The Rural Center for Independent Living, was created in 1998, following an organizational meeting led by Maggie Shreave, from the **Independent Living Research Utilization Program.** Approximately twenty individuals with disabilities attended the planning meeting and developed the first annual goals RCIL worked on. One thing the consumers of our area made clear was that they wanted their own Center for Independent Living, dedicated to the goals they thought were important to their community. They felt people in Reno and Las Vegas may not understand the problems encountered by individuals with disabilities residing in rural areas with limited transportation and services.

We continue the tradition of meeting once a year to debate and design our yearly goals, with the individuals with disabilities who live in our quad county area. Our Board of Directors has always consisted of individuals with disabilities and our staff is primarily made up of individuals with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities.

In 1998, I had been working at the Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, with Jack Mayes as Director and was well versed in Independent Living Philosophy and the data collection and policy guidelines needed to run a Center for Independent Living.

In 2003, it was becoming clear that our model needed to change in order to address the large numbers of homeless people with disabilities that needed services. We opened our first Drop in Center with a grant and the assistance of Todd Butterworth, when he ran the office of Disabilities Services and our community service providers who also acknowledge the need for a drop in center.

One thing that was different about the homeless people who were disabled utilizing our center was that 80% of them were from our local areas, unlike the transitory populations that many homeless shelters see. They were the people who were living paycheck to paycheck in our area that had one disastrous incident occur that propelled them into homelessness.

We came up with the Do Drop In, Drop in center because drop in centers are places of peer support, Drop-in centers are a nonjudgmental first point of contact, provide an informal atmosphere to attract and engage people who are homeless, help meet basic needs by proviing easy access to food, transportation and access to services.

People who access the drop-in center can access services, if they want to or can just come hang out and socialize. This helps with loneliness, depression and provides a good peer support model, because they are with people in the same circumstance and can gain knowledge on how to access services, which services work best and how to interact with service providers and in a social environment.

When providing housing to our clients who have been on the streets for many years, many need to reacclimate to living in a home again. We are a housing first program, because without stable housing, our clients cannot access consistent medical care benefits and supportive services.

One thing we have found that is critical to their success is the provision of life coaching. Many lose the ability to comply with the norms of society, having lived as outsiders for so long. It’s easier and less overwhelming to just walk away and not comply, than to put up with the stress of maintaining housing, benefits and paying utilities and everyday bills. Life Coaching is provided to our clients because they need intensive support when they are first placed in housing. This service is reduced as they become more independent. Income discrimination is prevalent in our quad county area and I would like you all to join us in supporting Assembly Bill 317, which would end this practice and provide a penalty for landlords who discriminate based on income.