

Direct payments factsheet 9

Purchasing your own support: deciding on your needs and finding support

This factsheet is aimed at direct payments users. The information may also be helpful for people who pay for their own support (self-funders). As a direct payments user you take on the responsibility of finding services that meet your needs. You can receive help to do this. Some councils may help you and each council area should have a direct payments support service to guide you when you're looking for staff.

If you use direct payments, there are several ways to find staff:

- you can employ staff directly yourself;
- you can use self-employed staff;
- you can use an agency or organisation.

There may be a possibility of using relatives or people that live with you. For more information, see Sense's factsheet 'Direct payments: an introduction'. For more information on what each option involves, see 'Purchasing your own support: employing people, using self-employed workers, using an agency or organisation'. For ideas on managing risk, see 'Purchasing your own support: managing risk'.

How can you make sure staff are going to meet your needs?

Before you start to look for staff, it is important to think about what it is you want staff to do. You may have already had an assessment from social services so you will have an idea of what areas of support your direct payments are for. If you haven't had an assessment yet, this might help you to make sure your assessment takes account of your needs. For more information on assessments, see the Sense factsheets on deafblind people's rights and entitlements.

Here are some suggested areas to think about:

Tasks and activities

The tasks and activities that you would like support with will need to fit within your assessed needs. Here are some suggestions for areas that you may be able to spend your direct payments on.

What tasks do you need staff to do?

- support with personal care;
- support with household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, gardening;
- support with tasks outside the home, such as shopping, going to the bank;
- support with leisure or social activities;
- support with learning skills or accessing information.

If you're not sure about what tasks you might need support with, you could keep a diary for a few weeks and record all the tasks that you think you might need support with. It's important to remember that social services will only meet eligible needs.

Different kinds of staff

Deafblind people are supported by staff with different job titles depending on the nature of the work they do and the skills or qualification they may have. This is a list of the kind of staff that most commonly support deafblind people.

- Support Worker or Personal Assistant (PA)

These kinds of workers may not have specific qualifications in working with deafblind people. They will normally provide practical help with daily activities.

- Communicator guide (comm. guide)

Communicator guides assist people with acquired deafblindness in daily living. They enable two-way communication with other people, access to information and support people to travel and move about in different locations. They may visit a deafblind person at home, read correspondence, assist with bills, forms and telephone calls. They may also accompany the deafblind person as a guide and provide communication support on activities including shopping, visits to friends, clubs and a range of other recreational and leisure activities. Communicator guides should have specific communication and guiding skills that allow them to offer specialist support to deafblind people.

- Intervenor

An intervenor is a specialist learning support assistant who works on a one-to-one basis with a deafblind child or young person to enable effective communication, the receipt of clear information and to enable the child to gain greater access to the environment around them.

- Interpreter

An interpreter facilitates communication by translating what is being said into relevant languages. Interpreters will generally support people in this role only and may not want to take on other roles such as guiding.

Skills, qualifications and training, experience, knowledge and personal qualities of staff

There may be a wide range of skills and qualities that you would like the staff who support you to have. The information below includes lists of a broad range of skills and qualities. It may be useful to think about which qualities are the most important to you. This may help you choose between applicants or services you are offered.

What skills would you like your staff to have?

- knowledge of large print and different print formats, Braille and Moon;
- clear speech;
- British Sign Language (Level 1, 2, 3);
- Sign Supported English;
- visual frame signing, hands-on signing;
- Deafblind Manual (Level 1, 2, 3, 4);
- Block;
- Makaton;
- Total Communication;¹
- Intensive interaction;²
- wheelchair skills;
- guiding skills;
- telephone skills, computer skills;
- money, organisational or time planning skills;
- ability to drive a car or van.

What qualifications or training would you like your staff to have?

- Guiding;
- communication, such as BSL or Makaton;
- Deafblind Awareness;
- communicator guide;
- intervenor;
- MSI teaching, teacher;
- First Aid;
- moving and handling;
- fire safety;
- food hygiene;
- medication;
- infection control;

- social work;
- NVQ, degree;
- disability equality training;
- person centred planning.

What experience would you like your staff to have?

- experience of working with other deafblind people before;
- experience of working with children, adults, older people;
- experience of working with people with additional disabilities, such as physical or learning disabilities;
- experience of working with people who are losing their vision and/or hearing and who need to develop new communication skills;
- knowledge of supporting people to re-adjust to daily living;
- experience of providing emotional support or working with people with mental health needs;
- experience of working with individuals with challenging behaviour;
- experience of support with individuals' health needs.

What additional knowledge would you like your staff to have?

