

**Support Service Provider (SSP)**

**Fact Sheet**

1. **What is an (SSP)?**

Support Service Providers (SSP’s) are specially trained individuals who enable people who are deaf-blind to access their environments and make informed decisions by providing them with visual and environmental information, human guide services, and communication facilitation.

The concept of Support Service Providers emerged during the 1980’s at a convention held by the American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB). AADB is a national consumer organization run by people who are deaf-blind from around the country. The members meet at national conferences periodically. To participate in these conferences, delegates relied on volunteers to interpret, provide visual and environmental information and human guide at general assemblies, workshops, tours and social events. After coming up with the concept and term, AADB worked on defining the roles and responsibilities of an SSP. This in turn helped make it possible to set up SSP programs for people in their own communities.

1. **Personal versus Agency SSP**

An Agency SSP is an individual who was recruited and trained by an established SSP program. This could be a paid or volunteer program. The individual must complete the specific training and supervision requirements set by the program and follow their guidelines. A background check is typically mandatory. The SSP coordinator is responsible to pair consumer and SSPs as well as manage schedules, supervise and handle issues that arise.

A **Personal** SSP is an individual that was recruited by a deaf-blind consumer for the purpose of becoming his/her SSP. There is no agency or program involved. The consumer, in this situation must take on the role of trainer and coordinator. He/she will need to establish the guidelines for the relationship.

1. **How many SSP programs in the United States?**

There are over 30 SSP programs across the country, although some of these programs may not be active at this time. There is much variety as to how these programs are funded and managed. Some programs operate on a state level while the others operate on a local level. Many programs receive grants or private donations to run their programs, while others rely on volunteers to coordinate, train and provide SSP services. There has been much exploration into creative ways to receive funds to support these much-needed programs. Seattle’s SSP program, through DBSC, has been in existence since 1985. It receives its funding through ODHH and private grants.

1. **What are the role and responsibilities of an SSP?**
* Empower deaf-blind consumers by providing visual and environmental information so that deaf-blind consumers can make their own decisions regarding what they want or need to do in their community. This can include:
	+ Explaining the layout of a room
	+ Explaining who is in the room
	+ Describing facial expressions and actions occurring in the room
	+ Reading menu, receipt or piece of mail to consumer
* Act as a human guide so that the deaf-blind consumer can travel safely in all situations
* Facilitate communication in order for deaf-blind individuals to have equal access to communication.
* Provide access to transportation, this may mean accompanying the consumer on public transportation or para transit or transporting in SSP’s vehicle. The SSP is not a driver, they are not to provide rides only. However, if the consumer requires additional services once they arrive at their destination such as communication facilitation, access to visual and environmental information and/or human guide and SSP may provide transportation.
* Be familiar with the cultural aspects of the deaf-blind community.

**SSP's DO NOT**

* Provide personal care for a consumer
* Run errands for the consumer – without the consumer
* Make decisions for the consumer
* Teach or instruct
* Provide formal interpreting services
* Provide transportation only
1. **What are the suggested training requirements for people who wish to become an SSP?**

While there is no standard curriculum for SSP’s as of yet, most programs agree that training in the following areas is essential to an effective SSP program:

* The Role of the SSP (Do’s and Don’ts)
* Overview of Deaf-Blindness and Etiologies
* Human Guide
* Communication Methods and Modifications used within the Deaf-Blind Community
* Deaf-Blind Culture
* Respectful Interactions
* Empowerment of Decision Making (by remaining objective when providing visual and environmental information)
* Specific guidelines and procedures of the agency the SSP is working for.
1. **What are the suggested training requirements for a deaf-blind consumer working with SSPs?**

Individual and group sessions are recommended for people who are deaf-blind to learn their role as well as the role of the SSP in this unique relationship. Additionally, training is recommended on how to effectively advocate for SSP services. Individuals who are deaf-blind working with SSPs are responsible for making their own decisions and choices and understanding the policies of the SSP program they are working with. Often SSP and consumer trainings are combined. This allows for hands on experiences and sharing of viewpoints.

1. **SSP Training:**

HKNC offers onsite and offsite trainings upon request. These trainings are modified to meet the individual needs of the agency/community. The training is typically two to three days depending on the needs of the group and includes presentations, hands on learning and practical application.

* SSP Training
* Consumer Training
* Train the Trainers

 For more information, contact pld@hknc.org

**8. Recommended Strategies to Advocate for a Professional SSP**

* Know your individual needs and accommodations.
* Be prepared to clearly explain these needs to others.
* Understand your specific rights under the law and be prepared to explain them to others.
* Educate the public about how accommodations, even if not mandated by law, can be beneficial to you as well as others.
* Consider the viewpoint of others.
* Be tactful and compromise when necessary.
* Know whom to contact.
* Have a backup plan.

**9. Tips for Recruiting and Maintaining Personal SSPs**

* Recruit from: interpreter training programs, local places of worship, community centers, friends, family and volunteer organizations.
* Have clear roles and responsibilities established (even if this is a friend or family member).
* Provide training to your SSP.
* Provide constructive feedback to your SSP.
* Reimburse the SSP for any costs she/he may incur while working as an SSP.
* Show your appreciation. If this is a volunteer, a simple thank you or short note explaining how much this service improves your quality of life can go a long way.