

CHOOSING A SUPPORTED LIVING AGENCY

One of the different things about supported living is that the person who wants supported living and their family have the right to choose who the provider will be. You should carefully evaluate whether the provider's style of service matches what you are looking for in an agency.

To do this, contact each agency to see if they can meet with you or talk to you over the phone. We have attached a set of questions that you can ask each one. Think about what kinds of answers you want to see before you talk to them. Agencies differ in how they provide services. One agency may be just what one person and their family is looking for and another person may not like their answers at all. It's a very individual and personal decision.

One of the things to ask them is how soon they could begin the assessment and the ongoing service. Some agencies have a waiting list and might not be able to accept someone new for quite awhile.

Other questions on the attached list have to do with how much control the person and their family have about how the support is provided (do they get to choose who works with them, are support plans flexible to meet a person's individual needs, etc.) Some agencies are more structured and have less variety and choice in the way they support people. This appeals to some people and is not acceptable to others.

You can also ask the supported living agency to give you a copy of their service design. The service design describes what they told the regional center that they would do.

If you need help with the process of deciding on an agency, please call your regional center service coordinator.

Good luck! This is the first step in taking charge of your life through supported living.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN INTERVIEWING A SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICE PROVIDER:

1. How long have you been doing this?
2. How many people do you provide support to?
3. Who do you provide services to? Are there any criteria to begin receiving services? Is there anyone you would not provide services to?
4. What communities or cities do people you support live in? (Does the person get to decide what community they want to live in? How do they get help to decide where to live if they aren't sure?)
5. Describe some of the living arrangements people are living in. (Some possibilities include the person living alone; living with a roommate who does/does not have a disability, living with a paid roommate, living with an unpaid roommate, living with their spouse or significant other, renting a room with a family, in houses, apartments, mobile homes, etc.) Probably the more variety, the better. How is each living arrangement decided upon?
6. If the person wants a roommate, what is the process for getting one? (What involvement does the person have in deciding who they will live with? Are the person's preferences for number of people, smoking/non-smoking, paid/non-paid, young/mature, etc. asked and respected? What if they want to live with someone the agency won't hire/doesn't think is a good idea?)
7. What do people that you are supporting do during the day? (Again, the more variety, probably the better: work, school, staying home, raising their children, etc. are all possibilities.)
8. How are staff hired/assigned? What kind of screening is done for hired staff? What role does the person have in selecting the people who work with them? (The person the staff are going to be working with should have AT LEAST the final decision about working with them or not. What happens if the person doesn't like the staff working with them? How are new staff introduced? How is the schedule between the person and the staff developed?)
9. How many people do your middle management staff assist (What is their "case load?") (Many agencies that have been providing supported living services have found that 6-8 people is a good number, so that this person can truly build a relationship, get to know the person, etc.)
10. How do you determine how much / what types of support to provide the person? Are the person's desires, etc. the guiding force? What are the range of services that you provide? How do you handle emergencies / unusual things

that may come up that are not specifically listed in the service plan? Do you have 24 hour emergency on call? How does it work? What if the person wants to turn down some of the services or changes their mind about what they want?

11. Have you ever stopped providing services to someone? Why? (What is the criteria to keep receiving services? Many agencies have "exit criteria." How long the list of things that people can no longer receive services for will give you an idea of the agency's philosophy.)
12. How would you assist the person to meet new people? (Determining with the person if they want to meet new people, helping them join groups, clubs, etc. with other people with their interests, etc.)
13. Describe some of the other community agencies, services, etc. that you have helped people to access. (Again, the more examples the better. Does the agency have a knowledge of other community resources and access those resources with the person or do they attempt to provide most of the services themselves? Examples of community services include counseling, crisis intervention, In Home Support Services (IHSS), housing assistance, pregnancy help centers, para-transit systems (dial-a-ride, metro access), food banks, supported employment agencies, community colleges, etc.
14. What would you do if the person was making choices to do something that was unsafe or questionable? (What if the person wasn't cleaning out their refrigerator and was eating food that was bad? What if they refused to take their medication? What if they were going home with people they met at a bar? What if they were drinking excessively? What if they were not ever cleaning their apartment to the point of neighbor and landlord complaints?)
15. Scenarios / What-If questions:(What if the person wasn't there for an appointment? This person visits his sister and crashes on the couch when he visits. What if she wants to come sleep on his couch when she visits? What if the person says they don't want help with budgeting or cooking or something else? What if this person and their roommate are having conflicts, etc.?)
16. What is your agency's understanding and use of "circles of support?" (Having a group of people-- some paid, some not, that assist the person to live on their own.)

You don't have to ask ALL of these questions if they don't seem to be needed for your situation. If these questions don't cover your concerns, think up ones that address what you want to know. Think about what kind of answers you would like to see before you ask the question so that you will know if their answer is comfortable to you.