

AGING & DISABILITY RESOURCES

Northwest Regional Council
1650 Port Drive
Burlington, WA 98233
(360) 428-1301 Fax: (360) 428-1302

Hiring In-Home Workers

Getting Started

Identifying Services You Need

In-home care becomes necessary when circumstances such as illness, cognitive decline, frailty or injury make it difficult to remain safe and comfortable in one's own home. Use the list below to identify regular tasks and determine what you can do by yourself, what your family is able to help with, and what is not being done. Once you have identified what tasks you need help with, you can write a job description for your in-home worker.

- ❑ **Bathing** – standby or hands-on assistance with bathing in tub, shower, or bed.
- ❑ **Personal Care** – assistance with dressing, brushing teeth or denture care, shaving, hair care, foot care and grooming needs.
- ❑ **Toileting** – assistance with toileting or incontinence products.
- ❑ **Ambulation** – help walking, using a wheelchair, or other assistive device.
- ❑ **Transfers** – assistance movement from wheelchair, tub, bed, toilet, automobile, etc.
- ❑ **Positioning** – turning or changing an individual's position to avoid discomfort or injury.
- ❑ **Eating and/or Feeding** – assisting with eating.
- ❑ **Medication Assist** – reminding and/or assisting an individual to take medications correctly.
- ❑ **Errands/Appointments** – transporting or escorting to shopping, appointments or errands.
- ❑ **Range of Motion** – providing assistance in movement of legs and arms as directed by a physician or physical therapist.
- ❑ **Housekeeping** – maintaining a safe, sanitary environment with a special focus on kitchen, bathroom and laundry.
- ❑ **Meal Preparation** – preparing nutritious meals to eat immediately or reheat later
- ❑ **Supervision** – providing protective supervision for individuals who are not safe if left alone because of confusion or poor judgment.

Frequently Used Terms:

As you begin the search for an in-home worker, you may hear some terms which are unfamiliar to you. These terms can give you an idea of the level of care you may be looking for. Be aware that some are used by home care agencies to assign costs.

- **Activities of Daily Living:** These are specific activities that individuals must perform with or without assistance to live independently.
- **Companion** – A companion provides social contact, going along on walks or errands.
- **Chore Services** – Housekeeping, grocery shopping, laundry, and some meal preparation (but no personal care).
- **Homemaker** – All of the above plus meal preparation and help with personal needs like getting dressed. Usually no bathing assistance.
- **Home Health Aide** – All the above plus personal care needs (like bathing and management of incontinence). Does not include skilled services that a licensed nurse must perform.

Paying for In-Home Care and Finding In-Home Workers

There are several methods of paying for in-home help. Try to investigate all of the options below to determine if you qualify for financial assistance.

1. Direct Hiring:

Directly hiring a privately paid in-home worker will generally will save you money, but it is more work to screen, interview, and hire workers. You can use the “In-Home Care Provider List” list produced by Aging & Disability Resources (360-428-1301), check employment listings at senior centers, look for ads in the newspaper, and check with community organizations or with your place of worship.

2. Hiring Through an Agency:

There are several agencies offering private paid services in Skagit County:

- A Better Solution Home Care (360) 629-4510 or 866-669-4510
- Caregiver Network, LLC (360) 724-4456
- Cascade Companion Care 888-390-6068
- Catholic Community Services 877-870-1582
- Home Attendant Care (360) 755-1547 or 800-967-8108
- Home Instead Senior Care (360) 982-2461
- Homewatch CareGivers (360) 240-9525
- Sunrise Home Care (360) 336-0798 or 800-984-9044
- Service Alternatives Home Care Services 800-717-8239
- Visiting Angels Living Assistance Services (360) 424-6777 or 888-264-3528
- Visiting Nurse Home Care (360) 416-0343 or 800-624-2714

Using an agency will save time and the interviewing process, but expect to pay several dollars more an hour for services that are structured in graduating levels. Agencies may also have requirements for a minimum number of hours. Some may offer a flat rate for a particular service like bath assistance and a minimum hourly requirement for a home health aide.

3. Community Options Program Entry System (COPES) and Medicaid Personal Care (MPC):

These are state-funded Medicaid programs offering in-home care to individuals needing personal care who meet income and resource guidelines. Some of the agencies listed above provide state-funded services. **Call Aging & Disability Resources at (360) 428-1301** for more details.

