

A man in a white t-shirt is leaning on a table, smiling at the camera. The background is a slightly blurred indoor setting.

Living

A man with a goatee, wearing a striped t-shirt, is sitting at a table playing dominoes. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The table is dark, and several dominoes are scattered on it.

On Your Own

A Guide to Supported Living Services



Did You Ever Think About...

moving into a house or apartment in the community so you could be more independent? Sometimes people with developmental disabilities are afraid to think about living on their own because they believe they will have to do it all by themselves. We all need help to live on our own. Some people just need more help than others.

If you want to live in a house or apartment but don't think you can manage it on your own, supported living may be the answer. Supported living services are used by many adults with developmental disabilities to help them live as independently as

possible in the community. When you live on your own, you have all the responsibilities for running your own life that people without disabilities have. For example, you will make choices about where you live, whom you live with, how you spend your time, and how you spend the money you have left after you pay your rent and other regular bills.

What kind of support do you think you would need to live on your own? Would you need someone to help you learn to shop, cook, or handle your money? Would you need help with planning your doctor appointments? Do you have physical challenges (such as using a wheelchair) so that you need help with bathing and dressing? Whatever your needs, supported living may be right for you.

In this booklet, we answer eight questions that clients and their families often ask about supported living. The answers to these questions can help you decide if you would like to try living more independently.

- What Are Supported Living Services?
- Who Provides Supported Living Services?
- Who Is Eligible For Supported Living?
- Will I Get All Of My Support From The Supported Living Service Provider?
- Can I Live Alone Or Must I Have A Roommate?
- Will The Regional Center Pay My Rent Or Other Things If I'm In Supported Living?
- How Do I Get Started On The Road To More Independence?
- How Can I Learn More?

Supported living is not for everyone. Some people don't want to try it. Some people decide to try it and then choose not to continue. Still other people decide they want to try supported living sometime in the future, when they feel more ready. But most people who try supported living find that it opens up all kinds of new opportunities for them and they never want to go back to their old way of living. It's OK if you don't want to try to live on your own in a house or apartment, but you shouldn't be afraid to try. There are lots of people out there who want to help you. Your regional center Counselor is only one of them. Let's take a closer look at the kinds of help you can get.

WHAT ARE SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICES?

There is a very easy way to describe the services you may receive in supported living: it is whatever help you need to make it possible for you to live in a home of your own choice in the community. You can get help with taking care of your home, taking care of your personal needs, using community services, or just about anything else.



Supported living services are "individualized." This means they are different for each person, depending on what the person needs and wants. For example, if you just need help to pay bills, you could have a person come to your home to work with you on paying your bills and balancing your checkbook. If you need more support – for example, someone to help you prepare meals, do laundry, or clean the house – you can get that, too. If you just need to be reminded each morning to take your medicine, someone would help you come up with a system that will help you remember.

When you first move into your own place you will probably need more help than after you've been living on your own for awhile. What kind and how much help you receive at any time is based on how much you can do for yourself and how much help you need to do things. It will be up to you and your planning team working together to decide what services and supports you might need and how those needs will change as you learn to be more independent. Supported living services can help people in four different ways:

They help you develop skills. These services help you learn to do things that allow you to be more independent. This includes skills needed to take care of a home (cooking, cleaning, etc.), skills needed to get around in the community (using public transportation), and skills needed to look after your personal needs (bathing, personal hygiene, etc.) and to stay healthy (making doctor appointments, taking medication, eating right, etc.).

They give you support in things that you can't learn to do on your own. If it turns out that you are not able to learn some of the skills, or if it looks like training is not the right course for some of the things you need to do, then people will make a plan to give you support in these areas. For example, if you are unable to learn to pay bills or balance your checkbook, someone can come to your home regularly to help you do it. If you need personal assistance with things like eating, bathing, and getting around the house, the supported living provider can help you find someone to give you this kind of help.

They make sure you have help in emergencies. Everyone in supported living has someone he can call in case of an emergency at any time of the day or night. Some of this assistance may be provided by family or friends, but the supported living agency will also assist with emergency back-up if needed.

They help you connect to other services and supports. A person living in the community may have a range of other needs. For example, you may want help with things such as signing up for a class at your local community college, finding a dentist who accepts Medi-Cal, getting your name on the waiting list for renters' assistance (Section 8 housing), or learning parenting skills. The supported living instructor will help you find out where you can get these services within your neighborhood or community, and he can even help you make any appropriate applications, fill out any necessary forms, etc.

At the end of this booklet we talk about "Guidelines for Supported Living Services." We asked a large number of people from the Harbor Regional Center area to describe what they thought a really good supported living service would be like. The people we asked were clients in supported living, their families, regional center Counselors, and people who provide supported living services.

