

New Jersey's Career Path in Developmental Disabilities

New Jersey, like many other states, is facing a workforce crisis. By 2016, the demand for direct support workers in home and community based settings will outstrip supply by 30% (PHI, 2007). Low wages and high demand on workers leave agencies with high turnover rates and a lowered quality of supports. The NJ Direct Support Professional Workforce Development Coalition developed the NJ Career Path in order to recognize and give incentives to DSPs. The voluntary career path process utilizes the online College of Direct Support in combination with mentoring, portfolio development and tiered, competency-based salary increases. This process will help to achieve a goal whereby the attainment of training, recognition and monetary incentive contributes to a reduction in DSP turnover while also enhancing professional skills.

The mentoring component is crucial to successful completion of the Career Path. Mentors help DSPs share ideas and use learning to increase competency. Mentoring also lead to increased staff camaraderie and greater job satisfaction. The portfolio allows DSPs to document what they have learned and encourages use of new skills on the job. The portfolio provides agencies with a method of ensuring coursework has been completed and competency increased.

The first two levels of the career path consist of seven College of Direct Support courses each. Each CDS course consists of between four and eight lessons each. The curricula for the CDS have been developed and undergone rigorous review by nationally recognized content and training experts. The courses align with the nationally recognized Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) and meet the requirements for National Alliance for Direct Support Professional Certification.

Level 1 Courses:

- Direct Support Professionalism
- Safety at Home and in the Community
- Documentation
- Community Inclusion
- Individual Rights and Choices
- Teaching People w/DD
- Cultural Competence

Level 2 Courses:

- Employment Supports: Exploring Individual Preferences and Opportunities for Job Attainment
- Person-Centered Planning
- Supporting Healthy Lives
- You've got a Friend: Supporting Family Connections, Friends, Love and the Pursuit of Happiness
- Positive Behavior Support
- Working with Families and Other Support Networks
- Everyone Can Communicate

Level Three is currently under development. This level will consist of courses related to a specialization. Some of the specializations will align with NADSP's specialized certification; others will apply to New Jersey only. Direct Support Professionals that have completed Levels 1 & 2 will be able to use Level 3 as an opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills in a particular area in the field of developmental disabilities and receive additional recognition and incentives.

Overall the Career Path provides Direct Support Professionals with the opportunity for increased recognition, professionalism, and increased knowledge and skills. The learning, recognition, salary increases, and relationships that are developed through the career path lead to greater job satisfaction for DSPs. People with disabilities will have staff with increased skills and longevity. Agencies will benefit through increased staff skills leading to better provision of services and increased DSP job satisfaction. The career path will contribute to greater longevity and reliability, thus reducing turnover. Informational sessions on how to successfully implement the Career Path and a "Becoming an Effective Mentor" Train-the-Trainer are offered by the Boggs Center. Technical assistance is available at the request of agencies.

