



Paralysis Resource Center State Pilot Program – Year One: Texas State Independent Living Council

Program Overview

The Texas State Independent Living Council (SILC) aims to increase supports and services through the use of virtual independent living services to help Texans living with paralysis become more independent and integrated in their communities. The Virtual Independent Living platform brings a variety of Independent Living Services to unserved and underserved populations through access from a smartphone, tablet, computer, or telephone. This technology increases access to independent living services for individuals with paralysis who have difficulty leaving home, reside in areas lacking adequate accessible transportation, or otherwise have limited access to services. The virtual platform offers assistance on developing an individual plan and services, and the opportunity to engage in small group discussions, such as peer support, training, and advocacy opportunities.

The project aims to provide greater access to Texans with paralysis in the environment they choose; decrease isolation and help them better connect with peers; increase coalitions between community-based organizations providing services and supports to Texans; and enhance employment opportunities for Texans with disabilities and provide strategies for them to thrive in their communities.

The partnerships created through this project between the SILC and community-based organizations provides a bridge to services for individuals in need. In Year One, Texas SILC awarded grants to three subawardees: Heart of Texas Center for Independent Living; NMD United; and United Spinal Houston. Subawardees will provide trainings, opportunities for discussion groups and mentoring, and disability-related education.

Administrative Structure

The Virtual Independent Living Services project relies on key staff from the Texas SILC to oversee the project:

- *Executive Director*, who manages overall project operations
- *Project Manager*, who provides day-to-day management of the project
- *Financial Officer*, who manages all financial and budget aspects of the award
- *General Council*, acts as the general council and runs specific project activities as they relate to the Independent Living network and the State Plan for Independent Living
- *Project Coordinator*, who ensures all Texas SILC project activities are fully accessible, works with subawardees on technical assistance, and maintains the project website

Texas SILC also works with the Project Advisory Committee, which provides leadership of the project and continuous monitoring for project improvement. Additionally, Texas SILC uses consultants to conduct third-party review of subaward recipient process, assist in data collection and analysis efforts, and provide technical assistance on the use of technology.

Technical Assistance Offered

- Texas SILC developed a toolkit that details how to effectively use and leverage the technology. The toolkit includes outreach materials, instructional videos, and troubleshooting support.
- A Project and Data Sharing webpage that houses project outreach information, project outcomes and highlights, and serves as a model for other organizations to provide virtual Independent Living Services for individuals living with paralysis.

Outcomes

In Year One, the Texas SILC received four applications and awarded three grants. In early surveys, program participants, families and their support networks expressed satisfaction with the subawardee programming and reported greater access to independent living services and decreased isolation.

The SILC noted challenges in building trust with participants and engaging them over a virtual platform, as well as technology-related challenges such as operating the virtual platform and overall lack of access to computers and internet in rural areas.