



Participant Direction Handbook

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What is Participant Direction?

Participant direction is sometimes called self-direction or consumer-direction. You may have heard it called by these names in other states or programs, but the term *participant direction* is used in Georgia.

Participant direction is not a program or a service or a waiver. Participant direction is a service delivery option available to individuals that receive the New Options Waiver (NOW) or the Comprehensive Supports Waiver (COMP) in Georgia.

We are so happy with the flexibility, choices, and control that we have since we began directing my daughter's services.

-Karen A., Lilburn, Georgia

Participant direction means that you direct your own services and have control over your funds. It means that you choose who provides your services and how much you pay for them. It also means that you schedule your own services and decide when and where you will receive them.

Participant direction also means you have responsibilities.

You have the responsibility of managing your annual funds. You are responsible for hiring, training and managing the employees who work for you. You are responsible for record keeping and complying with the requirements of the fiscal agent. You are also responsible for making sure that the services you receive are appropriate and comply with

the NOW and COMP waiver policies and all Medicaid regulations.

Most importantly, you are responsible for communicating with your support coordinator, your fiscal agent, and your employees when appropriate.

What are the NOW and COMP Waivers?

The NOW and COMP waivers are Georgia's Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) waivers for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). These waivers are designed to provide a community-based alternative to institutional care. Services provided in one's own home or community allows more freedoms and generally costs less.

HCBS waivers are not entitlement programs. To qualify for a NOW or COMP Medicaid waiver, individuals must meet certain requirements. The services and supports that individuals receive must assist them with living and participating in their community.

Waiver services are funded by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and matching state dollars. In Georgia, the NOW and COMP waivers are managed by the Division of Developmental Disabilities in the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).

For more information and to apply for a NOW or COMP waiver, visit www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/applying-dd-services to see **Instructions for Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Services Application**, or call your DBHDD Field Office. To find your DBHDD field office, visit www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/field-offices.

Visit the **GAMMIS** website to find the Waiver manuals. Click on Provider Information. Scroll to Provider Manuals. (www.mmis.georgia.gov/portal/)

Service Delivery Options

If you receive services through the NOW or COMP waiver, you have the option of using traditional or participant-directed service delivery.

Traditional Service Delivery

Services and supports are provided by a Medicaid-approved provider agency. In this model, you will choose a company to provide the waiver services. The company will hire all caregivers and support staff, and provide the other waiver services, such as diapers, respite, etc. The company will manage your funds, and determine how many hours of support you will receive and how much the staff will be paid. The company is responsible for complying with waiver regulations.

Participant-Directed Model

Services and supports are provided by workers and vendors whom you hire. You determine their pay, schedule their hours, and process their payroll. You choose vendors for other services, and you are responsible for processing their invoices. You are responsible for managing your budget and complying with waiver regulations.

NOTE: It is possible for you to direct some of your services and receive some traditional services. As an example, you might choose to direct the community living supports you receive in your home, but during the day, you might attend a day support program that is managed by a traditional provider.

It is important to know that you have a choice. The following charts may help you decide which method will work best for you.

PROS AND CONS

Traditional	
Pros	Cons
Someone else handles the details of managing your budget and your staff.	You have little control over services and vendors.
You can live in residential settings such as group homes or host homes.	Cost of services is higher due to agency overhead.
Provider can advocate for increases in budget, based on your needs.	You have little control over choosing support staff.
You do not need to have the skills required to direct.	You have no control over salary of your support staff.

Participant Direction	
Pros	Cons
You choose and control the cost of service vendors.	You are responsible for paperwork and details.
You choose how much you will pay your support staff.	You cannot live in a group home or host home.
You have the freedom to hire, train, and supervise your support staff in the way that works for you.	You have sole responsibility for the <i>lengthy</i> process of recruiting, hiring, and supervising your support staff.
You manage your budget so that it will fit your needs.	You are responsible for managing your budget so that it works for you the entire year.

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Participant Direction is Awesome!

Kori's mom knew when he was diagnosed with a developmental disability at 16 months that he would need some type of assistance as an adult. Her goal for Kori was for him to be as independent as possible despite his disabilities, so that he could live and enjoy life within the community.



Today, Kori is an adult who lives with his family and is involved in his community, thanks to the supports and services he receives from Georgia's COMP Waiver. Kori volunteers at the local nursing home, visits the local shops and restaurants, and attends social gatherings. Kori's rich life is dependent on the direct support professionals that enable him to move about the community with ease, assist him in preparing and eating the food he buys at the local grocery store, transport him to various locations, and assist with toileting and bathing.

Kori is especially proud of his volunteer work at the nursing home. While there, he interacts with the residents and helps out by setting up the dining tables and assisting with wheelchair transport. The nursing home even chose Kori to be honored at a volunteer appreciation luncheon.

Kori receives community living support, individual community access, group community access, respite, speech and language therapy, and day supports.

"Participant direction is the bomb! To me, it is the only way to go in order to make sure that my son is getting the best possible services," reports his mother, who acts as his representative. "The reason that we decided to participant direct was because it became apparent that the money he receives from the waiver would go further if I could make some of the decisions about how it was spent.

The waiver has helped Kori to be more independent and to enjoy his life. He has been able to develop relationships with his caregivers and others in the community that are independent of those within his family. His self-worth and confidence have increased and he is enjoying his life much more. It has given his family the opportunity for some freedom from the daily caregiving that can overwhelm the lives of family members of those with disabilities.

Kori's mother loves that participant direction allows her and Kori to choose the caregivers that work best with him. In doing so, she is able to know that when he is with his caregivers, he is their number one priority and can feel comfortable and relieved that he is in good hands. For her, this is everything.

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Making the Decision to Utilize Participant Direction

When deciding to direct, the first thing you will want to do is determine who is going to manage these responsibilities. This person is called the participant direction representative. This person is very important and should be chosen with care.

Who can Direct?

- The individual who has the waiver (participant); or
- A designated representative of the individual who has the waiver. This representative can be anyone you choose, except a paid employee who is providing other waiver services.

Responsibilities

Once you have determined that you are eligible to direct the NOW or COMP services, you will need to decide if you are willing and able to fulfill the responsibilities of the job. The person who is responsible will need to be able to handle:

- **Paperwork.** The paperwork can seem overwhelming to some people and may prove to be a barrier to successfully managing participant direction. Organization and attention to details are skills that will help you manage the paperwork.
- **Managing staff.** To be able to successfully recruit, hire and manage your staff, you should have good communication skills and have clear rules and expectations.
- **Monitor Funds.** It will be important to be able to make sure that you stay within a monthly and annual budget to ensure that the amount of the waiver funds lasts through the year. This will require you to take time each month to review your expenses and anticipate future costs.
- **Work with a Fiscal Agent.** Your fiscal agent will assist you with monitoring your budget and paying for your staff and services. Fiscal supports are a required service with participant direction, so be prepared to learn the rules and follow them.
- **Work with a Support Coordinator.** Your support coordinator will assist you with developing an individual support plan (ISP) and monitoring your supports and services. Support coordination is a required service, so be prepared to communicate your needs and any issues with your support coordinator.
- **Work with the Participant Direction Manager and Other Staff at DBHDD.** Most questions regarding participant direction can be answered by your support coordinator. For additional information, contact DBHDD's Division of Developmental Disabilities at 404-657-2252.

- **Be informed on the Waiver Manuals.** It is important that you be familiar with the NOW and COMP waiver manuals and stay up-to-date on all policy changes. Manuals change on a quarterly basis. The exact name of the manuals can also change, but they can always be identified by the title including the type of waiver, the words Part III, and the specific chapters contained within the manual. The waiver manuals can be found on the Georgia Department of Community Health's (DCH) GAMMIS Portal at www.mmis.georgia.gov/portal/. Click on "Provider Information" in the banner at the top of the page. Then scroll down to "Provider Manuals." There you will find:

- Comprehensive Supports Waivers Program (COMP) and New Options Waiver Program (NOW) – Chapters 600-1200 (*This contains the general policies and procedures for both the COMP/NOW waivers.*)
- Comprehensive Supports Waivers Program (COMP) – Part III, Chapters 1300-3500 (*This contains the policies and procedures for services in the COMP waiver.*)

- Comprehensive Supports Waivers Program (COMP) – Part III, Chapters 1900-3500 (*This contains the policies and procedures for additional services in the COMP waiver.*)
- New Options Waiver Program (NOW) – Part III 3500 (*This contains the policies and procedures services in the NOW waiver.*)



The best tip I can give a family who is just starting this process is to reach out to someone who has been through the experience, and get coaching from them. After all, there is no better teacher than someone who has walked the same walk.

