



Community Learning Curriculum

I. Program Title

Community Learning: Independent Living, Social, Adaptive, and Employment Skill Development

II. Program Description

Community Learning is a person-centered, group-based skill-development curriculum designed to provide participants with meaningful opportunities to learn, practice, and generalize functional skills within natural community environments.

Instruction will occur through structured small-group learning in **open, integrated community settings**. Participants will collaborate, practice shared decision-making, take meaningful roles, support one another, and **interact with members of the general public** while accessing businesses and community resources and developing independence.

Examples of instructional environments may include:

- Grocery stores
- Retail establishments
- Restaurants and cafés
- Libraries
- Recreation centers
- Parks
- Fitness facilities
- Community events
- Shopping centers
- Banks and financial institutions
- Public transportation
- Volunteer locations
- Employment-related community settings
- Other locations selected according to the participant's interests, needs, goals, and preferences

The curriculum will focus on five major areas of functional development:

1. **Social Skills**
2. **Adaptive Skills**
3. **Personal Care**
4. **Self-Help and Independent Living Skills**
5. **Employment-Related Skills**

New Jersey's HCBS guidance emphasizes that individuals receiving HCBS should have access to community life and integrated settings in a manner similar to people who do not receive HCBS. Accordingly, community instruction

should focus on **participation in typical community environments rather than simply taking participants on supervised outings.** [\[nj.gov\]](http://nj.gov)

The program will combine **in-person**, group-based **Community Learning** with **virtual group instruction**.

III. Program Philosophy

Community Learning is based on the principle that functional skills are most meaningful when participants learn and practice them together in the environments where they will actually use them.

Rather than teaching community skills exclusively through individual or classroom instruction and expecting participants to transfer them independently, the program will use cooperative group experiences that provide opportunities to:

Learn Together → Practice Together → Apply Individually and Cooperatively → Generalize → Increase Independence

The ultimate objective is **not** simply participation in activities. The objective is to help each participant develop skills that increase:

- Independence
- Self-determination
- Confidence
- Community involvement
- Social connection
- Personal responsibility
- Safety
- Employment readiness
- Ability to make meaningful choices
- Use of natural and community supports
- Cooperation and teamwork
- Peer learning and mutual support
- Shared decision-making

Instruction will emphasize **doing with** participants and learning with peers **rather than doing for** participants.

IV. Person-Centered Curriculum Development

Participants will learn in structured groups while each person's objectives, roles, supports, and progress measures remain individualized.

The program will consider the participant's:

- Strengths
- Interests
- Preferences
- Communication style
- Current abilities
- Support needs

- Community interests
- Employment interests
- Cultural preferences
- Personal goals
- ISP goals, when applicable
- Safety needs
- Desired level of independence

Participants will be provided meaningful choices regarding activities and community experiences whenever possible. Within the same group activity, participants may work toward different instructional objectives and contribute through roles matched to their abilities and goals.

For example, during a visit to a grocery store:

- One participant may work on locating three items independently.
- Another may practice communicating with an employee.
- Another may compare prices and stay within a budget.
- Another may practice waiting in line and completing a purchase.
- Another may focus on navigating the store safely.
- Another may practice using a shopping list and debit card.

The **community location is the instructional environment; the individualized skill is the lesson.**

V. Curriculum Domains

Domain 1: Social Skills and Community Interaction

Purpose

To develop the skills necessary to interact successfully, appropriately, and confidently with other people in natural community environments.

Skills May Include

- Greeting other people
- Initiating conversations
- Responding when another person initiates conversation
- Introducing oneself
- Maintaining appropriate conversational distance
- Taking conversational turns
- Listening to others
- Asking questions
- Requesting assistance
- Thanking others
- Giving and receiving compliments
- Understanding social cues
- Respecting personal boundaries
- Waiting appropriately
- Taking turns
- Participating in group activities
- Making choices within a group
- Managing disagreements
- Self-advocating
- Politely declining an activity or request

- Communicating preferences
- Recognizing appropriate and inappropriate interactions
- Developing relationships with community members
- Collaborating toward a shared goal
- Assuming and rotating group roles
- Offering and receiving appropriate peer support

Community Practice

Participants may practice these skills through shared group activities by:

- Ordering food at a restaurant
- Asking a store employee for assistance
- Speaking with a librarian
- Participating in a recreational activity
- Checking into a community facility
- Attending a community event
- Making a purchase
- Participating in clubs or groups
- Engaging appropriately with unfamiliar community members

Staff will facilitate the group, encourage peer modeling and mutual support, assign meaningful roles, and progressively reduce unnecessary involvement as participants become more capable of completing interactions independently and cooperatively.

