



PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES  
INFORMATION FOR  
PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

## **UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS USED IN THIS INFORMATION**

**PERSONAL ASSISTANCE**-the help provided to a disabled person  
**PERSONAL ASSISTANT (PA)**-people who provide help to disabled people  
**PA USER**-people who use ILA's services

### **INTRODUCTION**

Independent Living Alternatives (ILA) was established in May 1989 and is managed by people who use the services provided by the organisation. ILA promotes independence and freedom for disabled people. ILA aims to enable people who need personal assistance to be able to live independently in the community and take full control of their lives and thereby have individuality and spontaneity. ILA recruits personal assistants and establishes the personal assistance as a direct part of an individual's life.

ILA provides Personal Assistants (PAs) to people who need personal assistance in day-to-day living; people generally classified by society as having 'severe disabilities' and who need a constant and high level of personal assistance. ILA does not work with people who are ill, but people who have physical limitations in their lives.

Within society it is taken for granted that, as adults, we make our own decisions. It is natural that we decide when we get up or go to bed, when we have a bath or go to the toilet, whether we work or play, whether we have a night on the town or stay in and watch television, however, this right is denied to many disabled people. Even today for some disabled people who need personal assistance, the options for existence are limited. Disabled people are often sentenced to being second-class citizens and viewed by society as being in-valid.

Disabled people do not have to live like this, there are practical options for independence. A distinction must be made between disability and society. The majority of problems faced by disabled people are socially constructed and do not have to exist. For example, stairs, buses and shops can be physical barriers for people who use wheelchairs. Disability must be seen as a part of an individual and accepted in a positive manner and not be seen as something abnormal, it must be accepted in the same way as race, sexuality and gender. ILA is showing that with the right support disabled people do live independent lives.



Ms Smith has a muscular disability, which means that she has a general weakness in her muscles. She doesn't walk and uses an electric wheelchair. She needs help to get dressed, go to the toilet and have a bath. She also needs help at work with lifting books and someone to drive her to meetings. During the night she needs someone to help her change her sleeping position.

Mr Jones has cerebral palsy and as a result has little control over his arms and legs. He is often seen as being stupid because he has a speech impairment, but he is actually studying for a degree in sociology. He needs help to get dressed and to do the cooking and housework. He needs someone to push his wheelchair and to take notes at university.

ILA PA users live ordinary lives in the community. They interact with and contribute to society as do non-disabled people. They have the responsibilities and commitments considered as being 'correct' for their age and status. Yet in their lives they have all experienced denial of freedom and still face prejudice and discrimination. They have a strong sense of commitment to their own rights and self-acceptance, which is fuelled by a determination to develop themselves within society. With the right support there is no reason why a disabled person cannot live independently and develop their own potential.

## **THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT PROFILE**

**What is a Personal Assistant?** A Personal Assistant (PA) is not a carer or nurse. The role of a Personal Assistant is to follow the instruction and direction of the disabled person, known as a Personal Assistant User (PA User), to enable that individual to live independently in the manner in which they choose.

### **A Personal Assistant must:**

- Respect and maintain strict confidentiality
- Be open minded and have a flexible attitude
- Have an understanding of and a commitment to disability equality
- Have an understanding of the role of a PA
- Take direction from PA User and work in accordance with the PA User's wishes
- Have good verbal and written communication skills
- Know when to use their initiative and when to take a back seat
- Be reliable and punctual
- Be able to prepare and cook basic meals
- Be willing to provide personal care
- Be willing to perform domestic tasks, e.g. ironing, cleaning, washing clothes.
- Be willing to undertake training relevant to their work
- A full and clean driving licence is useful, but not essential. You do not need to have your own a vehicle.

The skills that ILA looks for in a PA are an ability to follow the direction and instruction of the PA User as opposed to someone who can go in and take over. In our experience someone who is open-minded and flexible is preferable to someone with a wealth of previous "care" orientated experience.

### **What are the terms and conditions?**

**Hours:** the hours of work vary from post to post, starting at a few hours per week to working blocks of 1 or 2 weeks

**Salary:** from £8.50 per hour plus holiday pay and pension contribution where applicable – there are also opportunities for over time

**Annual Leave:** 5.6 weeks pro rata

**The main duties of a PA may include any or all of the following:**

- Providing intimate personal care which includes going to the toilet, having a bath, putting on and taking off clothes, repositioning, moving arms and feet into comfortable positions, etc
- Providing non-intimate personal support, which includes picking things up, making coffee, washing up, fetching lunch, housework, cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc
- Driving to and from college, work, school appointments and meetings, etc
- Pushing a wheelchair, opening doors, carrying items, etc
- Accompanying someone to a meeting, the doctor, shopping, cinema, etc
- Taking and typing up notes at meetings
- Answering the telephone
- Typing letters
- Making/changing the bed
- Assistance with physiotherapy/exercising
- Assistance with medication
- Managing correspondence
- Assisting with literacy and/or numeracy

## PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

This information is designed to help potential personal assistants to decide if they would like to work for ILA. Although each placement is unique and very much about individuals there are many common features and shared experiences.



