



Quality Support 2005

An Agenda to Strengthen the Developmental Disabilities
Direct Support Professional Workforce in Illinois

Executive Summary

Illinois Direct Support Professional Workforce Initiative: A partnership of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, Institute on Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the Human Services Research Institute.

Supported by the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Purpose of this Plan

The purposes of this workforce development plan are to —

- Provide essential information about the high turnover, inadequate wages, lack of access to benefits, high vacancy rates and the growing shortage of DSPs in Illinois;
- Create a call to action from important stakeholders to ensure solutions are created and realized; and,
- Outline an agenda of short term and longer term workforce development solutions to assure the availability of high-quality community supports for those who need it.

This plan is based on research, dialogue and strategic planning undertaken by the Steering and Advisory Committee (SAC) of the Illinois Direct Support Professional Workforce Initiative and supported by the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities. SAC members include people with developmental disabilities and their families, advocacy organizations, providers and provider associations, Direct Support Professionals, workforce development experts, labor representatives, governmental agencies, and academic professionals (see list of SAC members at end of document). In preparing this plan, Illinois joins the ranks of a small but progressive group of states that are confronting current direct support workforce problems to build a more sustainable and positive future for people with developmental disabilities.

The recommendations in this plan model current strategies known to improve workforce conditions. They include a pool of interventions ranging from —

- Finding, choosing, and welcoming new employees;
- Improving organizational management practices;
- Strengthening training and education; and
- Creating professional career paths that are valued and respected.

Who are Direct Support Professionals?

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play a critical role in the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families. DSPs assist people with disabilities in activities of daily living, social activities, personal contacts, coordination of health care, community interactions, and more. The assistance they provide depends upon the situation of each person with a wide range of possible activities such as help in maintaining a home, meeting friends, finding work,

providing transportation, making important decisions, taking medications, learning new skills, paying bills, getting a job, and physical assistance. DSPs also facilitate connections to the people, resources and experiences necessary for families and individuals to live fully and safely in Illinois' neighborhoods and communities. The quality of support individuals with disabilities receive from DSPs has a profound influence on their daily lives.

Status of Recruitment and Retention

It is critical that we improve the status of recruitment and retention of DSPs in the State. In Illinois, as in the rest of the nation, the community support system is challenged by high direct support turnover and vacancy rates and difficulty recruiting people into direct support roles. Illinois employs an estimated 28,167 full time equivalent DSPs. The turnover rate for DSP positions in 102 community residential providers averaged 43% in 1997 (Rubin, Park, & Braddock, 1998). Among the 18 agencies participating in the Direct Support Professional Workforce Initiative, turnover currently averages 36.3% annually with vacancy rates averaging 10.4%.

Nationally, recruitment and retention challenges will grow dramatically as the total number of individuals with developmental disabilities seeking residential, in-home and day supports over the next 15 years is expected to rise 37%. Consequently, Illinois will need to hire an average of 700 new DSP positions per year for the next 15 years to reach this projected need for DSPs (10,422 additional DSPs by 2020). In addition, Illinois will need to replace the estimated 10,000 DSPs who will leave their positions each year between now and 2020. This does not include the more than 1,200 full-time equivalent DSP positions that were vacant as of June 2004.

The annual cost of staff turnover to Illinois is \$35.7 million per year (based on a cost of \$3,500 per hire multiplied by over 10,000 DSPs who leave annually [36.3% of the estimated 28,167 DSPs]). The fiscal costs pale in comparison to the emotional toll and the impact on quality of life for the people who rely on these DSPs for daily support. People with developmental disabilities cannot focus on larger life goals when they are using all their energy to meet basic health, safety and daily care needs.

As baby boomers age, and as demand for support increases, developmental disabilities employers will be in intense competition with other service sector employers (the fastest growing sector of the economy) for employees. While there is a

dedicated core of long-term employees who remain committed to direct support work, current employers do not offer wage increases or career advancement opportunities that recognize this dedication. Moreover, the revolving door of often inexperienced new hires that leave within six months further strains the commitment of these dedicated staff.

Status of Wages and Benefits

It is critical that we improve compensation levels to attract and retain quality DSPs to support citizens with disabilities in the State. In 2004, the 18 agencies participating in the Direct Support Professional Workforce Initiative paid DSPs in vocational, residential, in-home and child care settings an average of \$10.12 per hour. The average DSP starting wage in those organizations was \$9.00 and the average highest wage was \$14.56. These estimates are in the middle of the range of wages reported in other Illinois studies. The average wage for Frontline Supervisors in participating organizations was \$14.80 per hour. This was higher than was reported in the other studies, possibly because some people in QMRP positions, which are paid at a higher rate, were included as supervisors.