VI. Domain 2: Adaptive and Community Living Skills

Purpose

To increase the participant's ability to function successfully and safely across community environments.

Skills May Include

Community Navigation

- Identifying community locations
- Following directions
- Using landmarks
- Reading signs
- Using maps or navigation applications
- Identifying entrances and exits
- Locating restrooms
- Identifying safe meeting locations

Transportation

- Preparing for transportation
- Entering and exiting vehicles safely
- Following transportation rules
- Identifying destinations
- Using public transportation when appropriate
- Recognizing transportation problems
- Requesting assistance

Money Management

- Identifying currency
- Understanding prices
- Comparing costs
- Establishing a spending limit
- Making purchases
- Reviewing receipts
- Understanding change
- Using debit or payment cards
- Maintaining possession of personal belongings

Shopping

- Developing a shopping list
- Locating items
- Comparing products
- Selecting appropriate quantities
- Identifying prices
- Completing checkout
- Organizing purchases

Community Safety

- Recognizing unsafe situations
- Understanding pedestrian safety
- Crossing streets appropriately
- Identifying trusted community resources
- Knowing what to do if separated from a group
- Requesting help
- Maintaining awareness of personal belongings
- Responding appropriately during emergencies

VII. Domain 3: Personal Care

Purpose

To strengthen personal-care skills that support dignity, health, comfort, social participation, and increased independence.

Instructional Areas May Include

- Personal hygiene
- Handwashing
- Oral hygiene
- Grooming
- Hair care
- Dressing appropriately
- Selecting clothing based on weather or activity
- Maintaining clean clothing
- Recognizing personal-care needs
- Maintaining personal belongings
- Appropriate restroom routines
- Health and wellness routines
- Preparing personal-care supplies before community activities

Instruction will respect participant privacy, dignity, personal preferences, and individual support needs.

Community Learning may focus particularly on **recognizing and independently managing personal-care needs while away from home.**

VIII. Domain 4: Self-Help and Independent Living Skills

Purpose

To increase the participant's ability to complete everyday tasks, solve routine problems, make choices, and reduce unnecessary dependence upon paid supports.

Skill Areas

Meal and Food Skills

- Selecting meals
- Reading menus
- Ordering food
- Making healthy choices
- Purchasing groceries
- Preparing simple foods
- Cleaning after eating
- Following basic food-safety practices

Organization

- Preparing for community activities
- Developing checklists
- Following schedules
- Arriving prepared
- Keeping track of belongings
- Managing personal items

Time Management

- Understanding schedules
- Arriving at planned locations
- Monitoring time
- Estimating how long activities take
- Planning multiple activities

Problem Solving Participants will learn to:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Determine possible solutions.
3. Select an appropriate course of action.
4. Ask for assistance when necessary.
5. Evaluate whether the solution worked.

Self-Advocacy

Participants will be encouraged to:

- Express preferences
- Make choices
- Ask questions
- Request assistance
- Request breaks
- Communicate discomfort

- Say no
 - Participate in planning activities
 - Identify personal goals
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IX. Domain 5: Employment-Related Skills

Purpose

To develop transferable skills that can support future competitive integrated employment, volunteer experiences, career exploration, or other meaningful employment-related goals.

New Jersey resources identify **supported employment, career planning, and prevocational training** among DDD employment services and describe employment-related support such as developing job skills, résumé preparation, completing applications, interviewing, transportation to work, and workplace supports. [\[disability...ghtsnj.org\]](#), [\[disability...ghtsnj.org\]](#)

Foundational Employment Skills

Instruction may include:

- Arriving on time
- Following a schedule
- Appropriate workplace appearance
- Following directions
- Completing tasks
- Staying engaged with a task
- Asking for clarification
- Requesting assistance
- Taking appropriate breaks
- Accepting feedback
- Maintaining appropriate workplace behavior
- Working around other people
- Communicating with supervisors
- Communicating with coworkers
- Completing multi-step tasks
- Organization
- Problem solving
- Workplace safety
- Appropriate cellphone use
- Managing personal belongings

Career Exploration

Participants may have opportunities to:

- Identify personal employment interests
- Explore different occupations
- Identify personal strengths
- Learn about businesses in their community
- Understand basic job requirements
- Practice completing applications
- Develop basic résumés
- Practice interviews
- Learn appropriate interview clothing and grooming

- Explore transportation options
- Practice professional communication

Community instruction may also be designed to help participants recognize how skills practiced in everyday activities transfer to employment.

