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ABSTRACT

The fourteen brief articles in this theme issue all examine challenges in the development of direct support staff working with people who have developmental disabilities. The articles also include the views of direct support providers and people with developmental disabilities themselves, as well as examples of strategies used by provider agencies and others to improve the recruitment, retention, and training of direct support staff. The articles are: "Good Staff, Bad Staff, No Staff At All: Advice from Two Consumers" (Jim Beaty and Nathan Perry); "People Need People: The Direct Service Workforce" (Amy Hewitt and Susan O'Neill); "A Call to Exemplary Service" (Marianne Taylor); "Assessing Workplace Recruitment and Retention: The First Steps" (Sheryl A. Larson); "Expanding the Direct Service Workforce: Possibilities through School-to-Work" (Teri Wallace); "Reducing Turnover: The VNCC Approach" (Laurel A. Ditson); "Turning It Around" (Mary Claire Mohrfeld); "Peer Mentoring: Mission--Possible" (Sue L. Curtis and others); "Providing Culturally Competent Services" (William Ebenstein); "Strategies for Addressing Workforce Issues"; "A New Perspective on Training at Dungarvin" (Sandy Henry and others); "Training the Trainer: Minimizing Expense, Maximizing Skills" (Howard Miller and Jo Johnson); "Collaborative Training: The MATC Program" (Susan O'Neill and John Westerman); and "Self-Directed Work Teams: An International Learning Experience at Vinfen" (Harry E. Dumay and Elisa Velardo). Also contains information on related World Wide Web sites and the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. (DB)

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Impact

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**Feature Issue on Direct Support
Workforce Development**

Volume 10 · Number 4 · Winter 1998



For Jim Beaty, as for many other persons with developmental disabilities, direct support professionals such as Lori Sparks are the key to a satisfying life in the community. See story below.

Good Staff, Bad Staff, No Staff At All: Advice From Two Consumers

by Jim Beaty and Nathan Perry

Jim Beaty and Nathan Perry are two consumers of the services provided by direct support professionals in the community. When asked to describe the impact of direct service workforce development on their lives, they shared the following thoughts.

To us it is really simple – if agencies have good staff, we have good lives. If agencies have bad staff who aren't trained, don't understand our disabilities or have attitude problems, we suffer the effects.

We've been through the system, that's for sure! Institutions, groups homes, special education, supported living, workshops, real jobs and semi-independent living. We've had more staff than we can count, some good and some bad. But, most of them have been really caring and nice.

To us good staff:

- Are supportive and try hard to understand our problems.
- Have creative ideas to help us resolve our anger and control our own behavior.
- Know about our disabilities and understand the things that are out of our control.
- Try to understand where we are coming from.
- Don't hold grudges.

[Beaty, continued on page 22]

From the Editors

Clearly, the quality of services and supports provided to people with developmental disabilities is directly related to the quality of their direct support providers. Yet, as we have heard time and again from people with developmental disabilities, their family members, advocates, and provider agencies, finding and keeping quality direct support staff is a daunting task. Although it has always been challenging to cultivate a quality workforce, it is especially difficult when community services are growing rapidly, the economy is healthy, and the unemployment rate is low.

This issue of *IMPACT* briefly outlines current workforce development challenges. In addition, several direct support providers and people with developmental disabilities describe the importance of finding solutions to these problems. It also provides several examples of creative strategies used by provider agencies, educators, and others to enhance and improve the recruitment, retention, and training of direct support staff.

We hope that in reading these pages service providers and policymakers will find practical tips for improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities by improving workforce development practices. We also hope this issue will stimulate continued sharing of ideas regarding solutions to workforce development challenges.

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People Need People: The Direct Service Workforce

by Amy Hewitt and Susan O'Neill

A generation ago, institutional care was the primary model for providing human services to persons with developmental disabilities. Today, most persons with developmental and other disabilities receive services within the context of typical community housing, local work settings, and neighborhood schools. Workforce issues such as recruitment, retention, and training of direct support staff have become more common as services have grown in number and decentralized, and as the demographics of the workforce pool have changed.

The movement of services from one big place (the institution) to many smaller places (small group homes, individual supports in a home or apartment) spread over a large geographic area, along with increased expectations of fully integrating people with disabilities into our communities, have created real changes for the direct support staff. It means increased isolation from peers and supervisors because these workers are often working alone and their supervisors are often responsible for more than one site. It also means that direct support staff need a variety of new skills to effectively build bridges between community members and people with developmental disabilities who receive services and supports. These changes make it even more important to unite the workforce, to share training, and to build collaborative approaches to resolve problems facing the developmental disability industry. If changes don't occur, there is a risk that many of the goals people with developmental disabilities and their advocates have – such as full inclusion and citizenship in their communities – will not be realized.

Recruiting for the Future

Recruiting new workers is a major human resource barrier to providing adequate community services to people with developmental disabilities. It is an

understatement to say that there will be a significant and sustained need for human service workers and that the ability to recruit the types of workers who have traditionally filled direct support roles will diminish. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 136% increase in the number of human service workers and a 120% increase in personal and home care aides by 2005 (Kilborn, 1994).

Simultaneously, it can be anticipated that the recruitment of direct support staff will become even more difficult. While direct support staff have traditionally been women between the ages of 18-34 with limited education beyond high school, the proportion of the U.S. population in this age range is expected to drop by 19% by 2005. In addition, between now and 2005, the human service industry will be in intense competition for scarce personnel at the entry level. Service agencies in this industry will not just be competing among themselves, but also with other service oriented industries such as hotels, restaurants, telemarketing, and travel. One consequence is that the developmental disability industry can no longer depend on typical recruitment strategies such as newspaper advertising, which is costly and ineffective and which yields employees who are not likely to stay in their positions more than a few months.

Retention Challenges

Average turnover rates in private community residential settings range from 57% to 71% per year (Jaskulski & Ebenstein, 1996). Annually, an estimated 190,000 direct support staff in the United States leave their positions in residential settings alone. Add to this the turnover experienced in educational, vocational, and health services, and it seems obvious that turnover has affected the quality of services to citizens with developmental disabilities. Imagine if 50% of the people who were helping you

to bathe, get dressed, brush your teeth, learn new skills and get along in the community changed every year.

In addition to affecting service quality and consumer satisfaction, high turnover rates increase costs, decrease quality of communication between staff, decrease continuity of supports, increase administrative costs, increase job stress, reduce productivity and satisfaction, and lead to staff shortages. The estimated cost in 1993 of recruiting, orienting, training, and supervising replacement staff in residential settings alone was estimated at \$80-100 million dollars annually.

Nationally, direct support staff earned an average wage of \$5.97 per hour in private residential programs and \$8.56 per hour in public residential services in 1992 (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992). Wages varied tremendously from state to state. For example, institutional workers earned an average of \$4.77 per hour in Mississippi while institutional workers averaged \$13.03 per hour in California. Similarly, private agency workers earn an average of \$4.38 per hour in Tennessee, while those in Connecticut earned \$9.29 per hour. In 1994, the average wage for nursing assistants and personal care attendants was \$7.60 per hour. At these wages, the average direct support staff does not even come close to earning a livable wage, and many earn an income below the poverty level for a family of four.

Direct support staff constitute between 80-86% of the developmental disabilities workforce, yet they have the least amount of power and visibility of all workers in the field. Direct support staff do not have professional status, and are not afforded many of the opportunities provided to career professionals who work with people with developmental disabilities, such as membership in professional associations, a body of literature describing their work and value in society, a code of ethics, standards of

practice, and educational requirements.

Training Needs

The developmental disability industry requires that direct support staff have important skills, even though they are not required to have professional degrees. A recent national study reported that over 90% of all residential service providers require classroom inservice training and 80% require on-the-job training for direct service employees (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992). Although many states require training and/or certificate programs for direct support staff, requirements and certificates vary substantially and do not exist in all states (Jaskulski & Ebenstein, 1996).

Most states require training related to such health and safety areas as first aid, CPR, and blood borne pathogens (e.g., hepatitis and HIV), and on confidentiality of services. No state, however, has training requirements that cover all the skill areas outlined in the Community Support Skill Standards, a body of standards which summarizes the core skills necessary to be competent at direct support work in the community. Most agencies deliver training to their employees, with success typically measured based on the content delivered (for example, through a written test at the end of the training session) and not on the employee's competence as measured in on-the-job performance. In addition, many employees report that they feel devalued and humiliated by the common practice of requiring them to attend the same training year after year.

Human service agencies also have difficulty in locating and providing a sufficient number of high quality training opportunities, and in securing inter-agency cooperation and collaboration to deliver affordable training opportunities to their workers. Literally hundreds of effective, high quality training materials exist, yet their dissemination is costly and a systematic method for getting information out to provider agencies does not exist in all states. Finding ways to deliver high quality and relevant training

to direct support staff, and to ensure that workers actually learn the desired skills, is a challenge and will continue to be so in years to come.

Finding Solutions

There are a number of strategies that have been proposed to overcome the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified individuals as direct support staff. When direct support staff are asked for solutions, they point out the need for clearer, more consistent job descriptions, better training, an enhanced public image and greater valuing of their work, supportive work environments, better pay and benefits, and recognition of their professionalism by credentialing. Central to the success of any solution is direct support professionals and individuals with disabilities working with agency administrators and policymakers to effect change. It is this partnership of all stakeholders that can ensure that persons with disabilities receive the services they desire and need to be included as full citizens within their own communities.

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Direct Care Realities...

Imagine that you are a person with a disability. You are completely dependent on staff hired by a human service agency for all of your physical needs, including when you will get out of bed in the morning. Now, imagine that each morning, as you wait for the staff person to knock on your bedroom door, greet you and say good morning, and help you prepare for the day, you have no idea who it is that will be coming through the door. You have little or no assurance that it will be the same person as yesterday, or if that person who is here today will be back tomorrow. And imagine that this is the case each and every morning of your life.
— M.C., direct support professional

Currently, the majority of our workforce that works full-time is living below poverty level. Our responsibilities involve continuous medical care and emergencies, [responding to] behavioral issues, and overall responsibility for human lives. The expectations that employers have for the employee far surpass the present wage. Many employees are forced to seek a second source of income in order to finance the basic necessities in life.

