



CPAC Partner Profiles

Topeka Independent Living Resource Center



The Topeka Independent Living Resource Center is a civil and human rights organization whose mission is to advocate for justice, equality and essential services for a fully integrated and accessible society for all people with disabilities.

The DirectCourse/College of Personal Assistance and Caregiving (CPAC) continues to form strong partnerships with advocacy organizations around the country. One of our newest partners is the Topeka Independent Living Resource Center (TILRC.) TILRC is a federally-funded and recognized Center for Independent Living (CIL). As mandated by the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, CILs provide peer-run services that are cross-age and cross-disability. TILRC serves people of all ages and with any kind of disability across Kansas

CPAC is Elsevier's web-based curriculum designed to train and educate learners working with people with physical disabilities and older adults. It was created by the Center for Personal Assistance Services at the University of California, San Francisco, in collaboration with the University of Minnesota's Research and Training Center.

Mike Oxford is the Executive Director of TILRC, and he worked to bring CPAC to Kansas to help with training. "We are a peer-run organization," he explains. "A majority of our boards of directors, our staff, and much of our management are people with different kinds of significant disabilities." TILRC services are non-residential and non-medical, which means, in part, that the organization does not have housing or beds. "We work in the community and based on Federal statutes, we are required to provide core services, including information and referral,

peer counseling, advocacy, and independent living skills, roughly like life skills, learning to ride public transit, budget, and more," he says.

Those are the required services that TILRC must provide. However, in the state of Kansas there is another required service, which is to help de-institutionalize people, to move them out of institutions or help them avoid going in to begin with.

"As part of that mission," Oxford explains, "an additional service that we've been involved in is that we are a provider of self-directed personal assistance." Kansas law dictates that people have a right to hire, fire, manage, train, control and direct their attendant services. "We've been very involved, for many decades, to help direct these services," he says.

That's where the training comes in. In Kansas, the individual has a right to be in charge of hiring and training. However, there are no training requirements, nor any licensure. "Though there's also nothing prohibiting getting training or using trained people," Oxford notes. "It's just that the individual is in charge of that work." Oxford also observed that, for a decade, in Kansas and around the country, the availability of high quality, flexible, useful, to the point, voluntarily available training has often been a challenge. "Just because you're disabled doesn't mean you know how to hire someone, or keep them on task," he says.



Consumers need training and to know what to look for, for themselves in order to hire and manage, as well as training for the people they end up hiring.

Oxford has been involved in CPAC development for more than three years. “Naturally I’ve been involved in course content,” he says. As this course started to evolve, he volunteered TILRC to be a beta-test site. “Once I saw the content I got even more interested, and then I saw the whole course, I thought ‘what does this cost and what do we need to do to acquire this?’”

He points out that when managed care started to move into Kansas, all of the attendant services changed to a managed care model. “Managed care isn’t all that familiar with self-direction to the extent that it is in Kansas. They haven’t seen that much freedom and control by the individual,” he says. Naturally, these organizations became interested in training. Because Kansas law allows self-directed personal assistance, managed care organizations have to address this situation. “There are a lot of people who self-direct,” Oxford says. “The physical disability waiver program is 90% self-directed. That’s 8,000-9,000 people. About a third of the elderly waiver self-directs. Thousands and thousands of people in Kansas choose those options.”

Oxford saw CPAC as a great opportunity for people to get access to good content that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week in their own home, with good crossover utility for workers and consumers.

“We have a big interest here in Kansas,” he says, “instead of just training workers, train the individual.” He observes that a younger person with a disability will probably go through many workers in their lifetime. “Knowledge needs to reside in the consumer. So when they hire a new worker they don’t have to send them out for training, they can do their own training.”

Through his efforts to also ensure that CPAC is an affordable training option, Oxford was able to convince the largest managed care companies in Kansas to contract with TILRC, so that it’s paid for. “Roughly 40% of everyone we serve now has access to training for free,” he says.

“CPAC is a great curriculum with basic information, that works well with in-person follow-up,” Oxford says. “In fact, our staff uses CPAC. Over time, it’ll end up being picked up by the state and/or all the managed care companies. CPAC is that good and that useful.”

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CPAC Partner Profiles highlight the activities of state and local organizations that have integrated the College of Personal Assistance and Caregiving into the efforts to elevate the preparation, performance, status, and compensation of Personal Care Attendants (PCAs). The purpose of CPAC Partner Profiles is to identify and describe a variety of innovative and exemplary initiatives and activities into with the CPAC online curriculum has been integrated. CPAC Partner Profiles are written by leaders or organizations that are actually engaged in these efforts.

