

Independence First Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Independence First is a non-profit agency directed by, and for the benefit of, persons with disabilities serving the Greater Milwaukee Area. Our mission is to facilitate empowerment of individuals with disabilities through the core services of advocacy, independent living skills, information and referral, peer support, and transition. We believe that individuals with disabilities should have the freedom to control their own lives and are committed to their full inclusion in every aspect of our community.

In 1978, a group of Milwaukee area rehabilitation professionals and people with disabilities worked to organize an Independent Living Center committed to consumer control, self-determination, and advocacy. When a grant proposal to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration was approved in 1979, the Southeastern Wisconsin Center for Independent Living was incorporated (renamed Independence First in 1995 to better reflect our mission).

Our history is one of growth and innovation. In 1991, we opened our Assistive Technology (AT) Center which today houses 2,000 products that increase the independence of people with disabilities. In response to requests for information about adaptive bathroom equipment, in 2009 we developed the BAT (Bathroom Assistive Technology) Cave, now the largest collection of AT bathroom equipment in Wisconsin. We further expanded AT resources in 2021 with the creation of our Ageless Independence Center, a lab that facilitates healthy aging in place. Our Medicaid-funded Personal Assistance Services Program, established in 1992, is in the state. Other accomplishments include:

- Worked with the Milwaukee Housing Authority to ensure that over 1,000 public housing units are accessible to people with disabilities;
- Assisted 300 individuals with disabilities move from institutional settings to independent living through our Nursing Home Transition program;
- Arranged over 800 loans to people with disabilities through the WisLoan program, allowing them to purchase adaptive equipment and home modifications that increase their mobility or functionality.

Statement of Need

Support from the Wispact Foundation would specifically support our Independent Living Services (ILS) program area, which addresses Education/Recreation and other needs. This program fills a gap in community-based services designed to empower people of all ages and across all disabilities to develop the skills they need to maintain their independence at home, school, work, and in the community.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

The purpose of the Independent Living Services (ILS) program is to offer people with disabilities an array of classes, workshops, and other activities to help them gain skills that will enable them to achieve and maintain independence and self-sufficiency. Professional staff work one-on-one with individuals to develop individual plans for independence during an intake process. Individuals are directly connected to the ILS activities that will help them achieve their goals—whether they are job, housing, or education related.

Project Implementation Plan

ILS serves individuals with disabilities through the four county Milwaukee area (Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Washington counties). Consumers (clients) are assisted while working 1:1 with an independent

living services coordinator and by participating in group classes or workshops. Individuals receive assistance in the areas of independent living skills training, information and referral, peer support, and self-advocacy. Examples of additional year-round support includes:

- Workshops (social skills and advocacy, stress-reduction, home management, gardening, hiking club, cooking and art classes, peer support, and more).
- Assistive Technology Assessments and an AT Demo and Loan Center, which houses over 2,000 pieces of adaptive equipment and devices.
- WisLoan & Telework Programs, statewide alternative loan programs that allow Wisconsin residents with disabilities to purchase assistive devices.
- Youth Programs, providing leadership education and peer support to Milwaukee area youth with disabilities, ages 12-26.
- Nursing Home Transition assists people with disabilities who want to leave institutional settings to live in the community.
- Benefits Counseling to assist individuals with understanding how their benefits and disability services will be impacted by employment;
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Project for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind or Hard of Hearing and have SUD (Substance Use Disorder) issues.
- ADA Education and Technical Assistance about the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We collaborate numerous Milwaukee area service providers who mutually contribute to the success of these services by providing referrals and complementary services, publicity, and mentors for our consumers. Partner organizations include Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee County Disability Services Division, Sojourner Family Peace Center, WI FACETS, Muscular Sclerosis Society, ARC, Spina Bifida Association, the Spinal Cord Injury Center, National Seating and Mobility, Mental Health Association and others.

Evaluation Plan

Independence First evaluates the outcomes of our ILS program through participant post- surveys. We measure the progress made by each consumer in meeting their individual goals, rather than prescribed goals. Indicators might include the client demonstrates that they have: learned about self-care and self-advocacy; built self-esteem; resumed high school or pursued higher education; obtained accessible housing; learned financial and time management skills; controlled stress and anger; or found a personal care worker.

Our benchmark metric is to have at least 80% of survey respondents answer positively to questions and statements such as: Have the services you received from Independence First enabled you to increase your independence?; Has your experience with Independence First enabled you to become an advocate for your own needs or those of your family members?; I am satisfied with the assistance provided by Independence First staff and would not hesitate to refer someone to Independence First in the future. These results are reported back in our annual federal agency report.

Budget
EXPENSES

Salaries	1,495,805
Burdens / Fringes	535,740
Wellness Plan	2,462
Legal & Accounting	7,004
Audit	3,306
Interpreter / Professional Fees	119,676
Payroll Processing Fees	1,407
Temp Office Staffing	281
General Insurance	15,047
Innovation & Program Growth	3,518
Licenses / Fees	1,817
Memberships	5,749
Postage	5,313
Printing	18,258
Office Maintenance / Utilities	19,837
Computer Equipment / Licensing / Consulting / Infrastructure	14,562
Supplies	12,336
Telephone / Internet	14,039
Travel	35,491
Workshops	14,199
Special Event Expense	0
Office & Facilities Rent	14,022
Interest / Defaults / Fees	7,190
Agency Marketing	19,698
Depreciation	56,018
Agency Consumables	11,121
Other Expenses	6,462
Total Expenses	2,440,385

Staff Recommendation

The grant application can be recommended for approval. The funds have to be granted with specific instructions as to the section of the budget that support can be provided for. The overall general budget for the Independent Living Services program includes expenses we cannot support; however, the line item for Workshops provided to disabled individuals aligns with the initiatives of the foundation and we could provide a grant at our capped maximum of \$10,000.00