

New Jersey Honors Direct Support Professionals



New Jersey Workforce Development Insider

Direct Support Professional Recognition Week is held annually to recognize and celebrate the direct support workforce and the difference they make in the lives of people with disabilities. Direct Support Professionals (DSP) provide a variety of supports. From assisting with daily personal needs to helping develop friendships in the community, DSPs play a vital role in enhancing the lives people with disabilities. A majority of direct support professionals provide services in community-based settings and may work with one or multiple people at a time.

Celebrating direct support professionals not only acknowledges the importance of the work that they do each day, but also shows a commitment to investing in a quality workforce and advancing the profession of direct support. According to the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) Board Resolution, “many direct support professionals are forced to leave their jobs due to inadequate wages and benefits, creating high turnover and vacancy rates that research demonstrates adversely affects the quality of supports to individuals with disabilities.” Despite these challenges, many direct support professionals are out there doing the work and are committed to the people they support.

Last year, DSP Recognition Week was celebrated on September 16 with an event announcing the statewide implementation of the College of Direct Support (CDS) in New Jersey. The “Kick-off Event” held at the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Hamilton, NJ also honored Direct Support Professionals for their service to people with disabilities including those DSPs whom participated in the three year pilot of the NJ DSP Career Path and online training available through the CDS.



Safy Diedhiou from Matheny Medical & Educational Center poignantly describes her passion for being a DSP at the kick-off event. Mulualem Yihune, also a DSP at Matheny, looks on.

The event commenced with Commissioner Jennifer Velez announcing to the audience that this was an occasion to “honor the service of Direct Support Professionals and in concert, we recognize the work of the New Jersey Direct Support Professional Workforce Development Coalition, the professional and personal stakeholders in the disability community who are dedicating their time to improving the human services workforce.”

The highlight of the event was the panel of Direct Support Professionals who shared touching stories of their experiences learning from the CDS courses and supporting people with disabilities.

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The NJ Partnership for DSP Workforce Development

- *It's about the Quality...of supports that a well-trained workforce provides.*
- *It's about the Value...of professionalism gained through the College of Direct Support state-of-the-art training.*
- *It's about the Future...of Direct Support Professionals and the lives of people with developmental disabilities.*

Confidently Letting Go

By Gail Frizzell

As I write this it is late August. Young adults are gathering up new bedding, the latest style jeans, and mini fridges before heading off to college. Their parents are dealing with tuition bills, separation anxiety, and fears of unknown dangers lying in wait for their fearless sons and daughters. As the parent of a young adult with developmental disabilities, I have never had to worry about Lauren going off to college. She attended the local high school until she was twenty-one and has always lived at home. I was there to feed her breakfast every morning and did not leave her for any length of time without the knowledge that she would be sleeping safely each night in her childhood room, beneath the filmy canopy over her bed. Have I been overprotective, controlling? Maybe. But, she is so very vulnerable, so needy, so unable to protect herself from the perils and pitfalls of life. I have hovered over and around her knowing that the day would come when, just like those parents whose children are leaving to take their first steps toward their adult lives, I would need to let go as well. About six weeks ago, that day came.

Lauren has moved into her own home. We've been planning this move for about a year now. It's been a frustrating, exciting, and exhausting project organizing and preparing for Lauren's new home. The budgeting process was full of unknowns and often confusing rules. Some construction was necessary, which always a difficult undertaking. And, overbearing mother that I am, I had to develop charts, manuals, and assure Lauren's comfort and security. Most importantly, Lauren had to have care – 24/7. Lauren already had some staff, but we needed to add some hours and add one more regular staff member as well as substitutes.

For Lauren to be successful in her new home, the Direct Support Professionals who are her staff must be much more than caregivers who simply fill a shift. They must care for and about her. They must respect her as an adult. They must be aware that without their advocacy, Lauren may be *in* the community but will not be *part* of the community.