-Sitara N., Marietta, Georgia

Call Parent-to-Parent at 1-800-229-2038 or 770-451-5484 to be matched with a supporting parent who has experience with participant direction.

Getting Started

Once you have decided that you want to direct your services, you will need to take some steps to get the ball rolling.

7 Steps to Getting Started

Step 1

The first step is to contact your support coordinator and let them know that you would like to direct your services. *For more information, go to **The Support Coordinator***

Step 2

Next, you will need to choose someone to be your representative. Do you want to do it yourself, or do you want a family member or friend to assist you?

*For more information, go to **Making the Decision to Utilize Participant Direction***

Step 3

Register and attend mandatory training, and sign the memo of understanding. *For more information, go to **Mandatory Training***

Step 4

Choose a fiscal agent to be stipulated in the ISP. Sign up with the financial support services provider. *For more information, go to **The Fiscal Agent***

Step 5

Work with your support coordinator to develop an individual service plan (ISP) based on your needs. If you already have an ISP and are changing from a traditional provider service delivery model, you will need to coordinate the change of service and ISP with your support coordinator. The ISP will include funding allocations for each service. If you are new to the waiver and choose participant direction, your ISP will be developed based on directing your services.

Step 6

Once your ISP has been approved and you have completed the enrollment process with your fiscal agent, you will be ready to begin recruiting staff. *For more information, go to **Recruiting, Hiring, Training, and Managing your Staff***

Step 7

If needed, select service vendors for other services and complete necessary documentation with your chosen fiscal agent. *For more information, go to **Service Vendors***

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Mandatory Training

DBHDD requires that you or your designated representative complete a mandatory training before you can begin participant direction.

During the training, you will learn what your roles and responsibilities are, as well as what services are available under the NOW and COMP waivers. The trainings are designed to ensure that you understand the participant direction service delivery option and your role, authorities, and responsibilities.

Trainings are offered both online and in-person and must be completed prior to developing the ISP for participant direction. For more information and to register for one of these trainings, go to the Developmental Disabilities Training Announcement page at www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/developmental-disabilities-training-announcements-o, and look for Participant Direction New Enrollment Training.

The mandatory training is a wonderful opportunity to ask questions face-to-face with a DBHDD representative. Come with a list of questions, and then don't be afraid to ask them. It is likely others have the same questions.

-Cynthia W., Canton, Georgia

Memo of Understanding (MOU)

In addition to attending the required training session, you will be required to sign a “memo of understanding” or MOU before you begin participant direction. This document will be reviewed and signed during the training session and then again annually at the ISP meeting.

The MOU is a document that states the terms and conditions of participant direction. Your signature on the document means that you understand the terms and conditions, and that you agree to adhere to them.

The Support Coordinator

Support coordination is not only an important part of your waiver package, but it is a required service for all NOW and COMP waivers. Your support coordinator is available to assist you in deciding if participant direction is right for you. Together, you can talk about the benefits, risks, and responsibilities.



The more you are prepared for the support coordinator's visits, the smoother your meetings will go. For example, have employee activity records and/or annual funds allocations ready to review.

-Reiko D., Cherokee County, Georgia

Once you have made the decision to direct and have attended the mandatory training, your support coordinator will help you develop an individual service plan (ISP) and inform you of the allocated funds. Your support coordinator will continue to be a resource, evaluating supports and services and assisting with changes to the ISP, when necessary.

Types of Support Coordination

The purpose of support coordination is to oversee the health, safety, and well-being of waiver participants. In addition, support coordinators are required to track the use and outcomes of services identified in the ISP. There are two types of support coordination for individuals receiving services through the COMP waiver:

Traditional Support Coordination

The role of the coordinator is to evaluate and assess your individual needs, assist in coordinating services, and monitor your services and supports.

Intensive Support Coordination

This includes the same activities as in traditional support coordination, but adds specialized coordination of waiver, medical, and behavioral support services for individuals with exceptional needs.

You will be assigned to either traditional or intensive support coordination based on your level of need identified through your needs assessment.

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Support Coordination Agencies

There are currently seven support coordination agencies with ten locations in Georgia.

Benchmark Human Services

www.benchmarkhs.com/about/
530 West Thomas Street, Suite C
Milledgeville, Georgia 31061
478-451-0557

CareStar

www.carestar.com/
3312 Northside Drive
Suite A140
Macon, Georgia 31210
478-314-7770

Compass Coordination

www.compasstn.org/georgia
1124 N. Tennessee Street
Suite 104
Cartersville Georgia 30201
678-372-6626

Columbus Community Services

www.columbusorg.com/Community-Services/Support-Coordination
2470 Windy Hill Road, Suite 448
Marietta, Georgia 30067
770-916-1091

1453 Greene Street, Suite B
Augusta, Georgia 30901
706-736-0401

235 Roosevelt Avenue, Suite 455
Albany, Georgia 31701
229-435-3212

Creative Consulting Services

www.creativeconsultingservices.org/
353 Resource Parkway
Winder, Georgia 30680
770-868-5949

Georgia Support Services

www.georgiasupport.com/
101 Walke Dairy Road
Dublin, Georgia 31021
478-275-4845

Professional Case Management (PCSA)

www.pcsasc.com/
2404 Bemiss Road
Valdosta, Georgia 31602
229-241-1540

The Fiscal Agent

Once you have attended the required training and signed the MOU, you will need to choose a fiscal agent to manage your waiver funds. A fiscal agent or intermediary is a company that acts on behalf of another party by performing various financial duties. In participant direction, the fiscal agent is the financial support service provider who acts on your behalf to manage the financial aspects of the waiver and make sure you are complying with federal and state payroll requirements. The fiscal agent issues vendor and payroll checks and pays withholdings to state and federal agencies. You are required to have a fiscal agent if you direct the NOW or COMP waiver.



I chose our fiscal agent by getting recommendations from other parents. I also

looked to see what experience they had as a fiscal agent in other states.

-Sitara N., Marietta, Georgia

The Role of the Fiscal Agent

- Perform payroll responsibilities.
- Make sure necessary paperwork is completed on new-hire employees.
- Withhold taxes in compliance with state and federal laws.
- Track and monitor individual fund expenditures.
- Make sure your funds are distributed as authorized in the ISP.

Fiscal Agents in Georgia

Acumen Fiscal Agent, LLC

www.acumenfiscalagent.com

Katrina Simisnean, Program Manager
(Based in Lawrenceville, Georgia)
4542 E. Inverness Ave, Ste 210
Mesa, Arizona 85206
Direct: 480-339-3506
Toll free: 1-877-211-3738
Fax: 1-888-249-7023
Email: katrinasi@acumen2.net

Continuum Fiscal Services

www.continuumfs.com

Kyle Capers, Program Administrator
260 Peachtree Street, NW – Suite 1500
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
678-974-7942
Fax: 1-855-872-3728

Public Partnerships, LLC

www.publicpartnerships.com

Chantielle D. Tally, Program Administrator
2849 Paces Ferry Road, Suite 630
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
1-901-208-2907

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Funding

As part of your ISP, you will be allocated funds for the different services you receive. Your individual needs, along with evaluation and assessment results, determine the amount of the funds allocated for each service. Funding is allocated annually on your birthday.

Developing and Managing Funds

Once you know your funding allocation for each service, you will work with the fiscal agent to use the funds. The fiscal agent will be responsible for keeping you updated on how the funds are being spent. You are responsible for managing the funds, so that they can provide needed services for the entire year.

The waivers specify the maximum amount of funding for each of the services, but not every individual will receive funding at the service maximum. You will not be able to spend more than is allocated in your funds for any service. *For example, if you have \$1,000.00 allocated for incontinent supplies, you will not be able to spend more than \$1,000, regardless of the NOW and COMP waivers' maximum for this category.*



I monitor hours weekly and review my remaining funds every pay period to make sure I have enough to last the entire year.

-Cynthia D., Baconton, Georgia

EMPLOYEE WAGES

One of the most important decisions you will make when managing funds is determining how much you will pay your employees. The amount of their hourly pay will determine how many hours of service you can receive during the year.

