

Support Service Provider Services in Pennsylvania: An Historical Account

1990s

The deafblind community in Pennsylvania began to express their need to maintain their independence through a Support Service Provider (SSP) Program.

2009

During a quarterly meeting of the Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), a person raised the concern of isolation and lack of service for a people who are deaf and blind.

2010-2012

Participating agencies interested in services for Pennsylvanians who are deafblind:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Statewide Independent Living Council, Executive Director | Zaimab Jama |
| • Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Director | Sharon Behun |
| • Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Executive Director | Steve Suroviec |
| ○ Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services, Director | David DeNotaris |
| ▪ BBVS Special Services Supervisor | Shelly Faust-Jones |
| ▪ BBVS Aging Support Services | Susan Neff |
| ▪ Fiscal & Administrative Support Staff | Joyce Wilson |

SILC began to research how to create a program that would serve Pennsylvanians who were deafblind. The Council reviewed SSP models administered by other states but were unable to identify funding for a program in Pennsylvania.

PA Labor & Industry's Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) brought the concern to the Executive Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). He was in support of a statewide program and the work began!

- The first step was to add a goal to the 2013-2016 State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), a joint 3-year plan between SILC & OVR. The SPIL goals reads: *Outreach to the Deaf-Blind community is available upon request.*
 - Even though the goal was added successfully, the SILC Board had many questions, discussions and a few members were hesitant to adding the goal.

- SILC, ODHH and OVR began to brainstorm and gather information to establish a SSP program in PA.
 - As a special project, two BBVS Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors created a document that included:
 - States that had a SSP program
 - Program summary which included information about
 - Mileage reimbursement
 - Payment for services and
 - Training
- David DeNotaris, Shelly-Faust Jones, and Sharon Behun met with staff from New Jersey's SSP program because it was administered by their Vocational Rehabilitation program.
- Soon after the meeting, Shelly Faust-Jones attended New Jersey's SSP training in order (1) to gain a better understanding of their program and (2) to gather as much information as possible to develop a SSP program in Pennsylvania.

2012

The Core SSP Committee was formed. The committee had representatives from ODHH, SILC, and OVR. The members were:

- David DeNotaris
- Shelly Faust-Jones
- Susan Neff
- Joyce Wilson
- Sharon Behun
- Zainab Jama

At this stage, the members of the Core SSP Committee were limited to organizations who stated an interest in funding the SSP project. The committee met monthly, and its members gathered & reviewed information from a variety of resources and ultimately decided to use the American Association of the Deaf-Blind's white paper, *Roles and Responsibilities of SSPs*, as a guide to implement services in Pennsylvania.

For example, Pennsylvania adopted the following from their white paper:

- **Definition of a person who is deaf-blind**
A person who is deaf-blind has a dual sensory loss of hearing and vision that limits a person's ability to conduct many functions of daily life. The hearing and vision loss varies from person to person.
- **The role of a SSP**
A SSP provides 3 services—guide, access to the environment & facilitates communication, but does not interpret

2013

The Core SSP Committee created a stakeholder group to include various organizations and individuals who were deafblind. The group only met once. During this meeting, members shared their concerns and suggestions. At the meeting, the members strongly recommended that PA should get the feedback from the deafblind community regarding a SSP program.

Therefore, the Core SSP Committee began planning three town hall meetings across the state.

2014

The town hall meetings were held during the spring of 2014

Western PA: Pittsburgh

Eastern PA: Exton

Central PA: Lancaster

The feedback was consistent across the state. Participants:

- Confirmed the need for SSP services
- Shared their vision of a SSP program
- Who were deafblind stated they would be willing to pay for SSP services, in order to get additional hours
- Strongly recommended training for people to become a SSPs and for people who are deafblind and were going to use the service

The cost and workload of the town hall meetings were shared. The breakdown is as follows:

ODHH: Coordinated state-registered interpreters, meeting logistics and covered the room cost for one location, Exton. There was no cost for the other 2 locations.