Lauren's existing staff had to step up, not only to a change in location, but also to a change in responsibilities. I was no longer the "common denominator." I was no longer there to connect one DSP to another, one shift to the next. I wasn't there to tell them what to give her for dinner or update them on Lauren's day. They, in essence, now had new roles. They needed to support an independent adult. They *are* supporting an independent adult. They have come together as a team to surround Lauren with the care and support that make her life possible. Without their dedication and professionalism I could not have let my precious girl try to find the wings that will, hopefully, carry her into a safe and secure future. Without my knowledge that there are always people with her who I can trust to be my



Lauren with her Direct Support Professionals (from left to right) Les, Cheryl, and Nancy

"Nothing will ever replace me or her family, but caring, qualified DSPs have provided me with the confidence to let go."

- Gail Frizzell (Parent)

ears, my eyes, my gentle touch, I could not have allowed Lauren to make this move. Nothing will ever replace me or her family, but caring, qualified DSPs have provided me with the confidence to let go.

Lauren cannot tell me how she's doing, how she feels about the changes in her life. She cannot tell me if she likes the pink that I painted her bedroom walls or if she likes living in a new town. All that I know is that when I go to visit her, I walk in, and she's smiling. She looks up at me and there is joy in her eyes. You see, Lauren rarely ever made eye contact with me or with anyone. Now I feel that she has found a way to let me know that she is happy, well cared for, and enjoying her independence. Her bright, shining eyes speak volumes about the quality of life that Lauren is experiencing thanks to the DSPs in her life. Scrolling letters above Lauren's bed spell out the phrase "May you live every day of your life with joy." Thanks to Nancy, Cheryl, Mary, Les, and Sheryl, she is.

Bancroft Direct Support Professionals Start Off on the Right Foot with the College of Direct Support

“Why? Because the information in the lessons are at the core of what we do and who we are,” was the response Bancroft staff education manager Pete Cartwright gave to why they decided to incorporate lessons from the College of Direct Support into their new staff orientation. Since July 1, 2011, in addition to Pre-Service and other orientation requirements, all new Direct Support Professionals (DSP) hired by Bancroft are required to complete a series of lessons through the College of Direct Support prior to their one year anniversary.

A series of eight College of Direct Support lessons were selected by senior leaders, human service and medical professionals, and other experts at Bancroft and merged to create a module assigned to all new DSPs. To date more than 100 DSPs have been assigned this module at Bancroft. The lessons were selected to align with the mission and values of the organization and focus on philosophy in order to give staff a good perspective of the job at hand. DSPs are introduced to this cutting-edge training curriculum during a new hire training day when a trainer demonstrates the first lesson in the series. Then within their first three months on the job, the staff are required to take the test for the demonstration along with two additional lessons. At that time they meet with their supervisor to discuss their transcript and learning as part of their performance review. They continue completing assigned lessons and meet with their supervisors periodically until they complete their one year orientation period.

Any lessons made a requirement by the organization or a manager are completed on the clock. Managers see great value in the CDS lessons and carve out time in staff schedules to allow for this professional development. Staff are typically given an hour and a half on particular days to complete this work, allowing enough time to complete a lesson.

In addition to giving the staff information they need to provide quality supports, completing these courses also gives them a head start on the NJ DSP Career Path which they are given information about during their first introductory session. This gives the DSPs an opportunity to see what the work is all about and provides opportunities for further professional development.

Response from DSPs, managers, and directors is positive. They report seeing great value in the coursework and skills that are developed. In fact, some managers have requested that all their staff take these trainings. One “campus” wanted their managers to receive some additional training and as a result all are working on the courses found in the College of Frontline Supervision and Management.

As the staff education manager, Mr. Cartwright gives these helpful hints to other organizations wishing to implement similar staff development programs.