When deciding how much you will pay them, you will also need to figure in your costs as their employer. By law, employers need to pay a portion of an employee's Social Security and Medicare taxes, as well as federal and state unemployment taxes. Workers' compensation insurance is also an employer-related cost.

This means that for every \$1.00 you pay in wages, you must add the additional employer costs. As an example, let's say the employer costs are 20 cents per dollar. This means that if a employee makes \$10.00 an hour, the cost to you would be \$12.00 for every hour they worked.

It is very important to remember and include the employer costs when determining the hourly pay of staff and the hours of service you need. Your fiscal agent will be able to provide you with more information and give you the specific employer costs.

NOW & COMP SERVICES

All services provided under the waiver are based on the assessed needs specified in the ISP.

Participants have the option to self-direct COMP and NOW services with the exception of community residential alternative services, financial support services, prevocational services, nursing services, nutritional services, and support coordination. For details on participant direction, refer to the

Provider Manual, *Part II Policies and Procedures for COMP, Chapter 1200*.

Details of service specifications, provider requirements and licensure, covered and non-covered services, and reimbursement units and rates can be found in the Provider Manual, Part III, COMP/NOW Policies and Procedures. Each service is described in a distinct chapter with a service definition as well as non-covered items. You are responsible for reviewing and adhering to all service requirements.

The participant-directed service model may be selected for any of the following service types.

Services supporting needs that result from your developmental disability (must be prescribed by a physician and be provided by a Georgia-licensed therapist):

1. Adult Occupational Therapy
2. Adult Physical Therapy
3. Adult Speech and Language Therapy

Other eligible services:

4. Behavioral Supports Consultation
Professional services that assist individuals with significant, intensive challenging behaviors that interfere with activities of daily living, social interaction, work, or similar situations.
5. Behavioral Supports
Professional services that assist individuals with significant, intensive challenging behaviors that interfere with activities of daily living, social interaction, work, or similar situations, through direct training and assistance to family and support staff.
6. Community Access Services
Designed to assist you in acquiring, retaining, or improving self-help,

- socialization, and adaptive skills required for active participation, and independent functioning outside your home.*
7. Community Guide Services (only for participant direction)
Assists participants with defining and directing their own services and supports and meeting the responsibilities of participant direction.
8. Community Living Support
Individually tailored supports that assist with acquisition, retention, or improvement of skills related to a participant's continued residence in his or her family home.
9. Environmental Accessibility Adaptation
Physical adaptations to the participant's or family's home which are necessary to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the individual, or which enable the individual to function with greater independence in the home.
10. Individually Directed Goods and Services (not otherwise provided through the COMP waiver or Medicaid State Plan)
Services, equipment, or supplies identified by the participant and his or her support coordinator or interdisciplinary team.
11. Natural Support Training
Provides training and education to individuals who provide unpaid support, training, companionship, or supervision to participants.
12. Respite Services
Provides brief periods of support or relief for caregivers of individuals with disabilities and includes maintenance respite for planned or scheduled relief, or emergency respite for a participant requiring a short period of structured support (typically due to behavioral support needs), or due to a family emergency.
13. Specialized Medical Equipment
Devices, controls, or appliances specified

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in the ISP which enable participants to increase their abilities to perform activities of daily living and to interact more independently with their environment.

14. **Specialized Medical Supplies**
Food supplements, special clothing, diapers, bed wetting protective chucks, and other authorized supplies that are specified in the ISP.
15. **Supported Employment**
Supports that enable employment of participants, for whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage is unlikely, absent the provision of supports, and who, because of their disabilities, need supports to work in a regular work setting.

16. **Transportation**
Enables participants to gain access to waiver and other community services, activities, resources, and organizations typically used by the general population; does not include transportation available through Medicaid non-emergency transportation, or as an element of another waiver service.
17. **Vehicle Adaptation**
Adaptations to the participant's or family's vehicle approved in the ISP, such as a hydraulic lift, ramps, special seats, and other modifications to allow for access into and out of the vehicle as well as safety while moving.

SERVICE RATES

Service	Maximum Rate per unit	Annual Limit
Adult Occupational Therapy	Evaluation: \$67.21 (<i>Limit 1 per year</i>) OT Therapeutic Services: \$19.76 (<i>Four 15-minute units per day</i>) OT Sensory Integrative Techniques: \$24.46 (<i>Four 15-minute units per day</i>)	Annual Limit for All Adult Therapies - \$5,400.00
Adult Physical Therapy	Evaluation: \$69.34 (<i>Limit 1 per year</i>) PT Therapeutic Procedure: \$20.07 (<i>Four 15-minute units per day</i>)	Annual Limit for All Adult Therapies - \$5,400.00
Adult Speech/Language Therapy	Evaluation: \$54.93 (<i>Limit 2 per year</i>) Speech Language Therapy: \$62.53 per unit (<i>One unit equals one visit</i>) Speech-Generating Device Therapy: \$54.75 (<i>One unit equals one visit with limit of 8 visits per month</i>)	Annual Limit for All Adult Therapies - \$5,400.00
Behavioral Supports Consultation	1 unit equals \$1.00	\$2,262.00
Behavioral Supports Services	1 unit equals \$1.00	\$1,800.00
Community Access Group	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in individual budget up to an annual maximum of \$17,856.00
Community Access Individual	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in individual budget up to an annual maximum of \$10,670.00
Community Guide	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in individual budget up to an annual maximum of \$2,000.00
Community Living Support – Extended Community Living Support – Shared Community Living Support – Personal Assistance Retainer	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in the individual budget up to an annual maximum of \$51,300.00. Total annual amount of all services billed <i>cannot</i> exceed \$51,300.00 annually.
Environmental Accessibility Adaptation	The reimbursement rate is the lower of three price quotes or the lifetime maximum.	Lifetime maximum of \$10,400.00

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Financial Support Services	Maximum of \$75.00 per month	Annual Maximum of \$900.00
Individual Directed Goods and Services	1 unit equals \$1.00	Maximum of \$1,500.00 per year.
Natural Support Training	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in individual budget up to an annual maximum of \$1,787.00
Respite – Hourly Respite – Daily <i>Category 1 & Category 2 classification is determined by assessment.</i>	1 unit equals \$1.00	As authorized in the individual budget up to the annual maximum of \$4,608.00 for Category 1 and \$6,285.00 for Category 2 Respite.
Specialized Medical Equipment	1 unit equals \$1.00	The standard Medicaid reimbursement rate for the equipment or, in the absence of a standard Medicaid rate, the lower of three price quotes. Annual maximum number of units is 5,200, unless there is approval to exceed the annual maximum up to the lifetime maximum due to assessed exceptional needs of the participant. Lifetime maximum per participant is \$13,474.76
Specialized Medical Supplies	1 unit equals \$1.00	Annual maximum number of units is 3,800.00, unless there is approval to exceed annual maximum units due to assessed exceptional needs of the participant.
Supported Employment – Group Supported Employment – Individual Supported Employment – Individual	1 unit equals \$1.00	COMP: Annual limit is as authorized in the individual budget up to a maximum of \$7,065.00. COMP: Annual limit is authorized in the individual budget up to a maximum of \$10,670.00. NOW: Annual limit is authorized in the individual budget up to maximum of \$17,856.00.

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Transportation	1 unit equals \$1.00	Annual limit is authorized in the individual budget up to annual maximum for all self-directed Transportation services of \$2,797. 00.
Vehicle Adaptation	1 unit equals \$1.00	Lifetime maximum per participant is \$6,240.00

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A Life with Dignity

When our son, Evan, was born 34 years ago, we were told that he would have lifelong developmental disabilities. We were not sure what the future would hold for him, but we pledged as parents and as a family to give him a life filled with dignity.

Evan attended Smoke Rise Elementary, Henderson Middle School, and graduated from Tucker High School. He was football manager of the Tucker Tigers for many years.

Evan lives a rich and busy life in his community. For years, Evan participated in Special Olympics swimming, power lifting, and basketball. He has participated in several sports and life/social skill activities and been on overnight trips with local organizations. He has held jobs at a local grocery store and other businesses. For a while, he even had his own paper shredding company! Today, Evan is in his fourth year working as a stocking clerk in the emergency department of a local hospital.

Approximately four years ago, Evan moved his COMP waiver services to the participant direction model, so his supports and services could successfully provide him with greater independence in his home community of Tucker.