We put together what all these groups told us and came up with a list of things that everybody agreed on. If you read this list, it will help you understand better what supported living services are. When you talk to supported living providers about their services, you may want to take this list with you and ask them if they do these things.

WHO PROVIDES SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICES?

Supported living services are provided through an agency. For example, Harbor Regional Center works with providers with names like *LifeSteps*, *Independent Visions*, and *Independent Focus*. These agencies have lots of people working for them, but a client receiving supported living services usually has only one person that he works with. This person is called his supported living instructor.

The supported living instructor helps the client learn the things he is able to learn and helps him find support to do things that he will always need help doing. He may also help the client find other agencies that can provide him with certain services.

The client may have another person coming into his home regularly to help him with self-care and the daily responsibilities of running a home if the client is unable to do them. This person provides In-home Supportive Services (IHSS). Usually a person with physical disabilities gets this kind of service. The supported living instructor can help the client apply for IHSS and then hire an IHSS attendant to assist him as needed in the home.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICES?

If you are a Harbor Regional Center client over the age of 18 and interested in living on your own, you are eligible for supported living. Your Counselor will talk to you and your family to make sure you understand what living on your own means. The Counselor will discuss with you what responsibilities go along with supported living. For example, you will be expected to have enough money to pay rent or a mortgage, utilities like electricity and gas, and other daily living expenses. The Counselor will also discuss with you what challenges there might be for people living on their own in the community. Once you and your family understand what supported living will mean for you, you may choose to try it.

WILL I GET ALL OF MY SUPPORT FROM THE SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICE PROVIDER?

Some of the things that people in supported living need help with are the kinds of things that their friends or family members can help with. These might be things such as taking you to church, helping decorate your apartment, taking you grocery shopping, or giving you a ride to work, the library, or your health club. When people help you do things like this, it is called getting "natural support."

For things that family and friends cannot do, the supported living instructor will help you. The two of you will set up a schedule for him to come regularly to your home. He will help you learn new things and give you support when you need it. If you qualify for IHSS services you will also have a personal attendant coming into your home to help you with self-care and perhaps other things.

CAN I LIVE ALONE OR MUST I HAVE A ROOMMATE?

While people in supported living do not have to have a roommate, most do. They have roommates for two reasons. The first is that often it is not possible for a person to afford to live alone. Once they have paid their rent and other regular expenses, they have no money left to buy things they want or go out with their friends. Having a roommate means you will only have to pay half the rent and half the utilities. If you and your roommate decide to cook and eat together, you can also save money on food. The second reason people usually have a roommate is so they have someone to talk to and do things with.

WILL THE REGIONAL CENTER PAY MY RENT OR OTHER THINGS IF I'M IN SUPPORTED LIVING?

If you want to live in your own house or apartment in the community, it is very important for you to remember that you must have enough money to pay your expenses just like everyone else does. You will need to pay your own rent, gas and electric, food, and other regular expenses. You will also need to have a little money left over so you can do things like go out with your friends and buy clothes or things you like.

Your income may come from SSI or from a job, or from both. You may even be lucky enough to have family who can help you with your expenses. But, remember, the regional center does not pay rent for people in supported living. This is one reason that most people who choose to live this way have a roommate.

Your medical care would probably be paid for by Medi-Cal or, if you have a job with benefits, by your private medical insurance. If you have physical disabilities or other special needs, you may qualify for IHSS money that would allow you to hire someone to come into your home to provide personal assistance.

HOW DO I GET STARTED ON THE ROAD TO MORE INDEPENDENCE?

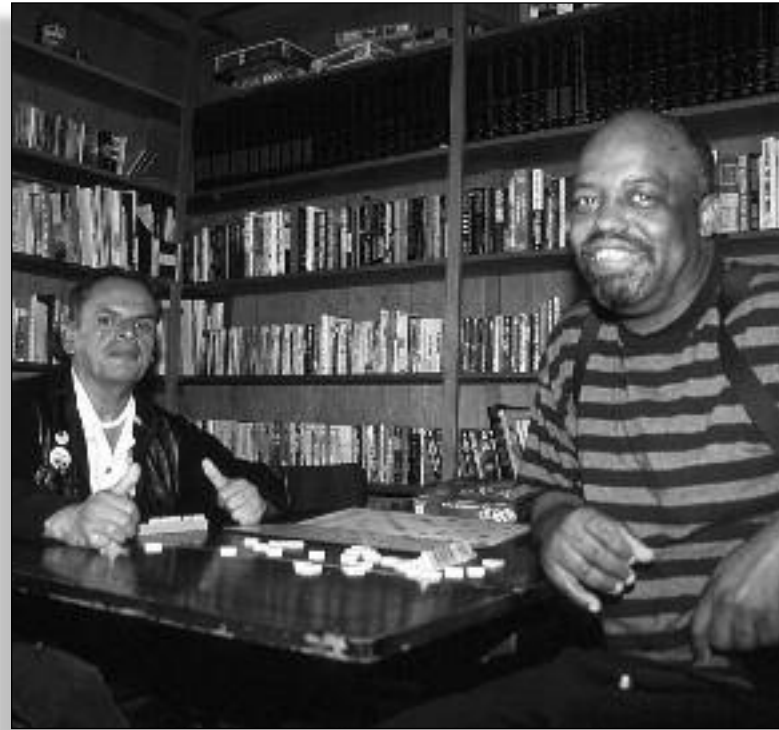
Whenever you make a big change in your life, you must plan ahead. Moving into supported living is just like any other big change. You need to give yourself plenty of time to prepare before you make the move. You will need at least six months and maybe as much as a year to do all the things you need to do. Let's look at what some of these things are.

