

A Quarterly Newsletter of the National  
Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

# Frontline Initiative

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## "If You Build It, They Will Come"

Remember this line from the movie *Field of Dreams*? It referred to building a baseball diamond in the middle of an Iowa cornfield. When it was finished, the ghosts of past baseball greats *did* come — drifting out of rows of corn onto the baseball field for exciting night games. For me, this line has become a metaphor for what we might accomplish if we establish a rigorous and nationally recognized voluntary credential for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

Recently, I was asked to put one of my life dreams on hold, the full inclusion of my son in his kindergarten. I had to

accept an interim program designed to help him get ready to be with the larger group. As a parent, I had few ways to know about the quality of support that my son would receive. I did, however, ask people about their credentials. I know there are limitations to credentials: they cannot assure me that my son will be loved, nor can they unequivocally ensure the competence of people who hold them. Still, I felt more assured knowing that the one-to-one aides hired by the school were certified teachers because it gave me an idea of their educational background and their level of commitment to

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Credentialed DSPs at the 1998 graduation ceremony of the Tennessee Community Rehabilitation Agencies' Credentialing Program. (See the story on page 6.)

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# Frontline Notes

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The world is changing for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), and no where is that more evident than the national activity around educational opportunities and the interest in creating a set of measurable credentials for DSPs. Many of the articles in this issue highlight efforts of states, regional coalitions, and individual agencies to create systems for providing DSPs with a clear understanding of what the important skills, attitudes, knowledge, and ethical standards of DSP work are, as well as for providing ways to support them in gaining these important skills.

The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has been active in assisting these and other exciting measures related to credentialing of DSPs and will continue to do so, but it's important to note that while these initiatives show a promising start, not all of them are in line with the full set of criteria the NADSP proposes for credentialing.

The NADSP firmly believes that to be successful and meaningful, a DSP credential should be *voluntary* in nature, based on mastery of nationally validated "best practice" competencies and ethics which are rigorously assessed both in the classroom and on the job (OJT). In

addition, a credentialing process should be affordable to DSPs, developed and regularly reviewed by a full group of stakeholders (families, consumers, DSP, agencies, governments, educational partners, etc.), include a consumer or family satisfaction component, and would need to be renewed regularly so that DSPs can keep abreast of changes in the field.

In sum, the vision of the NADSP is to create a goal toward which DSPs can aspire rather than creating a minimum standard which they should meet to be employed. If all these criteria are met, there should be consensus on the meaning of the credential and thus it should be highly transportable.

For more details on the NADSP position on credentialing of DSPs, turn to the Alliance Update on page 5 or visit the DSP Web site at <http://rtc.umn.edu/dsp/>. To help you better understand how each of the initiatives in these articles fare in comparison to the NADSP model for credentialing, we have included the chart similar to the one below with each article. There will be a check under the appropriate box to give you a quick snapshot of each component and where it falls.

Let us hear from you.

The Editors

### NADSP Position on Credentialing

	Yes	No	Possible
<b>Voluntary</b>			
<b>Transportable</b>			
<b>Consumer Satisfaction</b> (Includes consumer or family satisfaction component)			
<b>Regularly Updated</b> (Regularly updated through stakeholder consensus)			
<b>Need to Renew</b> (Need to renew credential regularly to meet current standards)			
<b>Competency-Based</b> (Based on mastery of validated "best practice" competencies and ethics)			
<b>Rigorous Assessment</b> (Employs rigorous assessment)			
<b>Financial Support</b> (Financial support for DSP to complete credential)			
<b>Practical Training</b> (Combines classroom and practical (OJT) training)			

# NADSP Member Organizations and State Contacts

**Frontline Initiative** is a product of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. The NADSP is a collaboration of organizations who 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 of Community Options and Resources
- The Arc of the United States
- Association of Public Developmental Disabilities Administrators
- Association for Persons in Supported Employment
- CARF...The Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission
- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
- JFK Jr. Institute for Worker Education
- 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
- Irwin Siegel Agency Inc.
- National Association of State Directors on Developmental Disabilities
- National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education
- National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion
- National Center for Paraprofessionals in Education
- National Organization of Child Care Workers Association
- National Organization for 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 Association

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## DSP Web

<http://rtc.umn.edu/dsp>

Did you know the NADSP has  
a Web site?

Did you know it is new  
and improved at a new address?

Did you know you are needed to  
make it even better?

Go to <http://rtc.umn.edu/dsp>  
and check it out!

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# The Real Scoop

Welcome to *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 you face as you forge ahead in your role as a Direct Support Professional (DSP). Seth has been a DSP for many years, and he loves to give advice. He may ruffle your feathers, but hey, it's for your own good! Clifford and Seth tackle this one with a few suggestions.

## Get Involved, Not Scared

*Dear Clifford and Seth,*

*I have been a DSP for 16 years. My agency is considering participating in a new credentialing plan for DSPs. This is causing a lot of stress for my co-workers and me. Does this mean that other workers with more formal education or who were trained more recently will have an advantage over me? Am I going to have to take tests just to keep my job?*

— *Nervous in New York*

## Dear Nervous in New York,

You've worked successfully at your job for 16 years. By having this new credentialing system, it doesn't mean you have done anything wrong, only that you will have new recognition for those abilities, and better opportunities to develop new ones. Don't be stressed out. You have proof that you are doing good work, and your new credentials will support the things you are doing now and will do in the future.

