

Strengthening Access Through Support Service Providers and Co-Navigators

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Learner Outcomes:

Upon completion of this training participants will be able to:

- Define the role of Support Service Providers (SSPs) and Co-Navigators (CN).
- Describe at least two ways SSP/CN services support independence and community participation for DeafBlind individuals.
- Summarize at least two features of successful SSP/CN programs from other states, including one funding or infrastructure strategy.

Terms: SSP or CN?

You will hear the terms Support Service Provider (SSP) and Co-Navigator (CN) used interchangeably in this presentation.

The DeafBlind Community is evolving their preferences and terminology around the role. At HKNC our obligation is to respect the terms determined by each individual program.

The purpose of the presentation today is to illustrate the essential service that SSPs/CNs provide.

What is an SSP/CN?

An SSP/CN is a specially trained individual who provides access and information to DeafBlind individuals.

This service enables DeafBlind people to be more fully engaged and efficient in the community and allows them to make informed choices and decisions about their life.

Core Responsibilities of the SSP/CN

- Provide access to visual & environmental information
- Provide human guide and orientation to the environment
- Facilitate communication

Possible SSP/CN Activities

- Health and Well Being
- Social
- Education (Post-Secondary/Training)
- Employment
- Household Management
- Community Integration

SSP/CNs Do NOT

- Teach
- Perform chores
- Care for individual
- Interpret
- Provide rides only
- Make decisions for the DeafBlind individual

Methods

- Sign
- Speech
- Text
- Touch (Haptics/Protactile)

Often a combination of methods are used

Unique Roles and Boundaries

But isn't an SSP/CN just a glorified interpreter? Is it an Intervener?

Interpreters, interveners, and SSPs/CNs share the goal of increasing access and independence but have distinct responsibilities.

Let's compare interpreters, interveners, SSP/CN and family members.

Interpreter and SSP/CN

Interpreter

- Focuses on accurate language access between parties that (typically) do not speak the same language.
- Relationship does not extend past interpretation.
- Works in educational, community, employment, medical, legal, and other environments.
- Completes coursework with intensive evaluation to show mastery of at least ASL and English and the process of interpreting.
- Has a national code of ethics and certifying body.

SSP/CN

- Supports DeafBlind adults in community and everyday life activities.
- Facilitates communication and provides human guide services.
- Assists with errands, social events, travel, and community participation.
- Relationship may be more flexible and individualized.
- Can be volunteer or paid, depending on the program and arrangement.
- Requires specialized training related to DeafBlind access

Facilitating Communication

- SSPs/CNs are not interpreters
- Interpreting verses facilitating communication
- Exchanging information accurately, efficiently & impartially

Certified and Qualified Interpreters

- Be aware of when interpreting services are required
- ADA: federal civil rights law, enacted in 1990
- Interpreting services required:
 - Law enforcement
 - Medical settings
 - Legal appointments
 - Complex content

Intervener and SSP/CN

Intervener

- Supports DeafBlind students in educational settings
- Eligible in the community in Texas through Waiver services
- Provides access to communication, environmental information, and learning opportunities.
- Facilitates social, emotional, and developmental growth.
- Focus on independence and self-determination.
- Requires specialized training related to DeafBlind education.

SSP/CN

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Interveners Continued

- Interveners in the educational system
- Interveners in the community
- Interveners provide supported decision-making
- Interveners provide information for supporting comprehension
- Interveners typically work consistently; a relationship is established
- Families are requesting Interveners!

Family Impacts

- DeafBlind - isolating condition
- Children lose incidental learning
- DeafBlind - an access disability
- Interveners as a related service = Interpreter for Deaf
- SSPs/CNs and Interveners provide **access**
- Most family members not skilled Interveners or SSPs/CNs
- Children fall behind
- Adults depend on state funding
- Loss of privacy and autonomy

Comparing Roles at a Glance

Interpreter: Provides communication access across settings

Intervener: Provides educational access for students or community-based services for those who have additional disabilities and/or qualify through developmental disability services.

SSP/CN: Community access and independent living support for adults.

Important Note: Family members do not fill these roles out of respect, dignity, privacy and autonomy of the individual.

Access Changes Daily Life

“People who are DeafBlind face unique and complex challenges every day in accessing information, communication, transportation, and their communities. Without readily available access to these foundations of everyday life, the ability to make informed decisions, remain independent, and perform daily living tasks may be compromised. Basic human needs may go unmet and essential human aspects of well-being, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and self-worth diminish. The SSP provides a vital human connection to information that is missed when one has limited or no vision and limited or no hearing.”

