

Living Arrangements

The Big Ideas:

Living arrangements

Choices of living arrangements:

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Renting

Group homes

Supervised apartments

Supported living

Foster or sponsor families

Independent living

Personal Futures Plan

Daily routines

Centers for Independent Living

County Offices for the Disabled

Personal Care Assistant services

NJ Division of Disability services

What does “living arrangements” mean?

Home is a special place. It’s not just where you live. It’s the people you want to be with, and the things you want to have around you (like furniture, pictures, music, plants, and pets). It’s activities you do like cooking, celebrating holidays, and having friends over. It’s a place to relax, and a place where you can choose to spend some time by yourself.

Living arrangements are where you live and who you live with.

Where will you live after high school? Do you want to live on your own or with others? Will you live with your family, or move in with a roommate? Do you want to live in the city, or out in the country? How will you get around to work or school, or to see friends? Living arrangements are what you do to live where and how you want to live.

I’ve always lived in my parent’s home. What other choices are out there?

There are many choices you can make about where and how you will live after high school. Here are some **choices of living arrangements:**

- **Buying a home** is a dream for many people, but it can be hard to do right out of high school. You need to have saved a lot of money, have a steady job that pays enough money, and be able to show that you pay your bills on time. This might be something you want to plan to do in the future.
- **Renting is when you pay someone money to live in a home that they own.** It usually costs less than buying your own home. Renting a home costs money, too, but if you earn enough money, or have family that can help, or if you choose to live with other people so you can all share the expenses, renting a home might be something you can afford to do now.

- There are agencies (formal supports) that provide other choices for living arrangements:
 - A few people live together **(these are called group homes or supervised apartments)**
 - People get the supports they need to live on their own in their own homes **(this is called supported living)**
 - People live with other families **(these are called foster or sponsor families)**
- **Independent living means living in your own home and directing your own supports.** If you choose independent living as an option, you can still receive the supports you need, but it's your responsibility (again, with help from family and friends if you need it) to manage those supports. These supports are often paid for with both your own money and money from a government funding source like Medicaid.

If you don't know what kind of living arrangement is right for you, don't be afraid to ask lots of questions! Also, remember that Person-Centered Planning is a way to help you sit down with other people and figure out what you want for yourself.

Greg's story:

Greg is a twenty-six year old man who is blind and has autism. He used to live with his mother in their family home, until she developed some health problems. Greg needs lots of support (help with showering, cooking, shopping, managing money, transportation, etc.), and his mother is no longer able to care for Greg. She went to the state's Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for help, and DDD placed Greg in a group home with four other people with disabilities.

In the group home, Greg can't have all his things (like his electric piano, and his three cats), and he doesn't have much privacy (that means a way to be alone). Sometimes other people in the home don't understand him, and Greg feels they are mean to him. He misses his mom and his old room. The group home staff says they don't have the time to take Greg to visit his mother very often. Sometimes Greg gets angry and breaks other people's things. The staff says that Greg is a problem and has to leave.

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, think about Greg's story and answer the following questions:

Our behaviors show people how we feel. What do you think Greg is feeling when he breaks other people's things?

How else could Greg let the group home staff know how he is feeling?

What can other people do to help Greg solve his problems with his living arrangements?

Who is there to help Greg figure this problem out?

A Personal Futures Plan helps you think about what you want to do and what supports you need. This can be a useful tool for thinking about what living arrangements will work for you.

Do you remember when we talked about Circles of Support? A Circle of Support is a group of people that knows someone well and helps that person live the life he wants. Greg's mom talks it over with Greg, and then invites some of their friends, Greg's teacher, and his case manager from DDD to a meeting at her home. She serves some good food as a way to say "thank you" to the people who have come to be part of Greg's Circle of Support. After they are done eating, Greg's teacher has everyone work on something called a Personal Futures Plan. This is a way to think about someone's dreams and strengths, what makes

that person happy and unhappy, and what supports that person needs. Greg's Circle uses it to get ideas about where Greg might want to live. This is what they came up with:

Greg's Personal Futures Plan

Dreams:

Greg lives with a family that cares about him
 Greg visits his mother often
 Greg has privacy and a place to play his electric piano
 Greg has a pet

Strengths:

Greg can do many things to care for himself, like getting dressed, feeding himself, and cleaning his room
 Greg can be a good friend
 Greg likes music. He likes to sing with other people and has a good voice.

