



Accessibility Annual Report
FY: 2019-2020

The objective of Easterseals Louisiana's (ESL) Accessibility Plan is to provide all ESL participants, employees and stakeholders accessible services and remove any identified accessibility barriers. This plan is reviewed and revised annually by ESL management. During FY: 2019-2020, ESL identified six (6) service accessibility areas to monitor. During this timeframe, ESL management assessed current functioning and implemented procedures to assist in the reduction of potential barriers. The narrative below provides an update on progress made throughout FY: 2019-2020, and in instances provides a comparison to the previous fiscal years data.

Objective 1: Continuous assessment, planning and improvement of architectural and environmental accessibility.

Throughout FY: 2019-2020 ESL continued to assess and improve its architectural and environmental accessibility. During this timeframe each ESL office across the state continued to complete a semi-annual facility/residential inspection providing updates on facility condition and accessibility. Once the completed inspections are completed, they are reviewed by the ESL Director of Quality Enhancement and Training with written feedback being provided on any identified concerns. It is always strongly encouraged that ESL staff report any facility concerns immediately to ensure a quick resolution.

ESL facility evacuation maps were reviewed and revised ensuring evacuation accuracy in the case of an emergency. In each office and residential facility, evacuation maps are posted in common areas ensuring that all staff and visitors know a direct evacuation route if an emergency should arise. Included on the evacuation map are the locations of all exits in the building, natural disaster safe areas, the location of office fire extinguishers, as well as the location of office First Aid kits. A sample of the regional evacuation maps can be found in ESL's Safety and Emergency Preparedness Policies and Procedures manual.

ESL also reviewed evacuation plans for individuals with disabilities ensuring they are able to safely evacuate a facility in case of an emergency. Designated personnel in each ESL office will assist individuals with disabilities safely evacuate in case of an emergency.

ESL regional offices also completed quarterly fire drills and semi-annual emergency/natural disaster drills. These 'tabletop' exercises provide all ESL staff the opportunity to practice an evacuation trial run ensuring everyone knows the proper procedures and designated evacuation safe areas. Documentation from the fire/emergency/natural disaster drills were reviewed by ESL's Director of Quality Enhancement and Training for analysis and trend identification. This information is discussed during ESL's Safety Committee and identifies areas of concern as well as an improvement plan to implement steps to assist in overcoming any identified barriers.

Each ESL office also submitted documentation from local fire marshals tracking annual fire prevention walkthroughs conducted by an agency other than ESL.

ESL reviewed and honored accommodation requests submitted by employees to help ensure the work environment was conducive to employee's needs. During FY: 2019-2020, ESL made a significant investment in additional technology due to employees working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the organization's strategic initiatives, ESL purchased approximately one hundred (100) new laptops for employees in the Home and Community-Based Services programs. Many of these employees worked from desktop computers in ESL offices. With the investment of the laptops, this allowed staff to be able to complete their requirements from their homes without having to remotely connect to their desktop computer from a personal computer. ESL has also provided all employees with a reoccurring tech stipend to assist in any additional needs or costs involved with working remotely.

In addition to the device advancements in technology, ESL had one (1) request that was submitted and honored that provided an employee with speech recognition software due to having an amputation. ESL also continued to accommodate employees with physical limitations with caseloads in areas where homes are easily accessible to them, as well as designated accessible parking at ESL facilities.

ESL continues to conduct semi-annual facility/residential inspections, as well as offer health/training to all employees based on OSHA suggestions and trends identified while reviewing participant and staff incident/accident reports. ESL will also continue to review and accommodate employees' accessibility requests, so they are able to complete requirements efficiently.

Objective 2: Assess social and attitudinal barriers which impact access to services.

