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Deafblind Support Service Provider (SSP) Program Guidelines

Brief Overview of Deafblind and SSPs

Deafblind describes a condition that combines both hearing and visual impairment. Each sensory impairment intensifies the impact of the other which creates a different and unique disability. The disability can vary significantly in severity and cause from one person to the next. The person's needs differ according to age, onset and type of deafblind. People who are deafblind are unable to use one sense to fully compensate for the impairment of the other. For this reason, they require services which are different from those designed exclusively for either people who are blind or people who are deaf. (Deafblind International, 2014). It is estimated that there are between 40,000 to more than 1,000,000 Americans who are deafblind, including adults who have lost their vision and hearing due to aging (Helen Keller National Center, 2014).

In order to provide effective support to people with combined vision and hearing losses, the Support Service Provider (SSP) Program was created. Support Service Providers (SSPs) are "specifically trained professionals who enable

people who have combined vision and hearing losses to access their environments and make informed decisions. SSPs provide them with visual and environmental information, sighted guide services, and communication accessibility.” (Bourquin, 2006). It is estimated that 23 states in the U.S. currently have an active SSP Program. (University of Arkansas CURRENTS, 2012).

The Utah SSP Program:

- 1) Is managed by the Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DSBVI) Deafblind Program, a division within the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS).
- 2) Encourages community integration and increases the level of independence for people who are deafblind.
- 3) Promotes employment through collaboration efforts with Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 4) Supports the rights of people who are deafblind to access their environment and community by providing SSPs who serve as guides to relay any visual or environmental

information in the person's preferred method of communication.

- 5) Prevents isolation of people who are deafblind by encouraging coordinated activities through DSBVI and the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH).
- 6) Increases inclusion for people who are deafblind by facilitating communication within the person's community.
- 7) Encourages people who are deafblind to utilize assistive technologies, not to replace human interaction, but for greater access to the community and its resources.

SSP Program Purpose

The primary purpose of the SSP Program is to increase independence for clients who are deafblind and provide them with greater access to their community. All activities that a client does with an SSP must be geared towards this purpose.

Yearly, the SSP Program coordinator and client meet to set goals following the SSP Program purpose. SSPs help the client reach their goals,

whether by learning a new skill or getting the client out of their residence monthly. SSPs provide the program coordinator with monthly reports regarding their client's progress on their goals.

Client Eligibility Criteria to Use SSP Services

A common misconception about deafblind is that a person lacks any ability to see or hear. The reality is many people who are deafblind have some usable vision and/or hearing. Many have enough vision and hearing to detect familiar sights and sounds at close range. In order for a person to be eligible for SSP services, a person must meet the following requirements.

- 1) Vision requirement (based on eligibility criteria to be registered for services at DSBVI):
 - Visual impairment of distance vision acuity at 20/70 or less in the best eye with best correction, or
 - Progressive vision loss with distance vision acuity of 20/50 or less in the best eye with best correction, or
 - Field loss of 20 degrees or less in the best eye. Loss must be a functional impairment documented by an eye doctor.

- Vision Report must be within the last two years of application date.
- 2) Hearing requirement:
 - Audiogram showing a Pure Tone Average at 500hz, 1000hz, and 2000hz of at least 50 decibels or worse in the best ear.
 - Audiogram must be within the last two years of application date.
- 3) The person is not receiving services from:
 - a school district education system or have a current IEP (Individualized Education Plan), or
 - the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD).
- 4) The person must have the cognitive capacity to advocate for themselves, respond in an emergency situation, and to give instructions or direction to the SSP regarding the activity they would like to engage in.

