The DSP Workforce Crisis

Imagine relying on someone to help you with daily living activities and personal care. Just as you start to feel comfortable and establish an effective working relationship, they are replaced by someone new. You know nothing about this person’s skills, training, or work history and must trust a complete stranger with your most intimate needs. Imagine the impact this would have on your quality of life. For many people with disabilities and their families, this is a sobering reality. The high turnover rates of quality DSPs is putting the goal of inclusion and full citizenship for people with disabilities in jeopardy.

Researchers at the University of Minnesota are looking for answers.

How We Can Help

The Research and Training Center on Community Living’s DSP Workforce Development Program is dedicated to providing state-of-the-art resources and consultation services to a variety of clientele that are facing DSP workforce challenges in recruitment, training, and retention.

Technical Assistance and Consultation

We offer technical assistance and consultation to federal, state, and local governmental agencies; DSP provider organizations; individuals and families who direct their own support; researchers; and others. Technical assistance might include —

- Providing access to research reports, survey instruments, and how-to guides
- Providing telephone and in-person trainings
- Assessing the unique challenges of and identifying customized solutions for organizations, agencies, and families
- Developing best practice government policies in DSP workforce development.

Training

We provide topical trainings regarding effective recruitment and retention strategies that target supervisors, managers, and administrative staff. Training can be customized to meet the needs of your organization and may include —

- Marketing and recruitment
- Realistic job previews
- Orientation, socialization, and mentoring
- Motivation and recognition
- Professional development and training
- Retention
- Effective supervision
- Developing, implementing, and evaluating intervention plans

Assessment

We use a variety of assessment instruments within our research and technical assistance projects, resulting in a body of evidence-based practices that help to reduce turnover rates, identify baseline workforce outcomes, and determine effectiveness of interventions over time. Customized assessment services can be provided to measure and collect information on many different needs, including —

- Staff and consumer satisfaction
- New hire and exit surveys
- Tenure calculations

Research

We have conducted research on direct support and frontline supervisor recruitment, retention, and training since 1980. We can assist states, organizations, families, and individuals who wish to assess workforce challenges and outcomes through a variety of research methods including —

- Focus groups and case studies
- Survey, evaluation, and intervention
- Literature reviews and synthesis
- Policy and job analysis

Reports of the outcomes of selected studies are accessible at rtc.umn.edu/dsp.

Contact Information

For more information about our services and products and related fees, please contact —

Amy S. Hewitt
Training Director
hewit005@umn.edu
612-624-6328

Sheryl Larson
Research Director
larson0729@umn.edu
612-624-6024

DSP Workforce Resources

RTC’s DSP Workforce Development Program provides state-of-the-art resources to help you find and retain quality DSPs. The following highlights a few of those available. For a comprehensive review of all resources and to order online, go to rtc.umn.edu/dsp.

College of Direct Support

The College of Direct Support is a dynamic on-line, competency-based curriculum offering comprehensive training for DSPs. The curriculum is based on careful analysis of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of DSPs and helps users understand and apply competencies and ethical practices through timely, innovative, and engaging training. CDS can be used by employers in a variety of ways to create effective learning opportunities for DSPs at all levels of experience.

To learn more, contact —

Bill Tapp, CDS National Director
1-877-353-2767 (toll free)
info.colegedirectsupport.com

U of M researchers at the Research and Training Center on Community Living study why Direct Support Professionals don’t stay on the job. Their data suggests that low wages, lack of recognition, poor supervision, and unclear job expectations contribute to the current DSP workforce crisis. RTC staff have developed creative interventions to address these challenges and can provide assistance to those needing to find, train, and keep quality DSPs. Learn more here or visit rtc.umn.edu.

Heritage Christian Services

Heritage Christian Services allows and technology is available in our rural locations.

- Developmental Services Of Northwest Kansas, Inc.

In one year of using the College of Direct Support we were able to retain 94% of the individuals completing the program as DSPs. We were actually able to retain 96% as employees because 2% of the individuals received promotions.

~ Daniele Lyman, Former Education Director, Heritage Christian Services

In one year our DSPs have been able to reduce travel expense in our large, rural service area by utilizing selected lessons from CDS as an online new staff orientation. We hope to open this up to all staff as the budget allows and technology is available in our rural locations.

~ Developmental Services Of Northwest Kansas, Inc.
Find, Choose & Keep Great DSPs
This full-color easy-to-use toolkit comes in two versions — one for families and one for people with disabilities — and is designed to help anyone looking for quality, caring, and committed DSPs.

NADSP’s Frontline Initiative
This newsletter contains timely coverage of issues important to DSPs and supervisors and provides tools to advance the profession of direct support. Included with NADSP membership. Go to www.nadsp.org.

Events and Awards
National Reinvesting Quality Conference
The annual Reinvesting Quality Conference provides useful information, new ideas, and active discussions about promoting and achieving support that improves the quality of life and citizenship for all. The conference showcases innovative services, programs, and practices that effectively support people to live valued lives in community systems of support. To learn more, go to reinvestingquality.org

Moving Mountains Awards
The Moving Mountains Awards are presented to organizations and agencies that have demonstrated best practice in direct support workforce development by the Research and Training Center on Community Living in partnership with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. To learn more, go to www.nadsp.org.

Direct Support Professional Recruitment Toolkit
This toolkit arms individuals, families, and organizations with the marketing tools they need to attract and recruit quality DSPs through a dynamic and targeted recruitment campaign. Includes templates for posters, brochures, newspaper ads, and recruitment cards.

At a support job, we must move to a place where we view direct care as a long-term profession — a career choice — rather than simply another job.
— Chris L., Columbus, Kansas

Higher Ground
The Dedication of Direct Support Professionals During and After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
When Hurricane Katrina struck the city of New Orleans on August 29, 2005, hundreds of people with developmental disabilities were displaced. Roads were severely crowded or impassable. Cell phones didn’t work. Many didn’t know where their family members were. And yet Direct Support Professionals stayed with those they supported, made sure everyone evacuated to higher ground, and continued to work long hours for low pay, put others before themselves, and provide care and support with improvised resources. This documentary tells their stories. Full-color brochure is also available.

Direct Support
A Realistic Job Preview
Realistic job previews provide potential employees detailed and balanced information about the job to facilitate an informed decision about job offers from employers. This video illustrates the real, everyday work of DSPs in the field of developmental disabilities and offers advice from DSPs about this important career choice. Customized versions of this professionally-produced video package for individual agencies are available.

We Watch the City
Stories in the Shadow of 9/11
This documentary illustrates the tragedy in New York City on September 11, 2001, as experienced by New Yorkers with developmental disabilities and those who support them. These are stories from a unique perspective, largely ignored or misrepresented by the larger media. Discussion guide is also available.