

A Quarterly Newsletter of the National
Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

Frontline Initiative

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Managing Stress and Preventing Burnout

Direct Support Professionals (DSP) are in a unique position to experience stress and burnout. There are several reasons for this. Probably the most notable reason is often feeling caught in the middle of or “trapped” between consumers, parents, supervisors, and administrators regarding issues such as appropriate supports and/or a lack of recognition of professional skills.

Feeling “trapped” by varying expectations diminishes your sense of control over your personal and professional life. A feeling of control is crucial to your happiness, health, and productivity. Lack of control and lack of recognition of your professional skills can lead to a diminished self-esteem, which can also lead to misunderstandings. For instance, concerns about issues, policy changes, or comments from others can get blown out of proportion and be dealt with poorly, which can in turn exaggerate feelings of poor self-esteem. When this kind of stress builds, it can lead to burnout or feelings of distress.

Distress is when stress becomes more than your coping skills can manage. A person feels overwhelmed or out of control. Burnout has some similar resulting behavioral and physical responses but is defined as work-generated distress which results from (1) a perfectionist personality, and (2) lack of a collegial support system. The former occurs when one feels he or she can never

give enough no matter how hard he or she tries. The latter happens when there are few or no colleagues in your environment from whom to get good, reliable feedback — no one to conspire with or from whom to get consolation. Thus, a key to reducing distress and preventing burnout is to alter your expectations to make them more realistic and to nurture your collegial support network. The following are suggestions for developing these personal aspects of DSP work as well as ways to recognize signs of distress or burnout.

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Ralph Vunderink (right) accompanies Robert Kienlen at a Christmas party.

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Welcome to the *The Real Scoop*. Clifford is a self-advocate who has been politically active for years. He’s ready to give you his spin on how to deal with issues that come up as you forge ahead in your role as a Direct Support Professional. Seth is a Direct Support Professional who loves to give advice. He has been a DSP for too many years to count. He may give you a hard time, but hey, it’s for your own good! Clifford and Seth tackle this one with just a few suggestions. How would you handle this situation?

Stares, Glares and Curious Looks

Dear Clifford and Seth,
When I’m out with the people for whom I provide supports, people often stare at us. I know they are curious, but it is very uncomfortable. I try to ignore the stares, but maybe there is something appropriate that I could say or do to raise their awareness. Any suggestions?

—Rose Melville, Fort Collins, CO

Dear Rose,
Be very proud of what you do! Explain in a polite way what your job is and why you’re helping people with disabilities. You can be proud of what you’re doing to help people live in their community in a safe and comfortable manner.

—Clifford

Dear Rose,
I’ve been in your position many times. I’ve found that the best way to handle it is to smile directly at the staring person, and if you make positive eye contact, take it upon yourself to walk over and introduce yourself and the person to whom you are providing supports. For example, “Hi, my name is Seth and this is Linda.” Usually, the person who is staring will be cordial and introduce him or herself as well. When you introduce yourself you’ve also broken the ice with the person who, because of past societal norms, didn’t see many people with disabilities in the neighborhood. Doing this personalizes yourself and the person you’re with. Your future hellos in the street will become more friendly and meaningful with this person. I don’t know about you, but on my block, I always say hello to a familiar face. It’s just a nice feeling. But you have to make the first move.

—Thanks, Seth

Ask Clifford and Seth

Do you have a burning question about direct support, but didn’t know who to ask? Submit it to —

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Please include your name, day phone for verification, and alias, if desired.

Member Organizations

Managing Stress continued from cover

Realize that you cannot control others

You can control your own attitude, behavior, values, and beliefs. At best, you can influence others, but not control them. DSPs need to think carefully about issues of control, not only with co-workers but with consumers of services as well.

Nurture your collegial and social support

It is essential that DSPs give and receive collegial or peer support. This requires trust, honesty, and caring, and requires a willingness to be receptive to honest feedback. Furthermore, with DSPs becoming increasingly isolated because of the implementation of more individualized services in smaller settings, it is all the more important for agencies to provide more ways for them to meet. Some ways could include more house meetings, parties, group training sessions, and peer mentoring. Social supports are equally important, but for a different purpose. These are friends outside of work who care for you; the people who you trust and who you can talk to and share your feelings with.