- knowledge of the social model of disability;
- knowledge of community care legislation.

What personal qualities would you like your staff to have?

- ability to take instruction and ask questions, willingness to learn;
- patience, open-mindedness, sensitivity, maturity;
- empathy, kindness, good listening skills, friendliness;
- honesty, reliability, punctuality, trustworthiness, ability to maintain confidentiality, tact;
- creativity, imagination, resourcefulness, flexibility, enthusiasm;
- independence, confidence, initiative, ability to remain calm under pressure;
- ability to promote independence;
- ability to challenge their own and others' assumptions.

Other cultural, religious or other needs related to:

- your ethnic or cultural background (you may have specific language and/or cultural needs);
- your religion or beliefs;
- your sexual orientation or personal relationships;
- your personal interests.

These personal needs might not mean you want to employ someone who is identical to you. He or she should be happy to work with someone who has your specific needs and lifestyle and support you to live your life.

Making a checklist

Once you have identified items from the above lists, you can create a checklist. This checklist can then be used to create a job description for employing staff, as well as guide you during interviews or when contacting agencies. You can tell an agency about your list to help them find staff that you might want to use. You might think that some items on the list are essential, while others might just be desirable. The National Centre for Independent Living have examples of paperwork for managing direct payments and staff recruitment and management. Local direct payments support services often have example job descriptions and personal specifications that can be adapted for your personal needs.

What time of day and for how many hours do you want support?

If you receive direct payments, your social services assessment will state how many hours your direct payments should fund. For more information see Sense's factsheet 'Direct payments: making sure you receive the right amount of direct payment'. You may need to decide which days and what time of day you want support. You will need to tell staff when some timings are essential and when you can be flexible. Direct payments should allow you to change when you need support so you may want to find out how flexible staff can be.

Employing people, using self-employed staff, agencies or organisations

Your local council or direct payments support service may be able to advise you on the availability of staff or services in your local area. There may be a brokerage service in your area. Brokerage services help individuals understand what is available in their local area and how to meet their assessed needs.

Job applications

You may decide that you would like job applications to be sent to an address that isn't your home address. This will mean that your home address does not need to be made public when you advertise for staff. You could ask your local direct payments support service if you are able to use their address.

Interviews

It is normal for some people to be nervous when interviewing for staff. Try to carry out interviews in a place that is comfortable. You may decide to hold interviews somewhere outside your home. Your direct payments support service might be able to provide a venue.

The idea behind interviews is to find out information about the applicant. Use your checklist to find out about interviewees. Have some questions prepared in advance. Record what individuals say. You might want applicants to support you with a simple (and safe) task as part of the interview. This will be a way to test their skills and find out how well they listen to you and/or take instruction.

Equal opportunities and your preferences

Laws exist to prevent people discriminating against others on the grounds of sex, race, disability, change of gender, sexual orientation and age (this includes both younger and older people). There are few exceptions to these laws; you would have to show a strong reason for making choices that go against these laws. This is not, for example, meant to stop you employing a female or male worker if you want to or someone who has the communication skills that you need. You just need to be sure you are making this choice within the law.

Training

You may want to provide training for your staff. For ideas on how to train staff, see 'Purchasing your own support: managing and supervising staff'.

September 2008

Resources:

National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL)

4th Floor,
Hampton House,
20 Albert Embankment,
London, SE1 7TJ.
Telephone: 0207 587 1663
Text: 0207 587 1177
Fax: 0207 582 2469
Email: info@ncil.org.uk
Web: www.ncil.org.uk

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

(National office),
Brandon House,
180 Borough High Street,
London, SE1 1LW.
Web: www.acas.org.uk

ACAS offer a free and impartial telephone service that can answer your employment questions in one confidential phone call.
The Helpline is open from Monday to Friday 08:00-18:00

Telephone: 08457 47 47 47

Textphone: 08456 06 16 00

Sense factsheets on deafblind people's rights and entitlements

Sense Information Service,

101 Pentonville Road,

London, N1 9LG.

Telephone: 0845 127 0060

Textphone: 0845 127 0062

Fax: 0845 127 0061

Email: info@sense.org.uk

Web: www.sense.org.uk

Endnotes:

¹ Total Communication (TC) is an approach to encouraging and facilitating communication that combines the use of a number of modes, such as sign, gesture, body language, spoken language, pictures and photos, to meet the particular needs and abilities of the individual.

² Intensive interaction is an approach to teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to children and adults who have severe learning difficulties and/or autism and who are still at an early stage of communication development. The process involves progressively developing enjoyable and relaxed interaction sequences between the interaction partner and the person doing the learning. (See www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk).