



Welcome to the Realistic Job Preview for the Community Living Assistant Position!

We are so glad that you are interested in the Community Living Assistant position with East Bay Innovations (EBI). The purpose of this realistic job preview is to give you information that will help you decide if this is the right job for you. It is important that you know about the rewards and the challenges of working as a Community Living Assistant for people with developmental disabilities (such as cerebral palsy and autism) before you accept a position.

In this realistic job preview we will look at:

- What Community Living Assistants do
- What the job requirements are
- Examples of different job tasks in actual work life
- What EBI is like as an employer
- What the difficulties and rewards of being a Community Living Assistant are
- What staff training opportunities are available at EBI
- What current Community Living Assistants say about their jobs

This job preview includes stories of Community Living Assistants and the people they support. These stories are based on situations that you may confront as a Community Living Assistant. The names and places have been changed. These real life examples are in the blue box areas throughout this realistic job preview.

By the end of this realistic job preview you should be able to answer the following questions, which will help you decide whether or not this type of work would be a good fit for you.

- What attributes do you think will make you a good candidate for working as a Community Living Assistant?
- What challenges do you think you will face as a Community Living Assistant? What supports will you need to deal with these challenges?
- Which parts of the job do you think you will enjoy the most?
- What about working for EBI appeals to you?

When people accept jobs at EBI and then leave them after a short amount of time, it can be very difficult for the people needing support, because they will again have to get used to a new person assisting them in important and personal parts of their lives. It is also difficult for their families, for your co-workers and for EBI. Because of this, we hope that this realistic job preview provides the information you need to make a good decision about whether or not to work at EBI as a Community Living Assistant.

What is the Role of the Community Living Assistant?



Supported Living Services (SLS) provides support to people with developmental disabilities who wish to live in a home of their own but cannot do so without support. The service is designed to help people be as independent as they can be.

SLS services are available to people who typically need more than 40 hours per month of service, and up to 24 hours per day, to live safely on their own.

As a Community Living Assistant, your specific duties and tasks will vary, depending on the people you support and their individual preferences, needs and interests. The assistance that you provide can include helping people with personal care, shopping and cooking, managing their households, getting to medical appointments, and getting around in their communities.

You will spend all of your work hours in someone's home or "out and about" in their community. People with disabilities have better lives when they are a part of their community and have valued roles. You could be involved in various types of activities and events such as:

- Going to a movie or a sports event
- Taking someone to visit with his or her friends or family
- Participating in a club activity or class
- Volunteering in the community
- Going to a church or place of worship

Supported Living Services are about giving people with disabilities whatever support they need to live quality lives of their choosing. It may also be about working with families and other people who care about the person you support. The job may change over time, as the people you support and their situations change.

Job Requirements for Community Living Assistants

There are just a few requirements for getting a job as a Community Living Assistant. In order to work for EBI, you must be at least 18 years of age and have a high school diploma or GED. You will also need a valid driver's license and a clean driving record. You cannot have been convicted of a felony in any state.

Your availability to work days, evenings, early mornings, weekends and holidays is important. Your work hours may change depending upon the needs of the person you support. It is important that you be willing to work with your supervisor at EBI to arrange a schedule that works for both you and the person you support.

Once you are employed, there are many skills you must develop to do the job well. It is not necessary for you to have any specific training prior to becoming a Community Living Assistant. EBI will give you training and support to develop the skills you need. They will also provide you with training on the history and philosophies of the disability rights movement as well as the philosophy and principles behind Supported Living Services.

About the Support You Will Provide



As a Community Living Assistant, you will support people in their homes and in their communities. Everyone who is supported by Community Living Assistants receives individualized support. With some people you may be providing support and assistance with grocery shopping, feeding, cooking meals, house cleaning, laundry or personal care. For others, you may be helping with exercising, meal planning, making medical appointments, finding social activities or organizing their medications. Truly, the range of job duties differs with each individual you support.

Each person has their own strengths, preferences and support needs and these will change over time. One of the rewards of working as a Community Living Assistant is to witness the accomplishments that people make in their lives and recognize your role in their successes.