Evan now lives successfully in a house with two roommates. His roommates also have disabilities, and they direct their waivers. They each require and receive caregiver support and assistance. The roommates pay rent and utilities to subsidize the costs of the home. Evan's caregiver support allows him to work, plan, and shop for meals and toiletries, complete the daily maintenance tasks of a home, do banking, attend social and recreational events in the community, go to movies, attend church, work out with his personal trainer, attend weekly bowling activities, participate in practices with a local band, and attend play practice. His favorite thing to do is go out to eat with friends.

We call Evan's home Twin Magnolias for the two magnolia trees that are in front of his house. Evan and his roommates have lived together successfully with support and careful planning for three years. Being able to direct his waiver has made all the difference, as this would not be possible within the traditional service delivery model.

The magnolia flower is defined as "dignity." We have come very far in realizing this dream for him and for our family.



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Recruiting, Hiring, Training, and Managing your Staff

Recruiting

One of the most important responsibilities you will have when you self-direct is hiring the right people for your staff. Depending on your needs and the availability of support staff in your area, you may find this to be one of the most challenging responsibilities as well. The following information will help you make the right choices for you.

CREATING A JOB DESCRIPTION

The first step in recruiting staff is to write a job description. A good job description will include basic information about the job, such as the work schedule, the amount the employee will be paid, and the total hours the person will be expected to work in a week. It will also have a clear description of the job responsibilities and the qualifications for the position. Job responsibilities are the tasks you want the support person to do. Job qualifications are the skill and qualities you want the person to have.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

To help you write the job responsibilities, it may help to develop a list of the tasks that you will need the support person to assist you with. You should use your ISP to help develop the list. Most tasks will fall under these four areas:

- Personal care
- Domestic/household assistance
- Health and safety care

- Community assistance

List the tasks you need help with under each area. These might include:

Personal care: Lifting and transferring, personal grooming, showering, assistance with toileting/diapering, feeding, etc.

Domestic/household assistance: Fixing meals, laundry, vacuuming and dusting, cleaning the bathroom, dishwashing, etc.

Health and safety care: Assisting with medications, assisting with daily range-of-motion or stretching therapy, care for specialty equipment, etc.

Community Assistance: Connecting to community activities, helping to get together with family and friends, meeting new people, going with me to appointments, helping me entertain in my home, assisting me with managing my budget, helping me balance my checkbook, going grocery shopping with or for me, assisting me with transportation (like scheduling rides to appointments), etc.



I have found staff through word-of-mouth and online recruiting sites.

I am always on the lookout for good caregivers and keep a file so I can reach out when I need one. I always have more than one caregiver working for us so if one leaves, I will not be without care.

-Karen D., Peachtree Corners, Georgia

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JOB QUALIFICATIONS:

Your job description will need to include the skills, qualities, and characteristics you want your support staff to have. Here are some examples of some qualifications you might want to include:

- The person understands you are the employer, is willing to take direction from you, follow your instructions, learn from you, be trained by you and respect your wishes.
- The person believes in your goals and is able to support you in achieving them.
- The person is able to meet all of your physical needs. The person can transfer you, move your wheelchair, lift you, move your equipment etc.
- The person is able to keep your home clean and in order, as well as prepare meals as directed by you.
- The person has dependable transportation, a valid Georgia driver's license, and current car insurance. The person is able to drive you if and when necessary, as directed by you.
- The person dresses appropriately.
- The person respects your privacy and keeps information about you private.
- The person puts your health and safety first and uses good judgment in keeping you from harm.
- The person remembers and follows emergency policies and procedures.
- The person shows up on time, is dependable, and stays for the entire shift. The person calls when he or she is unable

to report to work and gives advance notice or prompt notice of absences.

- The person keeps all necessary records, such as work schedules, time logs, daily activities notebook and your calendar of appointments. The records are accurate, neat, and organized.
- The person is sensitive to your needs, your self-respect, and your desires while providing a professional level of care.



I look at my funds and then look at the hours I need. Based on these two factors, I determine the maximum amount I can pay my staff. I let them know it's the most I can pay and there may not be an opportunity for a raise.

-Sitara N., Marietta, Georgia

OTHER QUALITIES:

Everyone is different, so you may want to look for certain qualities in a support person that are individualized to you and the others in your household. You may prefer someone who is calm and quiet, or someone who is upbeat, positive, and outgoing. You may enjoy being around someone with a great sense of humor or someone who enjoys watching sports. You should include whatever qualities are important to you in the job description.

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SALARY, HOURS, AND WORK SCHEDULE:

It is important that the job description state the work schedule, the amount the employee will be paid, and the total hours the person will be expected to work in a week. To help you decide what you need to include you should determine the following:

- How many hours of services you need
- How many people it will take to provide those hours
- The hourly wage for the position
- Whether you have enough money to hire all of the people that you need
(Remember to include the employer costs as well as the hourly wage.)

The number of service employees you need will depend on the answers to those questions and how many hours each person is able to work. If you hire more than one support staff, you will have a pool of people to draw from during holidays, when someone needs time off, or when someone is sick.

WRITING THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Now that you have determined the responsibilities, qualifications, and qualities of your support staff and decided what hours you want them to work and how much you can pay them, it is time to create a one-page written job description. You will want to make sure you include these 6 parts:

1. The job title
2. The name of the supervisor
3. Basic information about the job
4. A list of job responsibilities
5. A list of required qualifications
6. A way to contact you

NOTE: Job responsibilities cannot include household duties outside of those needed for

the individual with the waiver, such as: pet or sibling care, or housekeeping, laundry, or errands for other household members.

DEVELOPING A JOB APPLICATION

After you have developed a job description, you need to have a job application for each applicant to complete.

The job application will give you the following information:

1. Name
2. Address
3. Telephone number
4. Education and Employment history
5. Reference contact information

FINDING APPLICANTS

One of the challenges of being an employer is finding qualified applicants for the positions you have available. You will need to use your creativity, community resources, and networks to get the word out.

If you want to hire someone from the community, you can ask your family members, friends, and co-workers if they know someone who might be interested in working for you. Here are some other ideas that you might want to consider:

- Place a want ad in the local newspaper or in organizations' or agencies' newsletters.
- Contact disability-related groups or agencies and ask for recommendations.
- Make a flyer that describes who you are looking for and post it in libraries, places of worship, daycare centers, colleges and universities, and other public areas.
- Contact special education teachers, para-pros, and family members.

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SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title: Support Staff

Supervisor: Patty Participant Director

Job Summary of the main function/purpose of the position: Responsible for assisting an adult woman with a disability in her daily activities and routines.

Work Schedule: Monday - Friday 2:30 to 9:00 p.m.;
Saturday 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
NOTE: This work schedule is flexible depending on the needs of the employer and may be shared between several staff members.

Salary Range: \$12-15/hour depending on scheduled times and specific duties.

Total Hours Weekly: No more than 40 hours in a week.

Qualifications: Person should be upbeat, positive and outgoing. Looking for someone who is punctual, female, a non-smoker, and who likes small friendly dogs. Must have a valid Georgia driver's license and current CPR and First Aid Certification.

Duties/Responsibilities:

- Assist with bathing, dressing, toileting needs, and personal grooming
- Assist with meal preparation and self-feeding
- Cleanup kitchen and bathroom
- Change bedsheets
- Wash, dry, and fold laundry
- Assist with physical exercise program
- Assist in accessing activities in community locations (swimming pool, restaurants, park, etc.)

Work Environment: Most of the work will be performed in employer's home, but may also be required in community settings.

Additional Remarks: Ability to be flexible, adjust work habits based on feedback, and effectively communicate with employer. Punctuality and reliability are essential qualities for this position.

SAMPLE JOB APPLICATION

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Last Name _____ First Name _____ Middle Initial _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number (_____) _____

Are you eligible to work in the United States? Yes _____ No _____

Are you 18 years of age or older? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been convicted of a felony, or a misdemeanor related to theft, fraud, neglect, or violence?

Yes _____ No _____ If Yes, explain _____

Do you have a valid Georgia Driver’s License? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have a current CPR Certification? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have a current First Aid Certification? Yes _____ No _____

POSITION/AVAILABILITY:

Position applied for _____

Days/Hours available: Monday _____ Tuesday _____ Wednesday _____

Thursday _____ Friday _____ Saturday _____ Sunday _____

Hours available: from _____ to _____

Date you are available to start work: _____

EDUCATION:

Name and Address of School - Degree/Diploma - Graduation Date:

Skills and Qualifications: Licenses, Skills, Training

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

Employer Name and Address: _____

Supervisor: _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Position Title: _____ Salary _____

From: _____ To: _____

Responsibilities: _____

Reason for Leaving: _____

May We Contact Your Present Employer? Yes _____ No _____

References We May Contact: (Name/Title/Address/Phone/Email)

I certify that information contained in this application is true and complete. I understand that false information may be grounds for not hiring me or for immediate termination of employment at any point in the future if I am hired. I authorize the verification of any or all information listed above.