— K.K., direct support professional

We would not trust our cars to non-experienced mechanics, so why would we entrust the lives of our children...siblings... friends...neighbors to those without the necessary skills and experience? It is time for those of us who know what we do, and how to do it well, to come together and teach those skills to others. It is time that we offer accredited training programs, continuing education courses, and skill assessments for applicants.

— L.S., direct support professional*

Next to our families, it is professionals and direct support workers who can have the most important influence on our lives.

— A. F., self advocate*

*Note: Quote excerpted with permission from Jaskulski, T. & Ebenstein, W. (Eds.) (1996). *Opportunities for excellence: Supporting the frontline workforce*. Washington, D.C.: President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

A Call to Exemplary Service

by Marianne Taylor

Some scientists believe that the earth is continually engaged in an ecological balancing act understood as the *Gaea principle* (Gaea for “earth” after the Greek Goddess). They see Gaea as a quality that provides nature with the ability to counterbalance life-threatening trends, such as global warming, through the initiation of self-correcting, natural healing processes often unknown to observers.

I think that the analog to the Gaea principle in the human services world is the belief that the basic goodness and warmth of people – individually and together as communities – will ultimately create a world that welcomes and supports people with disabilities. But, just as Gaea cannot maintain a healthful ecological balance without help, most people who work in the human services or care for people who rely on human services, understand that full participation does not just happen without professional and personal action. Mediating structures are essential to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in the “good life” that is characterized, among other things, by developing friendships, finding satisfying work or other daily activity, choosing one’s own path, and giving to others.

Among the most important mediating structures in the lives of people with developmental disabilities are the direct support staff who, next to family and friends, are the ones that people most often walk with, talk with, laugh and cry with along the hard road of life. They are teachers, mentors, coaches, and networkers and, all too often, the only friends of the people they support. It is an enormous responsibility to fill any one of these jobs, let alone all of them.

Despite the depth and demands of this role, our field has done little beyond basic training to prepare and sustain the direct support practitioners in their jobs and help them grow in a meaningful career path. Training that does exist is not typically organized into programs offer-

ing a sequenced, coordinated approach to learning and usually does not offer the learner the kinds of awards that carry weight and confer status and value in our society such as certificates, credits or degrees. Direct service practitioners have been among the most underpaid workers in the United States, signifying a lack of public awareness and regard for their work and making it next to impossible for practitioners to make a commitment to a direct service career.

Crafting the Standards

One recent response to the challenge of strengthening our direct support workforce was the development of the Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) (Taylor, Bradley & Warren, 1996) and the various activities that have emerged from the national, collaborative effort to build the standards. 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 prac-

tioners, families, consumers, educators, employers, and policymakers throughout the United States, the CSSS were shaped by the consensus of major stakeholders. 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 CSSS provide descriptions of work approaches arranged in 12 broad domains of human service practice called competency areas (among these are participant empowerment, communication, community living skills, advocacy). The practitioner role captured in the CSSS incorporates important characteristics of work as it is defined in a post-industrial society. These standards describe a worker who is multi-skilled and, through proper preparation and an accommodating work culture, is empowered to make decisions alone and in teams and to work in partnership with participants and their families. Challenged to solve complex problems and to exercise creativity, the direct support practitioner in these standards assumes personal responsibility for professional growth and development.

The Spirit of the CSSS

Employers, teachers, and others using these standards as a foundation for employee development or instructional design should consider the philosophical tenets they embrace. Throughout the standards development phase, project staff devised approaches to ensure that the CSSS acknowledge the shared values that enable us to make a positive difference in people’s lives, and reflect and

[Taylor, continued on page 23]

Community Support Skill Standards Competency Areas

These competency areas describe the broad knowledge and skill sets required of competent direct support staff. Within each competency area several specific skill standards and concrete work activities also are identified.

- **Participant Empowerment.** The competent direct support staff (DSS) enhances the ability of the participant to lead a self-determining life by providing support and information to build self-esteem and assertiveness and to make decisions. Topics: self-determination; empowerment; consumer-driven services; self-advocacy; human, legal and civil rights; decision-making.
- **Communication.** The DSS should be knowledgeable about the range of effective communication and basic counseling strategies and skills necessary to establish a collaborative relationship with the participant. Topics: communication skills, augmentative and alternative communication, acronyms and terms used within the field, basic supportive counseling skills.
- **Assessment.** The DSS should be knowledgeable about formal and informal assessment practices in order to respond to the needs, desires, and interests of participants. Topics: assessment strategies and processes; conducting assessments; identifying preferences, capabilities, and needs of participants; using assessment tools; disseminating findings to the participant.
- **Community and Service Networking.** The DSS 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. Topics: making community connections, building support networks, identifying available community resources, outreach.
- **Facilitation of Services.** The DSS is knowledgeable about a range of participatory planning techniques and is skilled in implementing plans in a collaborative and expeditious manner. Topics: collaborative relationships, ethical standards of practice, individualized plans, strategies to achieve participant outcomes, developing successful program plans.
- **Community Living and Supports.** The DSS 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. Topics: human development; sexuality; health; grooming; toileting; personal management; household management; nutrition and meal planning; laundry; transportation; adaptive equipment; physical, occupational and communication therapy intervention; development of friendships and socialization; consumer-driven recruitment; training of service providers.
- **Education, Training, and Self-Development.** The DSS should be able to identify areas for self-improvement, pursue necessary educational/training resources, and share knowledge with others. Topics: completing required/mandated training, professional development, community outreach.
- **Advocacy.** The DSS should be knowledgeable about the diverse challenges facing participants (e.g., human rights, legal rights, administrative and financial issues) and should be able to identify and use effective advocacy strategies to overcome such challenges. Topics: identifying advocacy issues, laws, services, and community resources for people with disabilities; barriers to service delivery; negotiation.
- **Vocational, Educational, and Career Support.** The DSS 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. Topics: vocational assessment, opportunities for career growth and advancement, marketing skills, environmental adaptations, job interviewing, job retention, vocational services.
- **Crisis Intervention.** The DSS should be knowledgeable about crisis intervention and resolution techniques and match such techniques to particular circumstances and individuals. Topics: crisis intervention strategies, conflict resolution, de-escalation, environmental adaptations.
- **Organizational Participation.** The DSS is familiar with the mission and practices of the support organization and participates in the life of the organization. Topics: program evaluation, organizational structure and design, cultural sensitivity, peer support, organizational development / budgetary issues.
- **Documentation.** The DSS is aware of the requirements for documentation in the organization and is able to manage the requirements efficiently. Topics: data collection and analysis, confidentiality, ethical practice, documentation strategies.

For additional information on the Community Support Skill Standards contact Marianne Taylor, Human Services Research Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts, at 617/876-0426. Or see Taylor, M., Bradley, V., & Warren, R. (1996). *The Community Support Skill Standards: Tools for managing change and achieving outcomes*. Cambridge, MA: Human Services Research Institute.

Assessing Workplace Recruitment and Retention: The First Steps

by Sheryl A. Larson

Sharon was at the end of her rope. She had just completed her fifth exit interview this month and now had three vacant positions. The agency had to find a way to stop the revolving door.

This scenario is all too common in agencies that provide direct support to persons with developmental disabilities. One answer to the question, "How do we attract and keep good staff?" is to use a workplace assessment to begin identifying and solving staffing problems. A workplace assessment involves developing an accurate job description, examining retention outcomes and recruitment practices, evaluating workers who leave, summarizing the findings, and selecting an intervention.

A recent study of workplace recruitment and retention in 110 small Minnesota group homes (Larson & Lakin, in press) provided the following results:

- Crude separation rate: 48%
- Average tenure of staff: 26 months
- Average tenure of staff who quit: 7 months
- Percent who quit by 6 months: 46%

The same study assessed the percentage of stayers and leavers recruited through various sources, finding the following:

- Newspaper ads: Stayers (31%), Leavers (51%)
- Current employees: Stayers (43%), Leavers (21%)
- Direct support staff in other agencies: Stayers (12%), Leavers (6%)

These results are an example of the valuable information an assessment provides. The remainder of this article describes the steps providers can follow in assessing staffing in their own agencies.

Developing Job Descriptions

The first step in establishing a baseline assessment of recruitment and retention practices is to develop complete and accurate job descriptions for all positions in the agency. An accurate job description can guide the selection of interventions and assist in assessing the training needs of direct support workers and first line supervisors.

Examining Retention Outcomes

Four recruitment outcomes should be examined, including average tenure, current separation rate, average tenure of leavers, and percent of leavers with various lengths of tenure.

To compute the average tenure of workers at a particular site or agency, list each worker and their number of months at the site. Add the number of months for each worker at the site and divide by the total number of workers. The formula can be written as:

$$\text{Average tenure} = \frac{\text{Sum of number of months tenure of all current staff at the site}}{\text{Number of staff positions at the site}}$$

The result will be the average number of months workers have been at the site.

To compute the turnover rate for a particular site, count the number of workers in a particular category (e.g., direct support workers) who left within the last 12 months. Divide by the average number of workers at the site each day during the last 12 months. Multiply the result by 100. The formula is:

$$\text{Crude separation rate} = \frac{\text{Number of leavers in 12 mos.}}{\text{Number of positions at site}} \times 100$$

The resulting percentage (which may be

higher than 100%) reflects the annual crude separation rate.

To compute the average tenure of leavers, identify all leavers in the past 12 months. For each leaver, note the total number of months worked before quitting. Add the number of months for each leaver and divide the total by the number of leavers. The formula is:

$$\text{Average tenure of leavers} = \frac{\text{Sum of number of months in site for all leavers}}{\text{Number of leavers}}$$

The result is the average number of months a worker stayed before leaving. Computing separate numbers for workers who were fired versus those who quit voluntarily may be helpful. Be sure to include all workers who were paid for one or more hours of work. It is very common for some workers to quit after training or in their first few days.

