



▶ SUPPORTING AN ACTIVE LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY .....1



▶ WALKING THE NEIGHBORHOOD.....2



▶ WAYS TO CONNECT & ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTS AND LEISURE

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# The Safety Net

A PUBLICATION OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

PROMOTING CHOICE AND OPTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## Supporting an Active Life in the Community

Living a life that includes friends and meaningful activities is important for everyone. Having friends to talk to about your experiences, and to relax and have fun with, can alleviate stress and reduce feelings of isolation and boredom. Participating in activities that allow you to learn new things and experience success keeps your mind and body active, and helps develop a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. Having friends and participating in meaningful community activities can support positive mental health.

We can all agree that these things are important for people with developmental disabilities. However, as a direct support professional (DSP) you may confront barriers when you try to help the people you support to live active lives in the community. For example, you may find it challenging to:

- Arrange appropriate transportation to and from community activities
- Make sure that activities are accessible to people with developmental disabilities
- Pay for people to attend classes or events they would like
- Communicate with the individual about what activities they would find enjoyable.

Here are some resources that may help you overcome some of these barriers:

### Transportation Resources

Paratransit services are required by the ADA for individuals with disabilities who are unable to use fixed route transportation systems. You can find a free handout from The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund that explains how to apply for paratransit services at the link below:

- [http://www.dredf.org/transportation/paratransit\\_eligibility.html](http://www.dredf.org/transportation/paratransit_eligibility.html)

### Accessibility Resources

The following websites provide information about assistive technology, advocacy, and other accessibility issues:

- Protection and Advocacy in California—<http://www.pai-ca.org>
- The Assistive Technology Network—<http://www.atnet.org/>
- California Foundation for Independent Living Centers—<http://www.cfilc.org/>

### Communications Resources

The Consumer Advisory Committee provides tools to help people with developmental disabilities think about their life satisfaction and communicate their choices. These free tools are available online:

- Consumer Advisory Committee Publications—<http://www.dds.ca.gov/Consumer/Publications.cfm>



### Ways to Connect

As a DSP, you can help the people you support find new ways to participate in their community.

You can:

- ✓ Check your local newspaper for a weekly listing of low cost activities and events.
- ✓ Use the telephone book to find your city's Parks and Recreation Department or Adult Education program. Call them and ask for information on upcoming classes and activities.
- ✓ Contact local theaters or museums to see if they have free or low-cost programs, or if they need volunteers.
- ✓ Find a list of local religious congregations. They often have welcoming activities and volunteer opportunities.
- ✓ Contact community service agencies and local government officials to see if they need volunteers.



## Walking the Neighborhood

How much do you and the people you support know about your neighborhood? It is easy to get so busy that we forget to pay attention to what is right in front of us. But, by finding things to do in your own neighborhood, the people you support can walk or use the facility vehicle to get to community activities. They won't have to rely on (or pay for) public transportation.

A fun activity for you to try with people you support is to "walk" the neighborhood. This can be done by actually walking (great exercise!) or by driving slowly in a van or car.

Start by walking (or driving) around the block. You may see houses, a grocery store, or the local coffee shop. Help the person you support draw a map showing what you found.

Now expand your search by walking around several blocks, with your home in the middle. You may notice a park, a library, or a community service organization. Add this information to your neighborhood map.

If you see a park, check out what activities take place there. Are there Little League baseball games? You and the people you support could go and cheer on a team. If you see a library, go inside. Ask if they have books on tape, movies, or reading hours.

If you pass a religious congregation, stop in and ask about their services and activities. They may have a group for young adults, or older people. You don't have to be a member of the congregation to participate.

You can walk your neighborhood as many times as you like, taking different streets each time, and finding new ways to connect with community.

## FYI: Resource Links for Better Living



For more ideas on how you can support individuals' active involvement in the community, visit the following websites:

Best Buddies California: Matching individuals with disabilities with friends in the community  
[www.bestbuddiescalifornia.org](http://www.bestbuddiescalifornia.org)

Special Olympics Northern California  
[www.sonc.org](http://www.sonc.org)

Special Olympics Southern California  
[www.sosc.org](http://www.sosc.org)

The Life Steps Foundation: A self-advocacy and supportive services organization  
[www.lifestepsfoundation.org](http://www.lifestepsfoundation.org)

People First California: A self-advocacy and self-help organization for people with disabilities  
[www.peoplefirstca.org](http://www.peoplefirstca.org)

Making and Keeping Friends: A Self-Help Guide  
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SMA-3716/default.asp>

## Arts and Leisure: Opportunities Online

Creative arts, such as drawing or painting, writing (poetry, stories, or articles), dancing, and acting are great ways for individuals with developmental disabilities to express themselves, meet new people, and get involved with their communities. Below are two organizations in California that work to connect people with disabilities to the world of the arts.

- o **The National Arts and Disability Center** (<http://nadc.ucla.edu/index.cfm>)  
This organization maintains a resource library including information about arts programs, classes, and performances by and for those with disabilities. They also have an online gallery of visual and literary art by people with disabilities. If someone you support would like to be included in the gallery, there is a submission form on their website!
- o **VSA Arts of California** (<http://www.vsacalifornia.org>)  
This organization works to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the arts and to arts training. They support an online Artists Community (no fee required), which provides opportunities for support, advocacy, and arts career advancement to artists with disabilities in the State of California. The application to join the VSA Artists Community is on their website!

*Check out [www.ddssafety.net](http://www.ddssafety.net) for more information that can help individuals with developmental disabilities live healthier and happier lives!  
The site is translated into Spanish and Tagalog!  
...Just log on and tell us what you think....*