

THE NJ DSP CAREER PATH QUARTERLY

SPRING 2009



CAREER PATH PILOT PROJECT—MAKING STRIDES TOWARD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR DSPS

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The NJ Direct Support Professional Coalition and its partner agencies are approaching the end of a two year Career Path Pilot Project. This innovative project gives Direct Support Professionals the opportunity to enhance their skills, increase their professionalism, and earn salary increases continues to be a driving force toward professionalization of the field. A selection of DSPs from the nine participating agencies involved in this project have spent the past year and a half taking online courses through the College of Direct Support (www.collegeofdirectsupport.com), being mentored by a knowledgeable and experienced peer, and completing a portfolio to demonstrate competency.



Excitement for the Career Path spread like wildfire after last September's Direct Support Professional Conference. DSPs appreciated having the opportunity to learn about best practices, being recognized, and being seen as professional. The beginning of this grant year saw a 48% increase in enrollment. There are currently 179 DSPs enrolled in the Career Path; 49 of these are also mentors. In addition to those participating in the Career Path, there are 108 other agency staff enrolled in the College of Direct Support taking courses electively and/or as assigned by their agency.

DID YOU KNOW?

Education and Recognition can go a long way. Enrollment in the NJ Career Path increased by 48% following the Direct Support Professional Conference and Recognition Ceremony in September 2008.

DSP RECONITION IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND BEYOND

Agencies participating in the Career Path and throughout New Jersey are doing what they can to recognize the great work of their direct support professionals. For the September 2008 DSP Week, the Arc of Atlantic County took out a large ad in their local newsletter to show their appreciation and list the names of all their DSPs. New Jersey's Hospital Newspaper included an article highlighting Matheny Medical and Educational Center's DSPs participating in the Career Path.

Other agencies are making efforts to recognize their DSPs through other media outlets and by holding recognition ceremonies, luncheons and other celebrations.

The NJ DSP Workforce Development Coalition commends agencies and provider networks for their continued efforts to recognize the hard work and achievements of New Jersey's Direct Support Professionals.

DSP RECOGNITION SYMPOSIUM TO BE HELD IN SEPTEMBER

The NJ DSP Workforce Development Coalition is pleased to announce the scheduling of the DSP Making a Difference Symposium for September 18, 2009. This invitation only event will be held to enhance the professionalism of DSPs participating in the Career Path through continued learning and recognition for their accomplishments. Many thanks to the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities for funding this event through the Career Path grant.

ABOUT THE NJ DSP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COALITION

The New Jersey Direct Support Professional Workforce Development Coalition's mission is to promote the recruitment and retention of a professional workforce to enhance the quality of direct supports for people with disabilities and their families.

We do this by:

- Supporting the choice of direct support professional as a life long career
- Building partnerships among agencies, funding sources, educational institutions, families, and consumers
- Improving the quality of the work environment for direct support professionals

The Coalition's membership includes:

Direct Support Professionals
 Families of People with Developmental Disabilities
 Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities
 The Arc of New Jersey
 Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development/Community Colleges of New Jersey
 Division of Developmental Disabilities, New Jersey Department of Human Services
 Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services
 The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
 New Jersey Association of Community Providers
 New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities

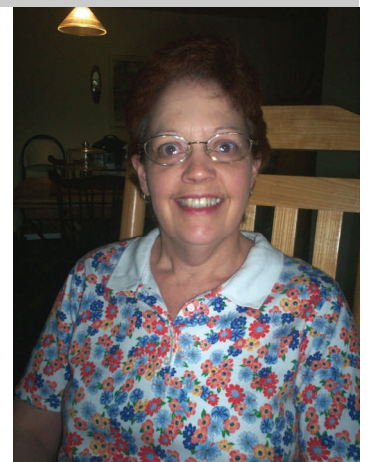
If you are interested in joining the Coalition's Listserv, please send an email to elizabeth.ong@umdj.edu

BRENDA HOAGLAND

NEW JERSEY'S FIRST NATIONALLY REGISTERD DSP

On January 23, 2009 Brenda Hoagland of Matheny Medical and Educational Center became New Jersey's first Direct Support Professional—Registered (DSP-R) through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). This is the first of three levels of credentialing offered by NADSP. This credential recognizes people in the direct support profession and desire to continue their careers in the field of community services for people with developmental disabilities.

Brenda is currently working on the second level of credentialing, Direct Support Professional—Certified. Congratulations go out to her for her accomplishments and dedication to the field. Most DSPs in NJ are eligible to become DSP-R. For more information on how to apply for credentialing go to www.nadsp.org.



DSPS FROM BANCROFT NEUROHEALTH TALK ABOUT THE CAREER PATH

I've enjoyed my experience with CDS. The information has been thorough and helpful. Although challenging at times, the CDS has given me the opportunity to examine some of the ways I interact with the people I support, determine which of these strategies are beneficial, and has persuaded me to make some changes for the better. Many of the situations covered in the material are situations I face everyday in the work place. The material covered in CDS has helped me to reinforce effective strategies and expand my thinking to incorporate new strategies that are beneficial to the people I support. CDS has also help me be more aware of situations that I do not face on a daily basis and helped me to be more prepared for these situations when they arise. The work has been tough and finding the time to complete assignments has been challenging but in the end it has been rewarding.