Monitor the pain you experience

Pain is a powerful motivator. It shouldn't be ignored, reduced, or eliminated artificially or prematurely (by pain killers, alcohol, food, whatever might be the case) but must be recognized and heeded. Physical pain such as a tension headache or emotional pain such sadness helps you to: (1) recognize that he or she is

Frontline Initiative is a product of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. The NADSP is a collaboration of organizations that are committed to promoting the development of a highly competent human services workforce that supports individuals in achieving their life goals. The following are some of those organizations—

- Administration on Developmental Disabilities
- American Association on Mental Retardation
- American Association of University Affiliated Programs
- American Network on Community Options and Resources
- The Arc of the United States
- Association for Persons in Supported Employment
- Association of Public Developmental Disabilities Administrators
- CARE, The Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission
- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
- CUNY Consortium for the Study of Disability
- Council for Standards in Human Service Education
- Human Services Research Institute
- Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota
- International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
- National Association of State Directors on Developmental Disabilities
- National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education

- National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion
- National Center for Paraprofessionals in Education
- National Organization of Child Care Workers Association
- National Organization of Human Service Educators
- National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals
- New Jersey Association of Community Providers
- President's Committee on Mental Retardation
- Program in Child Development and Child Care, University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work
- Reaching Up
- Self Advocates Becoming Empowered
- TASH
- United Cerebral Palsy of America

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I Stay Because I Care

Never did it occur to me that one day I would become a residential instructor, charged to support men and women with disabilities in getting dressed, eating, or taking a shower. But let me back up.

Having successfully completed a challenging graduate program in theology and philosophy at the University of Chicago, I intended to stay in higher education for a long time. After 16 years I realized college teaching was not for me and I looked for other employment. One day I saw an ad in a local paper: "Residential Instructors Wanted." I thought, perhaps this is a new calling, although I felt some hesitation when the interviewer asked me if I would feel comfortable helping people take showers.

Now I have been a direct care giver for over seven years and sometimes I am amazed that I am still one. I have worked in more than 20 residential homes, supporting people with developmental disabilities and people with mental illness. Some were quiet homes, while others were boisterous. In these varied experiences, I learned a lot about how people interact and treat one another.

Group home settings, can be hard on both DSPs and supervisors/managers. The stress level is enormous, and the pay is relatively low. In Michigan we recently received a raise from the governor. It helps, but not quite enough to really attract and keep people in direct service jobs. Since I can neither increase the salary of my co-workers nor remove all of their stress factors, I propose we think of the reason most of us chose this field: because we care and because we like knowing we make life better for others.

The following are two examples of why I stay. Last September our organization had a three-day camping event. I decided to take Roger to the camp's pool, but I was apprehensive because I was unsure of Roger's comfort level in the water. Once in the water, with a life jacket, Roger was not thrilled about the unsteady arrangement. Laying on his back limited him to seeing only the ceiling, not where he was going. I began to tilt his head, making him more at ease. As soon as he could determine his direction, his whole face lit up. I will not easily forget his response.

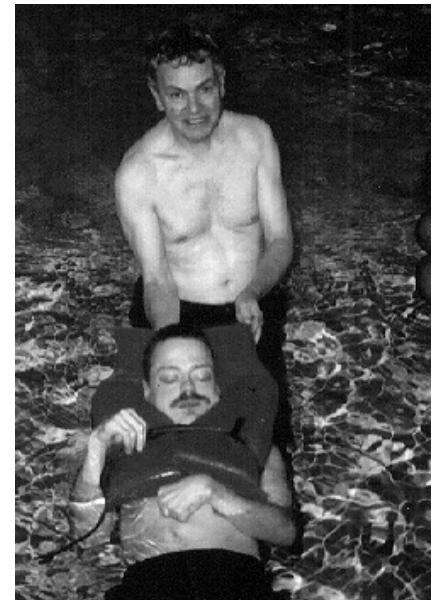
About three months later I was privileged to take Bob to a Christmas party. He thought it was quite an honor that he would be taken to a special table, receive individual attention during dinner, and have his picture taken next to the tree. His speech abilities are limited, but his expression of enjoyment was clear. The evening was a real treat for both of us. It is people like Roger and Bob who make my job worthwhile and keep me in the field.

Another way in which I am able to continue to work as a Direct Support Professional is to focus on the consumers for whom I provide supports. When I reach a low point in my work, I look for ways I can give one of the six people I work with a lift. Sometimes I go for a walk with one of them, or take someone out, but essentially, I devote special one-on-one time to someone. I also find focus for my work by becoming more involved in the operations of my company. By attending the meetings of two committees—the advisory and cultural diversity committees—I am able to understand my job much better, and gain clarity in the need for

support of co-workers as we address together the pressing issues of high staff turnover and burnt-out supervisors.

The ultimate answer to the question of why I remain a direct care giver lies in a vision. Early in the 21st century I hope our work will receive the honorable status of other professions like those of nurses, case managers, and therapists. By then I hope that applicants for direct support will have to get meaningful credentials to qualify for employment. The financial rewards, not to mention personal satisfaction, however, should more than off-set that small requirement.

Ralph W. Vunderink is a DSP for Spectrum Community Services, in Wyoming, Michigan. Ralph can be reached at vunderal@aquinas.edu



Ralph tilts Roger Robinson's head so that he can see where he's going in the pool.

Three Strikes and You're Out or at Least You Should Be!

Many things about direct support work can be stressful, but I know from experience that the one thing that has the biggest affect on a consumer's life is when the relationship between the Direct Support Professional (DSP) and the person with a disability is not going well. When this happens, there can be a lot of tension, frustration, and bad feelings between the support person and the person receiving supports. This can happen for a number of reasons, such as problems outside of the relationship, like illness, money problems, or trouble with family members or other people. Or sometimes, as in my case, there is not a good match in terms of values, needs, or personalities between the two people.

I want to tell you my story. I had decided to take a new job offered to me, and my support person was already working in the organization that offered me the job. As time went on, I felt like I was striving to prove myself to my support person and the administration. This caused me a great deal of frustration and stress. My support person and I would try to talk through the stressful issues, but I still did not feel that I was getting the support that I was asking for and needed to do my job well. I want to do my work in the best way possible so that the people who fund my work will be happy with my work and know that they can trust me for future projects. Also, due to the situation, I was afraid I would get a reputation of being a difficult person.

So, I started talking to others about what I should do. I knew what kinds of support I needed, but I needed to talk to my friends and colleagues about how to make it happen. After

many discussions, the administration listened and realized that my support person and I could not work together. I interviewed and hired my new support person, explaining up front the specific supports I needed to do my job well. I feel good about the work I am doing and the support I am getting now.

Not everyone is able to be as assertive as I was to resolve this issue. DSPs and the agencies that employ them need to understand that supporting people with disabilities is not the same as assembly line work. Every person you support is different and has unique feelings, values, and needs. A relationship will develop because two people come together. To foster and maintain positive relationships with the people to whom you provide supports, try to remember these things—

- Take your cue from the person receiving supports. The agency who hired you has ideas about what people with disabilities need, but now go to the person and find out what he or she expects and needs. For example, talk about supports needed before, during, and after meetings.
- Ask the person you support, and people who care about him or her, how you are doing and take the feedback to heart.
- Find ways to minimize stress in the relationship. Ask a supervisor or experienced coworkers what might work to improve the relationship. Maybe you need time with the person outside of the work atmosphere to understand each other's values. Try role-playing to see what frustrates the other person. Or maybe you just need a

change of scenery, or less time together for a while.

- Know when and how to call it quits. Sometimes two people just don't like each other. Their lives and perspectives are too different to mesh productively. If you have tried changing your behavior or seeking advice, and the relationship is still not good, it's time to ask for a transfer. Also, if the person you are supporting feels that it is not working, bow out and ask for a transfer gracefully.

Right now DSPs have too much control over people with disabilities. Often, when there is a problem in the relationship, the person receiving supports is seen as "difficult," or may get a bad reputation. Meanwhile, the DSP may feel trapped by the administration to make things better, no matter what. These pressures are not good for anyone. My hope is that people with disabilities will gain more say in who provides their support and that DSPs can be supported by their agencies in making positive working relationships with those they support. It is stressful to admit that you can't make something work. But if you have tried your best and it is still not working, it is better to end the relationship in the most positive way possible so that both the DSP and the person with a disability will experience less stress and dissatisfaction in their lives.

James Meadours is a self advocate with SABE and co-chair of the NADSP, and resides in Baton Rouge, LA. James can be reached at 504.927.0855.

A Day in the Life

DSP Shares her Stress Relievers

One day as I was driving to work, lost deep in thought about what I would accomplish with the women I support, Debbie and Kelly, when I noticed flashing lights from a police car in my rearview mirror. I was horrified to realize he was trying to pull me over. I pulled over. As I waited nervously, I realized that I did not have my proof of insurance with me. I had just received the new card, and it was still on my desk at home.

I was most unhappy as the officer walked up to my door and said, "Did you know that you were speeding?" He asked to see my driver's license and proof of insurance.

I told him I didn't have my insurance card and explained why. He went back to his car. Finally, he returned my license, along with my ticket, wished me a good day, and kindly reminded me to watch my speed. All I could think was, "Yeah, watch my speed now that I'm late for work; and after getting a ticket, I'm sure to have a nice day!"

When I finally arrived at my job, where the women and their ride home were waiting for me. I apologized profusely for being late. The driver glared at me and drove off.

One of the women, Kelly, then proceeded to tell me the details of her horrible day. She didn't have enough time to eat lunch, she didn't want to work the next day because she didn't like her job, and so on. As I tried to talk to her about her job, she started to complain about how her aunt had not come to pick her up a couple of weeks before. I listen half-heartedly, thinking about my own rotten morning and went into the house.

To my horror, I discovered that there was water all over the floor, leaking from a pipe under the kitchen sink. I hate plumbing problems! When I called the apartment manager, he said he could come out in two days to fix it, and that until then I could use a bucket to catch the water.

This is just a small sampling of the many frustrations I experience daily as a Direct Support Professional. I have to deal with coworkers, supervisors, families, and all the other circumstances of life that are thrown my way. It causes ongoing frustration—not to mention

burnout, loss of imagination, and waning enthusiasm. Nevertheless, I continue to love what I do despite the frustrations.

I can think of many reasons I choose to stay in direct support work and of ways to cope with the stress it brings. For one, I can truly help people, which gives me great satisfaction. There are other jobs that would be less stressful; but for me, I need to know that what I am doing is worthwhile.

Here are a few ways I try to reduce stress at work—

To manage my work day I have a list on paper, or at least in my mind, of the things I want to accomplish. Every shift I try to have some goals to meet that evening. Besides the regular cooking, cleaning, and data collection, I try to have another project to work on in case we run out of things to do (this rarely happens).

I find it helpful to visit with the women's families in person and on the phone. It helps me to get to know them better. When I talk to families, I feel more connected to their lives.

Our agency offers a lot of in-service training and workshops which help me keep up to date on changing methods and provides ideas that help me better serve the people I support. There is always something new to learn.

I have learned to keep things in perspective. Sometimes I have to remember that when the women I work with have a problem that I think is no big deal, such as not having time to eat lunch, it is a big deal to them. I must respect their concerns and realize they seem as insurmountable to them as my problems do to me.

Just like any other job, there are days when I just don't want to go, and could almost talk myself into staying home. But then I remember that I can make a difference for these women. I listen to them, and support them by helping them to participate in activities they really enjoy.

As support staff, we truly affect those we support. Sometimes it's hard to believe what a positive influence we can have, but if we have fun and stay positive, our everyday frustrations are easier to handle, and life for the people we support will be enhanced.

Julie Allwin, was selected by the St. Charles County Developmental Disabilities Board as the Outstanding Direct Support Worker of the Year for 1997 and works at Emmaus Homes in St. Charles, Missouri.

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I must respect their concerns and realize they seem as insurmountable to them as my problems do to me.