- Make sure you have a plan for the structure of your professional development program. Include everything from how to get courses assigned through following up with transcripts.
- Get the key people on board. Director and Manager buy-in is crucial.
- Involve the DSPs. Publicize the effort well. Make sure everyone in the organization knows what it’s all about.
- Make all staff aware of the lessons available through the College of Direct Support. They’ll know about the wide variety of lessons that exist, and this will assist managers and DSPs in creating professional development opportunities.
- Hold introduction sessions at orientation, directors, and staff meetings. This helps everyone understand the system and know how they can use it to increase the knowledge and skills of DSPs.
- Apply for grants that can be used to fund resources like laptops and PCs.

Planning, promotion, and passion for learning are critical elements of any workforce development initiative. This is one great example of how New Jersey agencies are making strides toward using the educational opportunities made available to enhance the quality, value, and future of direct support professionals and the lives of people with disabilities.

“Why? Because the information in the lessons are at the core of what we do and who we are.”

- Pete Cartwright (Bancroft)

From Suburb to City...

DSPs from Northwestern Human Services Support Community Life

Philadelphia, it's the city of brotherly love. It's a city of diversity, arts, culture, and great history. It's a place where people love their Phillies, Eagles, and Flyers. Now thanks to Northwestern Human Services' Direct Support Professionals (DSP) Erica Fletcher, Helen Tarr, Emmitt Herring, Cecelia Tyler, Shana Adrah, Kimberly Roberts, Tenezi Freeman, and Anthony Kenneth it's where four people who recently moved from a developmental center into the community enjoy all that life has to offer.

Even before they moved into their South Jersey community, the Direct Support Professionals that would support them throughout the day at their new home were there. The DSPs played an integral role in the lives of each person. Taking time to get to know them, using this time and information they were given to help them find roommates that would be a good match. They supported them in making the transition from the New Lisbon Developmental Center to a home in suburban New Jersey, selecting furniture, personalizing their rooms, and helping them get acclimated to their new life.

"...the others know that each day he is working will be a good day full of smiles and few challenges."

-Tawana James (NHS)

Even with staff there is a good match. One DSP understands and relates so well to one of the gentlemen using supports, the other staff know that each day he is working will be a good day full of smiles and few challenges. These staff exemplify the DSP role. They support the daily needs of each person, assisting them with everyday tasks from hygiene to cooking. They demonstrate skill and provide support when challenging behaviors occur and get to know each person to learn more about how to prevent such behaviors in the first place. The staff work as a team with each other and those using supports. They keep each other informed and take the time to listen to what each person wants and needs.

With staff support these men and women are living a life like they never have before. One, with the support of his house manager, has visited his family in Florida. With staff support, he maintains this relationship between visits through phone calls and letters which bring a sparkle to his eyes. The roommates each have frequent opportunities to experience a variety of events in Philadelphia, from the theatre, to sporting events, to restaurants. They all share their love of gardening through the vegetables they've planted in the yard. The DSPs work hard to support the needs of each person and all are loving the Southern New Jersey way of life.

Course Corner: Direct Support Professionalism

"What is a Direct Support Professional," is a commonly asked question. A direct support professional (DSP) is someone who is employed to support someone with a disability live the life they want. From supporting people with disabilities with daily hygiene to helping them develop relationships in the community, the tasks involved in a DSPs job are far reaching. Given the importance of this job, clear understanding of the role, ethics, and focus on professionalism is necessary. This course gives staff a realistic view of the job they perform as it helps DSPs understand the philosophy behind current practices, make ethical decisions, maintain confidentiality and identify and use their strengths in providing quality supports. Lessons found in this College of Direct Support course include:

- Becoming a Direct Support Professional
- Contemporary Best Practices
- Applying Ethics in Everyday Work
- Practicing Confidentiality
- Working with Your Strengths and Interests
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA)

If you'd like to have this course assigned to you or your staff, talk to your agency's CDS administrator and/or human resources/training department.