Studies show that many DSPs in community settings, especially those who work part-time, are not eligible for health care benefits. Even when benefits are available, many DSPs cannot afford to purchase them for their families. For example, a DSP earning \$10 per hour (\$400 per week--less FICA and Social Security) is hard pressed to afford the typical monthly family health care premium of \$300. This lack of access to affordable health care for employed DSPs is an important factor influencing recruitment and retention success.

Status of Education and Training

More opportunities for education, training, and professional career advancement must be offered to DSPs providing support to persons with disabilities. Typically, the requirements for DSP positions are minimal and include a high school diploma or its equivalent, a driver's license and a clean criminal background review. In 1999, the Illinois Department of Human Services established mandatory entry-level training for DSPs. Newly hired DSPs receive basic orientation and training, delivered by their employer. While this training provides a solid introductory foundation for the DSP, more must be done to

increase DSP levels of mastery. It is critical to create high quality certificate and degree programs that lead to career development and advancement.

Most employer-based training programs focus on regulatory procedures and do not result in a certificate or diploma. This does little to enhance employee motivation and commitment. Furthermore, there is little opportunity for advanced preparation or professional development to support DSPs beyond the foundational training.

Efforts to achieve the vision of an educated workforce must consider the likely barriers. Many DSPs work more than one job so they can pay their bills. This makes it difficult for them to participate in professional development opportunities outside of their scheduled work hours. While employers do offer the required introductory training to their new employees, few offer this training in the evenings or on weekends.

Action Plan: The Illinois Quality Support Agenda 2005

The vision and interventions discussed in this plan provide a framework to address challenges in recruitment and retention of DSPs. The following goals were developed by the Steering and Advisory Committee to build a stronger DSP workforce.

Recruitment and Retention Strategies:

Attract and Retain Qualified DSPs

Goal 1: Conduct annual on-going legislative advocacy campaigns to increase the wages and benefits of DSPs and FLSs by not less than \$3.00 per hour.

Goal 2: Disseminate and implement a public relations campaign kit throughout the state.

Goal 3: Improve the knowledge of supervisors related to recruitment and retention strategies.

Education, Training and Career Development:

Raise the Skill and Knowledge of DSPs

Goal 1: Building on existing DHS competencies for DSPs, develop intermediate and advanced education opportunities that bear college credit and that lead to voluntary, specialized credentialing.

Workforce Data and Statistics:
Develop a Systemic Strategy to Monitor DSP Wages, Benefits, and Workforce Outcomes

Goal 1: Convene stakeholders to identify statewide data needed regarding the community services DSP workforce supporting individuals with developmental disabilities in Illinois, inventory existing and potential sources of that data, and make recommendations about ongoing data collection, evaluation, and reporting strategies.

Goal 2: Report annually on the extent to which an adequate supply of DSPs is available to provide community based supports and services for citizens with developmental disabilities.

Status and Awareness of Profession:
Elevate the Awareness, Understanding, Status and Respect for the DSP Profession

Goal 1: Develop and provide support to an Illinois chapter of the National Association of Direct Support Professionals run by and for DSPs.

Goal 2: Develop and provide training to organizations on how to involve DSPs in the development and implementation of individual supports for the people to whom they provide services and supports.

Goal 3: Encourage agencies operating programs for people with developmental disabilities to include DSPs on relevant work groups, councils, board, and task forces.

Mentoring and Supervision:
Support DSPs by Developing Skillful and Effective Supervisors and Mentors

Goal 1: Develop and implement a training program for organizations about the benefits of effective mentoring and supervision.

Goal 2: Develop and implement a training program for DSPs about the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for being a mentor.

Goal 3: Develop and implement a training program to teach supervisors necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for guiding, directing, and supervising DSPs.

Direct Support Professional Workforce Initiative Steering and Advisory Committee

AAMR of Illinois
AFSCME Council 31
The Arc of Illinois
Arc of Rock Island County
Clearbrook
Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in Illinois
Community Support Services
Cornerstone Services
Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities
Division of Rehabilitation Services
Equip for Equality
Family Support Network
Gateway Services
Habilitative Systems
Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
Illinois Community College Board
Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities
Illinois Health Care Association
Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living
Institute on Public Policy
Neumann Association
New Hope Center
Oak/Leyden Developmental Services
Office of the Governor
Parents: Jill Garrett and Scott Aiello
Ray Graham Association
Seguin Services
Self-Advocates: Denise Horn, Mark Karner, Carla Norrick, and Paula Vanier
SEIU Local 880
Sparc, Inc.
United Cerebral Palsy of Illinois
US Department of Labor

Please join us

in our efforts to improve the quality of DSPs supporting people with developmental disabilities in Illinois. For more information, contact Katie Keiling at kkeiling@uic.edu or **(312) 996-1002** or visit <http://www.rtc.umn.edu/ildspworkforce/>

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