Signature _____ Date _____

PLACING AN AD

To help you with writing an ad, you might want to look at some similar ads and look for things you think make them successful. Be sure to include things that make the job interesting to people, such as: flexible hours, an interesting person to work with, a great location, rewarding work, and good experience. You should also include basic information about hours, pay, duties, the job name, and a phone number to call. Be sure to include any personal preferences you might have. These might be male, female, non-smoker, dog or cat lover . . .

There are also some things you do not want to include. For example, it is not a good idea to list your full name and/or address. Do not make your ad too wordy by sharing too much information. In general, you want to keep your ad simple and save details for the interview. Additionally, do not include words that may be considered discriminatory, such as words that relate to age or race.



Check out online job sites such as Care.com and Sitter.com.

Facebook also

*has a group called “Caregiver Jobs for Georgia Waivers,” which might help you find the employee you are looking for!**

*“DBHDD does not represent, state, or imply an endorsement of any external websites, companies, or other similar platforms that parents, representatives, and/or individuals use in locating and selecting potential employees.”

Support Staff Needed

Looking for help with my adorable, high-energy, fun, and sometimes challenging 23-year old daughter. You must be creative and energetic to keep up with her. Hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays in Stockbridge area. Must be able to lift 100 lbs. Duties include assistance with bathing, dressing, toileting and feeding. Looking for someone who is compassionate, trustworthy, dependable, and will find joy and fun in this work. Non-smoker only. Call 555-5555 for an interview.

Support Staff Needed

Thirty-year old man with disabilities is looking for support staff to assist him in the evening while he is out having fun in the community. Staff person will 1) accompany him to social activities and facilitate appropriate social interactions; 2) assist him with selection and purchases of items in stores; and 3) assist with appropriate restaurant behavior, menu selections and bill payments. Must have valid driver’s license and good driving record. Hours are flexible. Johns Creek area. Non-smokers only. Call 555-5555 for an interview.

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Interviews

SCREENING JOB APPLICANTS

Your first chance to decide if you want to interview someone in person comes when you talk on the phone.

Screening is a good way to find out a little about the job applicant before you meet in person.

The purpose of screening job applicants is to see if a person is a good fit for your needs.



● *Use the phone call interview as a way to screen who you will interview in person.*

- *Make a list of questions from your job description.*
- *Be sure to take notes.*
- *Do not share things like your address or other personal information.*
- *Do not hire anyone based only on the phone interview.*

After you have conducted phone call interviews, you will want to decide which applicants you would like to interview in person. You will want to interview people who are qualified for the job, have prior experience, seem motivated and interested in the job, and are agreeable to the hours and pay.

It is important that you interview everyone in the same way, even if you already know the person. Call each job applicant on the phone to get your first impression before meeting in person.

Once you have decided who you would like to interview in person, you should call him or her to make an appointment. Prior to the appointment, the applicants should send you a completed application that includes their prior employment references and personal references.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Review the application prior to the interview, and note anything you might have questions about so that you can ask about it during the interview.

Review the job description and your support plan prior to the interview. The job description should have a list of tasks you need help with, and you will want to make sure the applicant is willing and able to do ALL of them.

You can then arrange to meet the applicant in your home, or if you feel safer, you can meet in a public space such as a library or coffee shop. If you meet in your home, you might want to make sure you are not alone. Consider inviting a friend or family member to be included in the interview, so that you are able to get a second opinion about the applicant.

Take the lead during the interview. You should ask the questions, and make sure that you are learning everything you need to know about the applicant. Refer to the list of tasks from the job description, and go over your expectations for each of them. If you need help with private care such as bathing and toileting, make sure the person understands that he or she is expected to

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help you with these tasks. You should feel comfortable asking how he or she would do the job and what his or her experiences are providing similar supports.

At the end of the interview, let the applicant know that you will get back to him or her after you check their references and finish interviewing others. *You should not make any promises or hire anyone during the interview.*



Federal law prohibits discrimination based on age, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. You cannot ask questions related to those classes on the job application or at any point during the interview or hiring process.

After the Interview

After the interview, make notes about what you liked and did not like about the applicant. Refer to the job description and compare the characteristics of the applicant with what you wrote on the job description.

Be sure to interview all qualified applicants before making any hiring decisions.

REFERENCES

Before making the decision to hire anyone, you should check references. Employer references are from people for whom the applicant has previously worked. Past employers can tell you about the applicant's work history and job performance. While some employers have specific policies limiting what information they share regarding past employees, they should at least be able confirm employment start and end dates. Personal references are friends, neighbors, co-workers, or other community contacts that can tell you what type of person the applicant is. When the applicant fills out the job application and provides references, he or she is giving you permission to contact them.

REFERENCE CHECKS

In order to move the application process along, reference checks are best conducted by phone. You should be prepared with a list of questions you want to ask, and be ready to take note of their answers.

Begin the conversation with an introduction of who you are and why you are checking the job applicant's reference. Give a brief explanation of the job description. Then, ask about the job applicant's work history and how reliable the person was. Ask directly if the employer would recommend this person for the job. Listen to how he or she answers your questions. Does he or she react positively? Or, does he or she hesitate and avoid answering questions directly. Be sure that your notes reflect both the answers and your feelings about the answers.

See a sample Reference Form on the next page.

REFERENCE CHECK FORM

Reference Check Form

PART I (To be filled out prior to telephone background check):

Applicant's Name: _____

Reference's Position: _____

Dates of Employment Reported by Applicant: _____

PART II (To be filled out during Telephone Background Check):

Dates and Times Contacted: _____

Dates of employment confirmed by reference: _____

Would the reference re-hire this applicant? (_____) YES (_____) NO

Amount of time reference worked with applicant: _____

Applicant's attendance habits: _____

Applicant's Performance Record: _____

Applicant possesses any history of workplace violence: _____

Further Comments on applicant: _____

Hiring

Once you have identified an applicant that you would like to hire, contact him or her, and officially offer the position. Inform the person that he or she will be required to complete several forms and a background check before he or she is officially hired and can begin work. This process may take a few weeks and *must* be completed before the job begins.

HIRING FORMS

Once an applicant has agreed to accept the position, you will need to begin the enrollment process with the fiscal agent that you have identified on your ISP.

The fiscal agent will, among other things, verify employee qualifications and advise you of your responsibility as the employer of record.

Remember, you are the employer, and the fiscal agent acts as an employer agent.

The fiscal agent will assist with the completion of all employer related paperwork. These will include:

- Employer Identification Number (EIN) (SS-4)
- Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9)
- Federal Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate (W-4)
- Georgia Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate (G-4)
- Earned Income Credit (EIC)

It is your responsibility to collect the forms that need to be completed and arrange for them to be filled out and signed by the new employee. You will then need to submit

them to the fiscal agent, so they can be processed.

In addition, the fiscal agent will conduct criminal background checks on your employees.

While not required, you should consider having your employees sign a confidentiality agreement. Set the expectation that they will respect the confidentiality and privacy of you and your family.

NOTE: There is a limit of 5 background checks per year that the fiscal agent will provide free of charge. Additional background checks are an additional out-of-pocket expense paid to the fiscal agent.



We fill out the online forms together at my house, so I know everything has been done correctly.

-Karen D., Peachtree Corners, Georgia

DRIVER'S LICENSE/FIRST AID/CPR/CNA LICENSE

It is your responsibility to make sure that your employees have current First Aid/CPR training and any other required licenses.

NOTE: You are required to keep proof of certifications for all employees for 5 years, even if they no longer work for you.

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Training

Once you have hired your employee(s), it is time to train them on what you need to have done and how you would like it done.

You should go back to the job description and look at the tasks that you will be asking the new employee to do. Take those job responsibilities and write a paragraph about each one stating when it will be done and how it will be done. Be sure to include everything that is important to you.