Throughout FY: 2019-2020 ESL continued to assess social and attitudinal barriers that impacted access to services. ESL continued to build relationships with social service organizations and business owners to promote acceptance and awareness of our mission. Several members of ESL management have active roles in community organizations, including the Louisiana Support Coordination Alliance, local Homeless Coalitions, children's advocacy organizations, local homeless shelters, as well as representation on the regional advisory committee for the Office of Behavioral Health. These community memberships allow ESL staff to network with a variety of agencies and resources locally and across the state, working together to provide the best supports and services to the participant.

In October 2019, ESL was excited to expand its services by operating the Phoenix Peer Support Center in Region 8 (Monroe), which provides a welcoming environment as well

as a wide range of activities to individuals age 18 and older who have a diagnosable behavioral, mental, or emotional condition. This much needed program provides necessary services that include:

- Counseling Area
 - Sufficient space available to allow clinicians to meet with peers as needed to provide one-on-one peer mentoring and/or counseling.
- Structured educational and support groups
 - Including: Effective Communication, Educational resources/skill building resources, Community resource, Policy reviews, Nutrition and fitness, Anger management, Financial literacy, Arts and expression, Spiritual growth, Recovery, Job readiness
- Recreational and social events
 - Engaging participants in “give back” events to get the participants involved with community activities and events as volunteers.
- Linkages with support services
- Access to self-help resources, resource library
 - Including: Include general community resources such as local landlords or housing management groups, employment agencies, education institutions and programs, legal aid/protection and advocacy organizations, health services, utility assistance programs, food banks, thrift and resale shops, as well as treatment and self-help resources such as mental health services, 12-step programs, and local or state mental health consumer groups.
- General consumer advocacy for persons receiving behavioral health services
- Formal and informal crisis prevention.

Additionally, in 2019 ESL began offering services Case Management services for the EXIT-318 Re-Entry project in Region 7 (Shreveport), and offering Case Management and Housing services in Region 8 (Monroe). EXIT-318 (Ex-Offenders In Transition) has developed a framework to create a Continuum of Care to provide critical case management and wrap around services, including housing and employment services, to support returning participants needs to be successful and stay out of jail. The target population of the EXIT-318 Re-Entry program is individual, regardless of gender, race, age, and/or offense history, who is classified moderate or high risk for recidivism (re-offense).

ESL’s role with the EXIT-318 Re-Entry program includes:

- Case Management (Shreveport/Monroe)- Develop a service plan that will define the action steps, resources needed, challenges and track progress for each

participant. Assist with obtaining benefits and other essentials like food, clothing, hygiene supplies help arrange transportation to professional visits.

- Housing Assistance (Monroe) - Assist in locating safe, decent, affordable housing for those participants in need.

ESL continued to offer annual training in cultural diversity to enhance all ESL employees understanding on various cultures and practices that they will encounter while working in the community. Cultural diversity training has also been included in ESL's new hire orientations for all programs. Also, all staff annually complete a training in person-first language training, which stresses the importance of using language to speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual with a disability. People first language emphasizes the person first not the disability. In addition to cultural diversity and person-first language training, all ESL managers and supervisors have also completed a course in working with multi-generational employees. This course stresses the importance of having a management style that is accommodating to all ages in the workforce to ensure that all employees feel respected and valued.

ESL also continued to utilize technology to remove attitudinal barriers towards disabilities. The following resources are listed on ESL's website:

- City Guides
- Living with Autism
- Living with Disability
- Facts about Disabilities
- Making Life Accessible
- Services For Caregivers
- No More Stigma (social media)

In the 'Making Life Accessible' section, there is information about accessibility and the ways in which Easterseals is building a more accessible world on a local and national level. Information listed in this section includes:

- What is Accessibility?
- What is Web Accessibility?
- What does handicap accessible mean?
- What are the ADA accessibility guidelines?
- How is Easterseals making the world more accessible?