Being a Community Living Assistant comes with many responsibilities but also has many rewards, including:

- Feeling like you make a difference
- Getting to know unique people
- Touching the lives of people who really appreciate you
- Participating in new experiences

Many people find that being a Community Living Assistant to people with disabilities is a fulfilling and enjoyable career.

Avoiding Assumptions

When Nate first meets Diana he notices that all she does during the day is watch TV. She is happy watching TV but after the training Nate receives from EBI, he is not sure if this is following the philosophy of community inclusion and having fulfilled days. Nate isn't sure what to do because it is Diana's choice to watch TV and he wants to support her in her decision. Before his next visit with Diana, he takes a look at the weekly newspaper listing of local events. He reads that there is a parade that morning during the same time that he is scheduled to be with Diana. When he arrives at her house, he asks her if she would like to go to see the parade. She agrees and has a wonderful time there. The following week he finds another local event and asks Diana if she would like to go. She again agrees, stating that she enjoys going out but never knows what to do. At this moment Nate realizes that the reason Diana watches so much TV is that she is not sure what else to do or how to find out. Nate makes it a habit of bringing the paper with him each time so that Diana can see what is available in the community and choose which events to go to.

In this situation, it is important not to make assumptions about what the person that you support wants to do. By presenting options, the person you support has a choice whereas before she did not know what her choices were.

About East Bay Innovations

East Bay Innovations (EBI) is a private nonprofit organization established in 1994 that presently provides support services to over 100 persons with developmental disabilities throughout Alameda County.

EBI's mission is to empower individuals with developmental disabilities so that they can make choices about how to live their lives. EBI provides personalized support to make it possible for individuals with disabilities to live in their homes, to work jobs of their choosing and to participate in all aspects of the community.

Scheduling, Pay and Benefits

Scheduling Depending upon the people you support, you may be working evenings, mornings, days, weekends, and holidays. It is important that you show up for work on the exact hours for which you are scheduled.

Benefits EBI offers health benefits to employees working 20 hours per week or more as well as 401(k) retirement plan opportunities to all employees.

Wages Community Living Assistants are paid an hourly rate that increases over time. EBI is active in policy advocacy to promote good wages and affordable health insurance for all Community Living Assistants.

EBI is newly unionized with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Training

There is a lot to learn in direct support. Because of this, new Community Living Assistants sometimes feel overwhelmed or unsure about what they are supposed to be doing for the first several weeks on the job. To help you learn how to do your work, EBI provides you with a series of trainings when you start and once you are on the job.

EBI has launched a comprehensive, fun, and interactive training program based on the College of Direct Support, the premier training curriculum for this field. You will be paid for the time you spend in training.



At first you will probably have a lot of questions. If you take a Community Living Assistant position with EBI, it will be important that you talk to your supervisor if you need help or if you have questions. Your co-workers and the people you support might also know answers to your questions, and you should feel free to ask them for information. EBI is committed to making you feel welcome and have the support you need to do a good job. The supervisors and the managers at EBI are can answer questions and provide you with whatever support you need.



Documentation, Communication and Following Regulations

As a Community Living Assistant your primary role is to provide daily support at home and in the community. In order to do this, there are other parts of the job that you have to attend to. These include:

- Communicating with the family members, case managers and professionals, such as nurses or physicians, of the person you support
- Using alternative communication systems that the people you support might need — for example, some people are not able to speak and therefore use communication booklets, electronic talkers, or other forms of communication. You will be trained on how to use these forms of communication as necessary.
- Writing and reading a variety of documents such as communication logs or medical logs
- Driving your own vehicle to get the people you support to places they want to go
- Attending regular training and staff meetings for EBI, which may be at times different than your regularly scheduled work hours
- Understanding and following local, state and federal rules and regulations that govern the services provided by EBI

Most of the documentation that you will be doing at EBI will be done with the people who you support. This documentation includes budgeting worksheets, daily diet logs and calendars. You will also communicate with other EBI staff via internal case notes that summarize the work that you do with clients.