4. Private Insurance:

Some long-term care insurance policies provide coverage for in-home care. If you have this type of insurance, talk to your company to determine eligibility.

5. Medicare-Covered Home Health Services:

Medicare provides limited, intermittent coverage to homebound people for skilled in-home care *as prescribed by a physician*. It does not pay for homemaker services—help with toileting, cooking, housekeeping, etc. Bathing help may be included while skilled care is being provided.

When In-Home Help is Resisted

Even though in-home workers may be essential, the idea is sometimes resisted. It is important to respond to this issue with understanding. Some common concerns are:

- **Maintaining Sense of Independence**

Many people view accepting a stranger's help as an insult to their independence. What they may not realize is that they may have already accepted help in the form of neighborly assistance or family visits. It is important to involve the person needing care in the entire process of hiring and supervising the in-home worker.

- **Fear of Depleting Savings**

It may be helpful to compute the cost of in-home care over a year so that the exact cost can be seen relative to the benefits received. Compare this to the cost of moving into an Assisted Living or retirement community.

- **Fear of Reduced Contact with Family Members**

Assure the person receiving care that family contact will continue. Offer frequent phone calls and set dates for social contact. By stating clearly that the intention in hiring help is to prolong the ability to provide care, the family members can sometimes show the care recipient that this action is the very opposite of abandonment.

- **Fear of Victimization**

A new in-home worker may represent a threat. After all, this is a stranger who is gaining access to the individual's personal items. People who have hearing, vision or mobility deficits may feel very vulnerable. Ways of dealing with this issue may include:

- **Obtain Referrals from Friends:** An employee of a trusted friend can be an excellent prospect.
- **Be a Physical Presence:** It is sometimes wise for a family member or friend to be present during the first few sessions. Later, this person or others can make occasional, unplanned visits.
- **Carefully check references.**

- **Worry About Lack of Supervisory Skills**

Older people may need to learn how to provide clear instructions and appropriate supervision to inspire confidence in his or her abilities.

- Have a job description prepared before any interviews take place.
- **Compile a checklist of tasks to be performed. This checklist should be given to the worker before each session so that tasks are clearly stated and can be verified if not performed. This checklist also structures the relationship on a professional foundation.**

- **Discomfort Beginning the Process**

Start slow. It may be wise to start with a small amount of hours of in-home help and gradually increase the hours as the recipient becomes comfortable.

Hiring an In-Home Worker

Advertising

The best way to find a worker is to get a recommendation from a family member, friend, or someone else you trust. Let them know you are looking. Your place of worship or an organization you belong to may be helpful resources. **Aging & Disability Resources (360-428-1301)** also has an in-home worker list which is updated quarterly.

- You may want to check the “Help Wanted” section of the classified ads in your newspapers. Or you can place an ad in the paper. Your advertisement should include:
 - Hours needed
 - A brief description of duties
 - Your telephone number and the best time to call
 - Preferences such as non-smoker or male/female
 - The wage you are offering
 - Do **not** provide your name and exact address in the advertisement

Setting up a Job Description and Contract

The purpose of a job description or contract is to clarify the duties and responsibilities of both the employer and the worker. Having a formalized agreement is essential if there is a dispute about salary, hours of work, tasks, etc. A contract/job description can always be revised or updated as needed. It is important to be as specific as you can in a contract, to lessen the chances for confusion or disagreement. If the job involves special skills such as lifting into the bath tub or giving medications, the worker should be trained and experienced in those skills. See **Exhibit A** for a sample contract form, which you can find on **page 9** of this handout.

Arranging an Interview

When contacting possible workers, ask a few questions on the phone before setting up an interview. For example, inquire about their work history and other experience. Once you have decided which applicants meet your qualifications, schedule the interview. You might want to check out some of the applicant’s references prior to the interview. For your own safety, avoid interviewing people you do not know in your home. If you can’t leave home, you might want to try to arrange for a friend or family member to be there with you.

For the interview: Have your sample contract ready for the applicant to read. Write down the name, address and telephone number of the applicant. Below are some suggested interview questions. Feel free to make up your **own** list of questions which meet your particular needs.

