

## **Ohio PATHS**

### **An Initiative of the Ohio Alliance for Direct Support Professionals**

In response to the direct support workforce shortage, organizations in OHIO have created a career path by building a DSP credentialing pathway—PATHS (Professional Achievement through Training & Education in Human Services). The PATHS was a means to increase the image of the DSP and to legitimize direct support as a professional field thereby improving compensation, public image and awareness of the needs of DSPs, provide increased quality care, and improve retention and recruitment outcomes.

The PATHS initiative incorporates the Community Support Skills Standards, the NADSP Code of Ethics and the Minnesota Front Line Supervisor Standards. Participants work with a skills mentor to complete training and prepare portfolios to document their skills. Voluntary credentials are earned at four levels: Registration level, Certificate of Initial Proficiency (CIP), Certificate of Advanced Proficiency (CAP), Certificate of Specialized Skill and Knowledge. The registration level is achieved upon submission of a complete application packet by employees in good standing after 320 hours of employment, and 40 hours of instruction. The CIP is earned by people who have completed the Registration level who complete an additional 1000 hours of experience, 60 hours of related instruction, and who demonstrate mastery of CIP learner outcomes through a portfolio. The CAP can be earned by CIP completers who complete an additional 1680 hours of experience, 116 hours of instruction, and who demonstrate mastery of CAP learner outcomes and complete the CAP portfolio. Curriculum for the CIP and CAP has been developed. The Certificate of Specialized Skill and Knowledge is currently under design and construction.

Ohio PATHS was an outgrowth of The Ohio Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. Planning began in 2001 with grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Planning Council and the Ohio Department of MR/DD. The project was implemented in January of 2003 with three pilots located in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Toledo. The next session of CAP level training will begin September 2004 and the next session of CIP level training (including expansion to a 4<sup>th</sup> pilot region) will begin in January 2005. By 2006 the voluntary credential will be established throughout Ohio.

Project management, fiscal coordination, grant writing and reporting are supported through OPRA with Amy Gerowitz serving as the Project Director. Technical, evaluation and educational expertise is provided by Marianne Taylor – Human Service Research Institute, and other consultants as needed. The Statewide Council oversees project and approves candidates for credential. Three Regional Councils oversee local training and implementation activities.

To date, 65 DSPs have been awarded the Certificate of Initial Proficiency, 44 Skills Mentors have been awarded the Certificate of Advanced Proficiency. 32 agencies and 2 family advocates participated. All agencies participating report either an increase in wages ranging from \$.35 to \$.50 per hour to \$1000 bonuses or both. Several provider

agencies report revising performance evaluations, creating new supervisor positions, and promoting successful candidates based on their involvement in the PATHS project. 79% of pilot leaders say PATHS improved DSP career awareness and that a majority of completers want to continue to the CAP level. Satisfaction surveys of the candidates' reports that 74% expect to stay with the same employer and 56% of these attribute this to the PATHS project. There was a significant report of improvement in work attitudes with 8-10% fewer identifying low wages, poor recognition, insufficient supervision, problems with co-workers and insufficient training as barriers to satisfaction.

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