# A green and white logo  Description automatically generatedA close-up of a logo  Description automatically generatedThe Independent Living Advocate’s Toolkit for Mentoring Families of Children with Disabilities

## Brief #10: The Role of Centers for Independent Living in Youth Transition—Where Do Parents Fit in?

Parent organizations and Centers for Independent Living[[1]](#footnote-1) developed on a parallel track during a time of enormous social change in the U.S. The 1960s spawned an awakening among diverse groups that had experienced discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization for generations. Families of children with intellectual, developmental, and other types of disabilities were fed up with the lack of appropriate and respectful services their disabled family members wanted. They organized, became empowered, and began to impact policies and public attitudes. At about the same time, people with disabilities across the country who were self-directing began to demand equitable access to education, jobs, public buildings, and transportation. They wanted to direct their own services and advocate for systems change. The difference in the two movements was that in the latter, people with disabilities were speaking for themselves. They advocated for programs that they themselves would govern and operate.

Created as a federal program in 1978, CILs were charged with providing services that addressed all life goals, all age groups, and people with any type of disability. This was unheard of in disability services that had focused on a specific service such as employment or on a specific disability. This meant that from the beginning, the CILs provided services and advocacy to transition-age youth. However, in 2014, the Rehabilitation Act was amended, and transition services were added as a required “core service.” This was to include the same core services CILs had always provided – information & referral, peer mentoring, independent living skills training, and individual and systems advocacy – but now the services were to be specifically wrapped around the goal of transition. More targeted programs for preparing youth for the worlds of post-secondary education, employment, and adulthood were needed.

The CILs updated their programs accordingly and began to interface with parent organizations and families more often, recognizing that both parent organizations and CILs have a significant role to play in youth services and the success of the transition process. As families and CILs have both deepened their understanding of how best to assist youth with more complex support needs, the alliance between the two sectors has grown and must necessarily continue to grow.

When families meet peer mentors at CILs who have a working support system that allows them to be self-directing, the families can begin to see more possibilities. When families can see first-hand how independent living has been achieved, they often are willing to become collaborators, and step out of the manager role. As the purpose of parent organizations and CILs have come into closer alignment in recent years, they have an unprecedented opportunity now to work together for the common goal of supporting self-determination, self-advocacy, self-help, and empowerment of today’s youth with disabilities.

1. To find locations and contact information for CILs visit [www.ilru.org](http://www.ilru.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)