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Helping Newcomers Handle Stress

For three years (from 1993 to 1996), I collected information from 139 new Direct Support Professionals in 110 different small group homes in Minnesota to find out why some people stay and others leave during the first year on the job. I collected information from new workers when they started, after 30 days, after six months, and after 12 months. Only 33% of new workers in the study stayed in the same position for 12 months. The most common reasons for wanting to leave were problems with co-workers, inadequate pay or benefits, and problems with supervisors. The most stressful things for newcomers were—

- Getting to know the people in the home and their behaviors and traits.
- Learning the routines and completing my duties.
- Getting to know the other staff members.
- Finding out that not everyone gets along with one another.
- Adjusting to the schedule.
- Learning and remembering everything.

One way to help newcomers handle stress is to let them know what to expect in these areas, and that it is normal to find these things difficult at first.

Since turnover is hard on everyone and can increase stress, finding ways to reduce stress for new workers is very important. A study done in 1994 by Lynn Bachelder at the University of Illinois at Chicago tested whether the way co-workers treated newcomers made a difference in whether they stayed or left their jobs.

She reported that newcomers were more likely to stay in their jobs when experience workers —

- Go out of their way to help a new staff member adjust to the job.
- Take responsibility for advising or training newcomers
- Guide newcomers in how to perform the job.

Since most people who leave direct support work leave in the first three to six months, current workers can have a direct impact on turnover by supporting their new colleagues during this time.

Other studies have identified strategies for all workers who are feeling stressed. In his 1992 book called *Organizational Entry*, John Wanous described an intervention called Realistic Orientation Programs for New Employee Stress (ROPES). He recommended giving newcomers realistic information about initial job stresses (such as those listed above), providing general support and assurance to newcomers, and teaching staff members various coping strategies.

The coping strategies Wanous described are applicable both to new and long-term workers who are feeling stressed out. Those strategies include—

1. Deal directly with the stress.

For example, if you are stressed out because you don't know what you are supposed to be doing, ask for a written schedule so you will know what needs to be done. Likewise, if you are stressed out because you don't know how to communicate with a particular person, ask people who know the person well (par-

ents, co-workers, a supervisor) to give you some pointers about how to “hear” what the person is telling you.

2. Change how you are thinking about the stress.

Sometimes the messages we give ourselves about the situation increases our stress. For example, when we are new or are learning a new task we will make mistakes. Instead of telling yourself “I am a bad person because I made a mistake” think instead “Everyone makes mistakes at the beginning. Next time I will do better.”

3. Manage your stress.

When we are feeling stressed, our body often tenses as we prepare for “fight or flight.” Simple ways to manage the symptoms of stress include: exercise, systematic relaxation, and deep breathing. Taking a walk, tensing and then relaxing each muscle set in your body, or taking a series of very slow deep breaths (in through your nose, out through your mouth) can help us to reduce the tension in our bodies.

*Sheryl Larson is a Research Associate at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. She can be reached at 612-624-6024 or larso072@umn.edu, and much related information is available at the web site—
<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/DSP>*

Going the Distance

DSP Training in Alaska

Alaska has a population that is as diverse as its terrain. There are urban population centers, as well as small communities that dot the landscape. Many of these communities are far beyond being simply rural. They are remote. The majority of smaller Alaskan communities can only be reached by plane or boat. This remote quality lends itself to a sense of isolation among people who live in these communities. The Direct Support Professional in Alaska is not immune to this isolation. The cost of transportation alone has prohibited most training opportunities outside of an agency.

In 1996, The University of Alaska-Anchorage Center for Human Development: University Affiliated Program (CHD:UAP) created a series of distance delivery courses to overcome this barrier. This series consists of various topics — Introduction to Service Provision, Positive Behavior Supports, Assistive Technology, Person-Centered Planning, and Supported Employment — all of which will eventually be online. As of June '98, Introduction to Service Provision, Positive Behavior Supports and Assistive Technology are online and 136 DSPs have completed them. These three courses are offered two to three times a year, with Supported Employment and Person-Centered Planning under development.

Distance delivery has proven to be a challenge. Alaska was once a leader in distance technology; however, the rapid pace of innovation in the field

has left most of the state falling behind. Few DSPs have access to the Internet and other computer technology. Creating training materials that are interesting and engaging has also been difficult. Furthermore, there are only a few locations in Alaska that can access technologies such as compressed video or interactive television.

