

Every parent wants to see their kids have friends and be part of the community. But finding ways for our children or young adults (YA) with disabilities to be included in school and community activities usually means we have to be there.

This fact sheet offers options that **do not** rely on parents or other family members to give direct support. We have suggestions on how to find these trusted people, even when it's hard to hire caregivers or other community support staff. These ideas will help your child start to engage in the community and build friendships.

Tip for Families



Take the risk of trusting someone else to support your child or YA with special health care needs. By allowing your support in everyday activities to fade, your child will start to gain independence and learn self-direction.

School

One of the best places for a child to create meaningful relationship is at school. Your child's school is likely to have clubs, sports and extra-curricular programs that are great ways for your child to make new friends.

- **Talk with Your Child's IEP Team** or special-ed teacher about adding a peer-interaction goal to the IEP. Ask the team how they can support your child to take part in more school-related activities.
 - Your child's IEP can include transportation home after a school-related activity.
 - Your advocacy skills may be needed to add extra-curricular activities to your child's IEP.
- **Best Buddies** or **Peer Partner Programs** Students are paired together in this mentorship program that helps in the classroom and can form friendships. If your child's school doesn't have one, you can advocate for one. To learn more bestbuddies.org/wisconsin.
- Your child may be part of school-sponsored music, sports or art program with the help of a peer or paid school staff.

"My son loves music! An aide attended high school orchestra practices with him and he handed out programs at the winter concert. It was a great way for him to be part of this group." – FV staff member

- **Booster Clubs** or **Philanthropy Programs** Does your school host fundraisers for charity? Talk with the group(s) organizing these events to see if there's a volunteer slot for your child with the help of a peer or school staff.
- **Service Hours** Many high schools require service hours for graduating students. Your child's special-ed teacher may know students who are eager to help, and get their needed volunteer hours, by going to school-related activities with your child.



Community Recreation and Leisure Programs

- **YMCA and Sports Clubs** Talk to these groups about providing peer support to include your child. Many community non-profits and recreation programs have support people available, so a parent does not have to be there.
- **Service Clubs** Connect with organizations like the Kiwanis and Lions Clubs about projects in your community that your child or YA can join. Also ask if there is a member who can provide support to a person with a disability.
- **Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts** Many scout troops are open to children with different abilities. In fact, the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast recently received a grant from the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities to make their troops more inclusive.



Children's Long-Term Support Program

Children who are enrolled in the Children's Long-Term Support Program (CLTS) or Children's Community Options Program (CCOP), may be able to pay for a **respite provider** to be a connector and support person in community activities.

- **Inclusion specialist** One example is United Cerebral Palsy's inclusion programs that support children and YAs to participate in community activities.
- **Mentoring** The CLTS Program has a mentoring benefit that allows a child's service plan to pay for a person, other than a family member, to support them in their community.

Definition: Mentoring



Mentoring improves a child's ability to interact in their community in socially advantageous ways. The mentor provides the child or youth with experiences in peer interaction, social and/or recreational activities. Our CLTS fact sheet, [What Services Might be Covered?](#), has more details.



IRIS or Family Care

If your child is **18 or older**, and enrolled in IRIS or Family Care, these programs may pay for a respite provider, a mentor or other personal supports to make it possible for your adult child to participate in community activities.



LEARN MORE

- Our Family Voices of Wisconsin [Winter 2021 Newsletter](#) has steps to find activities and community opportunities for a child or young adult, and how to get around any barriers that may pop up.
- [LOV Inc.'s](#) Bridge Builder program supports adults with disabilities and younger children covered by CLTS. Contact Stefanie Primm, stefanie@lovinc.org to learn more.



Still Have Questions? Need Help Finding Services for Your Child?

- [Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm)
dhs.wisconsin.gov/cyshcn/index.htm
- [Well Badger Resource Center](http://wellbadger.org) wellbadger.org or call 800.642.7837