What works:

Living with one or two people
 Privacy and quiet
 Making sure that what's around him (his environment), and when he does things (his schedule), stay pretty much the same from day to day
 Pets

What doesn't work:

Lots of people and noise
 Not having privacy
 Talking to Greg in a loud voice
 Changes in what's around him (his environment) and when he does things (his schedule)

Support needs:

Help with showering, cooking, laundry, shopping, doctor's visits and managing money
 Transportation to work and to visit his mother
 Help to solve problems that come up

Next steps:

Identify a foster or sponsor family Greg can live with.
 Help that family learn about supporting Greg
 Continue to meet with the family and support Greg's new living arrangement

How will Greg find a family to live with?

Greg's Circle of Support takes out the "What Supports Would Be Most Helpful?" form to help them think about how to handle the next steps. They write down, "Find a foster or sponsor family for Greg" for the goal they want to work on. They list two things they have to do: 1) write down exactly what Greg needs and 2) let other people know that they're looking for a family that can meet Greg's needs.

Members of Greg's Circle (natural supports) get in touch with the people they know who live or work in town. They know that the more people they talk to, the better chance Greg has of finding a good family to live with.

Two weeks later, a family calls to say they might be interested in having Greg come live with them. The family is made up of a mother and a son who is about Greg's age. They have an extra bedroom in their house, and a basement space where Greg can play his electric piano. The woman thinks she and her son can provide the home and supports Greg wants.

Greg and his mom visit with the family. Greg is happy to be able to hold and feed the family cat. He doesn't say much, but he seems comfortable. Greg's mom thinks it's worth giving this living arrangement a try.

How will the foster family know what Greg needs to be happy?

Daily routines are the things we do everyday. They are part of what helps us to feel safe and happy.

Knowing *what* Greg wants and needs to do, and *how* he likes to do these things (his “routines”), will help Greg and his new foster family live successfully together. We all have our routines for getting up in the morning, eating meals, relaxing on the weekends, etc. We don’t usually think about them, but they can be very important to our happiness.

Here’s an example of my weekday morning routine:

- My alarm clock wakes me up at 6:30 a.m.
- I make a pot of coffee and drink my first cup of it in bed while I watch the news on T.V.
- I get up and take a shower and brush my teeth
- I get dressed and put on clean clothes
- I usually have a bowl of cereal for breakfast
- I feed my dog, then put her in the yard and make sure she has fresh water to drink
- I take another cup of coffee to drink on my drive to work
- I leave for work at 7:45 a.m.

I can do most of my morning routine without supports (except getting up – my alarm clock is definitely a support I rely on!). On weekends I like to sleep in a little later. When I get up, I move a little slower, and sometimes take the time to make a “real” breakfast (like pancakes). Other than that, my weekend morning routine is pretty much the same as my weekday morning routine. I don’t like to leave the house without a shower and clean clothes, and I still like my coffee.

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, fill out the following table:
 - In the first column, write down your morning routine.
 - In the middle column write down the supports you need (from people or things).
 - Check off how important that part of your routine is to you (“very important,” “kind of important,” or “not very important”).
 - **PORTFOLIO:** Put this in the section for “Personal Information”

Activity (cont.):

My morning routine				
My morning routine:	Supports I need:	Very important	Kind of important	Not very important
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				

Will Greg pay for this living arrangement with his own money?

Some people have enough money to pay for this kind of support on their own, but most people need help paying for it. A public agency like DDD (a formal support), along with a government funding source like Medicaid, will pay for much of the cost. DDD will also try to make sure the family that is helping to take care of someone is doing a good job. However, if DDD is paying for it, they will have the final say about whether or not this arrangement is okay.

Greg's Circle of Support continues to meet and to support his living arrangement. There are still times Greg gets mad and breaks things, but this happens less and less often as Greg gets to know the family he lives with and they get to know him. When a problem comes up that the family doesn't know how to solve, they call Greg's Circle of Support or his DDD case manager. So far, Greg's natural and formal supports have been able to work together to come up with solutions that make this living arrangement the right one for Greg.