Our approach to overcoming these obstacles relies on using the technology that is available in Alaska. Courses consist of instructional videos with a student handbook, application activities, and weekly audio conferences. This approach has been proven successful in meeting Alaska's needs.

A unique feature of this training is the employer's role. An advisory board composed of employer agencies

helped develop the curriculum. Participating agencies have supported DSPs by paying tuition fees and/or allowing workers to take courses during work hours. Participants use their own working environment as an extension of the classroom. Assigned activities relate to applying information to real work situations. In fact, many of the courses require the participants to identify a situation or person prior to enrolling in the course. This direct link to the agency has allowed participants to learn on

the job. A participant commented, "I liked the opportunity to share ideas and thoughts with coworkers about the people we support. Having been in this field for years the old way, this was an excellent way for me to really learn the current direction DD services are taking."

The distance-delivery courses are offered with the option of receiving college credit through the University of Alaska Anchorage Prince William Sound Community College, which is the only college in the state to offer a degree program that focuses on developmental disabilities. To date, 34 participants have elected to take the courses for credit.

The supported role of the employer has made this training project work. The desire for excellence found in the Alaskan DSP workforce has made it a success.

Karen Ward is the Director of the Center for Human Development University Affiliated Program. She can be reached via e-mail at afkmw@uaa.alaska.edu. Kristin Ryan is a Project Assistant with CHD:UAP. She can be reached via e-mail at rossayan@concentric.net.



The majority of smaller Alaskan communities can only be reached by plane or boat. The Direct Support Professional in Alaska is not immune to this isolation.



UCP of Los Angeles

Part of a National Network of Resources

Founded in 1944, United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles was established by a small group of parents united by a common bond to provide loving support and much needed care for their children with severe disabilities. Over the past 50 years, while remaining faithful to this mission, the organization has grown to become part of a nationwide network of approximately 150 state and local agencies which constitute one of the largest health care associations in America. UCP is a leading supporter of medical and scientific research in developmental disabilities. Other services provided include information and referral services, sponsors social programs, and community advocacy.

The breadth of services has grown out of UCP's commitment to serve the widely varying needs of those with developmental disabilities. Cerebral Palsy, for example, is a group of conditions, not a disease. Most often it is caused by damage to the brain, usually during pregnancy, labor, or shortly following birth. Even though the condition does not progress, it is permanent. Thus, individuals with Cerebral Palsy may have mild to severe life-long difficulties with movement, balance, posture, speech, sight and/or mental retardation. Each year about 4,500 infants are born with cerebral palsy; and roughly 500-1000 pre-school age children acquire the condition annually. It is estimated that 500,000

children and adults in the United States manifest one or more of the symptoms of Cerebral Palsy. The individuals served by UCP of Los Angeles also include children and adults with all other developmental disabilities.

UCP of Los Angeles has expanded over the years to include the widest continuum of programs and services providing direct care to children and adults with severe disabilities in Southern California. Daily services to 600 families include independent living services as well as residential and adult education services for those who need a higher level of care.

As a leader in developing independent living housing, UCP has worked with the Department of Housing and Urban Development on an innovative program for individuals with developmental disabilities that provides low cost and fully accessible housing. The latest addition is a \$4.4 million development grant reservation by HUD to be used in the construction of four 13-unit apartment buildings. This grant fills the need of allowing people with developmental disabilities to maximize their potential by living dignified lives as productive members of our community.

In addition to independent living housing, UCP of Los Angeles provides residential programs that exist in neighborhoods throughout greater Southern California. At these sites, individuals with a range of developmental disabilities live in physical environments that are user friendly and designed to help them to assume responsibility for their daily needs and

personal care. Each building is close to stores, public transportation and entertainment venues.

Direct Support Professionals who want to know more about Cerebral Palsy and the services UCPA and its affiliates provide can access its national website at <http://www.ucpa.org/html/>. At this UCPA site DSPs can access its referral services and obtain information about a variety of its topics, which include: "What is UCP?" "What's New," "Advocacy in Action." UCP affiliate information is also available at this site. Related websites which have a wealth of disability information such as a summary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, assistive technology, employment, and others including selected disability related links.

For information about UCP of Los Angeles or Ventura Counties call 818.782.2211 or email ucpla@aol.com.