CDS Administrator Tips

Viewing a List of Agency Learners:

College of Direct Support Agency Administrators, did you ever wonder how you can view a complete list of everyone in your agency that you've enrolled into the College of Direct Support? There is an easy way to accomplish this task. Using your Administration page in the CDS simply follow these few easy steps.

- Go to the "eLearning" tab, move your cursor onto "Assign Training To" and select "Department."
- Click the "Select Department" button and a pop-up page will appear.
- Select your agency's department by highlighting it in the list of choices in the drop down menu and clicking select.
- Click the "View Department Learners" button to see all the learners you've enrolled.

Classroom Training Rosters: What does the checkmark mean?

Trainers, did you notice the checkmark that appears beside some names on your class rosters you develop using the Classes & Events feature? The check mark denotes that an email address is attached to that staff person's user ID in the system. Using this aspect of the system can help you to determine methods for sending training reminders and any relevant preparatory or follow-up information.



Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills are Gained Through the Career Path at the Arc of Burlington County

The Arc of Burlington County is the first provider to implement the New Jersey Direct Support Professional Career Path since the pilot. Eleven DSPs were included in the first cohort of staff completing this innovative program aimed at increasing the skills and confidence of staff in effort to increase the quality of supports and retention of staff.

Agency Career Path Coordinator and Trainer Jennifer Parry emphasized how the ultimate outcome would be the impact it would have on the people using supports. She commended the College of Direct Support curriculum and how the Career Path covers all topics that DSPs need to have competency in if they are to support people to live quality lives.

For this first group, the agency trainers perform the duties of mentor. They split the group and follow-up with the participating staff on a one-to-one basis through email and stops out to the residences where the DSPs work. Feedback about the curriculum has been positive, and the only apprehension the DSPs convey is about completing the portfolio activities. In response, Ms. Parry in collaboration with an English teacher designed a "writing workshop" to offer to those staff concerned about writing. In addition, the flexibility of the portfolio process allows for other methods of documenting skill development such as audio/video recording, scrapbooking, creation of PowerPoints, and other creative means.

"I didn't realize what I didn't know"

-Victoria Williams

(The Arc of Burlington County)

Initiating the career path at an organization is not a task to take lightly. In order to have the greatest impact careful planning must be done. Ms. Parry admits if she were to do anything differently, she would have given the program more structure from the beginning and not leave as much up to the staff to do on their own. Through coordinated efforts, the organization continues to make strides to overcome barriers that need to be considered when starting professional development initiatives. Time, scheduling, and resources are always a concern. Ms. Parry made great use out of the "Discussion" thread available through the CDS. She created the thread and signed each DSP up each with a different color font. The participating DSPs now use this feature to have conversations, ask questions, and gain technical assistance. Overnight staff are able to use downtime to complete work and DSPs without computers have made use of local libraries. The majority of the learning is done off the clock, but those completing the Career Path will be rewarded with a day off at a time of their choosing. A schedule is currently being developed bring the group together to discuss the learning and the training department is setting up a computer in the office for staff to make use of.

Efforts to start the next cohort have already begun with Ms. Parry conducting presentations to the various homes and programs throughout the organization. With DSP Victoria Williams and other participating staff saying such things as, "I didn't realize what I didn't know," and "I'm a lot more aware of the things I do and what I say," it's easy to see the impact the Career Path can make. Through increased awareness, knowledge, and skills gained; quality supports for people with disabilities and career satisfaction on part of the DSPs can be achieved.

The College of Frontline Supervision and Management: Building Strong Management Teams at the Arc of Middlesex County

The Arc of Middlesex County is making waves in staff development. Earlier this year Executive Director, Richard Sheridan, requested that agency trainers Cheryl Minkoff and Lois Becker, Director and Assistant Director of Training respectively, review lessons in the College of Frontline Supervision and Management (CFSM) within the College of Direct Support (CDS). The Arc of Middlesex County is familiar with utilizing the online training through the CDS. They participated in the Career Path Pilot Project and have used the CDS course on Cultural Competence to train staff in their vocational program to meet the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) requirements for over a year.