— **Cliff**

## Dear Nervous,

Believe it or not, the credentialing process is specifically for your benefit. You have 16 years of experience working as a DSP. Your experience and inservice training more than make up for your lack of formal education. You should be the person new workers are coming to for help and guidance. You should be the person consumers and their families call for advocacy and information. You are the one who is able to lead the work your agency does to provide services.

As far as tests go, you are always being tested to keep your job. So take a lead in this effort! Help shape your agency's move to credentialing by getting involved. The credentialing process is meant to give DSPs more control and options in their own lives, not to have an advantage over others. Credentialing could change both your personal and professional life for the better.

— **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.

## Congratulations Cliff

### Cliff Poetz Receives Joseph P. Kennedy Award

The NADSP proudly announces that one of our NADSP co-chairs, Cliff Poetz, has been selected to receive the prestigious *Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation Self-Empowerment Award* for his pioneering efforts to promote self-advocacy among people with mental retardation.

The *Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation Self-Empowerment Award* was founded by the Kennedy family to recognize individuals with mental retardation who have the ability to successfully advocate for themselves and others in local, state, federal, and other policy and administrative bodies. Mr. Poetz will attend the award ceremony to be held on August 2, 2000, in Seattle, Washington in conjunction with the 11<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association of the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities. He will be presented a \$10,000 cash award and an original commemorative crystal.

# Alliance Update

## NADSP on National Credentialing for DSPs

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to strengthening supports to people who rely on human services. To do so, the role of the Direct Support Professional (DSP) must be enhanced and strengthened as well. The NADSP believes that establishing a voluntary, national credential for DSPs will move us closer to these parallel goals.

### Why is a national credential important to human services?

The NADSP asserts that a recognized body of skills, knowledge, and ethics is essential to a rigorous, voluntary credential. These skills, knowledge, and ethics must represent the spirit and essence of the direct support role in contemporary human services. It is critical to change the image of the direct support role from “just another job” to a role that is recognized and valued. Despite the importance of the DSP to the quality of support, our field is unable to find and retain workers. Further, direct support is often viewed as a temporary career stop. It is imperative that we transform the accidental job to a career destination of commitment and value.

Our field is driven by values; some values are easily identifiable, while others are mostly unspoken. In the past, opinions and decisions of the service system were valued more than those of the participant. Today, self-determination is the guiding principle for quality support. Our field must examine now

how it can make a similar shift with DSPs. This exploration must include a search for new ways of working — ways where DSPs are empowered to assist participants toward self-direction. The most promising forms of support are characterized by partnerships with participants, community participation, self-determination, and meaningful and lasting outcomes. A national credential, regularly renewed and updated, offers the promise of a full and detailed vision of professional support. The NADSP believes that the following principles should guide the development and enactment of a national, voluntary credential —

### Nature of the direct support role

- The essence of the role is to support people in leading self-determined lives as full participants of the community. Any program of practitioner credentialing must fully value and honor this fundamental precept.
- The DSP is a partner with the participant in the support process. This partnership is characterized by the ethical and respectful provision of relevant, individualized support, not the imposition of control.
- The credential tells that the DSP is a fully empowered, expert professional who embraces direct support as their primary work. With a credential, consumers, organizations, and community members recognize and value the DSP as a competent and creative partner in the helping process.

- The DSP recognizes that the consumer’s social and community networks are central to his or her well being and strives to strengthen these relationships.
- Direct support work is a core activity of human services and the DSP must be well prepared through comprehensive education, experience, and values clarification.

### Nature of the credential

- The proposed NADSP credential, whether national, state or local, must be voluntary. The purpose of a credential is to encourage people to recognize and select direct support as a career, not to exclude people from the role.
- A meaningful credential will be based upon mastery of competencies, acquisition of knowledge sets, supervised experience, and acceptance of an ethical code. The credential components must represent the consensus of stakeholders: individuals, families, DSPs, administrators, trainers, and educators.
- The credential program should be designed to support and encourage portability across local, regional, and state boundaries. By building and recognizing competency among DSPs, a valued credential should enable them to move along career lattices — exploring, experiencing, and practicing the diversity of direct support and other human service work.
- The national credential should mark the individual’s commitment to career development, best practices, and personal growth. It

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# The Tennessee Community Rehabilitation Agencies' Credentialing Program

Just recently, I met someone who asked me what I do for a living. I began to explain my job and this person interrupted, asking, "Yes, but what is your title?" I told her I have several titles including Job Coach, Employment Specialist, Program Manager, and Agency Support Coordinator, but the title that means the most and describes my job the truest is Direct Support Professional (DSP).

Later, as I was thinking of what being a DSP means to me, I recalled reading one article in the Fall 1999 issue of *Frontline Initiative*. It said that the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is working to "increase access to competency-based training, higher education, and career mentoring of all direct support staff," and to "acknowledge and reward qualified staff." It further states that it is "certain that in the future the role of direct support workers will be expanded."