For more information about the National UCPA contact—

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Ronald S. Cohen, is Executive Director of UCP of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in Van Nuys, California. Ronald can be reached at 818.782.2211.

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It is estimated that 500,000 children and adults in the United States manifest one or more of the symptoms of Cerebral Palsy.

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The National Alliance Needs You!

Members of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals met in March 1998 in conjunction with the ANCOR conference in Orlando, Florida. This was an exciting meeting with many new people in attendance. Important decisions were made at this meeting regarding Alliance affiliation and membership. When the Alliance was first developed in October 1997, it was established as an affiliation of national organizations that were brought together to address issues of workforce development for human service direct support staff. Since its origination, the Alliance has grown in membership to include 25 national organizations, 18 states or state organizations, and several interested individuals.

Although not intended to be a professional member organization for DSPs, it is clear that there is interest in developing such an organization. Of course, developing a new professional organization brings with it many challenges and related expenses including but not limited to: 1) becoming a non-profit entity, 2) developing a dues structure, 3) having a formal leadership structure made up of DSPs, 4) promoting and holding members accountable to a code of ethical practice. The Alliance members in attendance at the meeting in Orlando discussed this issue at length. They came up with the following strategies designed to honor the original intent of the Alliance while simultaneously capturing the energy and enthusiasm of DSPs throughout the country who are interested in developing a professional association—

- Seek Direct Support Professionals as affiliates of the National Alliance. An affiliate would be an individual who subscribes to the *Frontline Initiative* and is active on a National Alliance work group, attends Alliance meetings and/or is active at the state or local level in carrying forth the Alliance goals and objectives.
- Continue to encourage national and state organizations to become members of the National Alliance.
- Identify key contact people within all states to serve as a local coordinators in carrying out activities at the state or local level designed to achieve the National Alliance mission and goals. These individuals would actively seek Direct Support Professionals to serve in leadership capacities and would join together at National Alliance meetings or via teleconferences at least twice a year to network and share what is happening in their local area.

To date the following state coordinators have been identified—

Louisiana—David H. Belton
TRI*ADD,
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Louisiana State Univ. Medical Center
New Orleans, LA 70119
(504.942.8207)
DBelton@HDC.lsumc.edu

Massachusetts—Marianne Taylor
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Cambridge, MA 02140
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mtaylor2@concentric.net

Michigan—Karen Wolf-Branigin
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K.Wolf-Branigin@wayne.edu

Minnesota—Mark Olson
Owobopte Inc.
3195 Neil Armstron Blvd.
Eagan, MN 55121 (612.686.0405)

Missouri—Marci Whiteman
104-3 Old Hwy 40 #274
O'Fallon, MO 63366 (314.939.1514)

New York—Bill Ebenstein, CUNY
535 East 80th Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10021 (212.794.5486)
wiebh@cunyvm.cuny.edu

Ohio—Amy Gerowitz
Outlooks/ANCOR
3883 Blackwood Ct.
Cincinnati, OH 45236
(513.793.1946)
gerowitz@ix.netcom.com

If you are interested in joining together in your state to work toward achieving the National Alliance mission and goals, please contact your state coordinator to get involved. If you are interested in becoming a state coordinator, please contact a National Alliance Co-Chair (see page 3). Lastly, if you are interested in attending a National Alliance meeting...JUST SHOW UP. We'd welcome your ideas and enthusiasm.

Next Alliance meeting dates

The next meeting of the National Alliance for DSPs will be held August 6th from 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. and August 7th from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. at the Health and Human Services Building, Washington, D. C. This meeting is being held just prior to the PCMR Next Generation conference. For questions, please contact an Alliance Co-Chair (see page 3).

Frontline Resources

Movies, Videos, and Books

Birdy

Matthew Modine and Nicholas Cage star as childhood friends who are reunited after their tour in Vietnam. Modine, "Birdy," suffers from post traumatic stress syndrome and Cage is called in to help him regain his sanity and re-enter society. This psychological saga parallels many of the experiences DSPs face when working with someone who is non-verbal and/or withdrawn. *Birdy* was directed by Alan Parker, and the sound track is by Peter Gabriel. Running time: 120 minutes. Check it out at your nearest video store.