Obtaining an SSP

Once eligibility has been reviewed and the client has been determined eligible, they will be paired with an SSP. The program coordinator will first choose from the current SSP staff. If no SSPs are

available, the program coordinator may consider hiring a new SSP to work with the client. Availability to hire a new SSP will depend on the current budget. The following are limitations when hiring an SSP:

- 1) An SSP will be hired as an at-will, non-benefitted state of Utah employee. Due to overtime rules, an SSP cannot be a current full-time, state of Utah employee. However, a person who is employed part-time with the state of Utah, can apply and be hired, as long as the total work hours for all state of Utah jobs worked do not exceed part-time. Overtime is not allowed.
- 2) An SSP cannot be the client's immediate family member (i.e. spouse, child, or sibling). A client's family member can be an SSP for another deafblind client, but cannot provide services to their own family member.
- 3) As part of the hiring process, the person must successfully pass a criminal history background check conducted through the Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI) and a driver license background check. Employment is contingent upon successful completion of the investigations.

- 4) An SSP is responsible for using their personal vehicle for client appointments.

SSP Responsibilities

- 1) The SSP's primary responsibility is to relay visual and environmental information in the client's preferred method of communication. The following is an example of the information that might be provided to the client.
 - Who is in the room
 - What people are doing and talking about
 - The emotional tone of the room (are people frustrated/excited/tired/etc.)
- 2) Other responsibilities may include:
 - Errands: Assisting with errands such as shopping, going to the dry cleaners or the library, etc.
 - Reading/Writing: Assisting with routine banking transactions, reading mail and personal correspondence, paying bills, looking for apartments, applying for public services, etc.
 - Recreational Activities: Attending sporting events or other entertainment, going for walks, serving as a guide while walking to

ensure the safety of the client, playing card games, etc.

- Transportation: Transporting the client to and from scheduled activities.
 - To facilitate interaction between the client and the community, the SSP must be present throughout the activity.
- Communication: Assisting the client in situations where communication barriers are present but not speaking on behalf of the client. It is important to note that SSPs are not certified interpreters and may not provide interpretation services.
- Solution-Focused Mindset: Encouraging the client to have a solution-focused mindset to improve their independence. The SSP may not recommend a solution for a client but rather provide options that the client may evaluate.
 - For example, if the client cannot utilize their spices due to lack of organization, the SSP may suggest solutions such as categorizing based on priority, arranging alphabetically, creating braille labels, creating large print labels, color coding, etc.

Client Responsibilities

- 1) SSP Appointment Management: Planning and organizing activities for each appointment. Having a list of activities or tasks for that day prepared before the SSP arrives for the appointment.
- 2) Time Management: Organizing SSP appointments based on the amount of time each task is expected to take and the amount of time available with the SSP.
 - Appoints with the SSP must be at least a 2-hour minimum.
 - If a client fails to plan their appointment effectively and the appointment runs over the scheduled time by 20 minutes or more, the SSP will inform the program coordinator.

After 3 cancellations or changes in scheduling within the calendar year, the client will be reevaluated for program participation.
- 3) Mileage Management: Planning appointments within the program mileage guidelines and in a systematic order. Planning appointments in correlation to home and the location to other appointments.

- For example, the client should not plan to go east of their home, then west, then east again. If a client does not know where an appointment is located in reference to their home, they may utilize the SSP to help find the location and the distance from their home. This should be done during the prior appointment, not immediately before leaving their home.

Limitations

The goal of the SSP Program is to help clients access their community. There are a few limitations to the type of appointments clients are allowed to schedule.

- 1) The activity must be more than just transportation. The SSP is not solely a personal errand or transportation service. Other resources such as taxis and flextrans are available if the client requires just transportation.
- 2) The SSP is not required to accommodate overnight or out of state activities.
- 3) The SSP is not required to drive out of their immediate community unless prior

arrangements have been made with the program coordinator and agreed to by all parties.

- 4) The SSP is not required to pay admission fees, or other associated costs if attending an activity.
 - Some places will allow a person with a disability to have a guide or an aide for free. The client may want to consider calling ahead to see if the SSP can enter for free, otherwise they will be responsible for paying for the SSP's costs.
 - The client is not required to pay for meals or food for an SSP unless it is part of the cost of the activity.
- 5) The SSP is not required to do activities which the client should do for themselves like cleaning, cooking, bathing, dog sitting, personal care, etc.
- 6) The SSP may not sign any document, including any legal document, on behalf of the client.
- 7) The client is not responsible for parking or driving tickets.
- 8) The SSP is not allowed to interpret for the client, but can assist with communication.

