

Best Practices in Career Path Implementation

The Career Path pilot partner agencies recommend strategies for effectively implementing the career path. Here are their recommendations:

Project Coordination - Schedule specific start dates (quarterly or by the academic semester) to enroll DSPs into The Path. This allows you to release CDS courses in a planned way. Hold regular meetings with mentors and DSPs to discuss progress and challenges. Have more than one person coordinate the process/administer the CDS — you may need someone to fall back on. Know that a good Project Coordinator will increase his/her workload by about 20%.

Mentoring - When selecting mentors handpick people who have been with your agency for at least 1 year and have them complete Level 1 and the portfolio before assigning them a DSP to mentor. When selecting DSPs, make sure they have completed the probationary period and all pre-service training requirements. Recommend English as a second language classes to those who may struggle with writing in English. A lateral/peer match works best when pairing DSPs and mentors. Look at personalities and learning styles. Set aside time for the mentors and mentees to meet. Be flexible and encouraging to the mentor/mentee relationship.

Portfolio Development - Don't overlook the importance of the portfolio— it is where on the job competencies are recorded to demonstrate skills and a requirement for NJ certification. Have good examples available for review. Meet and discuss portfolio work as a group in scheduled 'seminars'. Mentors should be giving feedback on portfolios, not grading them. Don't get caught up in grammar and spelling. Be sensitive to cultural differences and language barriers. Complete the portfolio along with the corresponding module in the CDS. Portfolios should describe best practice and document how new skills are used on the job.

Motivating Staff - Have regular meetings at predetermined dates and times. They provide a chance for DSPs to get together and increases accountability. Give incentives such as gift cards or conference attendance to DSPs who stay on track. Encourage mentors to support each other. Recognize staff who are participating by naming them at staff meetings and internal publications. Have celebrations or luncheons. Publicly recognize DSPs who complete the levels. Allow them to attend the certificate ceremony at the Making a Difference DSP Conference. Use mentors as role models & coaches throughout the agency.

Remember that by improving the skills of your DSPs and rewarding them for that, you are improving the quality of your supports and your agency as well.

Other Tips include:

- Avoid mandating that all of your staff participate.
- Outline a plan for implementation. Don't rush into the process.
- Limit the group until you get a handle on how much time coordinating the career path will take.
- DSPs should not be mentored by their direct supervisor.
- Include frontline managers in the process. Keep them updated
- Figure out what will work best for your agency, while maintaining the integrity of the career path.