To compute the proportion of leavers who stayed less than six months, count the number of workers who left in the last 12 months. Then count the number of workers in that group who stayed less than six months before leaving. Divide this number by the total number of workers who left and multiply the result by 100. The formula is:

$$\% \text{ of leavers w/} < 6 \text{ mos tenure} = \frac{\text{Num leavers w/} < 6 \text{ mos. tenure}}{\text{Total number of leavers}} \times 100$$

This same formula can be used to compute the proportion of leavers who stayed 6 to 12 months, and the proportion who stayed more than 12 months.

Examining Recruitment Practices

It is helpful to maintain information on the proportion of direct support positions vacant, the total cost of advertis-

ing in the previous month, and the total cost of overtime in the site for the previous month. These data, observed over time, can assist in monitoring organizational investments in recruitment.

Parallel information should be maintained on recruitment sources and their relative effectiveness. Such an assessment could list the primary recruitment sources used by the agency (e.g., internal postings, recruitment by current or

leave) the extent to which several factors made the person want to stay or leave. Items to rate could include salary, paid-leave policies (sick, holiday, vacation), benefits policy (medical, dental), scheduling practices and hours worked, opportunities for promotion or career advancement in the agency, training and career development opportunities, company policies regarding the treatment of people with developmental disabilities, relationships with supervisors, relationships with coworkers, relationships with the people supported in the site, specific job tasks (ask the worker to specify), and specific frustrations or disappointments (ask worker to specify).

Qualitative exit interviews are useful in drawing out valuable information to assess and modify agency practices. Open-ended questions provide a rich source of information about the reasons direct support workers left or considered leaving their jobs. Among the most productive qualitative interview items are questions such as:

- What would you tell a friend considering taking your job?
- Give an example of one or two specific incidents that made you want to stay on this job.
- Give an example of one or two specific incidents that made you want to leave this job.
- What could (your supervisor/this agency) do to make your job better?
- What type of position do you plan to work after you leave this position?

Agencies will also want to integrate other information along with the specific exit interview responses including status at exit (e.g., whether leavers were fired or left for other reasons). Agencies may also want to include the job performance of the leaver, whether the leaver will continue "on-call," and where the person went when they left the agency (e.g., to perform similar roles for another agency, better position in the field, lateral move for higher pay).

Evaluating Current Workers

Many exit interview questions also can be asked annually of current direct support workers and first line supervisors. Ongoing formative evaluation allows agencies to identify and address issues as they emerge. Annual assessments of organizational commitment can provide an index for agencies of the current feelings of workers. Likewise regular assessments of job satisfaction can provide an indication of how workers feel about their job. Using such indexes over time can identify areas of relative weakness and monitor changes that may be associated with positive initiatives (e.g., a training program for supervisors) or changing contextual factors (e.g., decreasing real dollar wages). Another area for ongoing evaluation is the extent to which the expectations of new hires were met during their first few months. The results of such interviews can be used to improve the information provided to recruits before they are hired.

Summarizing and Intervening

Developing a good assessment of recruitment and retention is a helpful first step in addressing workforce development problems. Once the information is gathered and summarized, interventions that match the problems can be selected and tried. Their success or failure can be measured by comparing the assessment of the outcomes after implementation with the findings of the baseline assessment. Then, because workforce needs are constantly changing, ongoing efforts to assess workforce issues and evaluate interventions should become a regular part of an agency's workforce development plans.

Sheryl A. Larson is a Research Associate with the Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She may be reached at 612/624-6024.

Reference: Larson, S.A. & Lakin, K.C. (In press). *Turnover of newly hired direct support workers: Longitudinal study results and intervention suggestions*. Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.

One answer to the question,

"How do we attract and keep

good staff" is to use a workplace

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former employees, newspaper advertisements, employment agencies, temporary agencies, colleges, walk-ins, and other). For each source, the number of applicants recruited in the last 12 months should be recorded along with the percent of new hires from each source, the percent of leavers from each source, and the percent retained over different periods of time. Such information, when combined with the estimated costs of each recruitment source, will allow the agency to assess the relative cost-effectiveness of each recruitment source. Such analyses may lead agencies to invest more heavily in their most productive recruitment strategies.

Evaluating Workers Who Leave

Another component of an agency's self-assessment is an exit interview for workers who leave their positions. This can be done by asking leavers to indicate on a scale of one to five (1 = strong reason to stay, 2 = moderate reason to stay, 3 = not a factor in my decision, 4 = moderate reason to leave, 5 = strong reason to

Expanding the Direct Service Workforce: Possibilities Through School-to-Work

by Teri Wallace

As a nation, we face significant challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining direct support workers in human services. A number of recruitment strategies have been identified in the literature as useful in supporting this workforce, including developing training and support activities, improving wages and benefits, developing a better understanding of the unique needs of this workforce, and targeting recruitment efforts. While each of these is important in creating a comprehensive system of workforce development, this article will focus on the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, which creates new opportunities to expand the pool of qualified direct service staff to meet the present and future shortages.

Today's workplaces, and those of the 21st century, require a new kind of worker: one who excels at solving problems, thinking critically, working in teams, and constantly learning on the job. Nowhere is this more evident than in human services where supports are often provided in community settings away from supervisors and co-workers, during hours uncommon to most employees, and in a field that is constantly changing. The school-to-work, or school-to-careers, movement provides a timely response to this situation, creating a new form of education for a new economy that links education and work.

The goals of the school-to-work movement are to provide better education, better employment prospects, adult role models, and multiple post-secondary options for all students. School-to-work experiences are designed to develop young people's competence, confidence, and connections that can ensure successful careers and citizenship. They connect students to a range of postsecondary options, including four-year college, two-year college, technical training, and structured entry-level

work along a career path. Developed with the input of business, education, labor, and community-based organizations that have a strong interest in how American students prepare for careers, the effort to create a national school-to-work system contains three fundamental elements:

- **School-based learning.** School-based learning opportunities link academic subjects to the world of work. Educators collaborate with employers to develop broad-based curricula that help students understand the skills needed in the workplace.
- **Work-based learning.** Work-based learning provides students with opportunities to study subject matter and workplace skills in a hands-on, real-life environment. Working in teams, solving problems, and meeting employers' expectations are workplace skills that students learn best through doing and master under the guidance of adult mentors.
- **Connecting activities.** Connecting schools and workplaces requires a range of activities to integrate the worlds of school and work. Connecting activities provide program coordination and administration, facilitate school and business staff exchanges, and provide student support, such as career counseling and college placements.

There are many benefits experienced by those involved in school-to-work systems. Among them are that employers have an available pool of new workers who understand the needs and expectations of their business, can reduce employee training costs and turnover, and improve morale and management skills of adult workers.

There are several important strategies that can be used to ensure the inclu-

sion of the direct service workforce in development of school-to-work systems. Some activities include:

- Participating on local and state school-to-work advisory groups.
- Providing work-based internship opportunities to students through local school-to-work initiatives.
- Developing articulation agreements between secondary and post-secondary environments to build career ladders for individuals interested in pursuing further education in the human service area.
- Recruiting high school students into human service preparation programs.
- Identifying connecting activities and strategies to facilitate partnerships between schools and community-based organizations.
- Providing credits for community-based experiences.

Creative strategies are needed to recruit individuals into the direct service workforce. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provides structures for such strategies. Across the country agencies have available to them their state-level School-to-Work contact to assist them in taking the next steps toward partnerships that will better prepare today's secondary students to fill the vital direct service positions that open the doors into the community for so many individuals with disabilities.

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A School-to-Work Example: Work-Based Learning and Skill Standards at Tyngsborough High School

In 1996, Tyngsborough High School in Tyngsborough, Massachusetts, applied to their local School-to-Work Partnership for a grant to design and pilot test a school-to-work model based on the Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) for direct service workers. The CSSS were identified as the reference point for the model because of the richness of the community support worker career development resources in the local community, and the realization that many of the fundamental skills required by entry level human service workers would be useful and beneficial to all young people (e.g., supporting empowerment, resolving conflict, planning, documenting, and reporting).

Initially, a planning committee consisting of the principal, key teachers, administrators, and human service professionals from the local community outlined a process of career exploration that included school-based and work-based learning activities. An advisory committee was organized to oversee the project. It included representatives from Massachusetts Rehabilitation Center, Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, Merrimack Valley Goodwill Industries, Tewksbury Hospital, Middlesex Community College, Education Development Center, and Human Services Research Institute.

During spring of 1996, 120 sophomores participated in project field test activities that introduced them to the human services industry. The CSSS were integrated into the 10th grade English classes that are mandatory for all students. Students participated in a research-based career project in which the communication competency area of the skills standards was practiced. Educators crosswalked the CSSS with the state curriculum framework for 10th grade English. A common lesson format

was developed that involved identifying objectives, classroom activities and procedures, materials, minimum skills to be taught, and evaluation. They also developed projects in which students demonstrated both skills identified in the statewide English curriculum framework and communication skills embedded in the human service industry.

Lessons in the curriculum included:

- Career exploration research papers on what human services is and what community support workers do.
- Career interest assessments to investigate the education requirements, physical demands, temperaments, earnings, aptitudes, and so forth of a specific career group.
- Practice seeking positions in human services.
- Design of a path from school to a selected job.
- Discussions about career pathways and portfolio development.

Many challenges and benefits were realized by these activities. First, the skill standards were very helpful to the school in developing its first School-to-Career Initiative, and in redesigning its approach to education. Secondly, school staff felt that working with the skill standards made the conversation among educators, business partners, and students more realistic and meaningful for students. The emphasis on what workers need to know and be able to do allowed students to explore careers through learning what happens in work on a day-to-day basis. Talking to front-line workers helped them understand that expecting to leave high school making \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year was an unrealistic expectation. The English teachers implementing the field test activities

felt that the standards and activities resulting from their integration with the English curriculum caused some disenfranchised students to become more involved with their English classes.

A recent evaluation of the project (Taylor, et al., 1997) made the following observations about its effectiveness:

- The CSSS cover a common core of skills essential to the personal and career success of high school students and provide a useful base from which to explore other career specialties.
- The structure and organization of the standards help teachers to think about their curricula and establish links between the skills and curricula.
- The use of the standards facilitates the emergence of a school-to-work program that focuses on what workers need to know and be able to do rather than on what it takes to obtain entry level employment in specific occupations. Students learn about the relationship between what they learn in school and the skills they need in life.