- The act of interpreting would be when an SSP signs what another person is saying at the same time the person is saying it. However, if the SSP were to wait until the person has finished talking and then explain to the client what was discussed, this would be considered as “assisting with communication.” It is important that the line between the two is not blurred.

9) The SSP is not a medical professional and cannot be substituted for home health care. If the client needs consistent medical attention, they should not be left alone with an SSP.

What an SSP Can Do:

- Provide transportation to and from an appointment.
- Actively engage with clients in activities which stimulate mental growth and a sense of community.
- Provide client with

What an SSP Cannot Do:

- Provide transportation to an appointment, then drop the client off and leave.
- Solely be a companion there to talk. The SSP and client must be doing some activity or task.

information regarding services and events in their area.

- Go on walks or to a gym to increase access to the community and a healthy lifestyle.
- Support a client's ability to run errands.
- Help a client identify several solutions to an issue, i.e. several organization solutions for their pantry including labeling and placement.
- Take notes for a client during a meeting, training or class.
- Assist the client in establishing the skills needed to schedule an appointment, i.e. time management,
- Offer opinions on what the client should do with their time.
- Suggest a specific routine or habit that the SSP feels would increase a healthy lifestyle.
- Clean or cook for a client.
- Run errands for a client.
- Suggest what they feel is a better way to organize a client's home.
- Create the schedule for an appointment for a client; i.e. time management, mileage, etc.
- Answer the phone to speak for the client.
- Interpret for the client.

- mileage, etc.
- Assist with communication by speaking slower, clearer, clarifying, sitting closer to the client, etc.
- Support the client learning to test their own blood sugar.
- Call 911 in case of emergency.
- Handle bodily fluids, assist with testing for blood sugar levels, or provide medical advice or care.

SSP Personal Vehicle Usage

The SSP is responsible for using their personal vehicle on client appointments. Because of this, the SSP Program expects that the client is respectful of the requests the SSP makes regarding their vehicle. For example, if the SSP prefers that food is not eaten in their car, the program would ask the client to eat before or after riding in the car with their SSP. Although some people may prefer not to have animals in their car, an SSP should not refuse service to a guide dog user. The SSP may ask that the client bring a blanket to put down before the dog gets in or they may choose

to carry a lint roller to pick up stray hairs after the appointment. Any complaints in regards to vehicle use can be referred to the program coordinator. The following are important aspects that the SSP should keep in mind while using their personal vehicle for work purposes.

- 1) The SSP must have a safe, reliable and insured personal vehicle to use for the SSP Program. If the personal vehicle is a large-capacity vehicle (one designed to carry 12 or more people), the SSP must request, review, and comply with the Large-Capacity Passenger Vehicle Safety Protocols published by State Risk Management.
- 2) The SSP must have at least the minimum amounts of liability insurance required for automotive policies in the state of Utah (currently \$25K per person/\$65K per occurrence).
- 3) Many private insurance policies do not provide liability coverage for vehicles that are being used for work purposes. Therefore, SSPs are strongly encouraged to discuss the use of their vehicles for the SSP Program with their insurance provider to ensure their vehicle is covered.

- 4) The state does not provide collision coverage on personal vehicles. If the SSP gets into an accident during work time for the SSP Program, the damage to their vehicle will not be covered by state insurance.
- 5) For further questions regarding insurance or vehicle restrictions for part-time, non-benefitted employees, the SSP may contact the Employee Resource Information Center (ERIC) at 801-538-3742.

Mileage Compensation

Each client benefiting from the SSP program is **allotted 10 hours/week** and is allowed to use their SSP for transportation **up to 40 miles a week**. The 40 miles that the SSP drives the client are expected of the SSP as part of the SSP position and are not reimbursed. The client is expected to manage their hours and mileage by prioritizing needs. The SSP may assist the client with looking up distances or calculating driving time to give the client enough information to make an educated decision about their schedule.

