

Leading with Lived Experience: Building Bridges with the Inclusion Institute

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The League

Introductory Video

[Inclusion Institute - The-League](#)

History of The League

- 1949 Hellen Keller comes to Fort Wayne, Indiana and raises the seed money for the organization
- 1950 League becomes incorporated as the Allen County League for the Blind, Inc. Providing services and resources for people who are blind, have low vision, or other visual impairments as a Sight Center.
 - Independent Living Skills Training
 - Orientation & Mobility
 - Peer Support
 - Community education and advocacy

History of The League

- 1981 we received our federal Part C grant establishing us as a Center for Independent Living and began expanding services
 - Follow IL Philosophy and provide Core Services
 - Adding diversity of disability at both the staff and Board levels
 - Adding 10 new counties
- 1995 changed our name to League for the Blind and Disabled, Inc
 - Continue with Blind in the name to honor our commitment to this community
 - Add Disabled to reflect the expansion
 - Dropped Allen County from the name to meet broader community

History of The League

- Through the 1990s and 2000s we continued to add services to meet the needs in our communities with the IL Philosophy and core services at the heart of what we did.
- In 2021 we were given an opportunity to pursue a significant private grant to address the biggest barrier to the consumers we serve or our organization..
- We chose to focus on Consumers

Inclusion Institute – The First Step

- We started by forming a committee of five board members and five staff members to lead the way. All had disabilities
- The foundation first gave us funds to hire consultants for two purposes:
 - Identify the biggest barrier
 - Develop a plan for a solution

Inclusion Institute – The First Step

- We hired a local consulting group to conduct surveys of people with disabilities and other stakeholders
- We also worked with Purdue Fort Wayne's Community Research Institute to collect data and statistics
- Doing this gave us both qualitative and quantitative information to help guide our plans

Inclusion Institute – The First Step

Our research confirmed what we already knew. The biggest barriers to people with disabilities in northeast Indiana are:

Housing

Employment

Transportation

Education, Healthcare, and Social Opportunities also made the list.

Inclusion Institute – The Second Step

- Now what?
- The League has always engaged in systemic advocacy and community change.
- What became clear is that we needed to change the model
- The consultants helped us do a nationwide scan of CILs

Inclusion Institute – The Second Step

Attack a single issue or social dimension (Transportation, Employment, Housing)

- OR -

Develop the infrastructure for continuous community improvement and inclusion efforts



Inclusion Institute – The Second Step

- Now what?
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Inclusion Institute – The Second Step

- We reached out to NCIL, ILRU, and April to help us generate a list of 20 CILs to start
- Through internet research we narrowed that down to 10 CILS and conducted interviews to learn more about what they did

Inclusion Institute – The Second Step

- Dedicated employee that focused on systemic advocacy, community change and policy work
- Advocacy Departments
- Legal Departments
- Advocacy Days or workshops
- In-house training to train advocates

Inclusion Institute – The Plan



Building a Department

- Inclusion Institute Director, Luke Labas
- Advocate Development Specialist, Halie Brown
- Data & Research Specialist

Leadership Academy

- Using the grant we hired a professional firm that focuses on training and storytelling
- This allowed Luke's team and myself to serve as subject matter experts
- It also gave us a professional, universally designed product

Leadership Academy

- 8-month program
 - Topical knowledge
 - Skill building
- Each month
 - Web-based training
 - Fully accessible (descriptive video, close caption, ASL, plain language)
 - 60 minutes
 - In-person monthly group session
 - 3-4 hours long
 - Skill building, Independent living, and Capstone
 - Many have guest speakers

Leadership Academy

1. Your Story
2. Expanding Your Story to Education
3. Expanding Your Story to Housing
4. Expanding Your Story to Employment
5. Expanding You Story to Transportation
6. Leadership and Advocacy
7. Serving on Boards, Councils, Commissions, and Committees
8. Running for Office

Leadership Academy

**INSERT ACCESSIBLE
VIDEO LINK – 15min.**

Leadership Academy

- Participants have ranged in age from 17 to 79
- In the first two years 40 participants signed up for the academy.
- We graduated 34 people with disabilities and allies.
- Participants span most disabilities and other categories
- This year we have 44 participants and have split it into four classes.
 - Allows for more attention to individuals

Leadership Academy

- This year we have 42 participants
 - Three classes of adults
 - One class of teens and transition age adults
- Split it into four classes.
 - Recognized the experience level with the different topics
 - Allows for more attention to individuals

Community Change - Boards, Councils, Commissions, and Committees

1. Identify the interest and passion of participants
 - Conversations during applicant interviews
 - Conversations during 1-1 coaching
 - Conversations during group work
 - Quarterly follow-up conversations with graduates
 - Interest and passion doesn't have to be directly disability related
2. Make connections and promote participants
 - Promote at nonprofit coalition meetings, city meetings, etc.
 - One on one calls/meetings with interested organizations



American
Red Cross



Systemic Advocacy – Strategic Coalitions

The Inclusion Institute developed four advocacy coalitions

1. Accessible Neighborhoods (Housing)
2. Connective Community (Transportation/Infrastructure)
3. Accessible Media (Web, TV, and Digital)
4. Economic Advancement (Fair Wages, Employment, etc)