Currently, Tyngsborough High School has plans to expand this project by developing career exploration experiences for seventh through ninth graders, and by expanding site visits and internships for eleventh and twelfth graders.

For more information contact Ann Romano, Greater Lowell School-to-Work Local Partnership, Middlesex Community College, Lowell, Massachusetts. She may be reached at 978/656-3155.

Note: Much of the information in this article was adapted with permission from Taylor, M., Warren, R., Leff, J., & Malyn-Smith, J. (1997). *The Community Support Skill Standards Project: Technical report on implementation and demonstrations*. Cambridge, MA: Human Services Research Institute.

Reducing Turnover: The VNCC Approach

by Laurel A. Ditson

Many human services organizations struggle with hiring and retaining direct support workers. Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs), in particular, are in high demand. CNAs in home health care settings are quite autonomous, have only limited contact with peers, and receive minimal compensation for their efforts. Nationally, turnover rates for full-time CNAs averaged 21.46% (Hospital and Healthcare Compensation Service, 1997). Similar national numbers for part-time CNAs are not available.

In 1992, the Visiting Nurse Corporation of Colorado, Inc. (VNCC), a non-profit home health care agency in Denver, had turnover rates of 95.3% for part-time workers, and 20% for full-time workers. In addition, as many as 60% of the newly hired CNAs never performed a home visit after completing training because they quit. Other problems included customer complaints due to ever-changing caregivers, and lost productivity of office staff because they were required to constantly train new workers.

In 1992, VNCC established a team of employees to investigate the reasons for the high turnover rates experienced by the agency. This team surveyed current employees and agency schedulers. Current employees responded enthusiastically. It became obvious that participating in the survey itself fulfilled a need to be recognized and appreciated. Issues identified by employees included: housework expectations were greater than anticipated, paperwork was excessive, explanation of the paperwork was inadequate, the system for returning paperwork did not work well, and communication with the workers was inadequate. It became clear that employees' expectations did not match reality.

To address the issues uncovered by the survey, the agency restructured the job interview process to include both positive and negative features of the job. Job descriptions were rewritten to detail job tasks, physical demands, and expecta-

tations. This description is now provided during the interview and at orientation. We also modified recruitment strategies to focus on word-of-mouth recruitment from current employees. We learned that good employees will not knowingly refer friends who do not share their work ethics and values. Furthermore, we set consistent expectations regarding acceptable previous employment history and routinely conducted reference checks on all applicants.

Another intervention was to streamline the orientation process and improve communication with workers. New employees receive a schedule detailing the time, place, and purpose for each phase of orientation. Checklists were developed to insure that each new employee received the same information. In addition, training was provided to assist workers in completing paperwork. As possible, paperwork was streamlined.

In 1994, a mentor system was introduced for new workers, giving them an opportunity to watch experienced aides provide care. It also gave them opportunities to demonstrate their skills to someone on the job. Mentors check off new employees on basic competencies and act as role models to new staff. Mentors are selected based on having been employed for more than a year, and having met all their job requirements. Efforts are made to find mentors who do not mind performing the housework parts of their jobs.

A final intervention was to form an advisory group to discuss issues, make suggestions, and offer peer recognition. We provided recognition in the form of t-shirts, discount coupons, and recognition certificates for longevity. Monthly newsletters and weekly updates on a designated voice mail message line provide inexpensive current information.

These efforts have resulted in a reduction in turnover for part-time workers from 95% in 1990 to 66% in 1996, and have reduced the number of new

hires who quit before making a single home visit from 60% to 25%. These were significant successes, but we quickly learned that these successes could be reversed when we lost sight of our goals.

In 1996, a demonstration grant from a foundation enabled us to refocus on staffing issues. We established cognitive skills training as part of CNA orientation. This training, now peer-led, teaches both life skills of dealing with stress and anger as well as home health scenarios. We now use a career ladder that recognizes increased skills, and rewards CNAs financially on a skill-based-pay model. Employees have clear steps with related compensation levels. We provide training to all staff that enables them to move up the ladder and increase their earning potential.

We implemented a productivity bonus for full-time CNAs in April, 1997, to encourage responsible increases in personal productivity while increasing income. This is a management challenge, as it requires scrutiny to insure high quality care. The system encourages CNAs to maximize their schedules, within a 40 hour per week framework, instead of a previous system that rewarded inefficiency.

We have learned that a stable staff is built upon proper hiring and appropriate recognition. While no single formula exists for success, tending to basic principles of communication, support, and recognition can cut turnover rates significantly.

Reference: Hospital and Healthcare Compensation Service (1997). *Home care salary and benefits report, 1997-1998*. Oakland, NJ: Author.

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Turning it Around

by Mary Claire Mohrfeld

"I will not hire another one." Those were my exact words as I read the Residential Manager's letter of resignation. During the five and half years as director of the community-based program, I hired five residential managers for the one residential manager position. This time I refused to continue to do that which was not working. This resignation, coupled with staff turnover, awakened me to the reality that if I did what I had always done, I would probably get another letter of resignation within the year.

Key people in the program were called together to wrestle with the challenge confronting us. We didn't look to the experts or to models that were working. Rather, we took our combined years of training, experience, successes, and mistakes in the field and, with a strong conviction that we had within us the creativity and capabilities to meet this challenge, we began to brainstorm.

With the support and encouragement of our central office staff, we created an entirely new management structure. The structure includes a part-time management person whose only role is to support the residential direct service staff. This person has no IPP responsibilities other than training staff to implement the IPP. In other words, the person is free of meetings, paperwork and deadlines.

This support person is commissioned to create a working environment based on six principles:

- **Train.** First of all, believe in the staff person. Believe he or she has the potential to do the job. Convey this belief. Walk with the staff person. Explain how to do the job. Model it. Answer the questions. Do this daily, weekly, as often as needed. Once is never enough.
- **Listen.** Believe the staff person has something of value to say. Listen intently. You may hear a better way for doing something. It may be an idea never before shared. You will receive

insight into the staff person's life that will help you better understand him or her. It may mean the staff person will feel better because you genuinely listened to the person.

- **Learn.** Believe that mistakes are okay because they can be learning experiences. Teach the staff person to accept his or her mistake and not waste valuable time and energy trying to justify it. Once accepted, encourage the person to immediately learn from the mistake.
- **Inform.** Believe the staff person is entitled to be an informed member of the program. At staff meetings share with staff what is happening. The more they know, the more they feel a part of the program and the more ownership they have. Hence, the more willing they are to invest of themselves in the program.
- **Praise.** Believe each staff person is doing his or her best. Acknowledge it. Praise it. Never let quality work go unrecognized. This need not be formal or time consuming: A phone call, a comment as you work with the staff person, a note in their mailbox.
- **Motivate.** Don't look for gimmicks or motivational posters to pin on the bulletin board. Let your commitment to the vision and mission of the agency be the motivational tool. Your enthusiasm will inspire far beyond any fashionable gimmick. Your positive attitude will fill the environment with irresistible vibes.

We believe the environment created by adherence to these principles will reduce staff turnover and, in turn, reduce the stress experienced by management.

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Direct Care Realities...

In addition to turnover, the inability to recruit qualified people into the field continues to grow. We are finding that we are now competing with fast food restaurants and losing because we don't have enough money. As a result, we are spending more and more resources on recruitment. This money could be put to much better use for the people we serve.
– P.M., direct support professional

My wages in the human service field have never been enough to support myself, and I even have a B.S. degree. Ever since I started working in this field, I've also had to have a second job. Working two jobs is extremely tiring. I work from paycheck to paycheck, sometimes having to pay bills late. I'm constantly trying to catch up. I can't imagine how people with children can afford to work in this field, unless they have a spouse with a well-paying job to support them. How could I ever afford to have children?
– P.K., direct support professional

In the past three years, the agency where I work hired 201 people to fill 52 direct service jobs. Two hundred one new faces in the mornings, greeting the 28 people we serve in the home where I work. Twenty people to train, not knowing if they'll be here next week. Two hundred one people who do things just slightly different from the last person who woke you up. Two hundred one new people in three years at a starting wage of \$5.00 per hour.
– M.C., direct support professional

I think it is important for staff to protect me and be a supporter. Staff should help me to do better in my life. Helping me to succeed and to make it in life are really important, and they have to care. It's the people who have stuck with me the longest that have been able to help me the most. Those that have been around with me for years are those that have the best qualities.
– J.B., self advocate*

*Note: Quote excerpted with permission from Jaskulski, T. & Ebenstein, W. (Eds.) (1996). *Opportunities for excellence: Supporting the frontline workforce*. Washington, D.C.: President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

Peer Mentoring: Mission – Possible

by Sue L. Curtis, Loretta Wilson, Sally R. Clingman

The concept of mentoring for direct service staff at Montgomery Developmental Center was not designed from a review of literature, research or statistics. It was initiated from the repeated requests of veteran staff at this residential training facility operated by the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation. Long-term staff stated frequently that

During the six years previous to the mentor system, the turnover rate averaged 36.8% yearly.

Since mentoring, the average turnover has been 14% per year.

the one-week orientation program in place in the early 1980s was not sufficiently preparing new employees to handle their diverse job duties. In response, the “mentor project” was born.

The definition of a “mentor” is an “advisor and trusted teacher.” To fulfill the need for quality, on-the-job orientation for new direct service staff, a program was developed and implemented to provide the necessary training and support for success. Direct service staff who are considered to be excellent performers and trainers are selected by key administrators to perform mentor duties. New employees initially receive a week of formal preservice training. This structured format of presentations and post-tests features topics such as first aid/CPR, active treatment, documentation, unusual incidents, personnel policies, human rights, and many others.

