



Welcome to the Realistic Job Preview for the Independent Living Services Instructor!

We are so glad that you are interested in a position as an Independent Living Services (ILS) Instructor 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 an ILS Instructor 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 ILS Instructors 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 an ILS Instructor are
- What staff training opportunities are available at EBI
- What current ILS Instructors say about their jobs

This job preview includes stories of ILS Instructors and the people they support. These stories are based on situations that you may confront as an ILS Instructor. 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 the 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 an ILS Instructor?
- What challenges do you think you will face as an ILS Instructor? 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 an ILS Instructor.

What is the Role of the ILS Instructor?

Independent Living Services (ILS) are available to people who need up to 40 hours per month of help to live safely on their own. Typically services consist of one-on-one teaching in the person's home. Training and support services are expected to decrease as the individual gains independence.

ILS Instructors support and assist people with developmental disabilities (such as cognitive/intellectual disabilities or autism) who wish to live in a home of their own. ILS Instructors (also called "direct support workers") provide one-to-one help on a wide variety of everyday tasks and teach the client to do these tasks themselves if they are able. The goal of direct support work is to help people stay as independent as possible. Your specific duties will be based on the needs and interests of the people you support, and could include the following:

- Cooking meals
- Cleaning
- Shopping
- Menu planning
- Money management (e.g. banking and budgeting)
- Helping the person you support use public transportation
- Finding recreational activities for the person you support
- Helping the person you support schedule and get to medical and dental appointments
- Finding out about community programs and benefits the person you support could use
- Helping the person you support be safe at home and in the community
- Helping the person you support make new friends
- Helping the person you support participate in community organizations and places of worship, if he or she desires
- Running errands, such as going to the bank, grocery store, laundromat, or doctor.

Direct support is about giving people with disabilities whatever support they need to have fun and live fulfilled lives of their choosing. It may also be about working with families and other people who care about the person you support.



Job Requirements for Independent Living Services Instructors

There are just a few requirements for getting a job as an ILS Instructor. 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 California 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, and weekends is important. Although you will not work more than 8 hours per day, your work hours could be any time between 9am and 7pm during the week (in order to support clients who may be working their own 8-hour shift). This means that you could work 9am to 5pm one day and 11am to 7pm the following day.

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 an ILS Instructor. 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 Independent Living Services.

About the Support You Will Provide



As an ILS Instructor, you will assist each person on a one-to-one basis, and your job duties will be different for each person. What you might support one person to do, another person may already be able to do independently. You might support one person with grocery shopping for healthy foods, cooking meals, house cleaning, or doing laundry. For others, you may be helping with exercising, budgeting, making medical appointments, finding social activities or organizing their medications. Each person has their own strengths, preferences and support needs and these will change over time. One of the rewards of working as an ILS Instructor is to witness the accomplishments that people make in their lives and recognize your role in their successes.

Acknowledging Accomplishments and Setting Future Goals

George supports Erika with such things as making doctor's appointments and making sure that her prescriptions are refilled. One day George picks Erika up from her job and asks about how her day was and what she did. She smiles and asks him "guess what I did yesterday?" She tells George that she refilled her prescriptions last night on her own. She is very excited that she did this and George recognizes this accomplishment. She describes to George her fears and what she was thinking when she was making the call and how great she felt when she completed the call and had refilled the prescriptions.

Later in the day, Erika tells George that she needs to make a routine doctor's appointment. George asks her if she would like to call and make the appointment herself. She says that she is not ready to do that. George asks her for permission to use her calendar to make the appointment, with her at his side, to make sure that they both agree on the appointment date and time. Not only is George including her in making the appointment but he is also modeling for her how to do it so that she may become more comfortable with doing this task next time.

Being an ILS Instructor comes with many responsibilities but is 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 providing direct support to people with disabilities is a fulfilling and enjoyable career.

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, and weekends. 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 ILS Instructors 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 ILS Instructors.

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

Training

There is a lot to learn in direct support work. Because of this, new ILS Instructors 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 an ILS Instructor 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 and Following Regulations



The people you support may keep daily records to keep track of things such as money, what they eat, and their medications. One of your roles as an ILS Instructor may be to review their records or journals with them.

As an ILS Instructor 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. Together, you will complete things like budgeting worksheets, daily diet journals, and calendars. You will also communicate with other EBI staff via internal case notes that summarize the work that you do with clients.

Reporting Income

Carina, one of the people that Monica supports, works part-time at a grocery store. Carina also receives income and medical benefits through the Social Security Administration based on her low income and her disability. Carina asks Monica to help her in reporting her wages to Social Security, as required by the eligibility requirements. Together, Carina and Monica complete the necessary reporting forms. It is very important for Monica, as her ILS Instructor, understands the eligibility requirements and works with Carina to make sure that she follows the rules to avoid losing these benefits.

ILS Instructors are trained to understand how jobs and earned income impact the public benefits that the people they support receive. You can also use your supervisor as a resource to ask questions and get guidance if you have questions.

Advocacy, Empowerment and Self-Determination

As an ILS Instructor, 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, ILS Instructors 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.



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 helping them express an opinion about how they want to live when others do not agree with them. It may be to help them buy something in a store when a salesperson is not responding adequately. 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.

The Fine Art of Self-Determination

Phil is a very social and outgoing person who lives alone in his own apartment. Phil uses ILS services to assist him with a variety of activities. Every week George, his ILS Instructor, helps him do his banking and shopping. George meets him at his apartment, drives him to a nearby office to pick up his weekly check, drives him to the bank to cash the check and drives him to the grocery store to buy food for the week.