By Joe Copsetta

"The College of Direct Support has giving me the opportunity to examine some of the ways I interact with the people I support..."

- Joe Cosetta

"I enjoy being a mentor and guiding other individuals through the information."

- Michelle Lee

The part I enjoy the most about the Career Path and its mentoring component is that I have been able to meet a lot of interesting people working within our programs that I did not have the experience of working with in the past. I have learned more from all of the information I have gained in the past year than I have from attending trainings. I find that the College of Direct Support modules hold very important information that help me to successfully continue my career as a direct support professional. In the beginning the modules were a refresher course for most of us completing the program, but it was nice to be reminded of why we do what we do everyday, and the history of how the job has changed over the years. I think it will be beneficial to staff who are just starting out in our organization and have no experience working directly with person served. It will give them a better understanding of what their role really is.

I am looking forward to continuing level 2 and level 3. I enjoy being a mentor and guiding other individuals through the information. It has given me an opportunity to view someone else's opinion of the information and gives me a better understanding. I am learning things from my mentee and hopefully she is learning or gaining things from me. Some things I may have been confused or torn on and others have provided me with some clarity. It is nice to know that we have built a team of people who can lean on one another.

I have really appreciated being given the opportunity to complete this program and grow into a stronger more educated direct support professional.

By Michelle Lee

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DSPS FROM BANCROFT (CONTINUED...)

The Career Path has provided much insight and information about the Human Services Field. The "Person Centered Planning" concept is finally coming to fruition with real supports put into place. Communication with persons served, family members, staff, professionals and advocates has been taken to a higher level of realization. This realization includes the hopes, dreams and wishes of the people we serve to live a life that is valued and meaningful to themselves and society. This program attempts to include every aspect of normalization while embracing the needs of inclusion as a "whole person." This program is excellent for anyone seeking to advance themselves within the field of Human Services and provide direct care.

The program initially seemed time consuming with a lot of thought provoking questions to research although the overall content and concept are outstanding. I enjoyed the challenge. I would like to thank everyone involved in the pilot program for the opportunity to serve as a mentor to others while assisting those we serve to achieve successful lives.

By Wanda Conquest

I feel that the Career Path is a great experience. The program has helped me become a better Direct Support Professional. The available on-line courses allowed me to take the classes when I had time and I could work at my own pace. Having a mentor system to assist me throughout each lesson turned out to be a great asset. We were able to work together to help one another get through any bumps that came our way. I believe that the College of Direct Support solidifies our position and provides a strong foundation for the field of Direct Support Professionals. This program will greatly assist us in making a difference to the individuals we support. Thank you!

By Brian Odenath

:"This program is excellent for anyone seeking to advance themselves ...and provide direct care."

- Wanda Conquest

DSPS FROM UCP OF HUDSON COUNTY RECOGNIZED

A DSP Proclamation Ceremony was held on December 19, 2008 in North Bergen ASN for nine Direct Support Professionals: Alexis Cole, Ana Ramirez, Brenda Ford, Elda Sichuco, Elsie Adaros, Janeth Moreno, Janetta Ewers, Luz Rojas, Jannette Garcia and Activity Instructor and Mentor, Sandra Davis. The DSP's and Mentor received an achievement certificate which was presented by Ms. Doreen DiDomenico, Hudson County Freeholder.

Other honorary guests present were Thomas DeGise, Hudson County Executive and the Mayor of Kearny, Al Santos. The Board of Chosen Freeholders of Hudson County presented a Resolution plaque to the UCP of Hudson County thereby recognizing the vital role of Direct Support Professionals and their dedication. Each of those recognized were the first Direct Support Professionals to receive Career Path Certification in Hudson County. In addition, the Direct Support Professionals received a recognition certificate from the UCP of Hudson County. The entire ceremony was covered by North Hudson Cablevision News. We are proud to display the Resolution Certificate on the wall in the reception area in North Bergen ASN. Congratulations to the Direct Support Professionals and Mentors of UCP of Hudson County ASN Program.

DSPS FROM MATHENY EXCEL ON THE CAREER PATH

The College of Direct Support lessons have been very informative. Since taking the courses it makes me realize the importance of my job. It has taught me how to view my job in a different light. We are not just caretakers, but are friends, someone the patients can talk to and we are there for them in every situations. The information given helps to provide better care and have more knowledge of how to serve the patients.



I spoke to many staff taking this course and they came to the same conclusion. These are great courses. Many things to learn; it encourages us to stay in this field of work.

By Dennis Asante

The College of Direct Support lessons have been very informative. Since taking the courses it makes me realize the importance of my job. It has taught me how to view my job in a

different light. We are not just caretakers, but are friends, someone the people we support can talk to and we are there for them in every situations. The information given helps to provide better care and have more knowledge of how to serve people with disabilities. I spoke to many staff taking this course and they came to the same conclusion. These are great courses. There are any things to learn; it encourages us to stay in this field of work.