The SSP Program does not expect the SSP to drive after the client has reached 40 miles. The SSP can

respectfully deny providing transportation for the client's remaining hours that week. If the SSP wants to provide additional miles of transportation after the 40 miles are reached, they must first receive approval from the program coordinator. Once approved, the SSP can be **compensated by the SSP Program** at \$0.56* per mile up to an additional 20 miles, for a total of 60 miles per week per client. In order to obtain the reimbursement, the SSP must track their odometer miles and complete the SSP Program mileage reimbursement form.

After the client has reached 60 miles of drive time for the week, the SSP Program will no longer compensate mileage. The SSP can respectfully deny providing transportation for the client's remaining hours that week. If the client is still in need of transportation and the SSP wants to, the SSP has the option to continue to drive the client for a **client-paid compensation** of \$0.56* per mile. Payment for the client-paid compensation is between the client and the SSP, not the program.

*If the state of Utah changes the reimbursement level, the amount compensated per mile is subject to change.

Professional Ethics and Boundaries

The SSP is entrusted by the program and the client to provide services in a professional and ethical manner. The SSP works closely with the client which will generally create a close relationship. The following objectives must be followed by both the SSP and client in order to maintain appropriate boundaries and professional ethics.

- 1) **Choice:** The SSP Program is designed to facilitate community integration. Although at times the SSP may feel as though they are helping, they may be impeding on the rights that a client has to make decisions on their own. As long as it is within the parameters of the program guidelines, the client is the one responsible to make decisions as to what to do, and where and when to go.
- 2) **Confidentiality and Privacy:** The SSP and client spend a significant amount of time together and the SSP may learn many confidential, private and personal details about the client. It is important that confidential information is not shared with anyone without the client's consent. The client's privacy is important. Privacy is one step

beyond confidentiality. When the SSP is in the client's home, they must not move anything without asking for permission. The SSP must also remember to respect the client's privacy by not bringing anyone to the SSP appointment with them.

- 3) **Professionalism:** The SSP and client need to be on time for appointments, focused and ready to work. Both parties are expected to present themselves in a professional manner, including speaking professionally, both in tone and language and dressing appropriately for an activity.
- 4) **Technology:** As technology advances, it is important to remember that the SSP is at work and their full attention should be on the client. Texting, talking, playing games, and social networking are inappropriate while working. The SSP is being paid to give one-on-one attention to the client. There are times when a personal call is necessary such as during emergencies. There may also be times when a client is asking for online information such as looking up an address. These are acceptable uses of technology while at work.

- 5) **Record Keeping:** The SSP maintains documentation that is consistent with agency policy. The SSP will document any activities or notes which may be relevant to their visit. Appropriate records are a requirement which will assist the agency in maintaining funding for the SSP program.
- 6) **Continuation of Services:** The SSP should assist in making appropriate arrangements for the continuation of services during interruptions such as vacations, illness, and following termination. If the SSP will no longer be working with the client, they must give a minimum of two-week notice to the client and program coordinator. It is not fair to the client if the SSP gives last-minute notice.
- 7) **Drinking and/or Drug Use:** Neither the SSP nor the client may drink alcohol or use illegal drugs while on assignment. If the client drinks alcohol or uses illegal drugs prior to or during the assignment, notify the coordinator immediately. Leave the situation while ensuring the client is able to get home safely (taxi, family, etc.).
- 8) **Appropriate Attire:** The SSP must follow DWS dress code policy, unless the activity requires

something different. For example, if the assignment is to attend an outdoor activity such as a picnic, shorts may be appropriate. Or if the assignment is a wedding or a play, formal attire would be appropriate.