After reviewing the courses, the decision was made to have all current and new managers complete two courses: Becoming a Supervisor and The First Few Weeks and Months as a Supervisor. In June 2011, this requirement became a reality. The training requirement includes taking both CFSM courses and completing a portfolio assignment for each lesson, further supporting the managers to connect the online training to their day-to-day work. The staff are given time during the work day to complete the online training, with an option to also complete it at home.

Ms. Minkoff and Ms. Becker currently serve as mentors to the 20 managers across the agency as they work their way through the courses. Every two weeks, they facilitate a meeting with these new supervisors. During these meetings, managers have an opportunity to share their thoughts on the lesson they recently completed and turn in the related portfolio assignment.

In the beginning, staff would call the mentors often for guidance says Ms. Minkoff, but “once they got the hang of it” and began meeting regularly the calls became fewer and further in between. Ms. Becker shared that when they started they needed to give a lot of support to get everyone to complete the assignments. She commented that many “feared being back in school again with meeting deadlines and having assignments due,” which was to be expected. It has been a few weeks since the first lesson was assigned and both mentors report that there has been a change in the feedback they are getting from the managers. Managers now report that although it is sometimes difficult to find time to complete the training during the day, they enjoy it and find it applicable to the work they are doing. It seems they “are relating it to their experiences, you can see it in their portfolio assignments,” says Ms. Becker. Many of the managers have taken what they’ve learned and shared the information with their staff. They have learned to overcome the time barrier by waiting for down time during the day or after hours to complete the lessons. There continues to be a lot of one-on-one time available for staff to sit and meet with the mentors if they have questions or need help with a portfolio assignment.

*“[The Managers] are relating it to their experiences,
you can see it in their portfolio assignments.”*

*-Lois Becker
(The Arc of Middlesex County)*

Michael Birardi, one of the original DSPs to participate in the Career Path was promoted to Coordinator of the Metuchen Career Center and now takes the required supervisory courses in the CDS. He finds that the curriculum “directly applies to the job” and the portfolio assignments to be useful in helping him “take the learning and apply it to the job.” Although he has been a supervisor for over a year, Mr. Birardi still finds the information in the CDS to be “useful, interesting, and relevant to the work we do.”

Debbie Aidelman, Director of Vocational Services, looks at staff training as an investment. She’s always “in favor of sending staff out to conferences (for training and staff development),” but doing the online training is like having convenient staff development throughout the year. Ms. Aidelman has taken several of the lessons and finds it to be relevant to the work she does. Although new to her role at the Arc of Middlesex County, she has been in the field for several years in different capacities including staff trainer. She realizes that there are “more opportunities for training now” and that training doesn’t always have to take place in a classroom. Utilizing the online training through the CDS allows for greater flexibility when it comes to staff development and “the portfolio is a useful tool for gluing it all together”. Like Mr. Birardi, she agrees that it does take time to go through the lessons and complete the portfolio work but it is all a part of improving supports and helping people with disabilities live the lives they want. After completing the required lessons, Ms. Aidelman plans on taking other courses through the CDS that will be helpful to her and her staff in the work that they do.

The Arc of Middlesex County hopes to have the managers who have gone through the training serve as mentors for newer supervisors that come on board and are currently considering possible incentives for staff who complete additional training. The organization plans to continue their workforce development efforts and anticipate that once the original group of managers complete their requirements they will choose to continue their learning through additional coursework.

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Direct Support Professionals participating in this panel included: Alison Malnak and Abdul Gabisi from The Arc of Somerset County; Beverly Pavloff from The Arc of Atlantic County; Crystal Eisenbry then from The Arc of Middlesex County; Brian Odenath and Zoubir Bittout from Bancroft; and Safy Diedhiou, Binta Badji, and Muluaem Yihune from Matheny Medical and Educational Center.