Additionally, the following information is provided on the ESL website to assist in the breakdown of barriers:

- **Easterseals and Freddie Mac Offer Financial Guidance** – Easter Seals is partnering with Freddie Mac to provide credit education to the community through its Credit Smart program.
- **Century21**- ensuring people with disabilities can find accessible homes that fit their needs.
- **Easterseals Project ACTION Consulting** – training and consultation on ADA-accessible transportation so more people can get to where they need or want to go.
- **Comcast NBCUniversal** - ensuring that everyone is 100% included through assistive technology. Comcast NBCUniversal's generosity has helped to provide technology solutions to thousands of people with disabilities.
- **Campership** - Inclusive, barrier-free camps and recreation programs across the country allow adults and children with disabilities experience adventure and make new friends.
- **Accessibility of the Web and Web Tools** - Easterseals leads efforts to put people with disabilities to work on the Web and to promote Web accessibility.

Additional resources are also periodically shared via ESL's blog and social media pages.

The Easterseals Louisiana website also has the capability to translate the content to Spanish to accommodate individuals whose primary language is not English and allow them to research and access services.

Additional information regarding Easterseals Louisiana and how it strives to remove online barriers and improve website usability can be found at <http://www.easterseals.com/louisiana/accessibility.html>.

National Voter Registration Act: ESL Support Coordinators discuss voting information with participants, including information on how to register to vote, information on how to vote (early voting, absentee voting, etc.), upcoming election dates, assistance in voting, as well as information on how to volunteer as a poll worker. ESL Support Coordinators also provided participants information on the Advocacy Center Election Hotline, a group that provides individuals answers on voting questions or any disability-related issues that they may be experiencing. This information serves as a valuable resource to ESL participants ensuring that they have the same opportunity as everyone else in the voting process.

ESL continues to strive to assist all participants in locating additional supports and services through building and enhancing community partnerships to benefit our participants and their families.

Objective 3: Promote Economic Opportunities and Reduce Financial Barriers to receiving services and accessing the community.

ESL continued to partner with Camp ASCCA in Alabama and Camp ABLE in Louisiana to send as many kids with special needs to camp as possible during the summer.

Through sessions at Camp ASCCA and Camp ABLE it is ESL's goal to provide a healthier, happier, longer, and more productive life for children and adults of all abilities. After a session at camp participants will return with:

- A renewed sense of independence
- New friends
- Confidence in their abilities
- Stories to share with their friends at home
- Athletic and emotional growth

During FY: 2019-2020 ESL was able to send twenty-four (24) participants to Camp Able in Louisiana and two (2) to Camp ASCCA in Alabama.

Additional information regarding ESL's Campership program can be found by clicking on the 'Our Programs' tab on the Easterseals Louisiana website homepage and then clicking on the 'Play' tab by visiting: <http://www.easterseals.com/louisiana/our-programs/camping-recreation/>

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESL offered telehealth services to participants to ensure that they are receiving the supports and services that they need. Through this process, ESL will have the availability to identify participants that choose to not participate in telehealth services, opting to conduct their meeting via telephone instead. The organization's leadership team have worked on developing a telehealth survey which will not only assist in identifying technological needs for participants, but also any financial barriers that they have relating to technology. This information will be used for advocacy efforts to provide low-cost technology and internet service for participants. The survey will be completed via telephone, allowing ESL staff to probe for additional information that may be helpful in advocating for these services. ESL's management team will begin collecting telehealth data in Fall 2020 and will provide a forthcoming updated on detailed trends and steps moving forward.

Objective 4: Assess and Implement Action Plans to Reduce Communication Barriers to Receiving Services.

All of ESL's policies and procedures are reviewed on an annual basis for accuracy and clarity. ESL staff continued to review participant's rights, responsibilities, and grievance

procedures with the participant or responsible representative during the initial face-to-face visit as well as annually.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESL has made significant advances in technology to ensure that services can still be provided to participants remotely. Throughout this implementation, all ESL staff have been provided additional training in a variety of technological methods that are not only beneficial to their productivity, but also to the safety of their participants. The organization has held a series of 'Tech Tuesday' sessions which serves as global technology training provided to all staff in real time using Google Meets. During these sessions, staff have learned important skills, such as utilizing Google Meets to conduct virtual participant visits and best practices to keep in mind when conducting a virtual participant meeting. Also, sessions have been completed focusing on the functionality of the Google Suite, including Google Calendar, Gmail, Google Drive, and Google File Stream.