Fred's Story

This award winning documentary video is narrated by Fred Calabrese. He describes his 40-year experience of living in an institution and then finally getting his own place. This story represents much of the development of provider services in the United States this century. It's full of laughs, though underscored with poignancy, and is ideal for staff meetings and discussion. Running time: 27 minutes. Available from Disability Resources at 800.543.2119. A 30-day trial period is available. Cost is \$79.

The Boys Next Door

This video focuses on the experiences of four men and their residential counselor. Three of the men have developmental disabilities, while the fourth has been diagnosed with a mental illness. The story is not only realistic, but warm and poignant. Those working with persons with disabilities will appreciate the honesty and sensitivity with which this film has been produced. This film could also serve as an excellent training resource for those interested in working with persons with disabilities.

A television Hallmark Hall of Fame feature, this video is available from Hallmark Gold Crown Stores at a cost of \$14.98. The video runs 99 minutes.

Skallagrigg

by William Horwood

This novel tells the stories of a young girl with Cerebral Palsy, who grew up in an institution in England, and became an American computer games expert. Told from the point of view of a child with Cerebral Palsy, this book is a fascinating examination of the experiences of people with disabilities who have different life situations. Its

exploration of life in an institution from the perspective of someone living there is incredibly thought provoking. *Skallagrigg* is published by Penguin Books, and can be ordered from Special Needs Project 3463 State Street, Suite 282, Santa Barbara, CA 93105; 800.333.6867; www.specialneeds.com. \$15.95.

Still Me

by Christopher Reeve

In this autobiography, Reeve tells the story of the man who played Superman before and after a life-changing accident that paralyzed him from the neck down. The candid examination of life as a man with quadriplegia is interwoven with accounts of the author's stage and screen career. This story is interesting both because we see the personal life of a well-known actor and because it provides a detailed look at challenges and medical advances associated with spinal cord injury. *Still Me* is published by Random House, (1998) costs \$25 and can be purchased at local bookstores.

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Managing Stress *continued from page 3*

under stress, (2) determine where or what the source of stress is, and (3) recognize what can be done to reduce or eliminate that source. If you mask the pain with pain relievers — anything from taking aspirin to drinking too much alcohol — its source may never be discovered. Also, misuse of substances can induce guilt, and self-esteem can become even more problematic. When you recognize the pain and then the source, however, a real solution can be attempted. You could take a class on stress management, begin an exercise program, develop his or her collegial support system, or seek out retraining, new training, or even new work. Whatever the course taken, the overall idea is to develop a plan on how to appropriately handle future stress whenever pain manifests itself.

Develop a philosophy of life

It is important to keep life in perspective. There are a lot of gray areas in life. There are more questions than answers. There are rights and wrongs. Good parents sometimes have “bad”

children, and vice-versa. Some babies are born with disabilities, and some die. All of this is unfair, but it is true. But life, with all of its faults, has a beauty and a flow about it. There is also goodness and love.

Some different approaches to developing your personal philosophy might include connecting or reconnecting with established religion or spirituality, reading that expands your sense of life and history, or talking to an older, wiser person who might be able to provide insight or perspective on an issue.

Keep life in balance

The work DSPs do is important for the people they serve and for themselves. It provides a sense of identity, and feelings of worthiness and altruism. It makes you feel good and important. It gives you a feeling of purpose. But if all our emotional eggs are in the one basket (work), we run a huge risk. If your job is lost or changed — which is always possible — we can be left with nothing for support. Besides, if work is your

entire life, you may become one-dimensional. It is important for the Direct Support Professional to have a rich life beyond work. It is important not only to have friends outside of work, but to have hobbies and activities to give us joy. It is important that time be managed so that you have personal time.

In conclusion, the Direct Support Professional does have unique and difficult stressors that will not go away. Thus, they need to be understood and managed. Each Direct Support Professional needs to take personal responsibility to do those things that will maintain good emotional and physical health and happiness.

Jerry W. Johnson is founder of and consultant for Topeka Mediation and Stress Consultants in Topeka, KS, and a senior consultant at the Menninger Leadership Center. He may be contacted at 913.233.8033.

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