



## Supporters in Action

*A certified peer support specialist's take on Centers for Independent Living*

Centers for Independent Living are a free resource for people with disabilities that provide information and referral, skills training, peer support, and advocacy to facilitate independent living and community participation. We recently sat down with a certified peer support specialist to talk about his role and experience working at a Center for Independent Living for 11 years and as a peer specialist for 4 years.

### **How did you get into your role as a peer support specialist?**

I really like being a peer support specialist. I got hired here as a supports coordinator first, which is like a case manager and then moved onto this team. We offer the four core services of field training, information and referral, peer support, and advocacy but I wasn't doing any peer support at that time. I really enjoyed teaching the classes and all the other things I was doing, but I wanted to get involved in a more individual level with consumers and make more of a difference. The field training classes do help, and I've been told consumers learn a lot from them, but I still wanted to have an individual effect. I pushed my supervisor to get me some consumers for peer support, and since I was so interested in it I went through a certified peer support training.

### **What is unique about working at a Center for Independent Living?**

To tell you the truth I've never worked anywhere else so I can't really tell you what is unique about it, but it is cool. People come in here because they want to be here and I love working with the disability community. You can't push people here, you can't demand that they have any kind of treatment, therapy, or relationship with you at all. So it is people who do want to be here, and who acknowledge they do have a

disability, which is the first step. They are a fun group to work with.

### **One of the four core services Centers for Independent Living offer is advocacy. Can you explain a little bit about what advocacy looks like in your day to day role as a peer support specialist?**

Advocacy is definitely a little bit different. Advocacy is like when we navigate for consumers. For example, there is a guy I am working with right now that wants to get his driver's license and the ability to use hand controls on his car. The DMV is saying no, so it is my role to then go back to the DMV and advocate for him to find out why they are saying no because there are individuals with disabilities who are able to use hand controls in their car. That is just one example.

The key is that we're not social workers—we don't work for them and we don't do the work for them—but we help them to do the work themselves. The thing is we have a revolving door of people who are in here. People come in meet with me or different parts of the organization, get the services or help they need, and then move on. We advocate with them more than for them.