

**Title:** Finding and Keeping Quality Direct Support Workers for Children and Young Adults with Disabilities

**Description of presentation:**

Children and young adults with diverse abilities contribute much to the community. But appropriate supports are also necessary to maximize participation.

When a child has unique challenges, parents often are reluctant to send that child to an outside setting. With younger kids, childcare settings usually do not have expertise to address the unique sensory, behavioral, physical and/or social challenges faced by children with disabilities.

A one-to-one provider offers many advantages for young children. The home can be set up to accommodate a child's unique needs, families derive security knowing a child is home safe, a child can interact in his own neighborhood, etc.

As children develop, direct support worker duties also evolve. Needing assistance with personal care and basic needs may be replaced by facilitating social interaction, life skills in the community and/or academic tutoring. Of course, it is the responsibility of the child and family to define what is most appropriate, providing an early opportunity for a child to begin advocating for her own needs.

The session will provide concrete suggestions for developing a job description, how and where to advertise, and tips for screening and interviewing applicants. We will discuss, "red flags" to avoid in candidates. Ideas about how to orient/train a worker, define appropriate boundaries, and set up effective communication processes will be shared.

It takes skill and experience to hire quality providers. When done effectively, everyone wins; the child gains the benefit of intimate connections with other adults, parents obtain added support, and providers develop expertise that serves them personally and professionally. Examples will be cited from my book, *A Stranger Among Us* ©2005, hiring in my own family over 21 years, and experiences of participants at previous workshops.

**Intended Audience:** Parents of children with diverse abilities, self-advocates, community agency personnel supporting young adults to live in the community

**Anticipated Audio Visual needs:** LCD projector, screen, laptop and microphone