Time Reporting

- 1) It is mandatory that time is entered through the online state system by 5:00 p.m. the last day of the pay period (Friday). If the SSP does not have access to the internet at home, free public computers are available at local libraries or DWS employment centers.
- 2) Work logs must be submitted to the program coordinator by email or fax by 5:00 p.m. the last day of the pay period (Friday). The SSP documents within the work logs the time that they arrive for the client's appointment and the time the appointment ends. It is important to report hours worked accurately.
- 3) The SSP will calculate work time in quarter hour increments to ensure that the allotted time is being fully utilized. Work time begins when the SSP arrives at the client's home or designated meeting place and ends when the

SSP leaves the client. The SSP may not claim any travel time to and from the appointment unless specifically approved by the coordinator.

- 4) There are times when a client may call the SSP and request assistance with completing a phone task. The SSP may claim the time that it takes to complete this task. They may not claim any of the time when a client calls to schedule an appointment with them, when a client calls only to chat or when anytime not spent with the client.

Scheduling

It is important to try and coordinate a consistent, weekly, schedule between the SSP and client. If the client would like to modify their weekly scheduled appointments, it is a courtesy to give at least two days' notice to the SSP. The client must understand that any diversion from the pre-arranged schedule may result in the SSP's unavailability.

No Shows and Last Minute Cancellations

If a client fails to show up for an appointment the SSP will be required to stay 20 minutes, and then they may leave. In the case of a no-show, or if the

client cancels within 24 hours of a scheduled appointment, the SSP will be allowed to bill up to 2 hours which will be taken from the client's authorized weekly hours. The SSP must inform the program coordinator of the no-show within two days. Similarly, if the SSP or client is more than 15 minutes late to an appointment or runs over 15 minutes past the scheduled end time, the other party should report this to the program coordinator within two days. This is considered a change to the scheduled appointment and does not follow the guidelines of professionalism expected by the program. The program coordinator will track the number of last minute changes for every SSP and client. After 3 changes or cancellations the SSP or client will be reevaluated for their participation within the program.

Appointment Cancellations

Cancellations should only occur in the case of illness, emergency or other serious unavoidable circumstances. If the SSP or client needs to cancel they must notify the other person immediately. It is important that an SSP abide by professional conduct and honor the commitment made to the

client. If the SSP has a last minute cancellation the client is left with few resources and are forced to reschedule their appointment and plans as a result.

Permanent Cancellations

If the SSP decides to stop working for the SSP Program, they must first inform the program coordinator and then the client. This should be done two or more weeks in advance so a replacement can be found.

SSP Training and Observations

The SSP is required to take several required training courses when employed through DWS, such as Driver Training, Workplace Harassment and Conflict of Interest. The SSP will also be expected to complete SSP Sensitivity Training Courses within their first week of work. Modules include: Understanding Disability, Orientation and Environmental Feedback, Importance of Touch, Ethics in the Workplace, and Professionalism and Business Practices. Prior to working with clients on their assigned caseload the SSP is expected to observe an appointment with a current SSP and client to understand the role of an SSP and

relationship dynamics with clients. After approximately one month of working with the client, the program coordinator will observe the SSP to evaluate how the SSP facilitates the client's independence and how well the two parties work together. The coordinator will also provide semi-annual performance reviews for each SSP based on observations and client feedback.

Client Training

Prior to the approval of a client's application to receive SSP services they must have the program goals and guidelines described to them in person by the program coordinator. A client may be asked to complete training with their SSP regarding the guidelines of the program as well as their role as a client. If the client would like access to the SSP's Sensitivity Training to evaluate how the SSP has been trained and what they should expect from the SSP, this information will be provided upon request.

Emergencies

The SSP is not a trained medical professional and is not expected to deal with medical situations or emergencies. If help is needed, (i.e. client is

having a seizure or unable to communicate due to a medical issue), the SSP must call 911 immediately and notify the program coordinator and the client's emergency contact. If a situation arises where the safety of the client is questionable (i.e. client is dizzy), the SSP should make sure the client is able to get home safely and medical personnel is contacted if necessary. The program coordinator should be notified immediately and this information should be recorded in the log. It is important that the SSP has at least one emergency number for the client. Always remember, safety is the first priority for both the SSP and the client.

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