This is exactly what the Tennessee Community Rehabilitation Agencies' (CMRA) Credentialing Program is about. The role of the DSP is expanding and changing as people continue to leave institutions, and new concepts such as circles of support, visions for the future, and organizational redesign take hold. Though provider agencies may provide a certain amount of training for all DSPs, a credentialing program like ours goes much deeper than what time allows for in individual agencies. Funded by the State of Tennessee Division of Mental Retardation Services, the 60-hour training program includes 10 core com-

petency areas that are necessary for DSPs to fully apply themselves in their work. The competency areas are: Community Resources; Health and Safety; Introduction to MR/DD; Personal Facilitation; Philosophy and Rights; Professional Development; Rules and Regulations; and Values, Concepts, and Practices. Graduates from the program receive an official certificate, *Credential in*

## NADSP Position on Credentialing

	Yes	No	Possible
Voluntary	✓		
Transportable	✓		
Consumer Satisfaction		✓	
Regularly Updated			✓
Need to Renew		✓	
Competency-Based	✓		
Rigorous Assessment	✓		
Financial Support	✓		
Practical Training			✓

For more information, see page 2

*Community Support*, issued by the State of Tennessee. In addition, they receive letters of support and commendation from the Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist and President Clinton, a subscription to *Frontline Initiative*, and a one-year membership in the American Association of Mental Retardation (AAMR). Also, CMRA holds retreats for all graduates to promote professional development. These retreats have been well attended and reviewed by participants.

The first CMRA credentialing class graduated in August 1998. As one of the proudly credentialed DSPs of that year, I have been actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Many favorable reviews have been received.

Credentialed DSPs, regardless of their actual job descriptions and duties, feel better prepared to meet any challenges that may arise during the course of their employment. They also report higher self-esteem after having gone through the training. One credentialing graduate said, "It [the program] helped me solve problems and re-think the language I used when speaking to clients. I now know the importance of using people-first language." Another stated, "We had open discussions with our trainer and our co-workers. This proved to be very helpful to me, better than just learning from books." Yet another said, "[We] learned from co-workers in other positions and gained more of an understanding about their roles at the agency. [They] developed a 'team spirit' as they went through the training together." Ronnie Broach from Carroll County Developmental Center, who has a B.A. in sociology said, "I feel more professional and I am seen that way by others."

The CMRA credentialing program has definitely been seen as a plus to all who have completed training so far. All of the graduates that I interviewed said they would recommend the program to any employees, those new to the field or seasoned veterans — because of its breadth and depth. CMRA has tracked all of its graduates and maintained a file on promotions and turnover. There is a much lower rate of turnover among graduates than those who haven't been credentialed. Many credentialed DSPs have been promoted as a direct result of their

# Refreshing Changes at a Residential Agency

Last spring, I was lucky enough to participate in a committee at my agency that revised the job structure and job descriptions for the direct support staff. Prior to this change, ELM Homes had the same job descriptions for almost 20 years — since we first started the business! Although the essence of ELM Homes' expectations for its Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) hasn't changed, the language, organization, and the need to acknowledge that the competence and skill mastery levels of our DSPs has changed. It was about time we "freshened up" our look and language, and began discussing how our old ways did not do much for the DSP role, status, and image in our organization!

The committee, which consisted of direct support staff, frontline supervisors, qualified mental retardation professionals (QMRPs\*), and administrators, worked to align ELM Homes' DSP job descriptions with the Community Support Skills Standards (CSSS). Our DSPs used to be called Coordinators, differentiated at four seniority levels. While this old structure was taken into consideration by the committee, some major changes were made. The new job descriptions included an agency-level value statement for each of the 12 identified competency areas and the corresponding skill standards that all DSPs at ELM Homes' are expected to reach in their work. The skill standards were then divided into three building-block areas by achievement level: the base-level is the Residential Instructor (RI), the mid-level, Advanced Residential Instructor (ARI), and the mastery-level, Certified Residential Instructor (CRI). Accordingly,

we adjusted our pay scales to honor job level, seniority, as well as performance. Work location is also factored into the pay system, since the funds that we negotiate with counties may vary.

Under the new structure, staff no longer move up through the job levels simply by staying with Elm Homes long enough. They must

**NADSP Position on Credentialing**

	Yes	No	Possible
Voluntary	✓		
Transportable			✓
Consumer Satisfaction		✓	
Regularly Updated			✓
Need to Renew		✓	
Competency-Based	✓		
Rigorous Assessment	✓		
Financial Support	✓		
Practical Training			✓

For more information, see page 2

apply to their supervisors for promotion. The promotion decision is made based on an appraisal of job performance, in-service and staff meeting attendance, and personal initiative. The appraisals are conducted by the DSPs' direct supervisors and Program Managers (QMRPs or Designated Coordinators\*\*). There is a goal-setting process between the DSPs and their supervisors, where the areas in which DSPs need to improve their work, and eventually be assessed, are decided partly at the supervisor's discretion. Additionally, promotion is not permanent and may even be revoked if performance in the new position is below expectation. However, there is no pressure to "move up." Individuals may choose to stay as an RI for their entire employment with ELM Homes if they wish.

Individuals promoted to be ARIs focus on assisting QMRPs or Designated Coordinators in preparing consumer programs and conducting reviews of these programs, with a few additional duties. The CRIs primarily assist our Residential Managers (RM). While a RM's role centers around household maintenance, consumer finances, and staff supervision, a CRI helps with the day-to-day duties such as grocery shopping. Most importantly, CRIs must be able to take charge when RMs have their days off. This "on-call" duty requires knowledge of consumers and facilities and an ability to make autonomous decisions. Currently, the certification at the mastery level is an internal Elm Homes process. We are excited about the prospect of honoring high-level skill attainment of direct support staff through a national credentialing process in our industry.