The next two weeks are devoted to the mentoring process. New employees spend one week with a mentor, and the second week with a different mentor on

a different shift. This enables the new employees to meet two stable employees, observe two different training styles, meet individuals who reside in two distinct houses, and meet two sets of employees on opposing shifts. During both weeks, the new employee spends time both shadowing the mentor and being shadowed. In shadowing time, the new employee observes the mentor complete the daily routine, including conducting formal, individualized programs; providing informal training; providing mealtime training; completing documentation; communicating with other team members; attending social and recreational outings; attending meetings; and performing other duties as situations arise. After two days of this, the new employee actually implements the routine with the mentor there continually to provide guidance and immediate feedback, as well as to insure that no programs or duties are overlooked.

The same procedure is implemented in the second week of mentoring. At the end of both weeks, each mentor completes written documentation detailing their observations, which is then submitted to key administrators. This documentation provides objective feedback on many areas of job performance, and also provides an opportunity for both the mentor and the employee to indicate strengths or areas for additional training. At the end of the three-week orientation, the new employee is considered “independent” and is placed on the work schedule. It is important to note that the new employee is not pulled from the mentor, nor used as an “actual” staff person during the first three weeks.

The new employee’s supervisor and the staff development coordinator conduct a review of performance at the end of two months of employment. This review, based on observations, is to insure that the new employee is still “fresh” and has not developed any “bad habits.” At any time during probation, or after, the

new employee is encouraged to contact his or her mentor for advice or guidance. Mentors do not abandon their protégés; in fact, they often maintain long-term professional relationships.

The intent of this program, which is now in its eighth year, is to provide employees with enough actual experience to feel confident as each assumes a difficult position with individuals who can exhibit formidable behaviors. It also is designed to help protect both employees and individuals who reside in the center. New employees need proper support and training to promote and maintain the safe environment at the center.

One positive outgrowth of the mentor project has been a demonstrable reduction in staff turnover. During the six years previous to the mentor system, the turnover rate at the facility averaged 36.8% yearly. Since 1990, the average turnover per year has been 14%. Of course, there have been many changes in the center and in the field that may have contributed to this, including better recruitment and interviewing and changes in regulations. However, residential services continues to be a challenging and diverse field. The most important aspect of this reduction in staff turnover is the improvement in consistency of training and services provided to the people who reside at the center.

The ability to form long-term relationships with service providers is one key in developing rapport and trust with not only the individuals served, but also with their family members, guardians, and significant others. Any program that assists in providing incentives for long-term commitments is considered a worthy program to nurture.

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Providing Culturally Competent Services

by William Ebenstein

As a pluralistic society we celebrate our differences in heritage, language, religion and ethnicity. Acknowledging the importance of culture in a person's actions, thoughts, communications, beliefs, and values related to his or her disability, and in how disability is viewed by family members and others within the community, is an important step in developing a more consumer-oriented delivery system. Delivering quality services to persons with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds requires that agencies provide more individualized services and supports, a shift that will benefit all people receiving services.

Sensitivity to cultural differences among service recipients also requires a closer look at the culture of existing provider organizations. Part of the dynamic of these differences is reflected in how an agency is perceived and experienced by individuals and family members from a variety of cultures. Too often, minorities with disabilities mistrust mainstream agencies, whereas minority agencies tend to have higher consumer satisfaction ratings. The integration of consumers into the culture of their own communities, rather than into the culture of the service system, means many agencies must reinvent themselves.

Quality services are more likely to be delivered by a staff that is acquainted with the language, history, current events, and common practices of local minority communities. Cultural identification and participation are key aspects of community inclusion. Social customs that include religious celebrations, ethnic foods, and music give a meaningful context to activities of daily living. Culture binds together the networks of family, friends, and neighbors that constitute a world of natural supports. Besides being more fun, participation in the communal life of an identified group fosters a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Transforming the style of a human services organization to facilitate

these cultural connections and nuances, and building a diverse and culturally competent workforce, will help to create a more soulful system of supports for minorities, immigrants, first-generation Americans, and all consumers.

One way to evaluate the cultural sensitivity of existing human services agencies is to examine their inclusion of people from different ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds on their governing boards. In our 1993 survey of 24 nonprofit agencies in New York City, 78% of board members were white, 18% were African-American, and 4% were Latino. However, only 7% of board members at mainstream agencies were minorities, and half of the agencies reported having no African-American or Latino board members. Also, of the 27 different types of board committees identified through the survey, none were directly related to diversity issues.

Agencies need to develop outreach and training programs for minority consumers and community leaders to increase their participation on boards of directors. Agencies should also assess their organizations' policies and procedures, as well as the overall style and setting of services, and draft a specific plan to further cultural competence.

Cross-cultural training is needed by all administrative and clinical staff. In our survey, administrators represented 14%, and clinicians represented 18%, of all personnel at responding agencies. African-Americans accounted for only 15% of all professional-level positions. Two-thirds of all mainstream agencies had top management teams that were all white, while most minority agencies had executive management teams that were entirely minority. In a part of the country where people from culturally diverse backgrounds comprise a significant percentage of the consumer population, many will be served by mainstream agencies. At the same time, given the increasing diversity within the minority

community, it is likely that in the future minority agencies will also work with individuals and families from a wide variety of cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds. In either case, professionals from diverse backgrounds, who are schooled in the dynamics of cross-cultural practice, will have to deliver quality services in an individualized and culturally sensitive manner.

As America's demographic profile continues to evolve, more persons from culturally diverse backgrounds will enter the disability workforce. In our New York City survey, minorities comprised 60% of all direct care staff. African-Americans were especially well represented, accounting for 40% of all front-line workers. In New York City, and in many other parts of the country, where a large percentage of direct care staff are minorities and immigrants, their retention, continuing education, and career advancement are critical components in creating a more culturally competent workforce.

As an agency chooses to become more responsive to the needs of minority staff, it should be prepared to make the necessary organizational changes this may entail. In general, empowering direct care workers and consumers contributes to a minority voice being heard. Strategies to develop a more culturally competent delivery system are consistent with the move toward more individualized, consumer-oriented services. To be effective and permanent, these strategies need to be integrated into a more comprehensive plan to strengthen the workforce as a whole, and improve services to all consumers.

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Strategies for Addressing Workforce Issues

Many strategies to address recruitment, retention and training challenges for direct support workers have been identified by previous research and practice. These include selection and recruitment changes, orientation and socialization practices, mentoring and training programs, enhancing the status of workers, training supervisors, and evaluating recruitment and retention outcomes. Strategies for addressing workforce issues are limited only by the creativity of the agency. The following are a few examples of creative strategies:

- **Increase the use of inside recruitment sources.** Inside recruitment sources give information about the job that only an “insider” could provide. These strategies are more effective than outside sources such as newspaper ads, employment agencies, and job boards because people who hear about the job from an inside source have a more realistic idea about the job. Inside sources include rehiring former employees, or hiring referrals from former and current workers and from family members and friends of staff and people being supported. Inside recruiting can be encouraged by offering workers bonuses for recruiting newcomers.
- **Develop a regional consortium of providers to recruit and train workers.** Combining efforts can maximize resources (time, money, personnel) and create effectiveness by reducing overlap of effort. Residential and vocational provider agencies, advocacy groups, and governmental agencies have joined forces in some communities to deliver coordinated training, to visit high schools and college classes and inform students about job opportunities, to meet job-seekers at job fairs, and to develop recruitment brochures. Regional consortiums share job postings among agencies so that applicants who are looking for changes in job hours, location, or conditions can be referred to another agency with an appropriate vacancy.
- **Recruit and train new workers in anticipation of openings.** To avoid openings and overtime expenses, some agencies find it useful to recruit and train personnel in anticipation of openings. Once an opening occurs a well-trained person is available to take the position. While awaiting a permanent position, these individuals receive training and fill in when staff are sick or on vacation.
- **Develop a recruitment card or brochure.** Some agencies have developed business cards or brochures to increase the visibility of job opportunities, and to increase the number of recruits. These are placed at state and local workforce centers, schools, and other places where potential employees may see them. Current employees are encouraged to distribute them to people they meet or know who might be interested in a job.
- **Develop or use an existing realistic industry preview.** Videotapes and other materials that describe the tasks of direct support workers across a variety of settings can be used to recruit in high schools and colleges, at job fairs, in senior resource centers, and at job centers. A major barrier to finding people to work in this industry is that they do not know a lot about it. Preview materials can provide information about different types of available positions.
- **Provide hiring and retention bonuses.** Use incentive programs that pay bonuses to new employees who finish a set number of months on the job. Since most turnover occurs during the first six months after hire, offering workers an incentive to stay 9-12 months can be an effective way of retaining more new hires.
- **Offer agency-specific realistic job previews.** Realistic job previews (RJPs) are used to give potential employees a realistic impression of the job, allowing them to make a more informed decision about whether to take it. Components of RJPs include gathering information from new and long-term workers about the positive and negative characteristics of the job, summarizing information that recruits are unlikely to know or are likely to have unrealistic expectations about, and developing a strategy to present the information to recruits before they decide whether to take the job. RJPs could include inviting prospective employees to a meal or recreational activity at the home; showing videotaped interviews with consumers, parents and staff; showing a videotape of the typical household routines; or providing opportunities to meet the people living in the house and observe daily routines.
- **Match new hires to service sites carefully.** The skills and support needs of people receiving services vary considerably. One way to enhance the likelihood that a new worker will stay is to match their interests and skills with those of the people they will support.
- **Foster coworker support.** New direct support workers need coworker support to acclimate to their jobs. Agencies should encourage coworker support by (a) rewarding and encouraging coworkers who go out of their way to help new staff members adjust; (b) encouraging existing staff to advise, personally support, and guide new staff on how to do their jobs; (c) designing the role of direct support workers around groups versus individuals; and (d) communicating a

personal and supportive interest to all new employees.

