

Speech at the Disabled People's European Parliament European Parliament, Brussels, 11 November 2003

I welcome this historic opportunity at the Disabled People's European Parliament to address you and bring to your attention the important issues of Independent Living, Personal Assistance and the Freedom of Movement for disabled people to be able to move, live and work throughout Europe.

We urge that a European wide policy on Independent Living and Personal Assistance services be established by the European Institutions. This would open the doors to those disabled people who need support and assistance in their everyday lives, to have the same opportunities and chances as others in their own communities in every Member State. Until this framework of Independent Living is in place disabled people who require support will remain isolated and excluded, denied chances, restricted, and with too many confined to institutions without their basic rights and others barely surviving in poverty.

We believe that self determination and independent living should be a basic right for disabled people who aspire to it. The opportunities to live independently provide a sane alternative to institutionalisation which is both healthy to the individual and economic for the State. As institutionalisation is part of the current frame work of the social exclusion policies of the EU, it makes common sense for the EU to support Independent Living in community services as a viable alternative to disabled people living in institutions.

As long as Institutions exist, the possibility of a disabled person finally ending up in one is a fear that haunts most disabled people throughout their lives. Institutional life denies a person, real citizenship and participation in the community. It also takes away ones freedom. For those disabled people who have already experienced institutional living and the loss of control over the basic decisions of their life, they know only too well, that it is a large price to pay, sacrificing ones own contribution and livelihood in the community.

The EU should be redirecting resources away from institutions into Independent Living initiatives restoring our dignity, self-worth and

respect. Independent Living enables us to contribute to society positively, get decent education, jobs and a life of quality of our own choosing, which is in the long term more productive for the state.

We believe that the availability of Personal Assistance Services is long over due as there are still many countries within the European Union, who still do not have established and effective personal assistance services for their disabled people. What an ideal opportunity the EYDP offers us to try and publicise and implement this more, as personal assistance services are essential in enabling disabled people to live independently.

We also urge all European institutions to encourage the Freedom of Movement of disabled people throughout all Member States. To achieve this it means that all social security benefits must be exportable and that Personal Assistance services can move with individuals. Otherwise disabled people are confined to their own countries unlike their non disabled peers who are free to move around Member States as they wish. This social exclusion of disabled people because of the lack of freedom of movement must be removed to achieve a truly inclusive Europe.

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