

IL-NET

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Empowering Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities: The Role of the Peer Model in CILs

Contrasting Approaches: Integration and Affinity Groups

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Program Development: Contrasting Approaches

- 35.5% of those receiving Social Security Disability Insurance live with a primary mental health diagnosis.
- 70% of those eligible for “OneCare” (both Medicaid and Medicare) in Massachusetts are living with at least a secondary mental health diagnosis.
- Because most Americans who have a mental health diagnosis remain “in the closet,” many Independent Living Programs may underestimate the number of participants who live with mental health challenges

“Integration” and “Affinity Groups”

Integration as the Goal

- We share a common identity as persons living with a disability.
- We engage in consciousness raising around the strengths and needs of persons living with a mental health challenge and/or psychiatric diagnosis.
- We confront false beliefs and fears around “those people” who have a psychiatric diagnosis.
- We create access to resources and community within the Independent Living Center.
- We share a common pool of resources.

“Integration” or “Affinity Groups”

Affinity Groups (with allies across disabilities)

- We start by segregating ourselves into affinity groups based on common “lived experience.”
- We develop a unique sense of pride (“Mad Pride”).
- We view ourselves as activists, not “consumers.”
- We define what “equal access” means for our affinity group based on specific instances of exclusion that members of our group have experienced.
- We organize based on these experiences of exclusion.
- We seek resources for our Affinity Group.
- We support other Affinity Groups as allies across disability.

Cross-Disability Organizing

- Affinity Groups develop their own leadership and organizing structure.
 - Affinity Groups resist “outside” leadership (paternalism).
 - Affinity Groups respect the leadership of other groups.
 - Affinity Groups form alliances based on shared values (and at times shared needs) but retain their separate identity, leadership, and organizing structure.
- Common Value Across Disabilities:

“Nothing About Us Without Us”