- **Provide worker-centered orientations.** Agencies often gear orientation and training practices to meeting rules and regulations. The fact is that workers need to be welcomed to the organization and to get basic information about their job more than they need information about the rules and regulations. A worker-centered orientation will focus on (a) getting to know the people who receive their services (e.g., strengths, behaviors, skills); (b) describing specific job duties and routines; (c) providing organizational history, values, and goals; and (d) providing a balance of information during orientation and the during the first 90 days of employment so that individuals do not get overwhelmed.
- **Develop mentoring programs.** One of the most effective ways to support employee connections to their jobs is to assign mentors to new employees to help them through the first 3 to 12 months on the job. Successful mentoring programs have three components. First, they identify and match mentors carefully by selecting voluntary mentors based on fair, attainable, and known criteria. Secondly, they train both the mentors and the new employees about how mentoring programs work. In addition, mentors are trained on empathic listening, conflict resolution, providing feedback, leadership, and instructional techniques. And thirdly, they monitor, evaluate, and change the program as needed.
- **Use competency-based training.** Competency-based training identifies the organization's mission; identifies the needs, desires and preferences of the individuals served by the agency; identifies the job-related skills and attitudes required of employees; assesses whether or not new (or existing) employees have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes; pro-

vides training to employees for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they do not already possess; assesses learning and the ability to apply their new learning to their actual job; supports uses of new knowledge, skills, and attitudes on the job; and provides feedback on performance related to each required job skill.

- **Develop participatory management practices.** Direct support staff members have a great deal to offer agencies. Unfortunately, they are often left out of agency decision-making. Employees should be involved in interdisciplinary teams, organizational committees and task forces, and in the development of policies and procedures. Participatory management practices give direct support staff opportunities for social interaction and networking with each other and management, and send a message that they are valued and respected within the organization.
- **Establish partnerships with welfare-to work initiatives.** Agencies may find benefit in partnering with educational and workforce development programs designed to provide training and jobs for people receiving public assistance. These programs offer a new recruitment source, opportunities for realistic job previewing, work-based training, and often credited educational opportunities.
- **Emphasize self-directed work teams.** Some agencies have found success in moving toward self-directed work teams in residential and supported employment services. These teams provide opportunities for groups of direct support staff to manage their own work and create an environment that empowers employees to contribute to the improvement of services by giving them the ability to improve the work itself. This often results in more satisfying jobs.
- **Support and train first-line supervisors.** Supervisors have one of the most demanding jobs in our industry. Their effectiveness directly affects direct support worker job satisfaction and retention. Strategies to support and train supervisors include providing more and better training for supervisors, improving communication with supervisors, using fair and supportive agency management practices, providing staffing and recruitment support to supervisors, improving wages and benefits for workers and supervisors, and providing training on team building.
- **Develop links with higher education.** Many agencies and post-secondary educational programs across the country are beginning to partner to improve training practices, provide career pathways, develop incentives for increased pay, and identify potential new workers.
- **Use high performance work practices.** A variety of organizational strategies can be used to enhance employee skills and to build effective work teams. Some more promising strategies include providing a formal information sharing program (e.g., a newsletter); filling non-entry level jobs from within; administering attitude surveys regularly; involving workers in quality circles; providing access to company incentive plans and profit-sharing; providing access to a formal grievance procedure; and promoting workers based on merit or performance rather than seniority.

Each of these strategies has demonstrated effectiveness in improving recruitment and retention success for direct support workers. None of these suggestions, however, is a magic bullet, and certainly there are many additional strategies that could be employed. A thorough agency assessment is needed to identify the areas of difficulty to be addressed so that an appropriate strategy can be selected for each agency's unique needs and circumstances.

– The Editors

A New Perspective on Training at Dungarvin

by Sandy Henry, Orville Williamschen, and Dawn Smith

Dungarvin, Inc., represents a wide range of services across an equally wide range of geography. As owners and managers of 12 corporations in 12 states, Dungarvin provides residential, case management, Medicaid waiver, day habilitation, and supported employment services, employing 1700 direct service staff nationwide. With such a large and diverse

To transform current practices and develop a new competency-based training program is monumental, overwhelming.

workforce, orientation and training of direct support staff is already an enormous task. To transform current practices and develop a new competency-based training program is monumental, even overwhelming. Everyone in the organization has to change the way we think, talk, and act about training.

The traditional model of training direct support staff is through an initial orientation and periodic inservices. This model meets regulatory requirements, but often fails to motivate staff or really address what direct support staff need to know. Employees often leave orientation and training not understanding how to apply classroom learning to real work situations. Or, if they are experienced workers, they may leave bored and frustrated because they have not learned new or valuable information.

This is an especially critical issue at Dungarvin, which offers a wide variety of services in many different locales. Some states have an employment pool with many experienced direct support people; others have fewer experienced employees. We need to meet the needs

of a staff with diverse skills and experiences, assure that they are always learning and growing professionally, and make a direct connection between training and better services to consumers. For these reasons, Dungarvin is moving toward competency-based training.

When we decided to make this company-wide shift to competency-based training, we set up a national committee of members from four states with representation from different levels of management. This committee used the results of focus groups of direct support staff, on-site observations, and a needs assessment survey to determine what their direct support staff do, what they need to be good at their jobs, what they liked and didn't like about the current training model, and the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes of our direct support staff. The organization also established a mission and charge for the national committee and drew up a one-year work plan. Each member of the committee shared his or her specific knowledge, experience, and ideas regarding what competencies were required of Dungarvin employees during orientation. We started with the Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) and worked from there.

The CSSS is a set of competencies developed by the Human Services Research Institute in Massachusetts. It is designed to help organizations reconstruct their training programs and develop curricula that are relevant to a variety of direct service roles. The CSSS has 12 areas of competence, including well-established areas such as community living skills and support; education, training, and self-development; crisis intervention; and vocational, educational, and career support. But it also goes beyond the immediate "helping" attitude of traditional training programs, and includes standards for areas such as participant empowerment, communication, community networking, and advocacy.

In using the CSSS as a tool, the committee identified those standards that were needed by all Dungarvin direct support staff during the orientation period. Once the base competency areas and skill standards were established, the committee developed more specific performance indicators for each skill standard. These were reviewed and refined by Dungarvin managers across the country. The committee then identified how the various competencies would be measured using assessment strategies such as direct observation by peers or supervisors, written documentation or testing, employee self-reporting or verbal discussion. These assessments may enable some staff to test out of areas of training where they are already competent, while others may receive additional training until they achieve competence.

The committee is currently reviewing existing curricula and hopes to find a mix of appropriate curricula already available, developing only limited additional curricula. We have pilot-tested the competency measurement and evaluation tool in four states, are making revisions, and expect the system to be completed soon. All states will then add to the national standards and curricula for unique services in their areas.

The mission of Dungarvin, Inc., is "Respecting and responding to the choices of people with developmental disabilities." Living by this mission also means that as an organization we must also respect and respond to the needs of our direct support workers.

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Training the Trainer: Minimizing Expense, Maximizing Skills

by Howard Miller and Jo Johnson

"Training doesn't work." This announcement is the first thing that trainers from REM-Minnesota hear when they enter the train-the-trainer program. Training, as it is typically done (listeners auditing a speaker in a classroom situation) just doesn't stay with learners very long.

So, how do you train staff so that they retain the information? That was the question we tried to answer when we put together a generic train-the-trainer program titled Facilitating Adult Learning (FAL) for REM-Minnesota trainers. REM-Minnesota, a multi-service agency serving people with developmental disabilities, has more than 3,000 direct care staff who are trained by about 300 trainers, most of whom are supervisors in various management capacities.

The format that evolved was a full-day training program. The course was set up to be an example of optimal training, so participants would have a model to use from the outset. FAL is essentially a six-hour elaboration of the statement, "If adults know why they are learning, and if the reason fits their needs as they perceive them, they will learn quickly and deeply." The FAL course helps trainers assess their training styles and to recognize how those styles interact with the adult learning cycle. It introduces trainers to the wide variety of methods and materials available that will enhance their presentations. Trainers are taught to do whatever it takes to get the learner involved, presenting training that learners not only hear and see, but also do and review. Make people laugh, get them up, get them involved, and – most importantly – get them to demonstrate what they have learned; this is the essence of good training.

It would be hypocritical if we did not practice what we preach. So, after hours of being trained by others, the trainees take over and put together a training session for their peers. Topics have in-

cluded everything from how to do the Makarena to how to blow bubbles using bubble gum. While it is an intensive learning experience, FAL is also fun.

Facilitating Adult Learning is the cornerstone of REM-Minnesota's statewide training system. Once a trainer has completed FAL, the person is eligible for topic-specific training sessions that are held at least once annually. These are offered regionally to maximize the number of REM trainers who can attend without breaking the training budgets of their various REM-Minnesota companies. Formats and topics vary from year to year based on needs expressed by trainers in the field. During the summer of 1997, the topics included use of structured observations rather than classroom or other lecture formats, and updates and new ideas for required annual training (e.g., aversive procedure rules, client rights, active treatment, sexuality, and aging). In the coming years, input systems will be developed so that these regional meetings are more like seminars than training, and trainers from different regions will come together to exchange ideas, techniques, and resources with each other, and to be introduced to new materials or ideas from the training directors.

The REM-Minnesota training approach has proven to be quite effective – training supervisory staff who will provide ongoing reinforcement of those they train, and training those trainers in a manner that maximizes their abilities. In a time of limited resources (including new recruits), it is nice to know that sometimes the fiscally expedient approach is also the most effective one.

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Direct Care Realities...

I am repeatedly annoyed – even angered – by those who, upon learning my chosen vocation, exclaim that "it takes a special kind of person to work with those people." Hidden in that message is the connotation that no one in their right mind would choose to care for those whom we would prefer to neither see nor hear in our communities. Consequently, we continue to work in a field which enjoys little esteem or status in our society.
– L.S., direct support professional*

I believe that voluntary credentialing will be a major first step toward professionalizing direct services. As a result, I believe that we will see portability, reasonable wages, and an ability for someone to make a career of direct services work...I believe that credentialing will be part of the key to the survival of service delivery in the years ahead. As we become more and more decentralized in service delivery, no one will be more important than a well-educated direct service worker. The person served will be better served; the family will become an ally; and the service provider organization will have a trained, empowered professional to carry out its mission.
D.R., agency CEO*

A lot of these 201 people (who left) were good folks. Good staff, who had good relationships with the people we serve. They didn't leave because they didn't like the work or care about the people they served. They left because they had families to feed or student loans to pay or vacations they dreamed of but knew they couldn't afford because they were working for just more than minimum wage without even the hope of a cost of living increase once a year. And the people they serve are still here. Still needing quality services, still wondering who's coming through their bedroom door tomorrow morning.
– M.C., direct support professional

*Note: Quote excerpted with permission from Jaskulski, T. & Ebenstein, W. (Eds.) (1996). *Opportunities for excellence: Supporting the frontline workforce*. Washington, D.C.: President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

Collaborative Training: The MATC Program

by Susan O'Neill and John Westerman

The Metro Area Training Consortium's (MATC) Direct Support Professional Training Program is an innovative example of how collaboration between organizations can be mutually beneficial and deal with a variety of pressing issues in direct service employment. This partnership between industry, social services, and education was developed as one solution to a number of problems facing Minnesota and the nation today.

