

Applying for Supportive Housing and Independent Living Services

This story was submitted by a manager of a residence for people with disabilities. Arjun is not the man's real name.

Arjun is a 30 year old man who has cerebral palsy. He likes to communicate verbally however, his speech is severely impaired and only people who know him well can truly understand him. He has difficulty knowing when people are not understanding his speech and some people pretend to understand him when they don't. When a person tells him that they are not understanding his speech, he will use a letter board and spell out what he is saying. Arjun has tried other methods of communication such as a speech output device, but prefers to speak and use a letter board.

Last year, Arjun decided he wanted to leave the residence that he shared with eight other people with disabilities and to live independently in the community with attendant services to assist him with daily activities such as showering, dressing, toileting and cooking his meals. This is called supportive housing.

People who know Arjun think that he is very capable of living in his own place and directing his attendant services as they think that, with familiarity attendants will learn to understand his speech and when not understood, Arjun will use his letter board.

Arjun's sister, Silla filled out the application for supportive housing on his behalf. A few months later, Arjun was called to an interview to determine if he had the ability to direct attendant services and therefore be eligible for supported housing. Silla accompanied him to the interview.

During the assessment, the assessor asked Arjun a variety of questions regarding medical history, personal care needs/schedule, and whether he has any experience training personal support workers. Arjun was attempting to answer each question verbally however, the assessor could not understand him and asked Silla to interpret. Arjun tried to use his letter board, however, the assessor then directed all questions to Silla and proceeded to ask her about Arjun, as if he wasn't in the room. Arjun sat and listened to Silla talk about him and even though she said that she thought he could direct attendant services, the assessor felt that his speech would not be understood and that using a letter board to communicate with attendants would not be "practical" as it would take too much time. The assessor decided that Arjun was ineligible for Independent Living Support Services and Supportive Housing.

Communication Accommodations that Arjun required:

The author of this experience tells us that Arjun was denied the opportunity to live in a place of his choosing with the supports he needed because of the assessor's perception that he was incapable of directing his attendant services due to the way he communicated. She says that Arjun required the following communication supports in this situation:

- The opportunity to choose the person he wanted to assist him with communication as he knew his sister might “take over” the interview. He knows people who could facilitate his communication so that his voice could have been heard by the assessor.
- The assessor required training and procedures about provision of communication supports and accommodations, how to interact with a person who has unclear speech and who uses a communication board and the role of a support person in assisting with communication. In addition, she required information about Arjun’s human right to use his preferred methods of communication and to have equal opportunity to access supportive housing and attendant services.
- Attendant services should have policies, procedures and training to accommodate people who communicate in ways other than speech.
- Family members needed information about Arjun’s rights, autonomy and neutral supports.

More information: [Webinar 4](#)