her entire medical team and reduce frustration for everyone, leading to smoother medical care for the consumer.

18. A consumer's long-term goal of finishing his GED has struggled due to the lack of confidence and understanding how to study. Through a conversation with his IL Specialist, he was able to locate resources to assist him in studying for the GED. He plans on taking all of the GED courses either in person or remotely as the conditions of COVID permit. He had been trying to fill this goal since graduating from high school 20+ years ago.

19. A consumer with a TBI needs to engage in an exercise program. She lives in a confined environment because she has family living with her in someone else's apartment. She's been medically cleared to do anything "she wants" to start an exercise program. She had ideas of what she wanted to do, but didn't know the words for them and was open to other possibilities. We spent several sessions brainstorming options for her to start a home workout program. She's excited because it's simple equipment she can afford, and they're exercises she knows how to do. She's thrilled to finally find the vocabulary with my help to exercise.

20. A consumer lives in a remote community of Oregon. We're doing phone-based services because there's not another CIL in her area. Due to her multiple disabilities, including a TBI and bone condition, the second being quite painful, we talked about strategies she can use to access the joy in her life and also distract her from the pain of the medicine she has to take. We also talked about the fact that these are very real challenges that she's facing, but she has the strength to be a resilient human. Tapping into that has helped reject her pain and stay compliant with the medicine.

21. A consumer whom is committed to investigating a job is about to take the GED for the first time in the context of discussing his life goals. He realized that his goals require more finances than he has and his economic situation contributes to his insecurity. He is going to search for a job for the first time in his life after the GED is complete.

22. We've been working with a consumer for a long time who has a support team around him. His housing situation needs to change in 30 days, so the team has come up with multiple solutions to ensure his housing will be stable. He'll be able to keep his own home, have all the support he needs, which includes 24/7 support for a severe disability. This continued independence is a huge step and should be celebrated.

23. A consumer with profound language issues and multiple disabilities was able to obtain housing as a result of our work. She's been near the top of the waiting list for a long time. Now she has a move-in date. This will enable her to build the foundation for an independent life.

24. ILR recently had a consumer who unfortunately passed away. However, this story's not about that. She shared with us that IL services were extremely important in her life, and that they were one of the things that added quality to her life in the presence of a

pandemic where she was extremely isolated because of multiple medical conditions. She had recently moved to Coos Bay and we had discussed providing services with her there. She was in Coos Bay for about half the year. She attended every group meeting up until she was too sick to attend, which was two weeks before her passing. The value of IL services for her was that they helped her share her values and articulate her passion for a better world. This was the case even with the challenges that she had medically. She had been an advocate her entire life which was extremely important to her.

25. A consumer was able to locate safe and affordable housing assistance through Portland Urban League after a significant period of houselessness. She now has several months of rent covered and some help with moving expenses. She credits ILR with keeping her motivated when it seemed like everything else was keeping her from finding stable housing. She appreciates the peer support and understanding we offered.

"I just wanted to say thank you again for all of your support, the educational process, steps to acquiring more balance/sustainability (housing, transportation, insight/knowledge, mental and emotional understanding/awareness, etc....). I feel it is because you genuinely care and understand that helps during this difficult time. It also helps with sharing very private parts of my life and being vulnerable in a safe zone. Words can't express how grateful I am!"