The teller at the bank knows Phil because he comes in every week and is very social. The teller suggests opening an account, using direct deposit, and getting an ATM card so he will not have to go to the bank every week.

Phil is interested about this option and asks George if he should open an account. George begins a conversation with Phil about the pros and cons of opening an account. George expresses concern because Phil has a history of spending his weekly checks on things other than groceries. This has left him without sufficient food by the end of the week. Phil states that he wants to open an account, explaining that he is older now and should be able to make this decision. In following the ILS philosophy of consumer choice and the right for people to make their decisions, George sits back and supports Phil’s decision to open a bank account.

George keeps the conversation open and shows his concern by occasionally asking Phil whether or not he wants to talk about his decision to get an ATM card. Phil expresses excitement about getting an ATM card, understands the steps he needs to get one, and makes it clear that he does not want to talk more about it. Phil respects his decision and notifies his supervisor at the end of the day about what happened.

Community Inclusion and Relationships

Everyone wants to belong and to have valued roles in their community. One of your most important roles as an ILS Instructor 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 an ILS Instructor 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.

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 an ILS Instructor 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.

Community Inclusion

Dan has been living in the same town for a number of years. He talks with many people and knows everyone at the grocery store, library, and other places that he often goes to in the community. Peter, his ILS Instructor, spends a lot of his time with Dan, encouraging him to develop and maintain these relationships. Peter supports Dan by talking to Dan about his relationships and role rehearsing with him on situations that Dan is not sure how to handle. It is through these relationships that Dan becomes an active member of his community.



Supporting People to Have Active and Fulfilled Days

The people who you support will do different things during their days. As an ILS Instructor 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.

You may support someone who does not have a set daily routine. In this situation, it is up to you as the ILS Instructor 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.

Not Everybody Likes Surprises

Paul is independent and active in his community. He has an ILS Instructor to support him with driving from work, making and attending appointments, and doing other errands. Paul has specific expectations about how and when activities should be done. His ILS Instructor, Brandy, is aware that when something happens out of the routine or does not match Paul's expectations, he becomes concerned and anxious. In order to reduce Paul's anxiety, Brandy tries to break down the steps of what is going to happen. Ways that she does this include laying out what will happen step by step; asking Paul how he feels about the next event; asking for his permission before doing something; and giving him a reason when she does something new or different. It is also helpful when she lets Paul know about upcoming events or activities so that he is not surprised.

It is not possible to predict everything that will happen but you may be able to think ahead to help the person you support to step out of their routine and still feel comfortable. This can be a key part in helping people cope with new situations.

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 person questions or asking you to do something that you are not comfortable with.

For many potential new ILS Instructors, this sounds a little frightening. Yet, with training, many new ILS Instructors with no prior experience learn how to prevent people from displaying challenging behavior. They also learn to respond to people in a way that helps people become or stay calm. You will not be asked to work with people who have challenging behaviors without knowledge or specific training on how to prevent these situations and how to handle them when they occur. Over time you may decide that you really enjoy working with people with challenging behavior 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 an ILS Instructor.

Repetitive Behaviors

John frequently swears when telling stories or when expressing emotion. He curses both when he is upset and when he is happy about something. John goes with his ILS Instructor, Janet, to the grocery store. While he is telling a story he starts to swear. Janet asks John to pay attention to his choice of words and offers substitutions of other words for John to use. Janet also reminds John that there could be children around and how important it is to be careful about what language he chooses to use. John understands the importance watching his language. John and Janet go to the library to research local events and he begins to swear as he is telling a story. Janet again reminds John about not swearing in public. John tells Janet that he forgot and stops swearing. John forgets to watch the language but with a reminder from Janet he remembers and changes his language.

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

Depending on the needs of the people that you support, ILS Instructors may be expected to take a course in medication administration and first aid. Once trained, you may be responsible for administering medications to the people you support.

You will also be responsible for monitoring the general health and safety of all the people 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. You must be certain that they are 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 prior to the appointment. You must also complete follow-up after the appointment, including accurate documentation.

Work Environment



ILS Instructors 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 ILS Instructors or your supervisors. It is important to take this aspect into consideration when deciding whether this job is for you.

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

What Type of Person Makes a Good ILS Instructor?

How do you know you will be good at being an ILS Instructor? Here are some of the traits of a good ILS Instructor:

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

What Type of Person Should Avoid Becoming an ILS Instructor?

Being an ILS Instructor 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 only because you can't find another job that pays as much

What ILS Instructors Say

What Rewards Do ILS Instructors Have on Their Jobs?

- “I love seeing people progress and achieve things. You see how people change and accomplish things.”
- “I like the unpredictability of it.”
- “I love interacting and relating to the people that I work with.”

What Challenges Do ILS Instructors Have on Their Jobs?

- “The philosophy of ILS is for people to be independent. That is what our job is about. But it’s hard sometimes to do that, help someone be independent and make their own decision and watch them do something that you wouldn’t do.”
- “Patience. I thought I had a lot of patience until I started this job and then I wondered how could someone with less patience do this?”
- “People don’t know what you do as an ILS Instructor.”

Is Being an ILS Instructor 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 really for me?

When you work as an ILS Instructor people depend on you. It is important that you make sure this is something that this is a job you want to do.

Remember to answer these questions before making a decision to accept a position as an ILS Instructor:

- What attributes do you think will make you a good candidate for working as an ILS Instructor?
- What challenges do you think you will face as an ILS Instructor? 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 ILS Instructors and staff who shared their experiences and to the people who they support.

Many of the photos are of real ILS Instructors 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.