Deciding where you want to live. It may take a long time to look around and decide what kind of a place you'd like to live in and where you'd like it to be. First of all, you will want to find a place that is not outside of your budget and you will want it to be in a safe neighborhood. You need to decide if you want to live close to your family or your job, close to shopping, or close to friends or places in the community that you visit often. You probably will want to be close to a bus line. Some people like to have a house with a yard so they can plant flowers or have a vegetable garden. Some people want to have a pet like a cat or a dog. You need to think about all of these things when choosing a place to live.

Finding a roommate. Most people in supported living have a roommate and it often takes a while to find someone you want to live with. If you can't afford to pay all of the rent by yourself, you will need to find a roommate before you move into your own place so you can share the expenses from the very beginning.

Learning a few important independent living skills. Having a few more basic skills may make your transition from where you are now to supported living smoother. For example, if you know how to cook a few simple meals before you move, you will be much better off than if you have to depend on other people for this. If nothing else, you will be able to eat when you're hungry rather than waiting for someone else. If you know where the local stores are, you will be able to do your own shopping right from the start.

Getting furniture and supplies. If you move into your own place, you will need your own furniture, dishes, pots and pans for cooking, and other things such as sheets and towels. It may take you a while to get all the things you need. You will probably get some of these things from your family or friends, but you may also need to buy some. Garage sales and flea markets are good places to look for things like this. And don't forget, you might need to save money to pay someone to move you into your new home, if you do not have friends or family who can help you with moving.



As you can see, there are lots of things to do and lots of things to think about when you decide you want to move out on your own. Just remember to give yourself time and don't think you have to do everything at once. Remember also that lots of people around you will be willing to help you plan your exciting move.

What does HOPE have to do with supported living? Harbor Regional Center works very closely with an organization called Home Ownership for Personal Empowerment, or HOPE, that provides affordable housing for HRC clients. HOPE buys houses and condos, fixes them up, and rents them at low rates to clients of Harbor Regional Center. (The rents are usually not more than about one-third of the renter's monthly

income.) In the year 2002, more than 70 adults with developmental disabilities were living in HOPE homes in Torrance, Long Beach, Lakewood and Bellflower. A special feature of these homes is that every resident has his or her own bedroom. Because the homes are owned by an organization set up only for this purpose, HOPE offers greater stability than most other community-based options. In other words, HOPE will most likely always be there for clients. If you would like to learn more about this program, ask your regional center Counselor to put you in touch with HRC's housing specialist.



HOW DO I LEARN MORE?

If you are interested in learning more about supported living or anything else discussed in this booklet, talk to your Harbor Regional Center Counselor. Ask her to arrange for you to talk with some supported living service providers so you can learn more about what services and supports are available.

Probably one of the best ways to help you decide whether you want to try supported living is to talk to some HRC clients who have been living this way for awhile. They can tell you about some of the challenges they had achieving their dream of living on their own. They can also tell you about how their lives changed as they became more independent. In the back of this booklet you will find a checklist of questions that you could ask of people in supported living. Also in the back of this booklet is a checklist of questions you might want to ask of the supported living service providers you talk to.

*AND FINALLY...*Remember what we said at the beginning of this booklet: It's OK if you don't want to live on your own, but you shouldn't be afraid to try. If you do decide to try, you'll have lots of help.

Harbor Regional Center

Guidelines for Supported Living Services

This document describes Harbor Regional Center's guidelines for supported living services. The guidelines reflect what supported living clients, their family members, regional center staff, and service providers have told us an ideal service would be like. Since the guidelines describe an ideal, we do not expect supported living services to be able to satisfy them all, currently. We do expect, however, that our supported living providers will work in partnership with us in the coming years to move their services steadily closer to the ideal.