SSP Service Promote

- Independence
- Integration
- Full participation
- Increased self-esteem and overall health
- Efficiency and effectiveness

History of SSPs

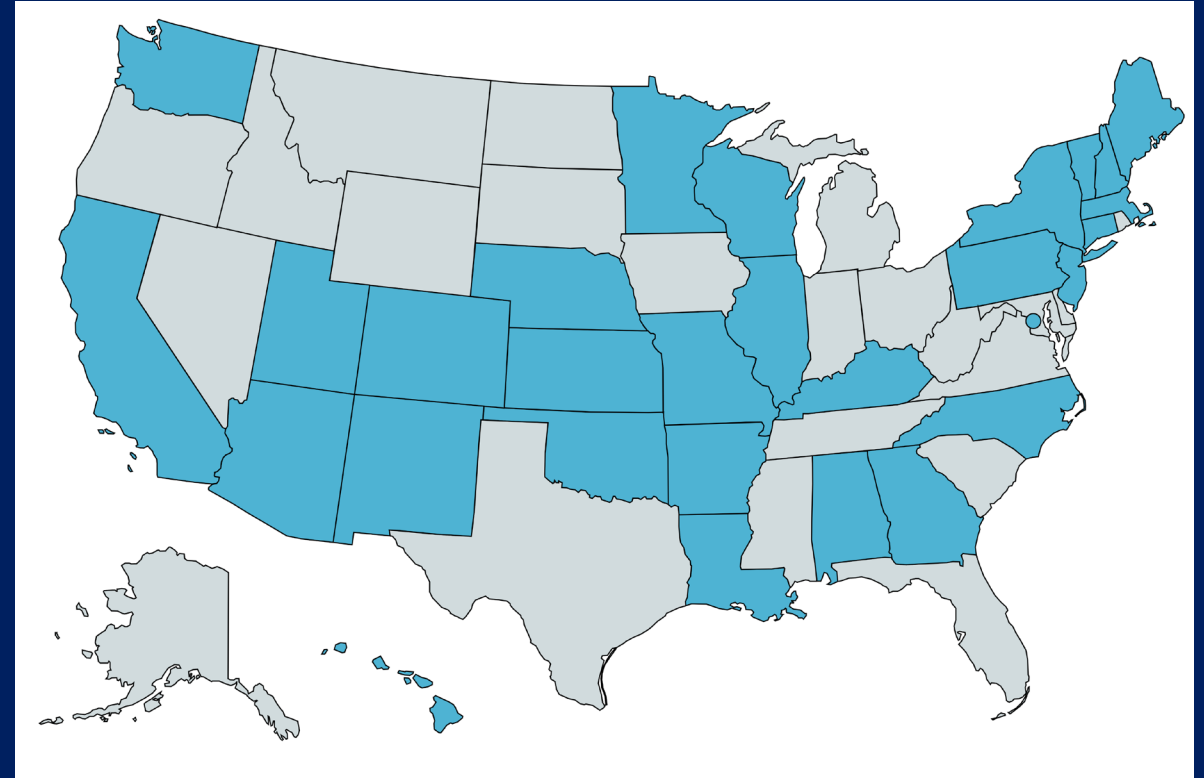
- AADB 1980s
- More and more programs around the country
- Various funding sources
- Concept of the SSP continues to evolve

Services around the Country

There are 35 operating SSP/CN programs in 26 states, compared to 2024 with over 40 programs in 31 states.

Map reflects programs that are not entirely volunteer or consumer self-pay models.

Each program is unique!



Funding Sources

- Funding sources include:
 - Legislated appropriations
 - Medicaid, Medicare or Vocational Rehab funds
 - State, county, or community grants
 - Donations and fundraising

Funding and Longevity

- Legislated funding is ideal ... and difficult to attain
- Initially, consider a pilot program with short-term funding
- Allow DeafBlind people to use the program and LOVE it!
- Let them “tell their story” to legislators, the media, social media
- Legislators want to support bills that help their constituents

Lived Experience

Stop sharing presentation to focus on our panelist's experiences!

- Jeri Cooper, Oklahoma
- Meagan Gorsuch, New Mexico
- Joshua Fontenot, Louisiana
- Tanya Arriaga, Texas
- Jacqueline Izaguirre, Texas