- Where have you worked before? What kinds of things have you done?
- Tell me something about your family, hobbies, interests, etc.
- Have you ever provided care for a person similar to what this job requires?
- How do you feel about cooking and eating what someone else wants?
- How do you handle people who are angry or violent?
- Why are you choosing to do this kind of work?
- What makes you uncomfortable or angry?
- What is your attitude about smoking, drinking, or using drugs?
- Is there anything in the job description which you would not do?
- What commitment to staying on this job are you willing to make?
- What training have you had? (CPR, First Aid, CNA, Fundamentals of Caregiving, etc.)
- Please give me two work-related and one personal reference.

Review the following checklist before ending the interview. If the applicant is obviously unsuited, be non-committal about future contact. Remind a suitable applicant that you will need to check references before making a decision.

Interview Checklist

- Was the person on time for the interview?
- Was his/her appearance and grooming appropriate for the occasion?
- Did the applicant and I agree on the terms and conditions of the contract?
- Do I need to modify my contract before employing this person? How?
- Did I get at least three references to call to verify his/her ability to perform needed services?
- Did I say when I would probably notify the applicant of his/her acceptance or non-acceptance?
- Do I have the name and number of the applicant?
- Did I feel comfortable or at ease with the person?
- Did I note anything that made me uncomfortable? (dress, speech, behavior, etc)
- If the job involves special skills (such as lifting into the bathtub or cooking diabetic meals), will the worker require specialized training?

Checking References- NEVER hire someone without checking references!

Before making a hiring decision, call at least three references to learn more about the applicant. Briefly describe why you are looking for a worker and ask the reference if the applicant would be a good match for your situation.

Questions to Ask References:

1. How long have you known _____? Dates? In what relationship?
2. Is _____ working for you now? Has _____ worked for you in the past? (If no longer working for reference, ask): Why did _____ leave? Would you re-hire?
3. What was _____'s position with you? Can you tell me more about his/her responsibilities?
4. How did _____ get along with you and/or others?
5. What were your impressions of _____ as a worker?
6. Did _____ show initiative or wait to be told what to do?
7. Did you find _____ reliable, trustworthy and honest?
8. Was _____ punctual and dependable?
9. What were his/her strengths and weaknesses?
10. Were you aware of any problems with drugs or alcohol?
11. Any other problems that could interfere with _____'s performance?

Supervising In-Home Workers

Once an applicant is offered the job and accepts, the agreement should be signed before the worker starts. Each party should have a copy of the signed agreement. You should then decide on a start date.

Here are some tips for supervising your newly-hired employee:

1. **Make a list of the steps for each task**, including preferences for cleaning products and supplies to be used, the locations of these items, and reminders of parts of the task which could be overlooked, for example, “please separate the white wash” or “please sweep under the table.”
2. **Avoid following the worker around the home.** Instead, ask to be notified after each task is complete. Check off each step that has been finished correctly. Simply remind the worker if any step has been left out.
3. **Be sure to acknowledge any extra effort or thoughtfulness**, even if what has been done does not fit exactly with your specifications. It is important to focus on the person’s good will rather than small mistakes.
4. **Correct major errors by giving information rather than criticism.** Unless an error occurs repeatedly, assume the person needs more information about how something should be handled within the home.

Maintaining Open Communication with Your In-Home Care Provider

Open communication between employer and employee can maintain a positive relationship. People appreciate being told when they are doing a good job. It is also important to tell people about factors that irritate you or unacceptable job performance. Small annoyances can often cause larger problems when not discussed. A good work environment will bring the best performance from an employee and open communication is a necessary component of a good work environment.

- **Be sure your expectations are clear:**
 - Give specific, written directions regarding duties to be performed and when breaks are appropriate.
 - Develop a checklist to be completed by yourself and the employee by the end of each shift.
 - Demonstrate difficult tasks and have the employee practice for you.
 - Review privileges such as eating meals at your home and the use of your telephone.
- **Be fair, honest, and kind**, and remember to respect your employee’s privacy.
- **Praise a job well done. People need to be appreciated.** Describe what you like. For example:
 - “Thank you for putting non-skid strips in the bath. I feel much safer,” or
 - “I really appreciate the extra care you take in cleaning under the furniture (around the sink, etc.). Having a clean home feels wonderful,”
 - “Thank you for making the effort to be on time.”

