

Japan Council on Independent Living Centers - 30th Anniversary

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It is my honor to address this meeting and to congratulate the Japan Council on Independent Living Centers on its 30 year anniversary. Since 1991, your organization has been spreading the concept of Independent Living throughout Japan, raising awareness among the Japanese people about disabled citizens' rights to full citizenship, inclusion, and participation on equal terms. You have supported the establishment of new centers for independent living all over Japan. But you have given hope to disabled people for a better life in the future not only in Japan but also in many developing countries, in Asia, in Latin America.

The Independent Living Movement, from its very beginning has been formed by us who have extensive disabilities and depend on our families or have to live in residential institutions. To keep our group out of institutions, to make us less dependent on our families, and to enable us to live, work, and love in the community - with the help of personal assistance services - has been the movement's main goal.

In working for this goal, we have lobbied with politicians, we have used the media to raise the general public's awareness, and we have demonstrated in the streets. These methods have worked to some extent. But most of us still depend on our families or live in institutions. It is time to add another strategy: we need to become better in using the law as a tool for changing society; we need to become better at working together with lawmakers to write and implement legislation for personal assistance; we need to become better at working with pro bono lawyers and law students to use existing legislation in court and defend our rights to live independently and be included in the community.

Now is the time to move the battle from the street into the courtroom!

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