



January 2026

My name is Stacy Ellingen. I'm a 40-year-old woman who lives in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I'm a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a friend, a college grad, and a business owner. I'm a valued member of my community. Reading this, you're probably asking yourself, "so, what is her point?" It doesn't seem out of the ordinary until I share that due to complications during birth, I was diagnosed with Athetoid Spastic Cerebral Palsy when I was three months old. Cerebral Palsy affects all of the muscles in my body. I use a power wheelchair to get around and a communication app on my phone to communicate. I rely on assistance from caregivers for everything from getting out of bed each morning, to using the restroom, to showering and dressing, to eating all my meals, to getting back into bed at night. I literally rely on the assistance from caregivers to live my life. Home-and-Community-Based Services allow me to live the life I want. Thanks to these services, I'm able to live in my own apartment and I own my own business. I'm a productive member of my community.

I'm a participant in the IRIS Program which allows me to self-direct all of my own services and supports. I've been hiring and scheduling all of my own workers for just about 10 years now. While this allows me to be as independent as possible, it's a lot of work and can be really frustrating at times. Finding caregivers to work has been challenging to say the least. When people can make more money flipping burgers at a fast-food restaurant or stocking shelves at a dime store than they can taking care of people, there is a problem. I've tried switching to home care agencies multiple times, but, unfortunately, they can't staff my hours because they aren't able to find people to work either. I've had a little better luck hiring my own people, but it's a struggle. That said, if it weren't for the IRIS Program, I would have to be in a segregated care facility.

Cares aren't the only thing I receive through Home-and-Community-Based Services. Things such as vehicle modifications, home modifications (an electronic door opener which allows me to be able to get in and out of my apartment independently), and employment services (which assisted me in gaining employment) have been things and services that have made it possible to be an active member of society.

While there are definitely a lot of things that could be improved in Home-and-Community-Based Services, the services I received have been and will continue to be what allows me to live the wonderful and productive life I desire!