As we move towards completing the DSPs job descriptions, we find that the staff are excited and interested in career advancement and positions within ELM Homes. It really is refreshing.

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\* The designation Qualified Mental Retardation Professional (QMRP) is a federally defined position in the regulations for Intermediate Care Facilities for Persons with Mental Retardation (ICF/MR).

\*\* Designated Coordinator is defined in the Minnesota Consolidated Rule. See page 9 for more information.

# Direct Support Certification: A Community Effort

As community agencies are faced with a critical shortage of frontline employees and budget constraints, can one community make a difference in addressing issues of quality service and empowerment of the direct support workforce? The answer is: Yes. The certification of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is one way to increase recognition of the value of this workforce. Currently, there is no state certification process in Missouri, although discussion has been going on for years. But as a community, we wanted to see an empowered direct support workforce, so we stopped thinking and did something about it.

In 1997, two major initiatives were undertaken in St. Charles County, Missouri, directed at issues surrounding the DSP workforce. The first was a Direct Support Task Force that focuses on retention and recruitment and is still going strong today. The second was a community partnership with St. Charles County Community College. With the vision of promoting an empowered direct support workforce dedicated to providing quality supports, concerned agencies in the community approached the college to develop training programs for DSPs supporting people with developmental disabilities.

As the primary location for a partnership on training, the college provides lifelong learning opportunities, and brings cost effectiveness and neutrality among agency providers. The college formed an advisory committee and sought input from DSPs, consumers and their families, and agencies. In a survey administered to about 150 DSPs in

the community, 85% of the participants indicated a desire for a certification process. Consumers and their families expressed their concern about the high turnover in the direct support workforce and said they would favor agencies that take actions to increase staff dedication and retention. The committee concluded that providing training opportunities and certification to DSPs is a

**NADSP Position on Credentialing**

	Yes	No	Possible
Voluntary	✓		
Transportable	✓		
Consumer Satisfaction		✓	
Regularly Updated			✓
Need to Renew		✓	
Competency-Based	✓		
Rigorous Assessment	✓		
Financial Support			✓
Practical Training			✓

For more information, see page 2

wise investment that will reap greater benefits in the long run.

The Direct Support Certification Program was finally initiated in January 2000 at the college. Designed for entry-level employees working in the field of disabilities, the program focuses on providing standardized competency based training for DSPs. The curriculum consists of four modules: Health and Safety, Supportive Interventions, Values and Vision, and Professional Development. Those who complete all four modules receive a certificate recognizing them as certified DSPs. Their agencies also receive documentation of this recognition. Successful completion of the program may articulate into two credit hours towards a degree in Human Services at the College.

Now in the third year of our partnership, many lessons have been learned about creating and managing a certification program. Above all, cost-effectiveness is the basis for the viability of any training and credentialing effort. From our experience, a training program can survive and grow only if it is provided at an affordable price. Our program is partially funded by the Developmental Disabilities Resource Board of St. Charles County (DDRB), a county tax board which funds services for people with developmental disabilities. From the college view point, we did not secure enough funding in the beginning of the project to provide training that the agencies could afford. This has made the implementation of training very difficult. Brainstorm with your work group to secure other strong funding resources such as collaborating with agencies to share training resources or building coalitions statewide to seek funding.

Realizing that limited funding often hinders agencies in sending their DSPs to external training, the college has been seeking alternative ways to carry on the partnership. Our next step is to ask St. Charles County agencies to work together on a competency-based certification exam that tests DSPs on the true job skills. The Community Support Skill Standards developed by the Human Service Research Institute as part of the Federal National Skill Standard Initiative will provide a basis for design of the exam. Quality internal training has long existed, however with the exam in mind, agencies will be asked to ensure that



# Community Supports Program for People With Disabilities

The Community Supports Program (CSP) for People with Disabilities is a credit-bearing educational program offered through nine campuses that are part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) system. The courses offered in the CSP emphasize building on the strengths and capacities of people with disabilities to maximize community inclusion. The curriculum is designed to train DSPs to provide effective residential, vocational, educational, or in-home supports to people with disabilities in their communities and meets the competencies identified in the national skill standards for the industry: the Community Support Skills Standards (CSSS) (see page 14 for an overview). The program offers several educational awards including a Certificate, a Specialized Diploma, and an A.A.S. or A.A. degree.

The Certificate award is aimed at preservice or orientation-level training, however, it is also effective for persons with experience in a broad human service area and who want to become more knowledgeable and skilled in community-based, person-centered work environments. Completion of the certificate program is required for participating in the specialized diploma program. It includes three technical courses: Facilitating Positive Behaviors I, Physical/Developmental Supports I, and Direct Service Professionalism. It also includes a general education course related to communication. The diploma program includes advanced coursework in facilitating positive behaviors, person-centered planning, human development and other important general education

areas. In addition, students in the diploma program engage in a work site practicum and choose a specialization such as vocational support, supporting people with challenging behaviors, or an emphasis on health.

