

**Supported Living in Wisconsin**

**Draft: *For Discussion & Feedback Only* – February, 2012**

**Getting Help to Have a Home**

**How Supported Living Oganizations Help People**

**Find and Live in Their Own Homes**

Do you want to live in your own home? To help a family member live in his or her own home?One of the exciting changes that has accompanied Family Care and IRIS has been the recent growth of Support Living across Wisconsin. Supported Living organizations help individuals, and families who are supporting those individuals, by providing:

* Assistance in finding and when desired changing an affordable place to live;
* Assistance in helping set up and manage living in one’s own home;
* Attention to issues of safety, security and stability;
* Finding, training and supporting direct support staff;
* Coordinating needed assistance related to household tasks and finances; health care; community activities and membership;
* Assistance in preventing problems related to living at home;
* Assistance if problems arise;
* Timely and responsive support in event of crisis;
* Other support as needed.

Supported Living organizations enable individuals or their families to lease or own a home that looks like, feels like and is their own. They are an alternative to services such as group homes or adult family homes. Supported Living organizations also offer a sustainable option for individuals who are not able to or no longer wish to organize assistance by themselves or through the support of family members.

**Two Short Stories**

I first met Bob three years ago at a self-advocacy meeting. A self-advocacy group had come together to learn together how to better understand self-determination and self-directed supports. Part of that learning included asking people to share what they would like to change in their life. With quiet eloquence, Bob shared his desire to move from a group home into his own home. He talked about the frustrations of living with other people who he did not choose to live with, over rules that were not his, over staff that were well-meaning but not supportive of how he wanted to live his life.

Recently I met Bob at a meeting. I was making a presentation about Supported Living. Bob proudly spoke up, letting me know that the dream he expressed when we first met was now a reality. He had shared with a care manager his desire to have his own home. Together, they worked out a plan for a Supported Living organization to help Bob find a home that he leases, that has no agency rules, that belongs to him. The assistance that Bob and the organization identified together as important for him comes from family, friends, and neighbors of Bob and from staff who understand the particular needs Bob may have, and who embrace his desire to have a place that is truly his.

Janet continued to live at home with her mother and younger brother after graduating from high school. Janet’s mother, Helen, used the funding available for Janet’s support to find, organize, coordinate, and supervise a variety of paid assistance that Janet needed. Because Janet’s impairments require extensive support for communication, mobility and continued learning Helen sometimes felt she was more of a care manager, human resource recruiter and agency supervisor than a mom. She felt that her life, and Janet’s, were becoming increasingly focused on Janet’s need for support, and less on helping Janet create her own life as people tend to do at her age.

Helen learned about Supported Living. She had learned about group homes as an option for Janet from Janet’s school during the transition years, but had not previously heard of agencies that could work in partnership with families and individuals to help people have a home that is their own, maintain connections with family and friends, and provide a variety of creative and flexible assistance.

Over a six month period, Helen and Janet worked with the funding agency and the Supported Living organization to develop a plan for Janet to have a place of her own. Janet, Helen and the agency looked at a number of places and found an apartment that Janet loves. The agency recruits, hires and supports staff, including staff that Helen and Janet had previously hired. They help Janet manage her home, and help with the many aspects of life that originate from our homes.

Helen says she is now “Just a mom” again. Janet values her involvement, as does the agency, but Helen now feels that Janet can and will do just fine when Helen heads south for the winter to spend time with *her* parents. “ I love it when Janet proudly points at the map of Florida and lets me know I can leave any time!”

**Key Features of Supported Living**

Supported Living enables people to live in their own home, not a place that belongs to an agency. The importance of that point cannot be overstated. Home is at the center of our lives. It is home base for our relationships to friends and to family. We choose who we live with, who we invite into our home, how we spend our time. We choose what we do within our home, how we create *our* place with our own peculiar mix of decorations, colors, pictures, cherished items from our past and for our future.

Supported Living enables people to live with as much support from a family as they and their family wish, but without a family member being responsible for all aspects of finding and supporting a person. Family members can help in finding a home, but also get help in doing so. Families can help in planning, problem solving, wondering about the future … but can do so as mom, dad, sister, brother … not as staff recruiter, care manager in charge of completing various forms, or back-up staff if someone doesn’t show up in the morning.

Supported Living can work for anyone. Janet has extensive need for support. Her impairments are such that she may require assistance at any time of day or night. The agency that provides funding for Janet has increasing experience from Janet and from others to show that life is reported to be profoundly better by individuals and their families when people have their own home, and that on average it costs no more than the alternatives that the agency had been or would have funded.

**Where to go if you are interested in learning more**

Family Care and IRIS are just learning about Supported Living, so some of the MCOs and IRIS consultants know more than others at this time. Feel free to contact inControlWisconsin, at [contact-us@incontrolwisconsin.org](mailto:contact-us@incontrolwisconsin.org) if you have questions about Supported Living after contacting Family Care or IRIS.

**A Request of You:**

This short paper is designed to give a brief overview of Supported Living. It is primarily directed towards families and individuals. I would appreciate your simple feedback:

1. On a scale of 1 – 10 (with 1 being *useless* and 10 being *outstanding*) how helpful was this document in helping you understand Supported Living?
2. What would make it more useful to you?

Please send your comments to me at [dwharks@aol.com](mailto:dwharks@aol.com) .

Thanks!

Dennis Harkins