Underlying these guidelines is the principle of client self-determination. People with disabilities make their own choices about how they live their lives, and these choices are respected. The primary purpose of supported living is to give clients the help they need to become as independent as possible and achieve the outcomes they choose for themselves. Client choice guides supported living services as long as these choices do not pose a threat to the client's health or safety.

MISSION

- The supported living service's (SLS) mission statement specifically promotes respect for people with disabilities and participation of these people in the community.
- SLS instructors know the mission statement and can explain how it affects what they do with clients.

CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Clients are entitled to receive supported living services without regard for their abilities and personal characteristics.
- The client's training and support schedule is set up to accommodate his needs and preferences.
- The client has the major role in selecting his SLS instructor and may request a change if he believes the match is not a good one.
- The client does not have to move out of his home if he requests a different SLS provider.
- The SLS asks the client to evaluate his relationship with his instructor and tell whether he is satisfied.
- The client knows the process for contacting the supported living service directly if he has concerns or is dissatisfied with his instructor.
- The SLS instructor makes sure that everyone supporting the client understands that the non-conserved client directs the services.
- The client gives consent before the SLS instructor talks to family members about the client's life.
- If the client wants his family to be involved in his life, the SLS instructor helps the client find appropriate ways for the family to do this.

CLIENT-INSTRUCTOR RELATIONSHIP

- If a client's SLS instructor is temporarily not available to work with him, the client receives services from a backup instructor whom he knows.
- If there is a need to change a client's SLS instructor, the client's regional center Counselor is involved to help the client make a smooth transition.
- The client and the SLS instructor communicate using the client's preferred language and method of communication.
- The client is able to contact his instructor or someone else from the SLS at any time through a pager or other messaging service.

CLIENT TRAINING AND SUPPORT

- The client receives assessment, training, and support as necessary, to help him do the following:
 - Stay safe from harm
 - Stay healthy
 - Get his bills paid and meet his other financial responsibilities
 - Develop and keep friendships and other personal relationships
 - Engage in activities of his choice at home and in the community
- A client who is a parent is helped to develop skills that will make her a better parent.
- A client is given a reasonable opportunity to master each skill and activity that he chooses as a goal.
- The SLS instructor helps the client interview potential roommates and screen, hire, and terminate personal attendants.
- The client participates in selecting his roommate.
- The SLS instructor maintains regular contact with the regional center, including attending the client's annual regional center planning meeting, attending quarterly review meetings, and submitting regular reports on the client's progress.
- The SLS instructor knows the client's medical needs and knows whom to contact for consultation about medical issues.

SLS INSTRUCTOR TRAINING AND SUPPORT

- SLS instructors receive initial employment training that includes:
 - Communication skills
 - Conflict resolution
 - Teaching techniques
 - Basic principles of how people learn
 - Assistive technology and how it may be helpful
- The SLS ensures that information about generic programs such as IHSS, SSI/SSA, HUD, and mental health services is readily available to instructors.
- The SLS instructor earns at least 150% of minimum wage.

- The SLS instructor is paid for at least 6 hours per month of non-direct care activities such as training and supervision.
- SLS instructors are encouraged to attend outside training conducted by the regional center or other organizations.
- Each SLS instructor is observed regularly in the community by his immediate supervisor.
- Each manager of the SLS observes staff in the community at least once a month.

QUESTIONS TO ASK PEOPLE IN SUPPORTED LIVING

1. How long have you lived in supported living?
2. What do you like about supported living? What don't you like?
3. What kinds of services and supports do you receive?
4. Does your supported living service provider do a good job of helping you find services and supports?
5. Do you have a roommate? Do you do things with your roommate at home like cooking and cleaning?
6. Do you do things in the community with your roommate like go out to eat, go out for coffee, go to the movies, or go shopping?
7. What do you do during the day?
8. What do you do for fun?
9. How do you use the community (for example, do you go to church, health club, stores, post office, the library)?
10. Have you been able to make friends?
11. Are you able to see your friends when you want to?
12. What have you learned to do in supported living?
13. Would you ever want to go back to living the way you did before? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS TO ASK SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICE PROVIDERS

1. What kinds of services do you provide to people?
2. What kind of training do you provide to clients?
3. What are some of the living arrangements your clients live in?
4. What kinds of things do clients do during the day?
5. How are clients involved in their neighborhoods?
6. What kinds of things do clients do for fun?
7. Do your clients receive support from different providers? What other providers do you work with?
8. What kinds of natural supports do your clients receive?
9. How do you handle emergencies?
10. What would happen if I didn't want some of the supports or services you suggest?



HARBOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES FOUNDATION, INC.
21231 Hawthorne Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90503
(310) 540-1711 (888) 540-1711
www.HarborRC.org