This partnership between industry, social services, and education was developed as one solution to a number of problems facing the nation today.

In Minnesota, there are well over 32,000 direct care positions providing support to people with disabilities and/or mental illness (Larson, 1997). Agencies that hire people to fill these positions report difficulties in recruiting qualified personnel and maintain a consistent 9% vacancy rate on average (Larson, 1997). In addition, these agencies report high turnover (45% annually) among direct support professionals (DSPs). Of those DSPs who remain in positions, many face burnout because of inadequate training and support, which in turn decreases their ability to provide quality services.

There are a variety of reasons for the issues in recruitment and retention in this field. Some of these include:

- A lack of visibility and respect for the direct service workforce.
- Low wage in comparison to the job duties.

- Demographics shifts.
- Lack of peer and supervisory support.
- Lack of training and career ladder.

As the disabilities field is struggling with staffing problems, there is an increasing need for entry level job training that also provides opportunities for professional development. To design and deliver training to the population of prospective DSPs the training program needs to include the following:

- Practical job experience. Worksite placement is essential to give students practical information and experience to complement their classroom curriculum, as well as an opportunity to address other workplace issues such as attendance, punctuality, working as a part of a team, etc.
- Little or no cost. Many students cannot afford to pay for tuition and related education costs. Programs with fees will often be inaccessible.
- Appropriate location. Many students will rely on public transportation to get to classes. Classes and worksites must be in areas where public transportation is available.
- Support. Outside issues like securing childcare, reliable transportation, and housing can affect the student's ability to complete the program and maintain employment. Support needs to be built into the program to assure the highest level of success.
- Teaching style. Instructors must use a variety of teaching methods in order to reach students who have not typically had success in traditional classroom settings. Instructors need the knowledge and credibility that comes from having practical work experience in the field and must be aware of techniques useful in teaching adult learners.

MATC has developed the Direct Support Professional Training Program as one model for trying to tackle many of these concerns to the benefit of all those involved. Collaborators include:

- Anoka-Hennepin Technical College. A Minnesota state college whose customized training department has provided the flexibility needed to transport the classroom portion of the DSP training program off campus to a location more accessible for program participants.
- Bristol Place Corporation. A private provider of residential and other mental health services that gave the initial impetus to development of the training program and which has continued to lend staffing support, instructors, student worksites, and other resources for planning and implementation of the program.
- Loring Nicollet-Bethlehem Community Center. A private non-profit social service agency offering employment and education services that aids with student recruitment and support and coordinates communication with student worksites.
- The Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. A developmental disability research and training center that provides technical assistance on workshop development and training issues.
- Seven other human service providers. Contributors of worksites and financial sponsorship for program students. They are: Community Connections Partnership; Dungarvin Minnesota; Lutheran Social Services; Mary T, Inc.; REM Minnesota; St. Ann's Residential Services; and Workabilities, Inc.

Briefly, the DSP training program recruits, educates, and supports people interested in working in the field of com-

community-based supports for people with developmental disabilities and/or mental illness. The model is an 11-week program in which the participants are active 40 hours per week. After a one-week orientation, which includes all the re-

The model is an 11-week program that includes all the required training necessary to be employed as a direct support worker, including 10 weeks of classroom activities and on-site work experience.

quired training necessary to be employed as a direct support worker in Minnesota, the participants spend the next 10 weeks splitting the 40 hours between classroom activities and on-site work experience.

This program offers advantages to both employers and program participants. For the employer, the advantages include the following:

- Well-trained potential employees.
- An opportunity to establish a relationship with the participant before hiring.
- Training and recruitment handled by others.
- Potential employees with a high level of commitment to the field.
- Two hundred hours of work by a trained person for the duration of the program at or below typical cost.

For the participant, the benefits are:

- Fifteen credits of college training with an opportunity to continue education after the initial certificate.

- A career pathway.
- Training that is completed over time and supplemented with experience so that learning is more efficient.
- Peer support and networking.
- A chance to “try out” an agency and a type of work (e.g. residential vs. vocational) before committing.
- More knowledge about employment choices/opportunities and the field in general.
- Support services and job placement assistance.

Some additional and unique components of the program are these:

- Education is from Anoka-Hennepin Technical College’s Community Supports Program (CSP), which is competency-based, field-initiated, and credit-bearing.
- Instructors in the CSP program have recent community work experience in the field. The content of the courses is very specific to the work, and consumers of services and their family members participate in the teaching.
- The coursework offered is part of a career path that could lead people to jobs that pay in the range of \$24,000-\$36,000 annual salary in a relatively short time.
- Recruitment yields much needed diversity among direct service staff.
- Financing for the program comes primarily through employer contributions.
- Student support is offered both during and after the program in areas such as childcare, transportation, workplace success strategies, etc.

Thus far, though development continues and many challenges still lie ahead, the training program has met many of its goals. MATC recently completed presentation of the program for the second time. Of the 27 students who have begun the training, 20 successfully

completed the program. Of the eight graduates from the first round, seven were placed in direct service jobs and remain employed after six months. At the time of this article, 6 of the 12 most recent graduates were working permanently in the field, with most of the rest of the students expecting to be employed in the near future. These rates exceed state and national averages.

A look at the student make-up thus far demonstrates that the program is also delivering on the goal of increasing the diversity of the direct service workforce in Minnesota. Of students in the first two rounds of the program:

- 63% are people of color
- 52% receive public assistance
- 44% are single parents
- 30% are male
- 22% self-identified as having a disability
- 7% are non-native English speakers

As the Direct Support Professional Training Program grows, the MATC is constantly changing to meet the needs of its consumers (i.e. students, agencies). Complete funding for the program continues to be an area of needed development. Hopefully, the continuing success of the program will enable its expansion to serve greater numbers of people and agencies across the state of Minnesota.

Reference: Larson, S.A. (1997). *Recruitment issues for Minnesota agencies serving persons with developmental disabilities or severe and persistent mental illness. Final report.* Minneapolis: Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota.

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Self-Directed Work Teams: An International Learning Experience at Vinfen

by Harry E. Dumay and Elisa Velardo

Leading views in the field of social services suggest that there exists a direct correlation between staff competence, the quality of work life for staff, and the valorization of the social role played by the people that they serve. The less qualified the staff and the less they – and society – value their role, the less valued will be the people who receive

Why, we were asked, is there a need for supervisors who supervise managers who supervise staff?

their services, and vice versa. As we seek social role valorization for people with disabilities, it becomes evident that one of the ways to proceed may be to promote intrinsic and extrinsic appreciation for the role of direct support practitioners. How do you create a more positive view of the role of the direct support worker both within the staff person and in society at large? Other countries, particularly in Northern Europe, have grappled with that question and are at different levels in their attempt to answer it. Some comparisons across cultures and across social welfare systems seem, therefore, relevant.

ILEX and Social Pedagogy

The International Learning Exchange (ILEX) in Social Pedagogy Program is an organization whose mission is to foster mutually beneficial learning experiences between American social service workers and their European counterparts. *Social pedagogy* is a professionalized

practice of direct support in which reflective teamwork, cross-discipline exchange, and a holistic awareness of the individual's reality are used in the habilitative/ rehabilitative model. Based in Maine and affiliated with several American and international universities, ILEX operates on the premise that the American social service workforce is professionally lagging behind that of other developed nations. ILEX materializes this exchange by recruiting European social pedagogues and bringing them into American social service agencies for a one-year period. The fellows spend the year as bona fide direct support staff members, learning about the American system and sharing their understanding of support provision.

Vinfen Corporation contracted with ILEX to obtain one such fellow in September 1996. Latifa Chakir Alaoui is an Educatrice Specialisee from Switzerland. She came to work at Vinfen Corporation in the Co-Op Network, a program that provides support for people as they learn to live in their apartments or as they maintain the skills of independent living. In addition to her role as a case manager for three women and one man, Latifa's special assignment was to critically observe Vinfen's practices. She was invited to share her observations through one-to-one contacts with her colleagues, through regular supervision, and through the introduction of pertinent brainstorming topics during staff meetings. Through that process, she was able to inquire about aspects of our support provision, share her philosophy of direct support practice, and spark discussions about alternative practices.

As we explored our differences and the rationale for their existence, we realized that our services could be improved in two areas by the introduction of some of the elements of social pedagogy:

- A more holistic approach to support provision. We function with a very result-oriented approach. The Individual Support Plan is constituted of goals or outcomes that are often met in incremental steps. While we focus on obtaining immediate results through the use of behavior modification techniques or planned interventions, we sometimes lose sight of the real causes of the individual's socially non-adaptive ways. Spending more time on the deeper needs of the individual may create longer lasting results.
- Use of team work. Our need to maintain adequate supervisory support, along with the high staff turnover rate and the limitations on the salary of direct support workers, leads to an organizational structure with multiple layers. The social pedagogy model calls for a team structure in which equally competent staff work side-by-side.

In the remainder of this article, we will share our experience in this latter area of teamwork.

The Self-Directed Work Team

Very soon after Latifa's arrival, a dialogue began on the merits of the hierarchical structure. Why, we were asked, is there a need for supervisors who supervise managers who supervise staff? And why not eliminate a layer and invest the savings into the direct support staff? The sensitivity of eliminating a position notwithstanding, it became evident that empowering staff and encouraging them to develop professionally could only be beneficial to all. In consultation with the existing staff, the program structure was reorganized.