Through these educational sessions, ESL employees have been provided the resources that they will need to assist participants in successfully completing a telehealth visit, with it be with ESL or with another provider, such as a primary care physician. These skills will allow ESL's participants to be able to communicate more effectively with their providers, resulting in a high level of care.

Additionally, on an ongoing basis, ESL's Information Technology (IT) consultant distributes an electronic 'Tech Talk' to all employees which provides helpful technology resources that can be shared in an effort to educate participants on accessibility features included on computer and computer software. The newsletter also provides best practices for safeguarding information that may be transmitted electronically.

Objective V. Assess and Implement Action Plans to Reduce Transportation Barriers to Receiving Services.

Each ESL facility has adequate accessible parking available and is also conveniently located on public transportation routes in cities that currently have a public transportation system. ESL has listed on its website resources relating to the reduction of transportation barriers, including a link to the Easterseals Project ACTION Consulting (ESPAC). ESPAC provides transit agencies and other audiences tailored training and technical assistance in areas related to transportation, including but not limited to: customer service, emergency preparedness, health and transportation, pedestrian access, safety and security, senior mobility, and travel training.

. This information can be found by clicking on the 'Our Programs' tab on the Easterseals Louisiana website homepage and then clicking on the 'Making Life Accessible' tab in the Explore Resources section or by visiting <https://www.projectaction.com/>.

ESL's Behavioral Health offices continued to assist participants that have no income with bus passes for transportation to necessary medical appointments (Behavioral Health Clinic, Primary Care Physician, Dentist, etc.) on an individual basis ensuring that participants are able to make appointments when scheduled. In rural areas, ESL Behavioral Health also coordinates with local health clinics to arrange transportation to necessary medical appointments. ESL continues to understand transportation, both rural and urban, is often a barrier for many individuals and will continue to work on ensuring participants have transportation available if needed.

Objective VI. Assess and Implement Action Plans to Reduce Employment Barriers for persons served.

ESL continued to work on 'Employment First', an initiative based on the fact that all individuals, including ones with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. All of ESL's Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) participants who are of working age (between the ages of 16 and 65) has a primary outcome included in their Comprehensive Plan of Care (CPOC) relating to employment with competitive compensation. Participants who are still attending high school have a primary outcome added to their CPOC that will assist with the transition process from school into the workforce. 'Employment First' has also been included in ESL's OCDD Performance Measurement, Management and Improvement plan.

ESL's Behavioral Health programs continued to provide Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR) services to participants teaching various skills, including but not limited to, workforce development. Through PSR, participants develop a strengths-based plan that will help achieve maximum independence. The primary focus of PSR is to help individuals develop skills and access resources needed to increase their capacity to be successful and satisfied in living, working, and learning in social environments of their choice.

ESL programs also link participants who have a desire to work, whether expressed or it is shown during their assessment, to Goodwill Industries or Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) through the Louisiana Workforce Commission. Through LRS, participants are assisted in their desire to obtain or maintain employment and/or achieve independence in their communities by providing rehabilitation services and working cooperatively with business and other community resources. Participant are also assisted with internet job searches (i.e. Indeed.com) with assistance from ESL staff.

Conclusion

Throughout FY: 2019-2020, Easterseals Louisiana continued to make progress in the goals that were set during this fiscal year. Through the data gathered, ESL was able to

assess and highlight many achievements throughout the last year, while identifying specific areas of focus in the upcoming Accessibility Plan. By using the data gathered, ESL will develop the FY: 2020-2021 Accessibility Plan and implement strategies for outcome achievement and continue to monitor outcomes that are being met for compliance. ESL will continue to work diligently on reducing accessibility barriers for individuals with disabilities, our staff as well as our stakeholders.