Would you say some more about residential services?

Residential services are formal supports. They can cost a lot of money, and usually require that you apply for government funds like Medicaid to help pay for the services you receive. You may or may not have to pay something as well. There are different kinds of residential services that you can choose from. Here's a brief description of some of them:

- **Group homes** are owned and operated by service providing agencies. In a group home, you will live with other people and be supported all day, everyday, by agency staff. Agency staff are trained to keep you safe and healthy, and to provide you with recreational and learning activities. For example, if you don't know how to prepare your meals, group home staff can prepare meals for you or help you to prepare meals. If you take medications, group home staff will make sure you take the right dose at the right time. If you have a problem, they may help you solve it. Your food is provided and household bills are paid by the agency.

In a group home you will have roommates that you generally don't get to choose. You may not have very much privacy, and there are usually rules that you have to follow. Support staff are hired by the service providing agency and you generally don't get to decide who supports you.

- **Supervised apartments** are living arrangements where you live with a roommate and have 24 hour staff to help you. Support staff live nearby. They can help you to do things that are difficult for you, like paying your bills, and making sure you have the right food to eat. They can help you in an emergency.

If you choose this option, you may have more privacy and independence. However, you may not be able to choose your roommate. The service-providing agency decides who your support staff will be.

- In **foster or sponsor families**, you live with a family or a trained support provider (this is the option that worked for Greg). Usually an agency sets this arrangement up and makes sure the family gives you the care you need. It can be a nice thing to live with a family, but you have to remember that every family has their own rules and their own way of doing things.
- **Supported living** programs are set up to give you just as much support as you need and want. In this option, you can choose where you live and whom you live with, though your support staff might still be hired by the agency providing you with supports.

What if I don't want to use these residential services?

Don't forget that **independent living** is always an option. That means you don't necessarily have to go through a service provider agency to arrange for the supports you need. Either on their own, or with the help of family and friends, many people with disabilities choose this path. It takes work and a lot of self determination, but you might decide that having the control you want over your own living arrangements is worth the effort.

Learning from Leaders

Colleen Fraser was born with a bone condition that required a lot of surgeries and kept her height at 4 feet 6 inches. Her family taught her that she could still do anything with her life she wanted to... and she did just that. She worked tirelessly to help people who were living in New Jersey's large developmental centers leave those institutions so that they could live and work in their own communities. Fraser also worked hard to remind people that individuals with disabilities have a right to direct their own supports.

Colleen Fraser was killed on September 11, 2001 in the terrorist attack that caused the plane she was on to crash in Pennsylvania. She had just been hired as executive director of the Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL), the independent living center for Mercer and Hunterdon counties in New Jersey.

Questions to think about:

1. Why do you think it was important to Colleen Fraser that her family believed she could do anything with her life she wanted to?
2. Go on-line to see what information you can find out about the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. What does this decision mean to people with disabilities? Here's a website to help get you started:
<http://www.bazelon.org/issues/disabilityrights/resources/olmstead/>
3. What do you think it means to "be a part of your community?"

Felicia's story continued:

Remember Felicia? You met her in the chapter called, “So, what’s all this talk about transition?” She wasn’t quite sure how to handle things at her IEP meeting, but Felicia finally figured out how to advocate for herself. Now she’s graduated from high school and works in a department store. She likes her job and hopes to become a manager at the store someday.

Felicia has been living at home with her parents. Her mother helps her with things like bathing and dressing. Felicia and her cousin, Maria, have been talking for awhile about getting a place of their own. Felicia really wants to do this, but she’s worried about who will help her with the daily care she needs. She doesn’t want to have to ask Maria to help her every day.

Felicia’s Vocational Rehabilitation counselor helped Felicia find the job she has now. Mr. Delia seems to know a lot about different things, so she calls him to see if he has any advice about moving into a home of her own. Mr. Delia tells her about **Centers for Independent Living** (also known as Independent Living Centers). He explains they are places run by people with disabilities, and that the staff at the Centers can give Felicia a lot of information about independent living. He also tells Felicia about the **County Offices for the Disabled**. These offices provide information and referrals to help people advocate for themselves and live independently in their communities.

