

Program Guidelines

Aspire of WNY Helping Hands is intended to provide emergency and supplemental funding to individuals of all ages with intellectual and developmental (I/DD) disabilities in WNY, for a variety of needs that create a financial burden for the individual and/or family. Applicants must demonstrate financial hardship, and all other funding resources must be exhausted before applying to this program.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Eligible for services with the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and can produce Notice of Decision (NOD01)
- Live in the community independently or with family/relatives.
- Individuals living in certified settings will only be considered when submitter can demonstrate that there are extenuating circumstances that require additional assistance.
- Applicants do not have to receive services through Aspire of WNY to apply.
- **The Helping Hands program application MUST NOW BE SUBMITTED THROUGH OUR ONLINE FORM:**
 - [Helping Hands Application](#).
- **The following information/documents will be required for a submitter to complete an application:**
 - Applicant's demographic information
 - Applicant's household income and household debt/bills
 - Applicant's eligibility Notice of Decision letter (NOD01) from OPWDD (will be uploaded to application)
 - Details regarding other resources that have been attempted including denial from at least one Family Reimbursement Agency or email correspondence that includes denial of respective request (if applicable)
 - Official bill, invoice or receipt- handwritten receipts may not be accepted if they cannot be verified by Helping Hands staff (will be uploaded to application)

***The new online application will be open and may be submitted anytime. Submissions will be monitored and accepted Monday through Friday during business hours. Submissions will not be monitored on weekends or holidays. All efforts will be made to respond to requests as quickly as possible.**



IMPORTANT TO NOTE

Application must be completed in full. Missing requirements will lead to a denied application.

Completed applications will follow our internal best practices to be reviewed and responded to per our process.

Following up after submission on application status may delay processing.



Funding Limit:

- **Helping Hands is a last-resort funding program.** Applicants must first try all other available funding sources. Every attempted resource must be listed on the application and supported with documentation (such as emails or denial letters). Applications missing this information will experience delays, even for emergency requests.
- **Helping Hands can give up to \$500 per request.** No annual funding limit will be imposed at this time; however,
 - People who haven't received Helping Hands funds in the past 12 months may be prioritized.
 - If someone has received funds before, that history will be considered when reviewing new requests.
- **If your request costs more than \$500:**
 - If the item or service costs **more than \$500**, you must explain **how the remaining balance will be paid**.
 - This explanation must be included in your application.
- **Honesty and appropriate use:**
 - If Helping Hands finds that funds are being used incorrectly or fraudulently, they will address it directly with the applicant.
 - Misuse could affect future eligibility for funding.
- **Funding is not guaranteed:**
 - Even for emergencies, funding is **not guaranteed**.
 - Every request is reviewed and approved (or denied) by a **committee vote**, on a case-by-case basis.
- **No cash payments:**
 - Approved funds are **never given as cash**.
 - **Payments are made by:**
 - Check sent directly to a vendor.
 - Agency credit card.
 - Aspire of WNY's procurement process.
- **Some payment methods take longer, and submitters may have additional responsibilities to assist Helping Hands Coordinator depending on how request will be paid. Failure to comply with requested actions may affect future funding.**
- **Priority is given to applicants that can demonstrate significant financial hardship.**

Funding Process: Requests submitted to the Helping Hands program fall into one of two categories, Emergency requests or non-emergency Scholarship requests.

- **Emergency Requests:** Once a request is submitted to Helping Hands and identified as an emergency* by the Helping Hands team, staff will work closely with the submitter to gather any required documentation. The goal is to prepare the request so it can be reviewed by the Helping Hands Committee as quickly as possible for a funding decision.
 - *Marking an application as an emergency does **not** automatically guarantee emergency priority. Helping Hands Coordinators determine the final status of the request. The committee may ask for additional documentation or clarification before making a decision, and delays in providing requested information will result in delays in the committee's determination.
- **Scholarship Requests:** All non-emergency requests are considered Scholarship requests and are collected and reviewed by the Helping Hands Committee on a **quarterly basis**. The committee may approve one or more requests from those submitted during the prior quarter, based solely on the committee's discretion.
 - Because funding decisions are made using only the information provided at the time of submission, applicants are strongly encouraged to include as much detail as possible in their application. There will not be an opportunity to submit additional information after review begins.
 - Scholarship requests include requests for respite reimbursement, recreational activities, and any other needs that do not meet emergency criteria.