Communicating expectations and your activities to someone is also useful in building and maintaining trust with the people that you support. Take into consideration the following story about Danielle.

Communication

Danielle lives alone in her own apartment and does not verbally communicate. She communicates by using a picture board as well as hand signals, facial expressions and head movements. Barbara recently began working with Danielle and is learning how to communicate with her. Danielle is learning about Barbara as much as Barbara is learning about her. Danielle is deciding whether she can trust Barbara in her home and with her personal care needs while Barbara are learning the best way to communicate with her and build a trusting relationship. Talking with other staff, Barbara finds out that Danielle has certain rituals that she uses when getting to know a new Community Living Assistant, such as telling specific stories and eating differently than normal. As Barbara develops a relationship with Danielle she also begins to understand Danielle's sense of humor and unique personality that makes working with her enjoyable and fun.



Advocacy, Empowerment and Self-Determination

As a Community Living Assistant, it will be important for you to support people with disabilities to make their own choices and decisions. Often it seems easier to get through the daily routine if you do things for people and make all of the decisions. Instead of doing this, Community Living Assistants need to learn how to offer choices in daily routines, activities and all aspects of life. Supporting people to learn about their abilities, to take control of their lives and to speak up and speak out about their preferences and strengths is an essential part of your job.

Self-Determination

On the first day of working with Andre he tells Bennett, his Community Living Assistant, that he needs to buy a pair of dress socks. Bennett drives him to the store and Andre buys the socks he wants. When they return to Andre's house Bennett goes with him to put the socks away and finds that he has a dresser drawer filled with dress socks. Bennett finds out later that one of Andre's challenges is spending money for things he does not need, leaving less money for the things that he does need, such as groceries.

The next time Andre says that he wants to buy something Bennett is careful not to say that he can't buy it, as that would go against Andre's right to make his own decisions; however, knowing that Andre has a habit of overspending money, Bennett asks more questions about why he wants to buy this particular item. Bennett's role here is also to help Andre to understand the consequences of his actions so that he can make an informed decision.

Each person has a reason for his or her actions. As a Community Living Assistant, it is important to do a thorough investigation with the person to understand their logic and reasoning. It is helpful for the person to understand their choices with the related consequences in order for them to make a good decision.

Sometimes you might teach people with developmental disabilities ways that they can take greater control over their own lives and look out for their own self-interest. This is called "self-advocacy." Teaching people to advocate on their own behalf is important to the main goal of EBI, which is to help people with developmental disabilities be as independent as possible. You will also be in situations where you will need to advocate on behalf of the people you support. This may be to helping them express an opinion about how they want to live when others do not agree with them. Over time you will learn the fine art of when to sit back and watch someone try to do something on their own and when to advocate on their behalf.

Community Inclusion and Relationships

Everyone wants to belong and to have valued roles in their community. One of your most important roles as a Community Living Assistant is learning how to support people to develop relationships in their communities. In order to do this it will help you to know what the person likes and what their preferences and strengths are.

As a Community Living Assistant you will need to develop ways of finding out what is going on in the community of the person you support. You will also need to find ways to build bridges between the person you support and his or her community.



"There's a whole part of the population out there that we don't know what kind of contribution they can make because they haven't been allowed to make one."

– Community Living Assistant

Public Spaces

Dan does not verbally communicate but he makes a variety of noises. His medications cause him to have an excess amount of saliva, which causes him to drool. He tries to wipe his mouth a lot to keep himself from drooling. Dan enjoys being outside and going to the local open-air mall. While out with Dan, Grace, his Community Living Assistant, notices that many people stare at him. Dan wants to get lunch from the food court and as Grace is helping to feed him, a young girl comes up to her and asks "what's wrong with him?" Grace tries to explain to the child that there is nothing wrong with Dan and that this is the way that he eats.

People with disabilities have a history of being excluded from mainstream society. Their presence in the community may cause people to stare or ask questions. As a Community Living Assistant you may be asked to take on the role of educating people who are not comfortable with people who appear different.

