



iKan History

During the spring of 2010 Kansas Rehabilitation Services (KRS) issued a Request for Proposals for the “Capacity Building Initiative”. Eligible applicants were charged with developing a proposal to meet the KRS’s priority to increase access to services for persons who are blind or have low vision in the communities where they live, work and attend school. Services were to be designed to support competitive, integrated employment and support achievement of independent living outcomes for individuals that had received services through Kansas Seniors Achieving Independent Living (Kan-SAIL). The Kan-SAIL program was retired in the fall of 2010.

Prairie Independent Living Resource Center (PILR), the Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc. (RCIL), and Southeast Kansas Independent Living (SKIL) formed a coalition, named iKan, to prepare and submit a proposal for the project. (Southwest Kansas Center for Independent Living was added to the project and later removed from the project when it closed for business and PILR is now serving this area). PILR was awarded a two year contract, starting in August 2010, and immediately began work to build capacity and begin providing independent living skills training for individuals aged 55 plus.

Orientation & Mobility/Outreach Specialists were hired and began the capacity building portion of the project by being admitted and beginning the orientation and mobility (O&M) certification program offered through Texas Tech University (TTU). The program at TTU usually requires two years to complete. The first iKan O&M Specialists to complete the program will be in May 2012. Braille Specialists were also hired and began their certification training programs.

Concurrently the O&M/Outreach Specialists began efforts to reach the individuals that had been working with Kan-SAIL to offer Independent Living skills training services. Other concentrated outreach efforts included 28 consumer/partner focus groups. The meetings were held in January and February 2011 in Parsons, Chanute, Independence, Arkansas City, Hutchinson, Emporia, Dodge City, Atwood, Fredonia, Scott City,

Johnson, Newton, Pittsburg, Liberal, Colby, Pratt, Columbus, Iola, Garden City, Stafford, McPherson, Fort Scott, Phillipsburg, Hill City, Topeka, Coldwater, El Dorado, and Hays. The focus group format was utilized to announce iKan services and gather information on independent living skills training topics. The information was used to create this manual for training direct service staff across the state to use to teach independent living skills to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Additional presentations to community groups and partners are on-going to increase awareness of iKan.

The following Independent Living Skills training manual was made available to independent living skills trainers at the 2011 Disability Caucus Pre-conference August 9-10, 2011, at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Topeka, Kansas.

The goal of iKan is to deliver Independent Living Skills training to individuals who are blind or have low vision utilizing the Independent Living philosophy. People with disabilities should have the same civil rights, options, and control over choices in their own lives as do people without disabilities.

As iKan conducted the focus groups throughout the state of Kansas, it became apparent that while national and state associations have done a tremendous job in advocating and securing rights to services many individuals were not afforded choice. Focus group participants reported family and community members being fearful, judgmental, and biased about their ability to go to school, hold down a job or even live independently just because they are blind or have low vision.

Mike Oxford and Gina McDonald described the Independent Living movement in the *History of Independent Living* by saying that “the history of independent living is closely tied to the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s among African Americans. Basic issues - disgraceful treatment based on bigotry and erroneous stereotypes in housing, education, transportation, and employment - and the strategies and tactics are very similar.”

We were told stories of public transportation dropping individuals off many blocks from their destination without any verbal exchange regarding where they were at or how far

they needed to go or in what direction. These stories fueled our passion to introduce the independent living model to their predominately medical model world.

Mike Oxford and Gina McDonald described the paradigm shift from the medical model in the *History of Independent Living* by saying that “It was in the late 1970’s, that Gerben DeJong proposed a shift from the medical model to the independent living model. People with disabilities no longer saw themselves as broken or sick, certainly not in need of repair. Issues such as social and attitudinal barriers were the real problems facing people with disabilities. The answers were to be found in changing and "fixing" society, not people with disabilities. “

Keeping society in mind, iKan’s intention is not to discount the need for the medical model; but to make room for the independent living model of choice and empowerment. The iKan intent is to deliver the five core services designed specifically to meet the unique needs of individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Tips for working with individuals who are blind or have low vision:

1. If he/she is talking to you hopefully he/she is in the right place.
2. Find informational resources.
3. Become knowledgeable.
4. Educate your consumer.
5. Learn how to trust and empower your consumer.
6. Take your time. It may take the consumer some time to absorb not only what he/she is experiencing but what he/she is hearing.
7. Find ways to put the consumer in touch with other people that are experiencing or have experienced the same situation.
8. The consumer might complain about you. Don’t take it personally.