The CSP is voluntary and DSPs in Minnesota are not required to participate as a condition of their employment. Some students pay tuition out of pocket. Others use

## NADSP Position on Credentialing

	Yes	No	Possible
Voluntary	✓		
Transportable	✓		
Consumer Satisfaction		✓	
Regularly Updated			✓
Need to Renew		✓	
Competency-Based	✓		
Rigorous Assessment			✓
Financial Support			✓
Practical Training	✓		

For more information, see page 2

money offered by their employer for continued education. The colleges also offer financial aid for eligible students, and there have been some funds available that pay instructor fees and thus waive tuition for students who work in businesses who are participating in the grant.

The initial goals of the CSP were to provide high-quality, cost-effective, flexible, and accessible training and educational opportunities for people providing direct support to people with developmental disabilities or related conditions. The program was designed to be delivered in a variety of ways and over varying lengths of time to meet the needs of varied learners including traditional classroom training through academic courses at a local college, interactive television that connects

people from across the state, or customized training developed on site at businesses. The program is offering for-credit or not-for-credit options.

One incentive for completion of the Diploma was created in 1997 when the Minnesota legislature passed a bill allowing people who had completed the CSP Diploma and had two years field experience to work in Designated Coordinator positions. This position was previously only allowed to be filled by people with four-year degrees. The newly created position allows for promotion of people who cannot or do not want to complete a four-year degree program.

The CSP can meet the needs of different types of learners. It can offer experienced staff a chance to learn new skills and hone existing skills while working toward a credit-bearing degree. It can provide an introduction to the skills needed by DSPs to high school students or college freshmen. It can be a supplement to the academic career of students in other fields such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, social work, teaching, etc. who need to know more about community supports for people with disabilities.

Many students and agencies have shared their stories about the benefits and impact of the CSP. These experiences are about exchanging information on workplace culture and values, sharing new information and skills to be more effective at work, and finding good jobs or being promoted — just to mention a few of the personal and quality

Continued page 11

# California Moves Toward Statewide Certification of DSPs

The state of California has about 1000 intermediate care facilities for the mentally retarded (ICF/MRs), serving approximately 7,000 individuals. These programs are increasingly challenged by trying to find and keep qualified Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). In an effort to develop and maintain a high quality of services, California is working on a statewide standardized training program and competency test for DSPs (called Developmental Assistant [DA] in California).

The California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF) has taken the lead in proposing to its legislature that they create a competency-based training and certification program which would be overseen by the California Department of Health Services. The legislation would create a new position, Certified Developmental Assistants (CDA), which according to the proposed legislation, is defined as any person who, for compensation, performs basic care services directed at the safety, comfort, personal hygiene, or protection of [persons with developmental disabilities], and who is certified as having completed the requirements of the certification program. The legislation distinguishes services from those that by law may only be performed by a licensed nurse or a qualified mental retardation professional (QMRP, see page 7).

CAHF proposed that the certification program be modeled after the state's Certified Nursing Aide training and Competency Exam Program as well as the one mandated in federal law. The proposed standardized

CDA training includes a pre-certification training program, which consists of a) at least 60 hours classroom training on basic direct support skills, client safety and rights, the necessary supports for people with developmental disabilities, and b) 100 hours of supervised on-the-job training in clinical practice in a long-term care facility serving people with developmental disabilities under the supervision of a licensed nurse or a QMRP.

## NADSP Position on Credentialing

	Yes	No	Possible
Voluntary		✓	
Transportable	✓		
Consumer Satisfaction		✓	
Regularly Updated			✓
Need to Renew	✓		
Competency-Based			✓
Rigorous Assessment	✓		
Financial Support	✓		
Practical Training	✓		

For more information, see page 2

The classroom portion of the training program may be conducted by instructors who are employed by or under contract with the facility, or by another approved agency or educational institution. It is anticipated that the American Red Cross will be at least one approved provider of the classroom component. In addition, due to their record of creating excellent competency testing, they are to develop the state-mandated test in conjunction with CAHF and providers in the state, and will likely administer the test when complete.

Any person hired as a developmental assistant (DA) will be required to have certification within six months of employment. The

certificate offers some benefits to the DA. For one, in California there are a substantial number of hours of training required for people in DA roles every time they start a new employment situation. This includes times when a person picks up a second part-time job, or moves from one agency to another, even though the services provided and the skills needed are essentially the same. The proposed certification is also proposed to be portable among providers in the state, which alleviates both CDAs and employers of the burden of repeated training. CAHF is also asking the Legislature to pass a 20-cent-per-hour wage increase to be given to CDAs upon successful certification. In addition, there are provisions for partial credit toward completion for those who start the certification process and have to stop temporarily (e.g., family emergency, birth, etc.) so that they can return without having to start at the beginning.

CDAs will need to renew their certificate every two years by proving that they completed a minimum of 24 hours of specified continuing education as well as 36 hours of discretionary training provided by their employers. The bill also sets forth the procedures by which the California Department of Health Services shall have the authority to revoke, deny, suspend, or place on probation a CDA certificate. A statewide database will record and track certification information, which may be accessed by state employers so that they can assure a CDA is currently certified.

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### Alliance Update

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should not mark the endpoint of the practitioner's training, education, or professional development.