To truly be included in communities, people need to have friends, family and other people they love, respect and enjoy being with. For many people with developmental disabilities, their paid staff are the people they see and interact with the most. Therefore, one of your most important roles is to support people with disabilities in maintaining friendships, making new friends and maintaining contact with their personally defined family.

Supporting People to Have Active and Fulfilled Days

The people who you support will do different things during their days. As a Community Living Assistant you will need to be able to identify the strengths and skills of the people you support, and help them decide how to spend their days with these strengths and skills in mind.

Man's Best Friend

Phil has his own place and 24-hour support. He is very active and enjoys being out of his house. Phil used to have a dog. The dog passed away about six months ago at the age of 15. Phil misses his dog and the companionship that an animal offers. After Phil's dog passed away, one of the things that Phil missed the most was playing with the dog. Jennifer, his Community Living Assistant, suggests to Phil that they can go to the local dog park and play with the other dogs. Jennifer goes with Phil to the park and notices how much enjoyment Phil gets from playing with the dogs as well as the enjoyment that the dogs get from playing with Phil. One of the pet owners notices this also, saying, "I'm not sure who is loving this more, the dog or the person." By finding a way for Phil to continue enjoying his time with dogs, Jennifer is helping him to be active as well as introducing him to other pet lovers in his community.

You may support someone who does not have a set daily routine. In this situation, it is up to you as the Community Living Assistant to ensure that the person has a fulfilling and active day. These activities can include taking a walk, attending social events with friends and family, or going out to eat.



Supporting People with Challenging Behaviors and Using Behavior Support Plans

You may support someone with challenging behaviors. A person you support may become agitated with you or raise their voice to you. They could cross your personal boundaries by asking personal questions or asking you to do something that you are not comfortable with.

For many potential new Community Living Assistants, this sounds a little frightening. Yet, with training, new Community Living Assistants with no prior experience learn how to prevent people from displaying challenging behavior. They also learn to respond to people in ways that helps people become or stay calm. You will not be asked to work with people who have challenging behaviors without training on how to prevent these behaviors and how to handle them when they occur. Over time you may decide that you really enjoy working with people with challenging behaviors because you will play an active role in teaching them better communication and living skills, which should cause their challenging behaviors to diminish. Many people with disabilities who display challenging behaviors are able to change with support from a Community Living Assistant.

Aggressive Behaviors

Felicia is very sweet and Tina, her Community Living Assistant, enjoys her time supporting her. Tina knows that Felicia has some emotional problems that she is working on, in addition to medical problems that cause her pain. Some days Felicia is not in a good mood, which can lead to her yelling and throwing objects. Tina decides to talk with Felicia's other support staff about strategies and techniques to prevent her aggressive behaviors. Tina learns that one of the coping skills that Felicia has is to squeeze a stress ball when she is feeling anxious or out of control. The longer Tina works with Felicia the more she is able to identify the signs that she is not feeling well and encourages her to use her coping skills to prevent challenging behaviors.

Supporting People with Health Care Needs, Medication Administration and Medical Appointments

EBI supports many people who have physical disabilities and need assistance with such things as getting out of a bed and into a wheelchair, getting out of a wheelchair and onto a toilet, or getting out of a wheelchair and into a bathtub. In many situations you will have equipment to assist you in supporting these individuals. If you support people with these types of needs, it will be important that you are able to lift 50 pounds or more. Some individuals may also need assistance with all of their self-care needs, including help in changing adult disposable diapers (Depends). It is important that you maintain the privacy and dignity of the people you support when you are providing this type of support.

Depending on the needs of the people that you support, Community Living Assistants may be expected to take a course in medication administration (to learn how to give injections, for example), first aid, and CPR. Once trained, you may give prescribed medications to people.

You will also be responsible for monitoring the general health and safety of all the people whom you support. On occasion, you might be asked to take a person to a medical or dental appointment. It is extremely important that people do not miss these appointments, so you must be on time (usually 10-15 minutes before a scheduled appointment). For each appointment, you will need to be prepared to speak with medical professionals by reviewing the person's medical notes and other information before the appointment, and writing follow-up notes after the appointment.



