

**PERSONAL TESTIMONY**  
**By John Evans OBE**

**Official Launch of the European Year for Disabled People Ceremony**  
**Athens 26<sup>th</sup> January 2003**

Why am I doing what I am doing? Why have I devoted my life to being a Disability Rights Campaigner advocating Independent Living in particular. It is because I strongly believe in the right of every disabled person to be included in Society like everybody else, and to be able to have the same equal opportunities and chances as most people take for granted. Disabled people for far too long have been excluded and denied such opportunities.

This is why we need to be empowered and to be enabled to live Independently in control of our lives and able to make our own choices. The importance of this was made clear to me when for 5 years of my life I had my freedom taken away from me and my life was in the hands and control of others. Yes, whether I liked it or not I had to live in an Institution, because at this time there were no other choices or alternatives.

This experience of living in an Institution is what inspired me to fight and devote my life to finding an alternative. This alternative is Independent Living. Such freedom of spirit is born from removing the chains of imprisonment. This kind of experience is unforgettable and enough to fire me up in our fight for freedom.

Independent Living has not only allowed me and other disabled people our ability to regain our freedom and to be able to live our own homes and not in Institutions, but also enabled us to find meaning in life and more importantly, real status through paid employment. I was not able to do this alone. Independent Living is the cooperation, networking, and collective working together of disabled people in order to be able to achieve our ultimate goals of being included in Society. Throughout this whole process it is disabled people who created Independent Living, developed and guided it and will continue to do so

Independent Living has provided us with a philosophy and practice of life. We still have some way to go and Independent Living has to be recognised as a basic Human Right and Politicians everywhere have to support it.