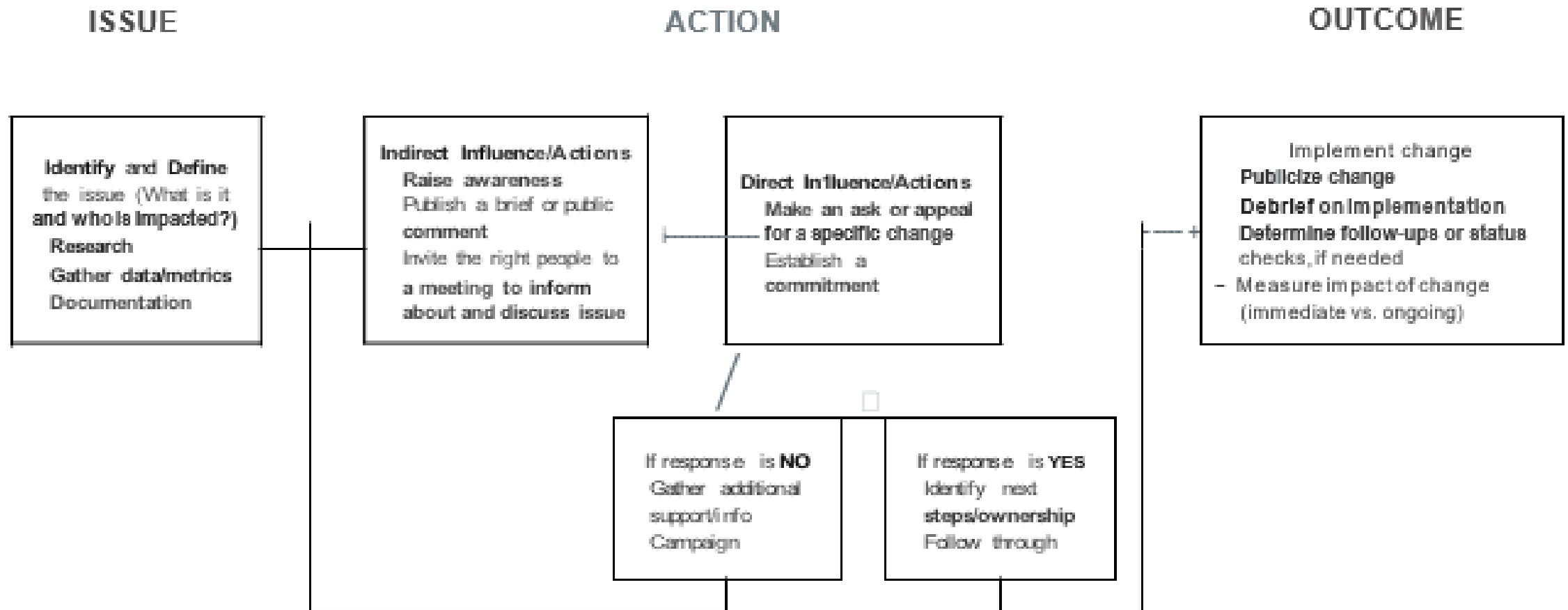
These four were strategically chosen based on data and research. Now, as the Inclusion Institute heads into its fourth year, they are preparing to add on focused on Healthcare.

Systemic Advocacy – Policy Briefs

Written by the coalitions, briefs were intended to shine a light on various topics or issues faced by PWD. The primary purpose of a brief is to expand the knowledge of an audience, with the goal of prompting advocacy impact through education and awareness.

- In some cases, the Inclusion Institute offered assistance or guidance.
- Each coalition also had input from their respective policy consultant to help inform brief writing.
- Briefs are fact-based and often cite statistics or metrics that compel the audience and describe the issue.
- Once a brief was drafted, it was reviewed by the Inclusion Institute for clarity, completeness, and effectiveness.

Systemic Advocacy – Strategic Coalitions



Systemic Advocacy – Public Meetings

Inclusion Institute/Coalition members attend key meetings/hearings including:

- City Council hearing on public transportation funding
- Quarterly or biannual meetings with City Departments (parks, planning, etc)
- Bimonthly meetings with the Mayor of Fort Wayne
- County and regional hearings on housing and comprehensive plans

Systemic Advocacy – Successes

Inclusion Institute/Coalition members attend key meetings/hearings including:

Accessible Mapping – Provided input that led to the creation of an accessible version of Fort Wayne's trail system map.

Infrastructure Improvements – Met with the City of Fort Wayne Department of Public Works and directly identified six locations that were subsequently repaired.

Systemic Advocacy – Successes

Inclusive Planning Practices – Influenced the Fort Wayne Planning Commission to adopt a standardized set of accessibility-related questions for all projects under review.

Public Transit Advocacy – Led a successful advocacy campaign securing local funding investments into public transit.

Deaf Community Access – Ensured ASL interpreter availability at every public comment/input opportunity across city processes.

Systemic Advocacy – Successes

Law Enforcement Communication – Achieved placement of communication tools in every police vehicle and produced a Deaf-friendly best practices flyer distributed to local tourism agencies.

First Responder Training – Trained all Fort Wayne Fire Department personnel on best practices for serving and protecting wheelchair users during car accidents.

Visitability Policy – Advanced adoption of a City of Fort Wayne visitability policy to guide inclusive housing and development standards.

Systemic Advocacy – Successes

Homeowner Accessibility Funding – Secured ongoing funding for the Homeowner Accessibility Modification Program for three consecutive years, with increases each year.

Expanded Housing Modifications – Advocated for and achieved expansion of the Owner-Occupied Rehab (OOR) program to include interior accessibility modifications.

Symposium Model Transfer – After a successful transportation symposium in Fort Wayne, we were asked to take our model to another city and assist with a symposium there

Next Steps

Determine Pilot Program Interest – This model is replicable in other areas of the country. Need to discuss with CILs interested in the model.

Exploring Funding – What are the options?

- Licensing all or components of the model
- Seeking funding from a national foundation

Discussion and Questions

What Questions Do You Have?

THANK YOU!

John Guingrich

The League

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