SILC: Used Part B monies to pay for interpreting services at each location

OVR: Provided light refreshments at each location

Next, the Core SSP Committee took into consideration the town hall feedback, information from the stakeholders, and consulted the Department of Labor & Industry's legal counsel to determine "how" to select an organization. The committee discussed, for example:

- What mechanism to use—bid, versus grant
- How many providers (statewide versus regional)
- "How" to set-up the program and
- Provider qualifications, and
- How should it be advertised

In addition, The Core SSP Committee realized that money allocated for the grant was not sufficient to establish a program from scratch (meaning start-up monies plus money to pay for the SSP services). Therefore, the Core SSP Committee carefully developed a minimum set of qualifications to hopefully find a viable candidate to administer the program who had successfully operated a similar program. The committee wanted one provider to administer a statewide SSP program.

OVR dedicated Social Security Reimbursement monies, \$425,000 for the 2 year pilot project.

April 15, 2014

The document, *Announcement of Grant Availability*, was published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and open for review

May 15, 2014

Deadline to submit proposals

May-July 2014

SSP Core Committee reviewed, evaluated and recommended a proposal to the Department of Labor & Industry

July-September 2014

Paperwork—signing contracts

October 1, 2014

Center for Independent Living of Central PA (CILCP) was awarded the contract

The pilot ran from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2016.

2014-2016

Notes:

- April 2015, BBVS Director, David DeNotaris was promoted to OVR Executive Director replacing Steve Suroviec.
- May 2015, Matt Seeley was appointed Director of the Statewide Independent Living Council

To advertise the new program:

- The Department of Labor & Industry issued an official press release announcing the SSP program.
- November 2014, ODHH hosted its Hearing Loss Expo. And at the expo, a meeting was held allowing the deafblind community, potential SSPs & CILCP staff to talk about the new program. Word of this project spread via the invitation:

November 15, 2014 there will be an opportunity to meet the SSP provider at the Hearing Loss Expo 2014! If you're interested in meeting staff, and getting a program update, stop by the expo on the afternoon of Saturday, November 15th.

The meeting was fully accessible. ODHH provided, coordinated and paid for interpreting services.

During the pilot, the Core SSP Committee continued to meet monthly, additional members were added,

- CILCP staff
- Helen Keller National Center's East Central Representative
- Attorney from Disability Rights Network of PA, and a
- Person who was deafblind

ODHH, and OVR staff continued to provide valuable input re: deaf culture, blindness and deafblindness, orientation & mobility, acted as a liaison with the deafblind community, advocated to meet requested needs, and provided logistical support to CILCP staff.

CILCP staff collaborated with ODHH and OVR to outreach to persons who were deafblind, as well as potential SSPs. CILCP conducted interviews with potential participants to determine eligibility for services. Concurrent with those activities, similar collaborations occurred as training for potential SSPs were planned. CILCP utilized highly qualified contracted trainers for the three SSP trainings, which occurred at accessible sites in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Camp Hill.

Following successful completion of training, individuals whose qualifications and background checks were acceptable, were placed in CILCP's SSP Registry, which is available on CILCP's website. The registry included the SSP's name, contact information, availability, service area, tasks enjoy doing and preferred mode of communication (ASL, or English for example).

From the beginning, the Core SSP Committee knew the project could not be sustained with grant funds beyond the pilot. Therefore, the Core SSP Committee's long-range goal was to sustain the program by advocating for SSP services to be included in the Office of Long Term Living Waiver or Act 150 program (attendant care), and therefore administered by the PA Department of Human Services (DHS). With that goal in mind, waivers and Act 150 standards were researched so PA's SSP project could be set up in such a way that its services to deafblind could be easily included in either the waiver program or Act 150.

During the pilot, CILCP and SILC actively advocated for the inclusion of persons who are deafblind in the waiver program or Act 150. People who were deafblind attended public meetings for Pennsylvania's proposed Managed Long Term Services and Supports (MLTSS).

2016

Deafblind community and the CILCP learned their advocating efforts were not successful. SSP services were not included in MLTSS.

The pilot ended. Since sustainable funding was not located. OVR gave \$225,000 from their social security reimbursement fund to the CILCP to continue operation from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017.

2017

While CILCP, and OVR continue to explore this MLTSS option, OVR proposed to give CILCP \$146,000 for a 4th year, October 1, 2017-September 30, 2018 in order to continue operating the program. Simultaneously, CILCP is exploring legislation. The goal is to find sustainable funding.

Document Contributors

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For more information

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