If possible, you might want to have an existing employee spend some time with the new employee to share some of their own tips. You can also have the existing employees share in writing the contacts they have made in the community for volunteering, the activities you enjoy and do not enjoy, etc. For example: likes to feed the animals at the nature center, loves eating at a particular restaurant, shopping at particular

stores, etc. If possible, you should plan to spend the first day training the new employee. Do not just expect him or her to figure things out on his or her own. You should have a notebook with all of the time sheets, goals, emergency contacts, a pocket for receipts and other general information. You can include a “cheat sheet” that describes and defines what all the codes mean and which goals fall under each code. Taking the time to properly train your employees will help save you time in re-training and help avoid any mistakes and confusion about how you would like things done.

Record keeping is an important duty of all service employees including those who provide support. It is important that your support staff are trained on how, where, and what you want recorded. You can create forms to be filled out or use a notebook to record daily activities. Instruct your staff on how you want notes to be written. Notes

SAMPLE GOAL TRACKING FORM:

Week of: _____

Goal A: Hannah will independently increase her home living skills over the next 12 months.

Date: _____												
Objectives to reach the goal	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun					
A1. With verbal to partial physical support, Hannah will prepare a meal/snack. (CLS – 4x’s per month)												
A2. With no more than 1 verbal prompt, Hannah will initiate her daily grooming / hygiene routine. (CLS – 4x’s per month)												
Other objectives												
A3. Hannah will straighten up the bathroom and hang her wet towel												
A4. Hannah will do her own laundry												
A5. Hannah will straighten her bedroom, make the bed, and pick up clothes and put them in the hamper												

should be objective and not to include negative comments about you or other staff. Notes should only include information that is necessary and relevant to your supports. You should also have the support staff sign in for each shift and sign out at the end of each shift. The time that is written on the timesheet must be the actual time that was worked. Timesheets may be kept in the notebook as well.

Personal needs training should be individualized for you. During this time, you share your own personal preferences as well as the things you require someone to know about you. These can be as simple as pointing out that you are left-handed, like to have a snack around 3:00 p.m., and like to listen to pop music. More important information might be that you wear orthotics in your shoes at all times, have a milk allergy and are prone to ear infections. While all of this information should be in the ISP, you may want to put it into a list that is shared with the staff.



I take the training slowly and write down details so they can be referred to

later if there are questions.

-Karen D., Peachtree Corners, Georgia

CONFIDENTIALITY

Staff should understand that information about you is confidential and should not be shared with others without your permission.

MEDICATIONS

Do you take regular medication that you need reminders or assistance with? It is a good idea to have this information clearly written down. You can also keep a record of when the medication was taken. This will also serve as a reminder of when a new prescription is needed.

INCIDENT REPORTS

Staff should provide a written report of any incidents that occur while you are under their care. This report should be included with the record of daily activities. Incidents can include falls, bruising, behavior outbursts, as well as health-related incidents such as nausea, vomiting, headaches, constipation and diarrhea. Notify your support coordinator if there are any suspicions or allegations of neglect or abuse.

HOUSE RULES

It is important to talk to your staff about “house rules.” House rules can help new staff understand what kind of behavior is expected of them and what behaviors might lead to termination. It is a good idea to write the rules down and have the support person sign that they have read the rules and understand them. Here are some house rule topics that you might want to consider when you first meet with a new support staff:

How do you want absences, tardiness, illnesses, and trading of shifts to be handled?

How will you handle time logs?

Are there specific behaviors that you do not allow? For example, you might want to ban vulgar language from your home.

Do you have standards for dress code, cleanliness, or wearing perfumes?

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Is smoking allowed in your home? Your car?

What parameters do you want to put up around personal cell phone usage for talking or text messaging while working?

How do you feel about your service employees bringing other family members with them to work?

What kind of rules do you want around use of your personal items such as your computer, TV, or washing machine?

What are your rules around meals? Are they provided or not?

Will they be using your car? What kind of rules do you want to have around its use?

You should make it clear that all issues regarding you are to be handled in a private and confidential manner. And, you should assure them that you will also protect their confidential information.

You can choose what rules you think are important. Be sure to write down the rules and share them with your employees during training. NOTE: It is a good idea to review and revise your rules annually. Be sure to share new rules with all staff.

TIMESHEETS

One of the most important responsibilities you have as a participant direction representative is to make sure your employees are accurately paid for the work they do, and that they are paid on time. This is important for several reasons. First, like most of us, your staff depend on their paychecks. If they do not receive the amount they are expecting at the time they are expecting them, they may refuse to continue working for you. Secondly, it is important to you because you have a budget that needs to

last for an entire year, so you will want to make sure that your employees are only working the hours that you have scheduled. And last, but maybe most important of all, is that it is *illegal* under Georgia Medicaid law for an individual to charge for work that is not done.

Timesheets should be kept by each support person and then approved by you. The employees should sign in for each shift and sign out at the end of each shift. If possible, you should ask them to sign in and out in front of you.



I have a tip sheet that explains everything about my son - likes, dislikes, wants, and needs. The first month, I am with the staff when they provide the services.

-Ganesh N., Marietta, Georgia

Time sheets are submitted to your fiscal agent. The fiscal agent will each have different requirements for submission and will process the payments after verification that they are authorized in your budget. The fiscal agent will also withhold federal and state taxes, FICA, and unemployment and workman's compensation insurance, as required by law.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

As an employer, you are encouraged to discuss job performance on an informal, day-

to-day basis. Formal written performance reviews are required to be conducted at 90 days and then annually.

The performance review is intended to be a fair and balanced assessment of the job a person is doing. It is an opportunity to discuss any problems and to give a person feedback on his or her work.

When discussing job performance with your support staff, you will want to follow some simple guidelines. Consider the following:

- Set aside a time to meet when you can go over the review without rushing.
- Discuss their actions and their performance, and not their personality.

Be specific. Spell out exactly what you want them to do or not do. Give examples.

- Be realistic in your expectations.
- Be honest and describe how you feel about their work.
- Give them your complete and full attention, and listen to what they say.

SAMPLE EMPLOYEE REVIEW

Below is an example of how you might track the performance of your employees. Once a year, you must write a summary of their performance for the year. Include areas that you would like to see improve, as well as those in which they are performing well.

Employee Review Form

September 2017-September 2018

Name: _____

Month	Arrives on time	Fills out Paperwork	Works on goals	Treatment of Hannah	Varied activities	Other
September						
October						
November						
December						
January						
February						
March						
April						
May						
June						
July						
August						
September						

Barbara is a loving and compassionate caregiver for Hannah. She supports her goals and allows her to be as independent as possible in all her efforts. Barbara is always willing and able to take Hannah to any activities in the community, and I have no concerns for Hannah’s safety when she is with Barbara. In this next year, I would like Barbara to improve her punctuality and attention to paperwork, as these are also important parts of her job.

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Terminations

There are times when you might find it necessary to let an employee go because his or her behavior or work is not what you expect. Remember, you are the employer and you have the responsibility to make sure that your employees are doing the job that you have hired them to do. This means that you can fire them if they are late to work or do not show up. They can be fired if they do not provide the services you hired them to perform, or if they break any of your house rules or if they are, in any way, intimidating, threatening, or inappropriate to you or others.

In order to terminate an employee, you should, first, notify the employee in person

and/or in writing that their services are no longer needed. When meeting in person, it is a good idea to have another person with you. This could be a family member or friend who will support you if the meeting goes poorly. After you have given notice to the employee, you should contact your fiscal agent and follow its procedures for termination.

NOTE: Terminations cannot be due to discrimination or any violation of Georgia Department of Labor rules.

Remember that all allegations of abuse or neglect, as well as other criminal activity, must be reported to your support coordinator.

Service Vendors

Service vendors are individuals or companies that provide goods or services such as therapies, medical supplies or equipment, home/vehicle adaptations, transportation, etc. Service vendors may not be used for community living supports, respite, supported employment, or community guide services.



When possible, I find vendors that are already in the fiscal agent's system. This way, the vendor already understands the payment schedule and invoicing system.

-Georgia Parent

SELECTING SERVICE VENDORS

When selecting a service vendor, it is important that the:

- Goods or services you are obtaining from the vendor are specified in the approved ISP.
- Vendor meets the eligibility criteria listed under the service being provided in the COMP or NOW Provider Manual
- Vendor agrees to the dollar amount as specified in the COMP or NOW Provider Manual
- Vendor is approved by the fiscal agent and agrees to payment from the fiscal agent.