- **Get small irritations off your chest before they build up.** In the event of irritations or problems, permit ample time to discuss and resolve.
 - Give criticism as soon as possible after the problem occurs.
 - Keep criticism brief and to the point.
 - Mention one incident at a time and make a suggestion for improvement.
 - Focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not the person.
 - Forgive and forget.

Ethical Considerations and Abuse Prevention

An important ethical consideration facing families and elders and their caregivers is that of gifts. An employee/caregiver should not accept gifts of money or anything else. It violates the professional relationship that should be established between a worker and the employer. This is a difficult concept for many elders to accept. The caregiver/elder relationship is by its nature one that has an imbalance of power. The caregiver is usually more capable, physically and often mentally. To receive gifts other than wages jeopardizes the “balance of power” and drifts into the area of elder abuse or exploitation.

Elder abuse is prevalent in today’s society. Unfortunately, elder abuse is all too common without proper advance planning, accountability and supervision. Abuse can take many forms from accepting gifts to theft of personal items, physical abuse or emotional battering and neglect. If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable with a caregiver, contact a third party such as Adult Protective Services (1-866-221-4909) or Aging & Disability Resources (360-428-1301).

Become knowledgeable about common types of abuse:

- **Misuse of time:**
 - Using up time doing easier tasks first. On your checklist, be sure the harder or more critical tasks are listed first.
 - Taking frequent breaks, making phone calls, watching TV.
 - **TIP:** Use supervisory skills and written checklist to maintain a professional relationship.
- **Taking advantage of the person:**
 - Worker wins trust and then takes advantage of sympathy and/or friendship by sharing personal and/or financial problems.
 - Persuades employer to sign for hours not worked, allowing late arrival/early leaving, bringing children to work.
 - Soliciting “loans.”

Prevent abuse by periodic checkups. Neighbors can also be helpful because of their proximity to the person.

Financial and Legal Considerations

When you become an employer, you have some obligations in record-keeping. If you pay \$1,000.00 or more per year to an employee, you are required by law to withhold for social security benefits and make quarterly payments to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). **(Exception: If the person you are hiring is self-employed, he/she is required to pay his/her own social security taxes. For bookkeeping reasons and less paperwork, many people prefer to hire only self-employed workers.)** Also be aware that accidents can happen to your employee while working for you and you need to have insurance coverage for such incidents.

Below is a checklist of financial and legal considerations:

1. Discuss with your homeowner insurance agent about your liability coverage as it applies to someone in your employ.
2. You should have a contract agreement detailing rate of pay, days and hours of employment.
3. To get IRS forms and publications about social security withholding requirements, call your local IRS office and ask for Form 942. In Skagit County, this number is 1-800-829-3676.
4. Set up a form for record of payments and deductions for your employee. (see sample below)

Name of Worker	Dates of Work	Date of Payment	Deductions (multiply gross by .0765)	Check No.	Amount Paid
John Doe	11/3-11/15	11/17/00	\$50 x .0765 = \$3.83	2635	\$46.17 net

5. When you file your own 1040 tax return, determine if payments to your employee qualify as a medical deduction for you.
6. Be aware of possible legal and financial pitfalls of paying in cash instead of by check. Use receipt forms or other proof of payments to worker. (Receipt books are available where stationary supplies are sold.)
7. Keep a record of any serious problems you have with your worker, in case of later disputes.
8. Do not tempt human nature. Keep cash, jewelry, or other valuables in a location where a worker will not see them or have access to them.

Exhibit A Contract Form

Employer: _____ Employee: _____

Salary: hourly \$ _____ weekly \$ _____ monthly \$ _____
(choose one)

Terms of Payment: weekly _____ bi-weekly _____ monthly _____

Schedule: MON _____ THURS _____
TUES _____ FRI _____
WED _____ SAT _____
SUN _____

_____ Changes in schedule are not negotiable.

_____ Changes in schedule are negotiable with prior approval.

Duties to be performed (be specific)

Household Tasks:

Personal Care Tasks:

Non-acceptable behavior

_____ Personal phone calls
_____ Foul language
_____ Leaving early
_____ Discussing personal problems
_____ Smoking inside
_____ Coming late
_____ Other

X _____
Employers Signature
Address
Phone

X _____
Employee Signature
Address
Phone

Employee's Social Security # _____

Or

"I will be responsible for my own Social Security or any taxes due to any governmental agency arising from this employment."

X _____
Employee Signature