

Announcement

ODP Seeks Providers to Establish Homes for Individuals who are Deaf

ODP Communication Number: Announcement 058-15

The mission of the Office of Developmental Programs is to support Pennsylvanians with developmental disabilities to achieve greater independence, choice and opportunity in their lives.

AUDIENCE: All interested parties

PURPOSE: The purpose of this announcement is to identify willing and qualified providers to establish community and shared living homes for individuals with an intellectual disability who are deaf.

BACKGROUND: The Harry M. settlement agreement was approved by a federal court judge on August 20, 2013. The settlement agreement ensures that Pennsylvanians who are deaf, have an intellectual disability, and are enrolled in the Consolidated Waiverⁱ are provided with necessary communication assistance services based on their assessed needs. The settlement agreement requires ODP to recruit and identify providers for individuals who are deaf and enrolled in the Consolidated Waiver for the purposes of offering such individuals the opportunity to reside with other individuals who are deaf.

DISCUSSION: It is not uncommon for people who are deaf to regularly interact and reside with other deaf persons. The purpose of this provision of the settlement agreement is to allow individuals with an intellectual disability to live with other individuals who are deaf.

The settlement agreement clearly establishes that ODP promotes individual choice, and that no individual will be required to move involuntarily.

Providers who currently operate homes where both deaf and hearing individuals are served may wish to consider filling future vacancies with other persons who are deaf as a means of establishing a deaf living environment.

Providers who elect to establish homes for persons who are deaf will be eligible for enhanced residential rates related to additional staff costs associated with providing staff fluent in Sign Languageⁱⁱ.

CONTACT:

Providers who wish to establish homes as described in this announcement, providers interested in filling future vacancies with persons who are deaf, or providers who would like more information about this provision of the Harry M settlement agreement should contact ODP's Deaf Services Coordinator at ra-odpdeafservices@pa.gov. The email's subject line should include the phrase "Housemates Matching System."

Following receipt of a provider's request, ODP will contact the requestor with additional information.

ⁱ Deafness as Defined by the Settlement Agreement

The settlement agreement includes a definition of "deaf." According to the settlement agreement, an individual is deaf when he or she has a hearing impairment and:

- Is unable to understand/communicate verbal expressions commensurate with his/her intellectual disability even with the use of hearing aids, OR
- his or her primary language is Sign Language

ⁱⁱ Sign Language as Defined by the Settlement Agreement

The settlement agreement defines "sign language" as American Sign Language ("ASL"), Sign Language from other countries, such as Spanish Sign Language; Signed Exact English; a mixture of ASL and signed English; tactile sign; and visual-gestural communication.

American Sign Language (ASL) is a language consisting of articulated hand gestures and their placement relative to the body as well as markers such as facial expressions, head movements, shoulder raises, mouth morphemes, and movements of the body. While it is rooted in the English language, it is not exact English.

Sign language from other countries is the same as ASL but is rooted in a different language (such as Spanish).

Signed Exact English is a system of manual communication that strives to be an exact representation of English vocabulary and grammar.

Tactile Sign is used for individuals who are deaf-blind. It is a combination sign language for the deaf and communication method for individuals who are blind. The most common form of tactile sign is hand-over-hand signing, where the hands of the deaf-blind individual are placed on the hands of the translator and communication is a combination of feeling and reading signs.

Visual-Gestural Communication (VGC) is a communication mode that uses gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Many individuals who are unable to communicate using ASL or signed exact English communicate more effectively using natural gestures. In many cases, the gestures, facial expressions, and body language involved in VGC are unique to the individual.