Being Aware

One night June, a Community Living Assistant, notices that the dosage of one of Peter's medications has been changed, but she does not see the EBI paperwork that is required when medication changes. June is worried about giving him the medication without consulting someone to confirm the dosage amount. She calls the emergency pager number to speak with a supervisor at EBI and let them know of the situation. The supervisor tells June to hold off on giving the medication until she makes some phone calls and calls back. While June waits, she gives Peter his nightly bath and helps him get ready for bed. The supervisor then calls her back, stating that there is no record of his medication being changed and to give the original dosage. The supervisor states that she will follow up with the appropriate people the next day to make sure that the dosage is correct and that the paperwork is in order.

Documentation is important in communication between Community Living Assistants and other people in the person's life.

Work Environment

Community Living Assistants spend their days in the homes and communities of the people they support. Your days are filled with a variety of activities and you spend most of your work time interacting with the people who you support and other members of their support network. On a daily basis, you will not have a lot of face-to-face time with other Community Living Assistants or your supervisors. It is important to take this aspect of the job into consideration when deciding whether or not this job is a good fit for you.

EBI works to provide support to their Community Living Assistants through a variety of meetings and trainings when Community Living Assistants can connect with co-workers and talk about the challenges and rewards they are experiencing. Community Living Assistants can also get support from supervisors by phone.

What Type of Person Makes a Good Community Living Assistant?

"I wanted to be in a job where I was relating, where I could readily see that what I was doing meant something to someone."

-Community Living Assistant explaining the reason for joining EBI

How do you know you will be good at being a Community Living Assistant? Here are some of the traits of a good Community Living Assistant:

- Reliable
- Patient
- Caring and compassionate
- Honest and loyal
- Accepting of others as they are
- Flexible
- Independent and creative
- Hard working and cooperative
- Interested in learning
- Good at communicating with others
- Respectful of other people

What Type of Person Should Avoid Becoming a Community Living Assistant?

Being a Community Living Assistant to people with disabilities is a difficult job. It is likely not the job for you if you:

- Need to work a fixed daily schedule
 - Want your work day to be nearly the same every day
 - Have difficulty with change
 - Prefer to have a supervisor with you at all times
 - If you are looking for "just a job"
 - If you are applying just because you can't find another job that pays as much
-

What Community Living Assistants Say

What Rewards Do Community Living Assistants Have on Their Jobs?

- “I like doing this job because I feel like I should be giving something back and I can do that here.”
- “I have a great time...it doesn't seem like work when I'm having so much fun.”
- “I love that the people I work with are open to my energy.”

What Challenges Do Community Living Assistants Have on Their Jobs?

- “Probably the hardest thing to do around here is the housework.”
- “If you're not used to having to deal with bodily fluid messes that could be a turn off.”
- “It can be challenging if you don't understand what someone is trying to tell you.”

Is Being a Community Living Assistant for You?

It is important for you to think about what you have learned in this realistic job preview. Ask yourself this question:

Is this work really for me?

When you work as a Community Living Assistant people depend on you. It is important that you make sure this is a job you want to do.

Remember to answer these questions before making a decision to accept a position as a Community Living Assistant:

- What attributes do you think will make you a good candidate for working as a Community Living Assistant?
- What challenges do you think you will face as a Community Living Assistant? What supports will you need to deal with these challenges?
- Which parts of the job do you think you will enjoy the most?
- What about working for EBI appeals to you?

Learn more about EBI and the other services we provide by visiting EBI's website at www.eastbayinnovations.org

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about EBI and the services we provide for people with developmental disabilities.

Credits and Thanks

Special thank you to the Community Living Assistants and staff who shared their experiences and to the people who they support.

Many of the photos are of real Community Living Assistants and the people who they support. Permission for these photos was obtained from each person and the staff who support them. These photos cannot be used for purposes other than as they are used here without prior written permission.