QUALIFICATIONS

Every service covered under the waiver has specific qualification requirements. When selecting a vendor, make sure he, she, or it is qualified to provide the services you are paying it to provide. For example, physical, occupational and speech and language therapies can only be provided by a Georgia-licensed therapist and must be prescribed by a physician. Other services, such as behavior supports or community guides, have different requirements. To make sure the vendor you have selected has the required qualifications, you should check the COMP or NOW Provider Manual.

PAYMENTS TO VENDORS

You want to make sure service vendors are properly paid for their services in a timely manner. This means that you will need to:

Have the vendor approved by the fiscal agent prior to beginning service.

- Follow all rules for the service as stated in the COMP or NOW Provider Manual. For example, some services are paid a set amount, some require price quotes in advance, and some require that invoices be sent to DBHDD.
- Some vendor payments require you to provide the participant direction manager with receipts.
- To find out more about the specifications for vendors, consult the COMP or NOW Provider Manual.

NOTE: Companies that are Medicaid providers of NOW and COMP services cannot be service vendors. For example, a day support program is a Medicaid provider.

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Therefore, the day support program cannot be a vendor.

Responsibilities of Representative

Maintaining Records

As with most things in life, directing your waiver services requires you to keep records. Medicaid requires you to keep these records for 5 years, in the case of an audit. Here are the key records you are required to keep:

- Copy of the ISP (For reference)
- Written summary of your progress on ISP goals (to be shared with support coordinator)
- Daily Tracking of Services
- Scheduling Calendar (to be shared with support staff and/or family)
- Proof of all Staff and Vendor Qualifications
- Evaluations of Employees
- Vendor Receipts
- Documentation of School Hours (if the child has an IEP or is homeschooled)

There are many ways to keep track of all the records. Some people use a paper system for keeping track of files while others will prefer an electronic filing method. You should choose a method which will work for you and that will allow your staff and support coordinator to easily record and review files.

Managing Employees

Managing employees is time consuming and can often be a frustrating experience.

Employees who do not show up on time for their shifts, do not do what they are supposed to, have bad work habits, or quit after a short time can cause a lack of services and supports.

You and/or your representative must be prepared to deal with the frustrations of managing employees and making sure that they are well supervised and providing the services they are hired for.



I keep records electronically, and keep all emails. For staff notes, I found an iPad app called Autism Tracker that can be customized to include different categories, specific goals and method of measure, (i.e., number of hits; minutes of attending to task; type of prompt).

-Georgia Parent

Managing Payroll

You are responsible for making sure that your support staff and service vendors are paid correctly and in a timely manner. This means that you must be able to conform to the payroll schedule of your fiscal agent and oversee the timesheets and bills for accuracy. If you do not approve them according to the schedule, they will not get paid on time. And, if they do not get paid on time, they may refuse to continue to work for you.

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It is also important that you stick to your budget, so that the money does not run out. You should monitor the funds every pay period and adjust services as necessary. Remember to always include the employer costs plus hourly wage in your budget.

NOTE: Be sure to submit timesheets and vendor invoices within 90 days of the service delivery date. Failure may result in non-payment.

Time

To be successful in participant direction, it is important to take the time to make sure you are doing the things that need to be done. Make sure you allocate time for payroll, supervision of employees, hiring and training employees, attendance at mandatory meetings, meeting with your support coordinator, and ISP development. This time can vary depending on the number of services and the number of employees.

What Problems Might You Encounter?

The responsibilities of directing your own waiver can, at times, be overwhelming. It is important to recognize when you need help and to reach out to your support coordinator and/or a community guide for assistance when you need it. So, what could go wrong? Here are a few examples of problems that you might encounter.

SCENARIO #1

Maria is twenty-four years old and lives with her parents. Maria's parents are the representatives for her NOW waiver. Maria has enough money in her annual budget for 10 hours a week of community living supports to assist her with daily living skills in her home. Her ISP states that she needs

The biggest problem I have had is caregivers calling in sick, which is usually not a quick one-day thing. They are really sick with the flu or something else bad, and they miss several days. I have never been able to find someone who could come in last-minute during typical Monday-Friday work hours. I do have back up, but it is mostly for nights and weekends. Of course, the caregiver gets sick when I need them most!

One mistake I have made is hiring friends and family because they do not know how to differentiate between the friendship relationship and the job relationship. They might be a good worker but a friend may not take correction well.

I made the mistake of using a vendor before I got clearance from the fiscal agent. The vendor's bill was then denied. The support coordinator wrote in the notes that my son was getting "therapy services" from a specific provider, but it was not therapy but instead it was community access individual [services]. It was just one line in the ISP, but it caused a lot of problems because my son should not have been receiving therapy through the waiver. A correction had to be made to the ISP before we could continue using that provider. Using the right code is critical.

-Georgia Parents

assistance with meal preparation, light housekeeping, laundry, and daily grooming skills. However, Maria's parents have asked

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her support staff to stay with her for fifteen to twenty hours a week. They realize the money in Maria's budget will run out before the end of the year, but decide they will deal with that when it happens.

Maria does not have enough money in her budget to cover these additional hours and will run out before the end of the year. Maria's support coordinator can assist the family in requesting additional funds based on her needs, but this needs to be done in advance of using money that is not in the budget.

SCENARIO #2

Jason has one month to go before his new budget allocation. He has used up all his community living supports funding, but still has money in respite and community access individual. He needs the support at home, so he is using these two categories to pay his community living supports until the new budget allocation. He has the money in his budget, just not in the category he needs.

The money in your budget is only to be used for the category to which it is allocated. The ISP specifies goals for each category. They are not transferrable without an addendum to the ISP. Contact your support coordinator for information about changes to your funding allocation.

SCENARIO #3

Janet has severe medical needs, as well as extended menstrual cycles and gingivitis. Her mother has had her doctor write a prescription for all of her medical supplies and personal care items that Janet needs. The doctor wrote prescriptions for an automatic toothbrush, toothpaste, lotion, body wash, and sanitary napkins. Her mom is planning to bill the personal care items under the service category of individual goods and services because she needs to use

the specialized medical supply funds for medical supplies.

The money in individual goods and services cannot be used for items that are specifically stated as covered and/or not covered under specialized medical supplies, or other services. Items covered under any service may require a doctor's order to justify services, but the order does not define coverage of items. Personal care items are not covered even if there is a doctor's order.

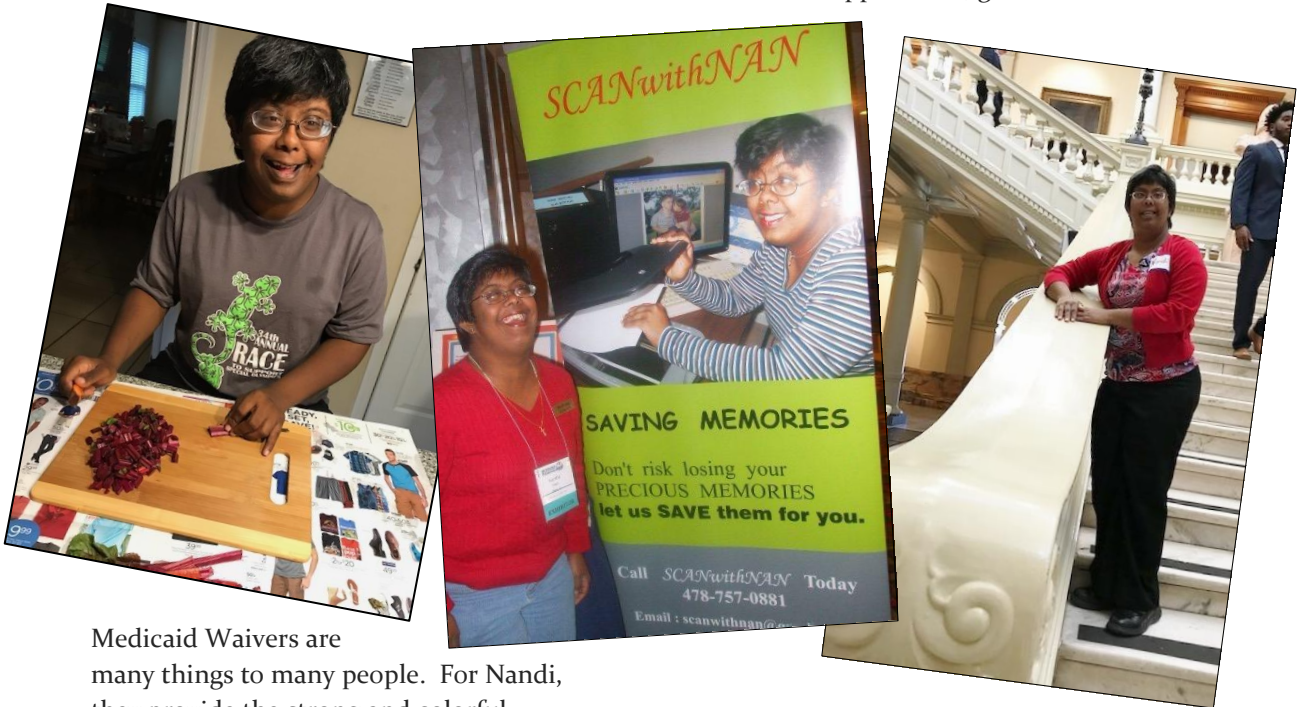
SCENARIO #4

Pete has hired two different employees to support his son. He has reviewed his allocation for community living supports and determined what the hourly wage should be, so that he has enough money to provide 20 hours of care per week. After six months, he reviews his remaining funds and realizes that he has used a lot more than he has budgeted. He was careful to make sure that his son only received twenty hours a week of support, so what went wrong?