For example:

- Following a shopping list develops organization and task completion.
 - Ordering food develops communication and self-advocacy.
 - Arriving at an activity on time develops punctuality.
 - Asking an employee for assistance develops workplace communication.
 - Following a multi-step community activity builds task sequencing and executive functioning.
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X. Virtual Instruction

Virtual group instruction will complement collaborative Community Learning rather than replace meaningful opportunities for community participation.

Virtual sessions may be used for:

Pre-Teaching

Preparing the group before entering the community, clarifying shared expectations, assigning roles, and rehearsing how participants can support one another.

Examples:

- Reviewing the day's schedule
- Looking at a menu
- Creating a shopping list
- Reviewing transportation
- Discussing expected social interactions
- Reviewing safety expectations
- Practicing vocabulary
- Role-playing community interactions

Skill Instruction

Virtual instruction may address:

- Financial literacy
- Social communication
- Employment preparation
- Interview practice
- Scheduling
- Problem solving
- Self-advocacy
- Personal organization
- Community safety
- Online job searches
- Career exploration

Post-Community Review

As a group, participants may reflect on:

- What they accomplished
- Skills they used
- Challenges encountered
- Problems they solved

- Assistance they needed
- What they could complete more independently next time

This creates a continuous group-learning sequence:

Group Preparation → Collaborative Community Practice → Group Reflection → Repeated Practice → Greater Individual and Collective Independence

XI. Instructional Methodology

Group instruction should encourage peer modeling, shared problem solving, and cooperative practice while using the **least intrusive level of assistance necessary** for the participant to learn successfully.

Strategies may include:

- Modeling
- Demonstration
- Verbal instruction
- Visual supports
- Checklists
- Task analysis
- Role-playing
- Rehearsal
- Prompting
- Prompt fading
- Repetition
- Positive reinforcement
- Natural reinforcement
- Error correction
- Self-monitoring
- Community-based practice
- Cooperative learning
- Peer modeling
- Guided group discussion
- Collaborative problem solving
- Role rotation and shared responsibility

Whenever appropriate, staff supports should be systematically reduced as competence develops, while peer encouragement and natural group supports are strengthened.

XII. Natural Supports

One important goal of Community Learning will be helping participants work together while learning to access the same community resources and natural supports available to other community members.

For example, rather than automatically asking staff: "Where is this item?" the participant may learn to locate a store employee and ask independently. Instead of staff ordering a participant's meal, the participant may communicate directly with restaurant staff using speech, an AAC system, visual support, or another preferred communication

method. This approach supports greater autonomy while increasing meaningful interaction with members of the general public.

XIII. Community Integration Standards

Group-based Community Learning activities should provide participants with opportunities to:

- Spend time in typical community environments
- Interact with members of the general public
- Make meaningful choices
- Access community resources
- Develop relationships
- Learn how community systems operate
- Practice functional skills in natural environments
- Participate alongside people with and without disabilities
- Increase independence
- Discover new interests and preferences
- Build confidence navigating their community
- Work cooperatively toward shared goals
- Learn from and appropriately support peers
- Practice leadership, teamwork, and shared responsibility

Activities should be selected because they provide **meaningful opportunities for learning and participation**, not merely because they provide a location to visit.

XIV. Scheduling and Service Structure

Community Learning will be delivered primarily through structured group experiences that may include:

- **In-person community-based instruction**
- **Virtual instruction or**
- **Small-group instruction**, when appropriate to participant goals

Schedules may be individualized based upon:

- Participant availability
- Development Goals
- Transportation
- Community activities
- Employment objectives
- Participant preferences
- Individual learning needs

Group instruction may occur at varying times and in varied settings so participants can experience different aspects of community life, practice teamwork, and generalize skills together.

XV. Progress Measurement

Participant progress should be measured individually within group activities according to each person's skill objectives, participation, collaboration, and level of assistance—not merely attendance.

For example:

Activity: Grocery shopping

Skill: Purchasing three items from a shopping list

Measurement: Level of assistance required

A simple independence scale may include:

- **Independent:** Completes skill without assistance.
- **Natural Support:** Completes skill using support naturally available in the community.
- **Minimal Support:** Requires limited prompting or guidance.
- **Moderate Support:** Requires repeated prompting or assistance.
- **Maximum Support:** Requires substantial staff assistance.

Progress should focus on whether the participant is becoming **more capable and independent over time**.

XVI. Sample Group Learning Objective

Group Goal: Increase cooperative participation and individual independence while completing purchases in community businesses.

