

Long Island  
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**INNOVATIVE RESOURCES  
FOR INDEPENDENCE**

## Helping clients live independently, IRI makes use of latest technology

From emails to GPS to e-calendars, technology's impact is so pervasive that many take it for granted. For individuals with developmental disabilities, however, technology can be life-changing as it plays a role in enabling new-found independence.

IRI, a nonprofit that works with 1,600 people every year, knows well the challenges and rewards of helping individuals with developmental disabilities and complex needs. For one thing, some people feel inhibited while being monitored around the clock by well-meaning staff.

Technology is changing that.

"We work with individuals with developmental disabilities to help them feel empowered by their own abilities," said Raymond J. DeNatale, Executive Director of IRI, which was founded in 1984. "If an individual wants to live more independently, we assess their capabilities, then use technology in an individualized way to help that person lead a more fulfilling life."

What sets IRI apart, according to DeNatale, is that the agency works closely with clients to find appropriate uses of technology that reflect the person's individual goals.

For example, if Jane has been living in a group home and wants to live in a house, either on her own or with housemates, IRI uses technology to support her.

If Jane is epileptic, she will be introduced to wearing a GPS watch or pendant that can monitor shakes that alert staff to seizures. Prompters will alert Jane to take her medicine from a device that opens to dispense correct amounts of medicine at precise times daily.

Thanks to a Remote Patient Monitoring system, Jane's vital signs are communicated digitally. If outside of the normal range, a nurse is alerted that Jane may need medical attention.

"Devices to automate living can make a huge difference in the life of a person with developmental disabilities," said John McGuigan, IRI's Associate Executive Director of Program Operations and Quality Improvement. "Technology helps us put safeguards in place so that the person has a greater sense of independence."

McGuigan explained that traditionally in residential facilities, individuals were supervised 24/7, which some found intrusive. Thanks to technology, fewer staff can monitor closely and often from a distance.

As Jane gets accustomed to living on her own, IRI is never very far away. Let's say she decides to cook pork chops on her stove, then suddenly leaves to do laundry. An automated sensor on the stove alerts IRI staff that the stove is unattended. Jane gets a phone call, asking her to return to the meal cooking on the stove. The laundry will have to wait.

As DeNatale sees it, technology helps individuals with developmental disabilities learn lessons and keeps them safe. "Technology is going a long way in allowing the people we work with to gain independence," he said.

IRI, based in Queens Village, offers residential services, service coordination, community habilitation services, family support services, day services, and more. For information, call 718-805-6796 or visit [www.in-res.org](http://www.in-res.org).