In February 1997, the self-directed work team model was implemented as

an alternative to the hierarchical management structure. The team is responsible for quality support services and makes decisions in regard to task assignments and work methods. The duties formerly performed by the manager were assumed by team members. As the responsibilities of the team members increased, so did their compensation. Team members received an average increase of 10%, and their titles changed from Residential Counselors to Case Worker/Managers. Administrative support is focused on training staff and facilitating the transition process, providing examples of successful implementation of this management style, and clarifying the strategies and focus of the program. Additional support is provided when the team has unresolved issues (e.g., unclear roles, non-team players, lack of skills). The team has autonomy to problem-solve daily decisions without input from upper management. The team also has shared responsibilities and provides each other with constructive feedback. Continuous dialogue and reflection on work quality and on issues faced in the support provision are fundamental to the team spirit. Once the individuals are trained, management empowers staff with the responsibilities of the program.

The advantage of a self-directed team is that everyone's judgment is utilized in a continuous brainstorming process. Nowhere is it more true that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Every member's ideas regarding working effectively, increasing consumers' quality of life, or managing crises is given respectful hearing and discussion. Empowering these individuals gives them ownership, which, in turn, improves the quality of service in very concrete ways. For example, team members feel comfortable assertively advocating for the individuals that they serve. The increased integration and communication have resulted in a team that is able to provide a seamless system of support, and the individuals served benefit from having the back-up of other staff when their primary support staff is away. Finally, the

self-directed team model provides each team member with opportunities to develop leadership skills without the need to move away from direct service.

The Co-Op Network is still facing some challenges in being a self-directed team. For example, team members must constantly remind themselves that differences in personalities and styles should not hinder communication. In addition, giving and receiving constructive feedback in a neutral atmosphere is a laborious learning experience. Other challenges which we prepared for, but have not experienced to a great extent, include a lack of time or of will to participate in the exchange process, the fear of exposing one's work to collective judgment, and ideological as well as professional conflicts. However, given the accomplishments of just a few months, and the tangible overall sense of individual and collective growth, we all agree that it is worth the effort.

Empowering staff, encouraging professional development, equipping them with more sophisticated approaches to direct-support practice, without a doubt, help to create that feeling of intrinsic value. Changing the way society views the role of the direct support staff, however, is not within the control of Vinfen Corporation, even less of the Co-Op Network. It is an endeavor that requires the establishment of a national effort in human services to develop competitive compensation for direct support staff, and professionalization of the practice.

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Resources: Web Sites

- **Direct Support Professionals: Initiatives, Issues and Resources** (<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/DSP/>). Includes state-of-the-art information of use to direct support professionals, trainers and supervisors of direct support professionals, researchers, and policymakers seeking to ensure that quality direct care services are available to all persons with disabilities.
- **The American Society for Training and Development** (<http://www.astd.org>). Includes online access to selected articles from current issues of *Training and Development Magazine*, provides 1996 national training statistics, and has links to other sites for trainers and other human resources professionals.
- **Workforce Online** (<http://www.workforceonline.com>). Contains several types of human resources information, including opportunities to exchange ideas with other human resources professionals, and a searchable database of articles on a wide array of topics including staff recruitment, retention and training.
- **Organizational Psychology Site of the International Association of Applied Psychology** (<http://allserv.rug.ac.be/~pcoets/div/home.htm>). Among topics addressed are motivation, leadership, groups and teams, organizational development and culture, employee relations, information systems, and design of policies and procedures. Also includes contents of many major research journals in organizational psychology, lists of upcoming conferences and congresses, an online newsletter, and links to other resources.

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

by Amy Gerowitz

The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals is a group of organizations and individuals working to improve the skills and abilities of direct support professionals. Alliance member organizations represent the wide spectrum of interests affected by the role of direct support professionals.

In my role of representative from the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), I have participated actively in the Alliance since September, 1996. At meetings in September and December, the Alliance developed a mission statement and five major goals. The mission of the Alliance is as follows:

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals promotes the development of a highly competent human services workforce which supports individuals in achieving their life goals.

The Alliance goals, in order of priority, are to:

- Enhance the status of direct support professionals.
- Provide better access for all direct support professionals to high quality educational experiences (e.g., in-service training, continuing and higher education) and lifelong learning which enhances competency.
- Strengthen the working relationships and partnerships between direct support professionals, self-advocates, other consumer groups and families.
- Promote systems reform which provides incentives of educational experiences, increased compensation, and access to career pathways for direct support of professionals through the promotion of policy initiatives (e.g., legislation, funding practices).

- Support the development and implementation of a national voluntary credentialing process for direct support professionals.

A sub-group of Alliance representatives has been developing a position statement and subsequent implementation strategies for goal number five, the national voluntary credentialing process. At the May, 1997, meeting a steering committee was established as well as work groups for each of the five goal areas. During the next several months, the groups will be meeting to develop strategies around the specific goal areas.

The Alliance will again next on March 11 in Orlando, Florida, following ANCOR's 1998 Conference on March 8-10. At the Alliance meeting participants and presenters will be given opportunities to showcase the successes and challenges around the issues of direct support professionals.

In addition to working hard to prioritize and develop action steps for each of its stated goal areas, the Alliance publishes a quarterly newsletter *Frontline Initiative*, which is available by subscription for \$10 per year.

For more information about the Alliance or *Frontline Initiative*, contact Amy Hewitt, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 204 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455 • 612/625-1098 (voice) • 612/625-6619 (fax) • hewit005@umn.edu (e-mail).

Amy Gerowitz is President with Outlooks, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio. She may be reached at 513/793-1946.

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- Are there for us when we need them.
- Are loyal, honest, and respectful.
- Don't see their job as "just a job" but as an opportunity to help people fit into society.
- Go out of their way for us.
- Are trustworthy.

To us bad staff:

- Don't show up for work when they are supposed to.
- Yell at us and threaten us.
- Have bad attitudes.
- Don't care about us.
- Are disrespectful.
- Steal our things from us.
- Sit around all day just waiting until it is time to leave.
- Hit us or put us in seclusion.

It really affects us when there are no staff to hire or when staff are hired and leave. When there are not enough staff to work with us it means that we sit around and are bored. For us this leads to doing things that get us into trouble like gambling with lottery tickets, fighting or spending all of our money on stuff so we don't have money to pay our bills. It makes us feel like we are put on the back burner and neglected because there is no one there to help us with our shopping, banking, bills, solving problems or doing stuff in the community.

When staff that we really like are hired and then leave it makes us feel lost and mad. It seems like we lose a friend and companion. There are a lot of past staff that we really liked, but haven't seen in years and really miss. It seems like we just get to know them and then they give up on us and quit. Then we have to start all over. Sometimes it makes us feel violated because they say they really care and are interested in our lives, but then they leave.

We don't like it when staff get hired that we don't know or haven't met. Most of the time we get to interview new staff

and get to know them before they are hired. But, sometimes they just show up. When that happens it stresses us out.

Also, it is important for staff to be trained and to understand us as people and our specific disabilities. If staff don't understand Tourettes or autism, there is no way they can understand us and provide the supports we need to live successfully in the community.

We think it is really important that agencies and the government do whatever they can to help people with disabilities find staff who understand us, want to work for us, and are willing to stick by us. We also think our staff need to get paid more money and also be respected by people in society.

Jim Beaty is a consumer and self-advocate who lives in Indiana, and Nathan Perry is a consumer and self-advocate who lives in Minnesota.

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operationalize the imperatives of progressive, contemporary community-based services (Bradley & Knoll, 1990), including the following:

- Focus on participant's strengths, preferences and life goals in the context of family, friends and community.
- Emphasis on the respectful, working partnership between the practitioner and the participant and the recognition of participant's strengths, gifts and potential.
- View of the practitioner as a knowledgeable, creative, empowered supporter and team member in all aspects of participant support and organizational life.
- Creation of a foundation of support that incorporates and extends a participant's natural support network.
- Emphasis on participant empowerment and self-direction.
- Emphasis on the individualization of supports and the flexible organization of resources to be continually re-

sponsive to changing life concerns.

The standards must therefore be understood as a complex composite of practitioner skills, attitudes, knowledge and values that incorporate these and other important enabling values and themes of contemporary human service support. It is also important to understand that the standards go far beyond minimum expectations. They depict the practices and knowledge base of an exemplary practitioner who has substantial experience in the role.

Impact of the Standards

One of the most exciting parts of the CSSS project has been talking with workers, consumers, families, employers, and others who care deeply about what is happening to the direct support workforce and who are joining together to promote a national agenda to meet the significant workforce development challenges described above. For example, the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals has many members who actively participated in the CSSS project and are carrying forward a strategic agenda for human service workforce development, including enhancing public awareness and regard for this role and planning the development of a national credential based on the CSSS and other relevant criteria.

The CSSS have provided an impetus for large public employers, such as the Missouri Division of Mental Health, to undertake a comprehensive plan to upgrade both expectations and salaries using a competency-based approach. It is also encouraging to see employers such as Vinfen Corporation, a large provider in Massachusetts; Dungarvin, Inc. with services in 13 states; and Lifelinks, a smaller provider in Lowell, Massachusetts, who are using the standards as a key component in comprehensive employee development programs.

The standards are also providing an important means of communicating with educators, who are the critical link to introducing young people to careers

in human services. It is a great loss to the field that few high schools offer students an introduction to human service careers (yet you can be certified to cut hair, fix cars etc.). This is changing as the National Association of Family and Consumer Educators has recently embraced the CSSS and are planning to use them to re-shape curricula and programs that will offer students greater access to introductory experiences in human services. At the post-secondary level we are seeing the development of programs keyed to the standards that result in highly proficient and valuable practitioners. The best example of this is the Community Supports Program offered in many Minnesota technical colleges. This program offers an articulated series of awards including a core certificate (15 credits), a specialized diploma, and an Associate's degree. Such well-planned programs offer interested people clearly defined and manageable steps to higher education and longer careers in human services – a "win-win" situation.

Creating a portrait that calls others to the honorable practice and spirit of the direct support role is ultimately the most important contribution of these standards. Unless we introduce the rewards of community support work to others, who will be there to support us when we need them? Unless we know what we are calling people to, how will they answer the call?

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