Objective: During a planned group shopping activity, participants will assume meaningful roles such as navigator, list manager, price checker, communicator, purchaser, or receipt organizer. Each participant will complete individualized steps, communicate with peers and community members, and contribute to the group goal with progressively reduced staff assistance.

Skills Addressed

- Community navigation
 - Money management
 - Communication
 - Waiting
 - Personal organization
 - Problem solving
 - Social skills
 - Self-advocacy
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XVII. Sample Weekly Curriculum

Up to 12 hours per week

Session 1: Community Access and Adaptive Skills

Virtual and/or In Person

- Possible focus:
- Transportation
- Navigation
- Shopping
- Money management
- Community safety

- Asking community members for assistance

Session 2: Social and Interpersonal Skills

Virtual and/or In Person

- Possible focus:
- Recreational/community activity
- Conversation
- Turn taking
- Self-advocacy
- Making choices
- Group participation
- Interaction with members of the public

Session 3: Independent Living and Personal Care

Virtual and/or In Person

Possible focus:

- Personal organization
- Meal planning
- Shopping lists
- Grooming
- Scheduling
- Home/community routines

Session 4: Employment Skill Development

Virtual and/or In Person

Possible focus:

- Career exploration
- Job applications
- Résumé development
- Interview practice
- Workplace communication
- Following multi-step tasks
- Time management
- Workplace expectations

The group schedule should provide shared learning experiences while allowing participants to pursue individualized roles, objectives, and levels of support within each activity.

XVIII. Desired Participant Outcomes

Through ongoing participation in group-based Community Learning, participants will be supported to:

1. Increase independence in community environments.
2. Develop stronger social and communication skills.
3. Interact more confidently with members of the general public.
4. Develop functional adaptive and independent-living skills.
5. Increase personal-care and self-management abilities.
6. Improve decision-making and problem-solving abilities.
7. Develop self-advocacy and self-determination skills.
8. Increase utilization of community and natural supports.
9. Develop transferable employment-related skills.
10. Explore employment, volunteer, recreational, and social interests.
11. Increase meaningful participation in community life.
12. Generalize learned skills across people, locations, activities, and situations.
13. Collaborate effectively with peers and contribute to shared activities.

14. Practice leadership, teamwork, mutual support, and shared responsibility.

Overall Curriculum Goal

The purpose of Community Learning is to move beyond simply providing access to the community and instead **use the community as a natural learning environment**.

Participants will have repeated opportunities to learn through shared real-life experiences, contribute to group decisions, solve problems together, learn from peers, interact with members of the general public, explore employment interests, and strengthen their ability to participate both cooperatively and independently in their communities.

The group-learning approach will emphasize shared participation, cooperation, peer learning, and each participant's **abilities, interests, choices, potential, and increasing independence**, while providing individualized support when that support is needed.

XIX. Participant Training

The CLASS will provide structured group training with individualized objectives and supports for each participant to support successful functioning in all appropriate aspects of community integration and program operations. Training will include explicit instruction in Social Skills, Adaptive Skills, Personal Care, Self-Help, Independent Living Skills and Employment-Related Skills. Demonstrating these skills is important for continued participation with The CLASS and for successful involvement with other professional and community organizations.

If a participant requires additional instruction or practice, The CLASS will provide targeted support, peer-assisted practice, and repeated opportunities within the group to refine the relevant skills.

The training program will combine virtual group instruction with collaborative learning in integrated community settings. The length of the training period, completion criteria, instructional materials, and training methods may be modified at the discretion of The CLASS and the success in addressing program needs and individual learning requirements.

Program Description

The Community Based Learning program provides person-centered, group-based instruction with individualized objectives and supports for participants seeking to strengthen the practical skills needed for greater independence, self-determination, safety, employment readiness, and meaningful participation in community life. Using integrated community settings as natural learning environments, participants receive opportunities to learn, practice, and generalize social, adaptive, personal-care, self-help, independent-living, and employment-related skills through real-

life experiences that reflect their strengths, interests, preferences, communication styles, support needs, and personal goals.

Services may be delivered through in-person community-based instruction, virtual preparation and review, individual instruction, or structured small-group learning organized around shared activities and compatible participant objectives. Staff will use the least intrusive level of assistance necessary, promote choice and self-advocacy, encourage the use of natural and community supports, and systematically reduce prompts as skills develop. Progress will be measured through individualized learning objectives and the participant's increasing ability to complete meaningful activities across people, locations, and situations with greater confidence and independence.

Desired Participant Outcomes

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1. Increase independence in community environments.
 2. Develop stronger social and communication skills.
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 4. Develop functional adaptive and independent-living skills.
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 9. Develop transferable employment-related skills.
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