During the panel presentation, Crystal Eisenbry shared that she liked “the incorporation of videos, activities, and stories into the learning material. It gave examples of experiences I could relate to and situations that I see almost everyday.” Another DSP, Zoubir Bittout, commented that “he felt challenged and a sense of increased responsibility to himself, his mentee, co-workers, the organization, and the people he supports daily.”

Abdul Gabisi an Industrial Engineer from Sierra Leone, West Africa arrived in the United States eleven years ago and began working as a DSP with little knowledge of how to support people with disabilities. He admitted that working in this field was challenging at first, but through ongoing trainings, support from his co-workers, and care for the people he supports, he was able to commit to the field and has been doing so ever-since. He shared that after being in the field for so long he appreciated being a part of the Career Path because it gave him a “new professional outlook” and that before doing so he considered like many people, his work as a DSP to be a “transition ground” or stepping stone, but “with the advent of this career path this perception is changing.”

***“I have a new professional outlook.”
(as a result of the career path)***

***- Abdul Gabisi
(The Arc of Somerset County)***

Statewide implementation of the College of Direct Support began in November 2010 with regional rollout of training and access to the system. The rollout began in the southern region and ended in June 2011 in the northern region. To date, approximately 144 agencies and 22,000 people supporting individuals with disabilities have been enrolled in the College of Direct Support in New Jersey.

Many agencies have taken full advantage of the online training and have already begun to assign lessons to their staff. By the end of regional rollout approximately 13,000 total lessons were assigned by agencies across the state. Some of the more popular courses in the CDS include Direct Support Professionalism, Introduction to Developmental Disabilities, and Cultural Competence. Other courses found through the CDS’s College of Frontline Supervision and Management have also been assigned widely including courses such as Fueling High Performance, Training & Orientation, and Preparing for the Supervisor’s Job in Human Services.

This year DSP Recognition Week takes place from September 11–17, 2011. Agencies are encouraged to find creative ways of recognizing the DSPs in their organization. The Developmental Disabilities Lecture Series held on Friday, September 16, 2011 will focus on DSP workforce development. Guest speaker Joseph Macbeth, Executive Director of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) will give a presentation entitled “Commitment, Capacity, and Culture: Solutions for the Direct Support Workforce Crisis.” During the event direct support professionals that have completed one or both levels of the Career Path within the last year will be recognized for the work they have done as DSPs and completion of the online training.

Have you considered what you and/or your agency can do to celebrate direct support professionals? Here are some ideas:

- Article in the local paper
- Sending out thank you cards
- Launch of agency workforce development initiatives
- Staff appreciation breakfast, lunch, ice cream socials, BBQ, etc...
- Gift cards
- Honorable mention in an agency newsletter
- Wearing a pin: DSPs Make a Difference
- Flyers encouraging others to thank a DSP today

If you have information you would like to share on how you/your agency honored DSPs, please send them to cdsta@umdnj.edu.



DSP Crystal Eisenbry shares how the Career Path impacted her education and desire for lifelong learning. From Left: Abdul Gabisi, Zoubir Bittout, and Brian Odenath await their turn to present.



The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School
335 George St. • P.O. Box 2688
New Brunswick, NJ 08903-2688
Phone: 732-235-9300 Fax: 732-235-9330

Staff Contacts:
Colleen McLaughlin, M.Ed.
Shellyann Dacres, M.S.
cdsta@umdnj.edu

<http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter>

Information about New Jersey's DSP
Workforce Development Initiatives
can be found on the NJ Division of
Developmental Disabilities website:
www.nj.gov/ddd/DSPWD



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Information on training and technical assistance related to the College of Direct Support can be found at:

<http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/training/CDSAdministratorTraining.html>

Current Training Topics include:

CDS Administrator Training

Making the College of Direct Support Work for Your Agency



New Jersey Workforce Development Insider

THE INFORMATION YOU NEED ABOUT NEW JERSEY'S DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES