

# Rights or wrongs?

Inventing and innovating need a lot of personal stamina and courage, particularly when faced by doubters and outright opponents.

Twelve years after the Human Rights Act was passed, 62 years since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was adopted, four years since legislation was approved to establish a British as well as a Scottish human rights body, and a year on from the UK ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, there is little evidence that we 'enjoy' such rights.

Independent living should be regarded as a human right in Scotland, in fact, if the human rights of disabled people are to be realised, then it's crucial.

Instead of blaming human rights as 'woolly and irrelevant', we need the public sector to have a sensible debate about putting human rights law into practice.

Public bodies making decisions about your life must mainstream the human rights principles of fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy into the process.

They must comply with the European Convention on Human Rights. Interpretation of rights is crucial, so, for example, Article 8 does not give you the right to a house, a physical structure, but a right to enjoy living in it such as cooking and bathing. That is the theory but the reality for disabled

people can be quite different: "When my social worker told me they had to cut budgets I had no idea things were going to get so bad. I need help to go to the toilet. There is not enough money to take me to the toilet more than twice a day.

"When my carer comes in the morning, I go to the toilet, and

**'There is not enough money to take me to the toilet more than twice a day'**

before she goes she puts on an incontinence pad for me so that I can do the toilet in my chair. I have been told to wet or soil myself. When they come back at night to make my dinner, they change my pad. I am so embarrassed, I don't let my friends visit me anymore."

When 'rights' pressure from the public can no longer be ignored and leadership makes change happen, human rights will improve all our lives.

**Carole Ewart, public policy and human rights consultant**

## Money, money, money

When times are good, funding decisions should support human rights and independent living, and so it follows that when times are tough, when traditionally people's human rights are chipped away, funding decisions must crucially protect these rights.

As with many other equality strands, disabled people face an uncertain future in today's economy.

We all know change is needed, what we have now doesn't work, for disabled people, the economy or society. Now is the time

to use scarce resources more efficiently. Funding to support human rights often involves political decisions, for example: the total raised in charges for

adult care in 2008/09 was £350m, more than the cost of freezing the council tax for a third year (£310m).

Disabled people have experience-based knowledge of how effectively resources are used just now, and so they must be included in these decisions, finding the solutions to fund their human rights and independent living for the future.



## The time is now

The Independent Living Movement in Scotland faced injustice, inequality and frustration that their rights were not yet a reality. In 2008, the movement asked the Scottish Government to work with them to change this reality. They needed to support disabled people to have their voices heard and they needed to grow and strengthen the movement, here in Scotland.

In 2008 the government announced three years' funding for the Independent Living in Scotland project, to do just that.

The project is hosted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and steered by a group

of disabled activists in Scotland (pictured above).

Jim Elder-Woodward, convenor of the project's steering group, said: "Independent living means disabled people of all ages having the same freedom, choice, dignity and control as other citizens at home, work and in the community.

"It does not mean living on your own or fending for yourself. It means rights to practical assistance and support to participate in society and live an ordinary life.

"For independent living to really work and for disabled people to be in control, then they have to be pushing the boundaries and working with and challenging policy-makers."

## A movement has arrived!

We have much to celebrate, from the grassroots development of disabled people's organisations to the opening of doors at policy and official level. The movement has arrived and it's time to celebrate! In December, there will be a full-scale, all singing, all dancing festival for the Independent Living Movement. Whether you are a disabled person, policy-maker or service provider, come along, have fun, learn, get connected and join in the celebration.

Visit [www.ilis.co.uk](http://www.ilis.co.uk) for details



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## Competition Flying the flag



The Independent Living in Scotland project recently inducted disabled people as ambassadors for independent living. One of the things they collectively agreed was there is no recognisable image, logo or badge for the Independent Living Movement.

Over the next four months, a group of ambassadors will give the disabled people the chance to design a flag to represent their movement. At a festival of the Independent Living Movement in the December, the final image will be voted on and unveiled!

To get involved in this, please visit [www.ilis.co.uk](http://www.ilis.co.uk) for more information!

## New website launched It's new, it's live and it's for you!

The Independent Living in Scotland project is for disabled people and their organisations and about disabled people getting their voices heard. That's why the ILiS project team have completely revitalised the ILiS website. It's not about information on the project (though you'll find that too) - it's about finding out about independent living and the Independent Living Movement in Scotland.



the website gives you a chance to find who's doing what, what's working and what's not.

**Get Active!** We have included tools and publications including DIY guides on how to organise campaigns, such as how to use the media, undertake research or use the Freedom of Information Act in your campaigning work.

**Get Talking!** We've got blogs, opinion pieces, a vision and room for you to tell others what you think. Don't keep your views to yourself. There's something for everyone, not just disabled people. People from other social movements will be able to learn about the approaches being taken by disabled people and share with us their activities. Policy-makers and service designers can learn about what life is really like for disabled people.

**Get Informed!** You can find out about what independent living for disabled people means and what the difference is between the rhetoric and the reality.

**Get Connected!** "Don't be a lone voice in the wilderness," we're told. Well then, get connected with others in the disabled people's Independent Living Movement in Scotland. The Spotlight section of

Visit us soon at [www.ilis.co.uk](http://www.ilis.co.uk)

# Independent living

## They're not just buzz words

What do a government minister, a councillor and a leading disability activist have in common? It's not a joke - when Housing and Communities Minister Alex Neil, West Dunbartonshire Councillor Ronnie McColl (below) and James Elder-Woodward got together at the Scottish Government headquarters recently, they set out their agreed vision for independent living in Scotland.

The trio signed a joint statement on behalf of the Scottish Government, the Convention of Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Independent Living in Scotland steering group, committing them to a Scotland where independent living is a reality and where disabled people of all ages having the same freedom, choice, dignity and control other people take for granted - a Scotland where disabled people have rights to the practical assistance and support they need to participate in society and live an ordinary life.

The landmark statement was an important milestone in developing a shared approach to making independent living a reality for disabled people in Scotland. It proves that 'independent living' are not just buzz words or a campaign issue, but something that the highest levels of national and local government are committed to making a reality, and it means that disabled people will at last take their seat at the decision-making table.

The partners acknowledge this vision will require continued effort and time to achieve, but they vow "to deliver real choice and control for disabled people in all areas of life and all parts of Scotland". Housing and Communities Minister Alex Neil said: "It's important people feel empowered and supported to say yes to what they want to do in

life. And we know that being able to live independently is of great importance to many people. That's why we are proud to support the Independent Living in Scotland project to give disabled people a voice and strengthen their involvement in shaping public services that promote independent living."

Councillor Ronnie McColl, COSLA spokesman for Health and Wellbeing, said: "Delivering independent living is about giving disabled people the same freedom, choice, dignity and control that others in society take for granted. That is why we are embarking on a new way of working. We call it co-production, and it means that we are working with

**'It is about giving people freedom'**

disabled people and the government to plan services right from the start. This is different and exciting because it means that none of us are doing things to others - we are doing things with the others.

"We have a lot to learn from each other and that is why COSLA has signed up to an ambitious vision to make independent living a reality for all disabled people in Scotland.

"Public finances are facing the toughest squeeze in living memory, so there will be challenges, and delivering our vision for independent living will take time. However, only by ensuring that all voices are heard can we be sure of delivering the best possible outcomes for disabled people in Scotland."

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/29164308/1](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/29164308/1), to read Independent Living: A Shared Vision

