

Role of a Personal Assistant

The prime function of an SHAD Personal Assistant (sometimes referred to as a PA or Personal Care Assistant) is to facilitate a physically disabled person to lead life in the way they want to... to enjoy independence, spontaneity and freedom of choice.

As no two service users (or clients) are the same so no two Personal Assistants are the same either and by definition therefore no two care placements are the same. Most of our service users live on their own but some live with their partners and family. The majority of our service users are female, although we do have male service users too.

The broadness of the Personal Assistant's role is what many people enjoy; the challenge of adapting to new environments, understanding of varying needs and the consideration of the service users' home, working and social life requirements.

SHAD Personal Assistants form teams of between 2 and 4 providing support to a service user for one or two days at a time helping them with everyday activities such as getting in and out of bed, washing and toileting, shopping and cooking and not forgetting nights out on the town! Actual patterns of support vary according to the needs of the service user. Some service users require support over a full 24 hour period (normally followed a rest break of 48 hours); while other service users require support during the day only.

Trust, friendship, respect, understanding and compatibility are critical to the relationship between a Personal Assistant and a service user and can be mutually rewarding with many Personal Assistants remaining in close contact once they return home or progress in their career.

Although all care work placements are different there are some generally common activities which may offer more insight to the role of a SHAD Personal Assistant.

- Service User personal care
- Assistance with washing, bathing, changing, dressing
- Helping in and out of bed, wheelchair
- Full toileting and bladder routine
- Assistance with personal grooming, hair care, nails, feet, eyes etc.

- General domestic duties
- Laundry, washing and ironing
- Shopping
- Cooking and serving meals
- Light housework such as dusting, vacuuming
- Simple maintenance of wheelchair and other equipment

Extra mural activities

- This is when the service user's individual lifestyle most influences the role of a Personal Assistant. Some service users work full time, others are studying; some have active involvement with disabled organisations or a busy social life with family and friends. Of course, some opt for a quieter, home based way of life with interests in computers, painting, music or reading.

Help with day-to-day activities such as:

- making drinks

- assistance with correspondence
- paying the inevitable bills
- moving things in the home
- assistance in and out of transport (bus, car, train etc.)
- daily and holiday escort assistance
- care of pets

Could you be a SHAD Personal Assistant?

Personal Assistants come from all different areas of life but generally are enthusiastic with a lively personality, enjoy an active lifestyle and have a good standard of spoken English. Good health is essential as there are some lifting, bending and physical requirements in this type of role. As SHAD service users do have some set routines a Personal Assistant needs to be able to combine these with the flexibility necessary to support a commitment to an independent and spontaneous lifestyle.

Other attributes of a Personal Assistant might include:

- an understanding of the philosophy of independent living and the issues faced by physically disabled people
- patience, understanding and the ability to be non-judgemental
- flexibility and reliability with respect for personal boundaries and confidentiality

As the role involves spending time in a service user's home SHAD expects all its Personal Assistants to conduct themselves in a polite, discreet manner with respect for a service user's privacy.

Although you will be carrying out duties on your own, with the responsibilities that this entails you will have the continuous support of the SHAD office staff team as well as a 24 hour helpline should you need it.

SHAD arranges placements on the basis of matching suitable people together and personal assistant's choices regarding who they are placed with are always given consideration before placements commence.