At the Center for Independent Living near her home, Felicia meets a woman named Roberta. Roberta uses a wheelchair, too. Felicia asks lots of questions, and Roberta has lots of good information. Roberta tells Felicia about **Personal Care Assistant (PCA) services**. She tells Felicia that because she has a significant disability and already receives Medicaid, she can apply for these services. Roberta explains that her PCA helps her with bathing, dressing and household chores that are physically difficult for her. She also tells Felicia about adaptive equipment like a lift for the bathtub. Roberta gives Felicia lots of printed information about PCA services and adaptive equipment. She gives Felicia the phone number for the **New Jersey Division of Disability Services**, the state agency that helps people get PCA services and other supports for independent living.

Activity:

- Either by yourself, or with your classmates, think about Felicia's story and answer the following questions:

Why do you think Felicia doesn't want to ask Maria to help her with her everyday needs? _____

What are the pros and cons of asking family and friends for help with everyday needs? _____

Can you think of other kinds of assistive technology or environmental adaptations that might help with someone's everyday needs?

Let's Review:

- There are many kinds of living arrangements, including buying your own home and renting (paying someone else to live in a house or apartment they own).
- Residential services are formal supports that help you live in the community. They include group homes, foster or sponsor homes, supervised apartments and supported living programs.
- Independent living means living in your own home and directing your own supports.
- A Personal Futures Plan is a way to help you think about what living arrangement makes the most sense for you.
- Another useful tool to help you choose the right living arrangement is to think about your daily routines and the supports you need for those routines.
- Centers for Independent Living (also known as Independent Living Centers) are places run by people with disabilities. They can give you a lot of information about independent living.
- County Offices for the Disabled are offices that provide information and referrals to help people to advocate for themselves and live independently in their communities.
- Personal Care Assistant (PCA) services can help you to live in your own home independently. If you have a significant disability, are eligible for Medicaid, and can direct your PCA, you may be eligible for this service.
- The New Jersey Division of Disability Services is the state agency that helps people get PCA services and other supports for independent living.

Additional Activities:

- Fill out a worksheet for identifying your routines and supports for other times of the day besides morning.
 - Do a worksheet for your weekend routine.
 - **PORTFOLIO: Keep all these worksheets in the section for “Personal Information.”**
 - Keep the routines that are important to you in mind when you find out about different living arrangement (see activities below), then ask yourself, “What living arrangement would be best for the routines that are important to me?”
- If you are interested in residential services, make an appointment with two service providers and interview them.
 - First think of questions you want to ask. You can use the worksheet “Getting the Formal Supports (public agency or private service provider) I Need.”
 - Ask if you can have a tour of the living arrangements they provide.
 - Talk to the people who live there, and find out what they like and don’t like about that living arrangement.

Additional Activities (cont.):

- If you are interested in “independent living”:
 - Interview a staff person at a local Center for Independent Living. They are on the web at:
<http://www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm>
 - Contact your local County Office for the Disabled to find out what services they offer. They are on the web at:
<http://www.wnjp.in.state.nj.us/services/cofd.htm>
 - Contact the New Jersey Division of Disability Services and get information about Personal Care Assistant services and other supports for independent living. They are on the web at:
<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds>
Or call 1-888-285-3036

Using What You've Learned

1. Take out the worksheet, “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” Write down a living arrangements goal you’d like to work on or a problem you’d like to solve.
2. Write down one or more things you have to do to reach that goal or solve that problem.
3. Are these things you can do on your own, or do you think you need some help?
4. If there’s something you can do on your own, fill out the worksheet called, “My To Do List.”
5. If there’s something you need help with, write down who or what might be most helpful to you on the “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” worksheet.
6. Depending on which kind of support you decide to try first, fill out the worksheet for getting natural, community or formal supports. Also, don’t forget to think about what kind of assistive technology and environmental adaptations might be helpful.
7. Once you’ve gotten the supports you need, fill out the worksheet for “Evaluating and Managing My Supports.”
8. Remember to thank the people who support you!
9. If a problem comes up that you cannot seem to find a solution to, go back to the “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” worksheet to see if there is someone or something else that would be more helpful.