It seems that Pete forgot to add in the employer costs when determining how much each hour of support will cost. Remember, when deciding how much you will pay your staff, you also need to figure in your costs as their employer. This means that for every \$1.00 you pay in wages, you must add the additional employer costs. The total of the hourly wage plus the employer costs are paid from the funds. Pete will need to look at these costs as he determines the hours of support his son can receive for the remainder of the year.

What does the Waiver do for Nandi?

“I love my life!” To hear it from Nandi, her parade of days is rooted in the firm foundations of a self-determined life.



Medicaid Waivers are many things to many people. For Nandi, they provide the strong and colorful scaffolding which supports and encompasses her current reality.

Her time is divided between her small business, “Scan with Nan” and fun times with friends in cooking class, chorus, bowling and Special Olympics sports activities.

Whether it is dishing out hotdogs and smiles at Macon Outreach or activity time with a Boy Scout troop, her volunteer activities embed her in the greater community. These activities are supported at all levels by her participant directed waiver support, including planning, scheduling, and the all-important transport arrangements to keep her mobile.

The resulting community integration is evidenced at most outings, where she is greeted by familiar faces and high fives.

Her service on advisory councils and state boards enable her to advocate for her peers. A trip to the Capitol this legislative session, with her support staff, gave her the

opportunity to encourage representatives to increase waiver funding.

As one of Nandi’s support staff said recently, “Nandi has grown tremendously since I met her. I have learned a lot by watching her overcome her daily challenges and having the power and mind to continue striving for the best, no matter the circumstances.”

NOTE: Although Nandi’s mother is the representative for the participant direction waiver services, Nandi is involved in choosing the staff and the supports and services she receives.

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Developing Safety and Backup Plans

Everyone should have an emergency plan. Being prepared for emergencies will help keep yourself and your loved ones safe, and instruct others on how you want things handled.

Think about the different types of emergencies you will need to be prepared for. Medical emergencies, fires, power and water outages, severe weather, and other natural disasters are some of the things you should address in your plan. You will also want to include a backup plan for when your support person does not show up or needs to leave. Both of the plans need to be discussed with the support coordinator, added to the ISP and stored in an easy-to-find place.

Medical Emergencies

Emergency Contacts

Make a list of emergency phone numbers. These should include all family members' home and cell phones. Include relatives who do not live in the home, as well as those that do. List neighbors, friends, all support employees, support coordinator, and medical doctors.

Emergency Service Contacts

Make another list of phone contacts for specific types of emergencies (ex., power outage, heating and air-conditioning, fire, medical emergency, police, appliance repair, etc.).

Important Documents

Gather medical information, insurance information, and other legal documents (guardianship, living will, etc.).

Disaster Plan

Disaster Planning List

Make a list of medications, supplies and equipment that you will need if you have to leave your home due to an emergency such as weather-related, power or water outage, or fire.

Prepare in advance for predicted weather emergencies by storing extra food, water, medical supplies, and medication.

Backup Plans

It is important to have a plan for what will happen if one of your support staff cannot or does not show up. Will someone be available to assist you? Are there family members or friends who can fill in? If you have hired more than one person, perhaps another support person might be available. You should share a backup support procedure with staff, family, and friends so that it can be followed when needed. Your plan should include training information so that emergency replacements will know what your needs are and how to assist you.

The Support Notebook

Organize the above information into a notebook that is stored in an easy-to-find place. Be sure to review and update on a regular basis and share with each of your support staff and your support coordinator.

Additional Resources

Applied Self-Direction has a mission to promote self-direction so individuals have the choice and control to live the lives they want. (www.appliedselfdirection.com/)

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is part of the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). CMS is responsible for the administration of Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Health Insurance Marketplace. (www.cms.gov/)

Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO) has a mission to work with and for oppressed and vulnerable individuals in Georgia who are labeled as having a disability or mental illness to secure their protection and advocacy. GAO's work is mandated by Congress, and GAO has been designated by Georgia as the agency to implement protection and advocacy within the state. (www.thegao.org/)

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is a federally funded, independent state agency that serves as a leading catalyst for systems change for individuals and families living with developmental disabilities. (www.gcdd.org/)

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) provides treatment and support services to people with mental health challenges and substance use disorders, and assists individuals who live with intellectual and developmental disabilities. (www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/) The website contains updated information on **Developmental Disabilities Services** (www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/developmental-disabilities) and **Participation Direction** (www.dbhdd.georgia.gov/participant-direction).

Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) serves as the lead agency for Medicaid in Georgia. DCH is responsible for the Provider Manuals for the NOW and COMP waivers, which can be found on the **Georgia Medicaid Management Information System (GAMMIS)**. (www.dch.georgia.gov/) and (www.mmis.georgia.gov/portal/)

Georgia's Aging and Disability Resource Connection supports individuals and family members who are aging or living with a disability. (www.georgiaadrc.com/)

NOW/COMP Waiver (Questions/Support) is an independent, family organized, closed Facebook group for current Georgia waiver participants and their families. You may send a request to join via Facebook. (www.facebook.com/groups/233443446838931/)

Parent to Parent of Georgia (P2P) provides support, information, and training to families of children with disabilities and special health care needs. (www.p2pga.org/)

Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia is a private nonprofit corporation governed by people with all types of disabilities from across the state. The SILC identifies societal barriers to independent living and collaborates with Centers for Independent Living, rehabilitation services, and other related entities to remove those barriers and to increase the supports and services needed to create independent living opportunities. (www.silcga.org/)

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Glossary

Intellectual/Developmental Disability (I/DD): A severe, chronic disability attributed to a cognitive or physical impairment that was diagnosed or that become obvious during the developmental period. The condition is likely to continue indefinitely and results in significant deficits in adaptive behavior functioning.

Entitlement Program: A program guarantees certain benefits to those who fulfill certain criteria. There are no limits on the number of people who can receive the benefits of such programs.

Individual Support Plan (ISP): The written details of the supports, activities, and resources required for the individual with the waiver to achieve personal goals.

Vendor: An individual or company which provides a product or service.

Acronyms

ABA:	Applied Behavior Analysis (behavioral approach that may be used for people with I/DD)
CMS:	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (division of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that oversees Medicaid)
COMP:	Comprehensive Supports Waiver
DBHDD:	Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities
I/DD:	Intellectual/Developmental Disability
DCH:	Department of Community Health
GCAL:	Georgia Crisis Access Line
GCDD:	Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
GCRS-DD:	Georgia Crisis Response System for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities
HCBS:	Home and Community Based Services
HRST:	Health Risk Screening Tool (screening tool used to look at a person's medical issues)
ICF/ID:	Intermediate Care Facility for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and Developmental Disabilities
I&E:	Intake and Evaluation (<i>single point of entry into services</i>)
ISP:	Individual Service Plan (<i>annual plan that with goals, objectives, and services</i>)
MAO:	Medical Assistance Only (<i>process used to make someone Medicaid eligible</i>)
MOU:	Memorandum of Understanding (<i>agreement</i>)
NOW:	New Options Waiver
P2P:	Parent to Parent of Georgia
SC:	Support Coordinator
SIS:	Supports Intensity Scale (<i>Assessment tool used for NOW and COMP Waivers</i>)
SSI:	Supplemental Security Income

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