



## **Virginia Support Service Provider (SSP) Pilot Project Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What does the term deafblind mean?**

According to the National Center on Deaf-Blindness, it is defined as hearing loss accompanied by vision loss, the combination of which impacts the effectiveness of communication, education, or development. This term may also be written as DeafBlind, deaf-blind, or Deaf-Blind.

### **What is a Support Service Provider (SSP)?**

The American Association of the Deaf-Blind ([AADB](#)) explains “Support service providers (SSPs) relay visual and environmental information, act as sighted guides and facilitate communication for people who are deafblind, using the deafblind person's preferred language and communication mode. SSPs enable deafblind persons to access their communities and connect with other people, reducing communication barriers that otherwise would result in social isolation, incapability to live independently, and inability to participate as citizens within mainstream society.”

### **What is the Virginia Support Service Provider (SSP) Pilot Project?**

This two-year, grant funded pilot project is to train providers on how to perform SSP duties, train deafblind Participants how to utilize SSPs, and coordinate assignments of SSPs to individuals who are deafblind to establish a successful provider/client interaction.

### **What are the goals of the SSP Pilot Project?**

Over two years, the Project plans to 1) develop program policies and procedures for participant selection; 2) train up to 50 SSP candidates on duties and responsibilities, as well as train up to 30 deafblind Participants on how to effectively utilize SSPs; 3) develop and maintain a listing of qualified SSPs that will be made available to deafblind consumers; 4) coordinate the deafblind consumer-

directed SSP hiring process and ensure that the consumer is able to hire an SSP of their choice.

### **How long will the Project last?**

This grant funded project will be conducted from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2024. If sustainable funding support can be identified after 2024, the Pilot Project may become a permanent Program under VDDHH.

### **Why do we need a SSP program?**

VDDHH promotes accessible communication so that persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing may fully participate in programs, services and opportunities throughout the Commonwealth. People who are deafblind often experience social isolation, lack of independence and mobility, un- and under-employment, lack of access to information in community settings, and difficulty performing daily activities, all due to their dual vision and hearing loss<sup>1</sup>

### **Who can participate in the SSP Pilot Project?**

Deafblind applicants and SSP candidates will be screened to make sure they meet minimum qualifications. Deafblind Participants must be deafblind individuals who live in Virginia, are at least 18 years of age, capable of self-determined decision making, and who can attend a mandatory training. SSP candidates must be Virginians who are at least 18 years of age, hold a driver's license and insurance, can attend mandatory training, can pass a criminal background check, and have some sign language proficiency.

### **How do DB Participants and SSPs benefit from the Project?**

Deafblind Participants will receive limited SSP services during their participation of the Project at no cost to them. Individuals interested in becoming SSPs will receive training in the form of a for-credit college course at no cost to them, provided through partnership with Reynolds Community College. Trained SSPs can be paid for providing services to the deafblind Participants.

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<sup>1</sup> [Jaiswal, et al., 2018](#)

**What training is involved for deafblind Participants and SSPs?**

Deafblind Participants must attend a mandatory Orientation workshop onsite in the summer. SSP trainees must attend and successfully complete a for-credit college course during the summer session, including a combination of online learning and mandatory hands-on training. The training cost is covered by the Project grant.

**Where does the funding for SSP Pilot Project come from?**

Funding for this project/product is supported, in part, by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), under grant number 2201VASCDD, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL or VBPD policy. The Project received a two-year grant award from VBPD in the amount of \$214,450, and VDDHH and its partners are matching those funds with \$86,821 in-kind contribution.

**Who are our Project partners?**

VDDHH is partnering with the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and Reynolds Community College, along with community stakeholders.

**Where can I find more information about the SSP Pilot Project?**

Questions about the Project can be emailed to [ssp@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:ssp@vddhh.virginia.gov).