- Local or regional entities should administer preparation programs to ensure adherence to nationally established criteria.
- The components of a national credential process must be developed according to well-accepted and valid methods. These components must be regularly reviewed and revised through national, collaborative means.
- A national credential should be crafted to make more explicit the career and educational paths for students, and incumbent workers.
- Establishing a national credential will facilitate the exposure of young people to human service careers through their secondary and post-secondary educational experiences.
- The direct support credential must be accessible to both new and incumbent workers.
- Given the low wages of DSPs, financial aid must be made available to these workers to ensure that the credential is truly accessible.

In the last few years, members of the NADSP have been supporting credentialing efforts across the country. As these initiatives continue to develop and mature, the Alliance will continue to be a resource on what is working and what is not, as well as be a general point of contact for resources and information about national voluntary credentialing for DSPs. If you have information about initiatives happening in your state, please contact one of the Alliance co-chairs.

### Tennessee Credentialing Program

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training. I am very proud to be part of the program and hope that more and more people will understand and appreciate the value of the credentialing efforts in our field.

Jill Jackson is a credentialed DSP at Hilltoppers Inc. in Crossville, TN. She may be reached at [hilltoppers@multipro.com](mailto:hilltoppers@multipro.com). For more information on the CMRA credentialing program, contact Katrina Lee at 200 4th Ave. N., Suite 600, Nashville, TN, 37219; Tel. 615.254.3077, Fax: 615.254.3078, Email: [klee@cmraonline.org](mailto:klee@cmraonline.org)

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### Direct Support Certification

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their training addresses the expected competencies. Operated on a voluntary basis, the exam will result in a portable certificate amongst agencies, helping to standardize training and reduce possible retraining cost. This calls for strong collaboration and commitment on the part of all parties.

A process like this is never easy, but we are eager to meet the challenges. DSPs are the backbone of every agency. They deserve recognition of their contributions and opportunities for professional development. We invite you to join our efforts in taking the community initiative to develop a system to recognize competent DSPs. With collaboration and commitment from all parties involved, we believe that one community *can* make a difference.

Sherrill Wayland is the Inclusion and Training Specialist at St. Charles County Community College in St. Peters, MO. She can be reached at Tel: 636.922.8000 x 4312, Email: [swayland@chuck.stchas.edu](mailto:swayland@chuck.stchas.edu)

### Community Supports Program

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outcomes from participating in the program. One of Minnesota's first CSP Diploma graduates says that the CSP has had an enormous influence on her personal and professional life. She proudly proclaimed that now she is equipped with the tools needed to provide the support that consumers want and need to reach their dreams.

For more information on the CSP program, contact Carla Lagerstedt at St. Cloud Technical College, 1540 Northway Dr., St. Cloud, MN; Tel. 320.654.5403; Fax: 320.654.5568.

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### California Moves Toward Statewide Certification

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Facilities currently absorb the cost of training. They will continue to do so but with the anticipation that they will have a better trained and more stable workforce which will translate to improved quality service for people being supported. With no major opposition and widespread support, the legislation is expected to be passed and enacted by January 2001.

For further information on the California Certified Developmental Assistant legislation, contact Sheree Crum from the California Association of Health Facilities at Tel. 916.441.6500 ext. 227; Email: [scrum@cahf.org](mailto:scrum@cahf.org)

# Accepting New Challenges

Ellen Strickland is an Employment Specialist with Chesterfield Employment Services (CES) and the Chesterfield County Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Substance Abuse Services in the state of Virginia. Working with people with disabilities, Ellen demonstrates excellence, professionalism, and enthusiasm in her daily work, which has become the benchmark of best practice in her agency. Recently, one of the *FI* editors had the pleasure to talk with Ellen about her experience as a DSP.

*Q: Ellen, last year you were nominated for the JFK Jr. Award at the President's Committee for Mental Retardation by your supervisor, co-workers, and consumers. Tell me how you got into this field and what makes you so successful in your job.*

*A:* I was always interested in the helping profession. After I got a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Virginia in 1995, I started working part-time as an Employment Assistant at Chesterfield Employment Services. My job was to provide daily support to three women employees at the Virginia Department of Taxation. Later, I moved into a full-time position placing and training individuals in competitive community employment. I enjoy what I do and I want the best quality services for my customers. Now I'm a senior employment specialist working on the Supported Competitive Employment Team. I conduct team-building activities and work with my supervisor to improve my approach of leading the group.

My supervisor is extremely supportive. She is always encouraging me to develop leadership skills.

*Q: Speaking of skill development, you have participated in many training programs in your county which are not mandatory. Why?*

*A:* For me, it's important to accept new challenges and give more on my job. I always try to participate in as many training opportunities as possible. The programs are offered by the county at minimal charges to department training budgets. There is an application process and attendance requires your supervisor's commitment of your time and use of the knowledge learned.

*Q: Give me some examples of how your work benefits from the training.*

*A:* I've learned skills such as conflict management, customer service, and person-centered planning. All these have a lot to do with building relationships, recognizing different needs and styles, respecting people's own choices, and focusing on the outcome.

Some time ago, I got a call from an employment site where two people I support worked in competitive positions. They were both about to lose their jobs due to a serious misunderstanding. I intervened by talking to everyone involved. It's important to let people express their concerns. I supported each customer during meetings with their supervisors. Then I suggested the employer let these people take some days off before getting back together for a solution. We wanted to give them

time to think and make their own choices. I am glad to report that these individuals are still working and getting along just fine.