Approval Times (Approximate):

- **Emergency requests:** If Helping Hands agrees your request is truly an emergency and you submit all required documents, you should hear back **by the end of the next business day**.
 - If you apply on a **Friday**, you'll hear back by Monday (or the next business day if Monday is a holiday).
 - Payment itself may still take extra time, depending on how it's processed.
- **Non-emergency requests:** These are reviewed quarterly (once every three months). If your request is approved, a Helping Hands Coordinator will contact you.
- **Important things to know for all applications:**
 - If the committee has additional questions or needs additional information, this may delay processing of request depending on response time of submitter.
 - If/when request is approved; additional time may be required to process payment or to research and purchase products or services.

Item Specific Guidelines:

- **Rental assistance (i.e. rent or security deposit), utilities, etc.:**
 - These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and the committee MAY fund a percentage of the total owed. **A full accounting of amount owed, attempts to make payment, attempts to establish payment arrangement, and plan for addressing future payments MUST be provided with request. The committee will not hear request if individual is more than ONE month behind in rent or TWO months behind in utilities.**
- **Environmental modifications, repairs, adaptive equipment:**
 - Clinical justification by an appropriate clinician must be documented and included with the request.
 - Item cannot be funded by another source (i.e. Family Reimbursement, Medicaid, insurance, Waiver E-MOD) and proof of denial (letter, emails, etc.) must be included with request.
- **Respite reimbursement** (*all requests for respite reimbursement will automatically be considered a non-emergency request*):
 - Respite provider must be 14 years of age or older, cannot live in the family household and cannot be a parent/guardian regardless of whether parent/guardian lives in the primary household.
 - Submitters are encouraged to review and use the Family Reimbursement process with OPWDD- Respite Verification Form may be used as documentation (copies of original submitted application will be accepted). Otherwise, documentation must be included outlining: respite provider name and relationship, parent/guardian information, date(s) of service, time(s) of service, rate(s) of service, total hours, total amount paid and both respite provider and parent/guardian signed confirmation that service was provided. ***Proof of payment must be provided by copy of check or receipt of online payment (i.e. Venmo).**
 - Typical childcare costs, such as day care for working parents, will not be considered for reimbursement. Extra expenses incurred due to the child's disability, and childcare for persons over the age of 13, may be considered for reimbursement. Reimbursement for after school or school break respite can be considered if documentation is provided showing the child is unable to access other after school respite/school break programs.
- **Technology requests (tablet, iPad, computer, software, etc.):**
 - For all technology requests, a clinical justification will be required outlining how device/software will be used and how it relates to individual's developmental disability.
 - If primary use is educational, there will need to be explanation why school cannot provide the device.
 - Payment or reimbursement may be prorated if device will be used by family members other than the individual.

Item Specific Guidelines Continued:

- **Requests for the following will not be considered at this time by Helping Hands in either the emergency or non-emergency categories:** Any sort of legal fee/ ticket/legal representation, normal wear and tear home/car repairs, reimbursement or payment for Medical Marijuana, reimbursement or payment for any medication or supplement, reimbursement or payment for any therapeutic treatment that is not endorsed or acknowledged by OPWDD, or any type of electronic monitoring/tracking/observation devices. This list is subject to change at any time.
- Requests for medical equipment, services, special diet, and others where appropriate will require a clinical justification from doctor, therapist or another qualified professional.

Resources: Below are some resources you should try before applying to Helping Hands. All attempts should be listed on your application.

- **Please note, this is not a complete list of available resources:**
 - Insurance: Medicaid and/or any private insurance should both be attempted prior to Helping Hands; a denial from insurance is required when applicable (medical equipment, therapies, medications, etc.).
 - Family Reimbursement Program (FRP): if request is denied by FRP or all funds have been exhausted, please provide denial (letter and/or emails) from FRP agencies and provide details about use of FRP funds on application.
 - Maria Love Fund (Erie County only)- for residents of Erie County ONLY who meet eligibility criteria (categories are convalescent care aids/adaptive equipment, medication or pharmaceutical supplies, medical related transportation, food or specialized dietary needs, utilities related to medical needs).
 - Department of Social Services/Catholic Charities/Red Cross.
 - Food Bank of WNY.
 - Community Action Organization (CAO).
 - Catholic Charities- Neighbor for Neighbor Heat Fund (help with heating bill for low-income, disabled, elderly, medical emergencies).
 - Children's Love Fund (Chautauqua County only)- helps families in Chautauqua County who have children with long-term illnesses by reimbursing them for non-medical expenses related to doctor or hospital visits
 - Family, friends, neighbors, church, etc.

Quick Tips:

We strongly encourage submitters to review our guidelines before applying for funding as additional steps and documents are required to complete the application. All questions about the program should be sent to helpinghands@aspirewny.org.