ILA places a personal assistant (PA) with a disabled person needing personal assistance. A PA becomes part of someone's life providing personal, physical and practical assistance when necessary, in an atmosphere of equality; not as a 'carer' or 'facilitator'. There are no particular qualifications needed to be a PA except an open mind and an empathy with the philosophy of the organisation and the disability rights movement.

The role of a PA is to provide personal assistance to disabled people to enable a PA user to live independently. The relationship between PA user and PA is complex and unique. Both PA users and PAs are dependent on each other, as fundamentally one cannot survive without the other. Within this relationship both PA user and PA can expect to be treated with respect and equality. The most essential criterion to enable a successful placement is communication between both PA user and PA.

PAs provide personal assistance to people to assist in every day living. They help to do simple things like getting dressed, going to the toilet, washing, dressing, cooking, driving, shopping, etc. PAs do not need any experience as all the training is provided by the PA user with regular support from ILA staff.

A placement is about equality and flexibility. However, because ILA is working with individuals there are no hard and fast rules and no fully defined roles.

*Working for ILA has given me an understanding of the problems faced by disabled people and an insight into myself working in a one-to-one situation.*

*Joe*

Starting a new placement is usually stressful for PA users and PAs. People are always apprehensive and it takes time to get to know each other and to learn what is involved in the placement. As a PA, at first, you will no doubt find providing personal assistance a little daunting and possibly frustrating. This is a common experience, but you will quickly overcome it. You will be learning many new techniques, from

how to dress someone to how to charge a wheelchair battery, from using a hoist to emptying a urine bag.

*The only aspect of the physical support that really bothered me was helping the PA user go to the loo. Helping someone go to toilet is one of society's strongest taboos, but like all the other things, I quickly got used to it.*

*Pete*

A PA is not provided as a servant or a master and nor is the PA user. Respect and accept the PA user for what s/he is and the PA user will accept you for what you are. Be free to be yourself, say what you feel, but try not to judge, impose or control. Also remember you have your own time to live your life, a PA user is always dependent on having someone to assist in their daily life.

You will see a PA user's life with all its rough edges. There are few secrets and as the placement progresses you will learn much about each other, bear in mind that there are things that happen in a placement that are confidential. PAs share a PA user's ups and downs, successes and failures, you will be interacting with a PA user's friends, family, colleagues and lovers. Some people you will like and others you will not.

People need their own space, always remember that you both need space and you will not always be needed: understand that sometimes, particularly in the case of close relationships, three people can be a crowd. Good communication is the essence of a successful placement.

## **APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

### **RETURNING AN APPLICATION FORM**



Applicants must complete an application form. The form is used to assess an applicant's suitability for working with ILA. The application form is also shown to PA users to enable them to decide if they feel an applicant is suitable to work with them.

Please complete the application form in black ink as it will be photocopied and include as much information as possible to assist ILA in deciding your suitability for working with the organisation. CVs and resumes are not considered.

### **PROVIDING REFERENCES**

ILA will write to your referees and ask them to complete a form on your suitability to work with the organisation.

A referee must be an employer or a tutor. Your friends and family are not acceptable as referees.

### **INTERVIEW**

You may be invited to ILA for an informal interview. This meeting is to explain further how ILA works and gives you an opportunity to ask questions about the organisation. It is also for ILA to find out more about you and determine your suitability to work for the organisation.



### **PA USERS**

Application forms are passed to PA users so that they may select the applicants that they wish to interview.

### **2ND INTERVIEW**

This interview is usually held in a PA user's home. A strong preference is given to applicants who are prepared to attend this interview in person.

### **PLACEMENT**

When both a PA user and an applicant are happy to work together an offer of a placement is made to the applicant. There is a one month probation period on all of ILA's placements.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING ALTERNATIVES  
ROWLANDSON HOUSE  
289/293 BALLARDS LANE  
LONDON  
N12 8NP**

**TEL: 020 8369 6032**

**FAX: 020 8959 1910**

**EMAIL: [PA Services@ILAnet.co.uk](mailto:PA Services@ILAnet.co.uk)**

**EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS:**

**07540704369/07540704370**

**TRACEY JANNAWAY:**

**DIRECTOR**

**ILDIKO KORTE:**

**PA CO-ORDINATOR**

**ALEXANDRA BAYLES/MONIKA GRIVNOVA:**

**ADMINISTRATORS**

**MELISSA TURNER:**

**ADVOCATE**

**ILA is a registered charity number: 802198**

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