*Q: I know you also coach and train new staff. What do you do as a mentor?*

*A:* I introduce the position to new staff and guide them through the entire process, including interaction with consumers. The new employees shadow me at work and then I allow them more space to develop their own style. As a mentor, you have to recognize everybody learns in a different fashion — this is out of my leadership class, so you need to adapt and match your coaching with them. I make sure that a person communicates well with other team members and understands the expectations. I keep them up to date and make myself always available to answer questions, even outside weekly team meetings. I provide feedback to supervisors who appraise new staff's performance.

*Q: What is your plan for the future?*

*A:* I want to develop more of a focus and have a chance to experience a supervisory role. I'm glad that I stayed in direct support. I love the work I do.

*Q: You are doing a great job Ellen. I wish you every success in your career.*

*A:* Thank you.

Ellen Strickland may be reached at Employment Services, Chesterfield County Department of MH/MR, Richmond, VA 23237; Tel: 804.271.9451.

# My Job Coach My Best Friend

My name is Oscar Turner. I am 35 years old and I have a developmental disability. Ellen Strickland has been my job coach for two years. Ellen helped me get a job at Castlewood in January 1998 as a laundry person. She came and stayed with me as I washed clothes and rags and towels. Then I got another job in the pulp area. She came to work with me in learning that job really well and to help me talk more to my coworkers. She stood beside me as I learned my job duties. Ellen takes time to help me as my job coach. She comes to see if I need her to help me do something, like if I can't understand what my boss wants me to do. She tells me about the job and lets me try the job before I decide to take it. She lets me make up my own mind

about the job and whether I want it or not.

There are so many things I can say about Ellen as a good person and friend. Ellen is a person that cares about others and makes them feel good. Ellen is a good person because she takes time to get to know me as a person and as her friend. She taught me to believe in myself as a person first. She taught me to speak up for myself when I need something. Ellen is a person who lets you know that you can do anything, if you are willing to put your heart and soul in whatever you want to do, whether it be finding a job or just needing a good friend to talk to about your problems.

Ellen believes in me and when I ask her to help me with my problems, she always does what she said she will do. Ellen has done so much for me. She tells me that I am doing well and my boss is happy with the job that I do. She tells me that she is happy for me and wishes the best for me. Ellen is the best there is and the best there was and the best friend I could ever have.

Oscar Turner lives and works in Richmond, Virginia. He may be reached through Chesterfield Employment Services; Tel. 804.271.9451.



Oscar and Ellen

**"If You Build It, They Will Come"**  
continued from cover

their work.

For sometime, we've had unfair expectations of people doing direct support. We speak with great excitement about blending natural and paid support, and individualizing supports so that people with disabilities can direct the course of their own lives. We ask that staff facilitate change by embracing these new approaches, but we do very little to prepare them for these roles. We also ignore the potential of DSPs and invest in "case managers" or "service coordinators" to direct their work — adding more layers of people who are farther away from the lives of the people we support. Then we wonder why it is so expensive and why it is so hard to help people get closer to their dreams and achieve the outcomes they desire.

As part of my professional work, I was able to direct the National Skill Standards project for community support workers. When we visited with DSPs across the country while developing the Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS), they were unanimously in favor of earning a credential for the important work they do. When the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) adopted its slate of priorities in 1997, the DSPs at the meeting embraced the goal of developing a voluntary, national credential, stating "We want to be held to a clear and high standard."

While evaluating a community college certificate program designed for teacher aides, I recently interviewed several program participants.

Continued back page

# Frontline Resources

## The Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS)

The CSSS are a comprehensive set of practice guidelines for community-based human service practitioners in direct service roles. They are a tool that can be used by employers, educators, and others for a variety of staff preparation and development purposes, including the following:

- Conducting training needs assessments for current personnel;
- Assessing strengths and weaknesses of current orientation and training programs;
- Encouraging post-secondary educational programs to modify curricula to be more relevant to contemporary community services;
- Helping local secondary schools to develop school-to-work opportunities in human services;
- Developing job descriptions and job performance reviews for direct support practitioners.

Developed and validated by a collaborative national partnership of practitioners, families, consumers, educators, employers, and policy-makers throughout the United States, the CSSS represent the first time that accepted occupational analysis and validation methods have been used to develop a comprehensive and progressive vision of direct service practice at the national level. By identifying the skill and knowledge sets, ethical posture, and attributes associated with effectiveness in community service environments, the CSSS provide the critical elements necessary for the direct support role to be viewed as a profession. The 12 broad competency areas of the CSSS are as follows:

- **Participant Empowerment.** The competent community support human service practitioner (CSHSP) enhances the ability of the participant to lead a self-determining life by providing the support and information necessary to build self-esteem and assertiveness, and to make decisions.
- **Communication.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about the range of effective communication strategies and skills necessary to establish a collaborative relationship with the participant.
- **Assessment.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about formal and informal assessment practices in order to respond to the needs, desires and interests of the participants.
- **Community and Service Networking.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about the formal and informal supports available in his or her community and skilled in assisting the participant to identify and gain access to such supports.
- **Facilitation of Services.** The CSHSP is knowledgeable about a range of participatory planning techniques and is skilled in implementing plans in a collaborative and expeditious manner.
- **Community Living Skills & Supports.** The CSHSP has the ability to match specific supports and interventions to the unique needs of individual participants and recognizes the importance of friends, family and community relationships.
- **Education, Training & Self-Development.** The CSHSP should be able to identify areas for self-improvement, pursue necessary educational/training resources, and share knowledge with others.
- **Advocacy.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about the diverse challenges facing participants (e.g. human rights, legal, administrative and financial) and should be able to identify and use effective advocacy strategies to overcome such challenges.
- **Vocational, Educational & Career Support.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about the career and education related concerns of the participant and should be able to mobilize the resources and support necessary to assist the participant to reach his or her goals.
- **Crisis Intervention.** The CSHSP should be knowledgeable about crisis prevention, intervention and resolution techniques and should match such techniques to particular circumstances and individuals.
- **Organizational Participation.** The CSHSP is familiar with the mission and practices of the support organization and participates in the life of the organization.
- **Documentation.** The CSHSP is aware of the requirements for documentation in his or her organization and is able to manage these requirements efficiently.

The following six publications provide more detail information of the standards and ways to put them into practice. They are available from the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), 2336 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140; Tel. 617.876.0426, Fax: 617.492.7401.

**Community Support Skill Standards: Tools for Managing Change and Achieving Outcomes** (1997)  
Cost: \$20.00

**Using the Community Support Skill Standards: A Guide for Educators and Trainers** (1997)  
Cost: \$12.00

**The Community Support Skill Standards Project: Technical Report on Demonstration Projects Implementing the Community Support Skill Standards** (1997) Cost: \$10.00

**Analysis of the Content of the Community Support Skill Standards and the National Standards for Human Services Educational Programs** (1997) Cost: \$8.00

**Results of the Validation of an Occupational Analysis of Skills Needed by Community Based Human Service Practitioners** (1997) Cost: \$8.00

**Pathways to Success: A Guide to Best Practices Using National Skill Standards in Workplace Development Activities** (1997)  
Cost: \$10.00

**The Tennessee Community Rehabilitation Agencies Credentialing Curriculum** (1998)

*The Credentialing Program at the Tennessee Community Rehabilitation Agencies (CMRA)*

This competency-based program aims at improving the job skill, knowledge, and attitudes of DSPs. Training topics include introduction to MR/DD, philosophy, professional development, rules and regulations, values, concepts, and practices, community resources, and health and safety. The curriculum has a broad coverage of topics including many of the competency areas and skill standards of the CSSS. All materials are value-based, reflecting the best in contemporary support services including consumer-driven support models.

For more information visit the CMRA Web site at <http://www.cmraonline.org>, or contact Katrina Lee (see page 11).

**Guide to High Quality Direct Service Personnel Training Resources (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)** (1997)

*Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration*

This publication is designed to assist agencies providing services to people with developmental disabilities in identifying, selecting, and acquiring high-quality training curricula that can assist them in providing training for their direct service personnel. Materials included in this resource guide are from a variety of sources in all 50 states and Canada, including University Affiliated Programs, state agencies, and commercial publishers. New curricula of credentialing programs around the country are being reviewed and will be added to the third edition.

Cost: \$35.00. To order, contact Publications Office, 109 Pattee Hall, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Tel: 612.624.4512. This publication is also available online at <http://ici2.coled.umn.edu/rtc/dspr/>.

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## **"If You Build It, They Will Come"**

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They were delighted to be attending college paid for by their employer, and were applying what they had learned in college every day at work. Most were planning to stay in their jobs despite low income because they loved being with the children and felt that the program was helping them to be more competent. We need people like this who bring enthusiasm and skills to their work in community supports, and we cannot afford to lose them.

By identifying what DSPs must know and do to be effective in their work, a credential focused on direct support can communicate best practices to the human services field and to society as a whole. The components of the credential will serve as the foundation of the emerging profession, establish a cultural identity for the role of direct support, and drive the development of educational and training opportunities.

If we build it right, it will ensure that people who pursue the credential will learn the most important

aspects of the work in programs of study and experience in nearby schools or through job training. Most of what we currently teach people on the job covers the basic skills oriented to health and safety and required by state regulation. We need to convey the complexities of current best practices including facilitating community inclusion, supporting participant empowerment, and honoring dreams and preferences by offering learning opportunities with greater depth and challenge.

If we build it right, people outside of human services will see that direct service, like other professions, has a name and a body of knowledge, skills, and ethical principles that comprise its identity. This will provide us with a tool to market the role to prospective workers. How is it possible that a young person can contemplate a career in human services if they have no information about the direct service role?

If we build it right, young people will come because it is interesting, meaningful, and valued work. If we build it so there are linkages among secondary, post-secondary, and agency classrooms, people will come because they see explicit career and educational paths that show a promising future. If we build it right, the quality of support will get better. If we build it right, people with disabilities, their mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers may find some comfort and assurance in knowing that the people they must rely upon every day are well prepared to achieve desired outcomes. Let's build it so they will come.

Marianne Taylor is an NADSP co-chair and mother of a son with special needs. See page 3 for contact details.

Visit the DSP Web site at <http://rtc.umn.edu/dsp>

## **Frontline Initiative Newsletter**

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