By Ethredge Hanson

"I sent my children to school, then I went to school online. I'm loving it, and it has helped me in my everyday work."

-Binta Badji

MY EXPERIENCE ON THE CAREER PATH

ELIZABETH KINYANJUI—THE ARC OF SOMERSET

The Career Path has been an eye opener in almost every area that concerns, relates to, affects, and improves the quality of the lives of the people I support. It has given me more understanding of procedures and practices, legislation governing their rights, documentation, privacy, safety, rights, freedom of choice, inclusion in the community, etc...

"It has given me insight into the American Culture, which is so diverse..."

- Elizabeth Kinyanjui

It has also given me insight into the American culture which is so diverse in the beliefs and values regarding freedom of choice and respect for liberty concerning privacy and personal space. Noticing that the American culture emphasizes: time schedules and meeting them; planning and focusing; growth, development and improvement; economic independence; etc... Knowledge of this diversity will avert many problems with those I work and support.

I have also learned to know my rights too and become more direct and voice any concern without fear where I know it will help improved the work atmosphere and also the lives of those I support. I have learned to put the person's issues before mine as they depend on the support I give. In conclusion the exposure has made me emerge better equipped

than when I started. It is my belief that I will be able to do things differently and better than I did before now. I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to the Arc for allowing me to participate in this program.

LETTING GO A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE BY KATHY ROBERSON

My daughter, Katie, is about to turn 18. She's a beautiful young woman, happy, social, into music, eager to be out in the world. She also needs help with all self-care, speaks in 2 or 3 word sentences, doesn't know numbers or letters, and would walk away with anyone who seemed friendly. Increasingly, I find myself wondering, "What will it mean to parent Katie as an *adult*?"

I work in the field of developmental disabilities, and am fortunate to have heard the voices of self-advocates who speak passionately about their desire to be treated with the same respect and dignity as any other adult. I have also attended many meetings where I've heard the frustration of professionals who feel the parents of the individuals they support are unable to see the ways their children are, in fact, growing up. I understand these perspectives, and share the same vision of how things should be. And yet, like many parents of children with significant intellectual disabilities, I struggle with the question of how to honor my daughter's growth and maturity in ways that make sense for her – including honestly recognizing her own specific challenges and needs.

Katie's the youngest of three, and I've had some experience guiding her two older siblings into adulthood. Over the years, that's meant finding a balance between keeping them reasonably safe, and at the same time affording them the freedom to take risks and fail. I've also had to accept that I no longer know all the ways they navigate their worlds, and that some of their decisions I agree with, and some I don't. For me, however, being able to step back so that they could step forward on their own has had a lot to do with trusting they had the skills – or at least a reasonable foundation of skills – to understand rules and consequences, handle the unexpected, solve problems, and know who to go to for help. Walk to a friend's house alone? Yes, if I thought they could look both ways before crossing the street, and even that didn't necessarily mean yes to also crossing the busy intersection in the center of town. Of course learning and developing skills doesn't happen in a straight line, and children who know the rule for looking both ways can still forget when it's their soccer ball that's rolling across the road. And certainly there were moments, perhaps most especially when they started driving as teenagers, I just had to hold my breath and hope for the best. Still, even at my most worried I had some trust in the range of abilities they had demonstrated up to that point, and figured these helped to at least raise the odds in their favor.



With Katie, it's different. It has to be. Even if some of her interests are what one would expect of an 18 year old, almost none of her skills are. Despite working diligently for years on how to look both ways, she will step into traffic without so much as a glance if you don't remind her to stop first. She cannot tell me about her day with any real accuracy, including if she's been hurt or upset, which means I have to wait to read the occasional notes the teacher sends home in her backpack. So while I know I need to respect Katie's own growing need for independence and adult status, for me, this means trusting not *her* skills, but the skills of *the people who care for her*.

Like many parents, for years I've comfortably entrusted the majority of Katie's days to the people who work in her school. But I'm talking here about an adult life in the community, where inevitably there is much less structure and many more opportunities for interacting with people in a wide variety of unpredictable contexts. It's how it should be. It's how I want it to be. And yet I also recognize that for my daughter the delicate balance between choice and risk will, increasingly, be up to other people to find. The fact is, Katie's ability to live a healthy and meaningful life in the community is going to depend more and more on the direct support professionals who provide her with the assistance she needs, and my "letting go" will ultimately depend on my believing in the expertise and fundamental goodness of the people who support her. It can be scary to contemplate such a leap of faith, at least in the abstract, but when I think about some of the DSPs I've had the good fortune to meet – each of them extraordinarily committed and caring – it starts to seem like perhaps a reasonable chance to take after all. Knowing these individuals makes it possible for me to envision new possibilities for Katie. They make it easier for me to feel it will be okay to take the plunge, hold my breath, and hope for the best. They help me to realize that despite her dependence on others, with people such as these in her life the odds will still be very much in Katie's favor.



**THE NEW JERSEY DIRECT SUPPORT
PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT COALITION**

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:

Project Coordination:

colleen.mclaughlin@umdnj.edu - 732-235-9313

CDS System Administration:

carol.britton@umdnj.edu— 732-235-9321

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



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Workforce Development Coalition**

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