

Independent Living and Culture Brokering ~ A Case Study

Thalia, a 30-year-old Latina, lives with her parents on the first level of a two-story home. She has difficulty walking and maneuvering the several steps into her home. Thalia also needs assistance to get in and out of the bathtub and, to use the sinks and toilet. The house, about 70 years old, has antiquated features and fixtures that are inaccessible. Thalia's aunt, uncle and cousins live on the second floor. The family is very emotionally close and all members help Thalia with her daily living routines. She sometimes gets embarrassed when her younger female cousin helps her in the bathroom.

Thalia thinks about going to college and working like her cousins but recognizes that it is her family's responsibility to take care of her. She looks forward to the times when her cousins and only friends are home so she can talk to them. However, because of their hectic schedule, these times are becoming increasingly infrequent.

An "American" doctor once told Thalia's parents that she had "cerebral palsy". The parents and extended family did not understand what that diagnosis meant and never returned to this doctor. Thalia's parents, aunt and uncle speak very little English and could not even understand the translated information provided by the medical interpreter. Thalia's parents believe that their family was chosen by God to care for this child and take this role very seriously.

There are no expectations of Thalia to work or conduct even the simplest of chores because that would be considered "abuse" and their church might denounce them. Recently, the cousin met another person at college who seemed to have the same physical difficulties as Thalia. After a conversation with the other student, the cousin found out about assistance



that Thalia could get through a place called an "Independent Living Center" located in their community. She learned about ways to change their home and some items that might help Thalia in the bathroom. More importantly, Thalia could meet other people with similar concerns and develop friends through the Center's activities. The student was also sure the Center had a Latino outreach worker.

Thalia's cousin eagerly conveyed this information to her family but it was not well received by her parents, aunt and uncle. The elder family members considered the younger individual to be very naïve and gullible. Even though the younger members were bilingual, they still could not tell the older members what to do. The family "took care of their own" and the Center must be for homeless people with a condition like Thalia. Also, why would they change their home or obtain products for Thalia to use when it the family's role to help her? Thalia and her cousin became quite dismayed when the older family members told them not to discuss the Center again.

