

**A Publication of the National  
Alliance for Direct Support Professionals**

# Frontline Initiative

Volume 7 • Number 2 • 2007

## If You Build It, They Will Come

[Note: This is an edited version of Marianne Taylor's article that first appeared in the Spring 2000 issue of *Frontline Initiative*, before the NADSP built a national credentialing program. Now that the program is built, we need direct support professionals (DSPs) to "come" and use it.]

**M**ovie buffs will remember this line from the movie "Field of Dreams." It referred to building a baseball diamond in an Iowa cornfield. When it was finished, the ghosts of past baseball greats *did* come and play ball at night.

For me, this line articulates what will be accomplished by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals' (NADSP) rigorous and relevant voluntary credentialing program for direct support professionals (DSPs) across the country. The NADSP credentialing program identifies what people must know and be able to do in order to be effective in supporting people in the community. Credentialing communicates best practices in direct support to the human service field and to society as a whole. The components of the NADSP credential program will serve as the foundation of the emerging profession, establish a professional

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Congratulations to Laura L. Pittman, NADSP's first Registered DSP. Laura is a DSP-R who works at the Orange Grove Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



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# Frontline Notes

## Editorial Information

Editor · **Nancy McCulloh**  
Assistant Editor · **Michelle Trotter**  
Managing Editor · **Amy Hewitt**  
Graphic Design · **Connie Burkhardt/Tom Donaghy**  
Web · [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org)

## NADSP Board of Directors

**Mark Olson, President**  
Arc Greater Twin Cities  
Diamond Hill Center  
4301 Highway 7, Suite 140  
Minneapolis, MN 55416-5810  
952.920.0855, Fax: 952.920.1480  
[molson@nadsp.org](mailto:molson@nadsp.org)

**Cliff Poetz, Vice President**  
People First of Minnesota  
2433 5th Ave. S., #212  
Minneapolis, MN 55404  
612.871.0675

**Tony Thomas, Secretary**  
Ohio Affiliate (see page 5)

**John Rose, Treasurer**  
Irwin Siegel Agency  
25 Lake Louise Marie Road  
Rock Hill, NY 12775  
800.622.8272  
[jrose@nadsp.org](mailto:jrose@nadsp.org)

**Don Carrick, At-large**  
Missouri Affiliate (see page 4)

**Regis Obijiski, At-large**  
New York Affiliate (see page 4)

**Marianne Taylor, At-large**  
Massachusetts Affiliate (see page 4)

## Contribute to Frontline Initiative

If you are interested in contributing to *Frontline Initiative*, reprinting an article, or becoming an editorial board member, please contact –

*Frontline Initiative* Editor  
P.O. Box 13447  
Minneapolis, MN 55414  
Tel. 612.624.0060  
Fax: 612.625.6619  
E-mail: [nmcculloh@nadsp.org](mailto:nmcculloh@nadsp.org)

Dear Readers,

Are you ready for some change in your profession? Would you like more recognition for the important work you do? Wouldn't it be nice if, when you said, "I am a Direct Support Professional," people actually knew what you were talking about? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then you may be ready to discover what credentialing for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is all about. With this issue of *Frontline Initiative*, the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) begins rolling out the new National Direct Support Professional Voluntary Credentialing Program.

This news is so big we decided to devote a whole issue to helping you understand what credentialing is and what it means to DSPs. Beginning with Marianne Taylor's cover article – "If You Build It, They Will Come" – you can explore why credentialing is important and what it means for DSPs. Next, Amy Hewitt shares information about the NADSP National Credentialing Framework. This piece will help you understand what you will need to accomplish in order to earn DSP credentials.

DSP credentialing has already begun in some states, and beginning on page 8 you can read about credentialing programs in Kansas, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Maryland.

Becoming a credentialed DSP involves acquiring specific experiences, pursuing higher education and training, and meeting competency requirements. It is also about sharing what you have learned through a professional portfolio. If you are not familiar with professional portfolios, don't worry – we have included some of the basics in this issue.

Many DSP who provide quality support and are dedicated professionals have succeed as professionals without formal credentials. Jeanne Desjardins shares the value of this approach to direct support in her article, "Many Provide Quality Support without Credentials," which begins on page 21.

As always, *Frontline Initiative* offers ideas and suggestions for resources you may find helpful. Cliff and Seth offer advice on why DSPs should consider participating in the NADSP Voluntary Credentialing Program. We hope you enjoy this issue and consider moving forward with DSP credentialing as part of your career development.

If you have a story you would like to submit for publication consideration, you can e-mail *Frontline Initiative* at [nmcculloh@nadsp.org](mailto:nmcculloh@nadsp.org).

The Editors

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*Frontline Initiative* is available in alternate formats upon request.

# National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

## About NADSP

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is an organization for individuals and organizations that are committed to helping people with disabilities achieve their life dreams. We recognize that people needing support are more likely to fulfill their life dreams if they have well-trained, experienced, and motivated people at their side in long-term, stable, compatible support relationships. NADSP, a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization, has developed a national agenda to address these workforce issues and to develop strategies to –

- Enhance the status of DSPs.
- Provide better access to high-quality educational experiences for DSPs.
- Strengthen working relationships and partnerships among consumers, family members, and DSPs.
- Promote system reform, including incentives for education, increased compensation, and access to career pathways.
- Support a national voluntary credentialing process.

## Become a Member Today!

- Join a growing national movement to elevate the status of DSPs.
- Learn about national and international successful practices, such as certificate programs, apprenticeships, credit-bearing coursework, and ways to improve agency culture.
- Help educate policymakers and legislators about the importance of high quality human services.
- Learn about and gain access to public forums and conferences on DSP issues.
- Learn how to develop and enhance DSP regional affiliations.
- Develop leadership skills in the field of direct support.

## NADSP Membership Form

- DSP Membership\* \$25.00** Please mark one:  
 DSP  DSP (member of a state affiliate of NADSP)  
 Frontline Supervisor
- Associate Membership\* \$25.00** Please mark one:  
 Self-Advocate  Family Member
- Other Professional Membership\* \$40.00**  
For professionals working in the field of disability services, such as social workers, administrators, and healthcare professionals. Please tell us what your profession is:
- 

\*DSP Memberships, Associate Memberships, and Other Professional Memberships include **one subscription to Frontline Initiative**, a Code of Ethics pocket card, and a NADSP membership card.

- Affiliate Membership \$200.00**  
For individuals and providers committed to supporting the efforts of DSPs. Membership includes a certificate of membership and two subscriptions to *Frontline Initiative*.
- Supporting Organization Membership \$500.00**  
For individuals, agencies, and organizations dedicated to advancing the interests of DSPs and the people they support at a national level. Membership includes a certificate of membership and four subscriptions to *Frontline Initiative*. Your organization will also be listed in *Frontline Initiative* as a supporting organization.

**Please make checks payable to NADSP or visit us at [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org) to pay by credit card online.**

We are unable to accept purchase orders.

### Mail membership form to:

NADSP  
P.O. Box 13447  
Minneapolis, MN 55414 Phone: 612.624.6328

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

# NADSP Member Organizations and State Contacts

## NADSP Supporting Organizations

We would like to acknowledge the following NADSP Supporting Organizations for their generosity and ongoing dedication to the goals and mission of NADSP.

- ANCOR
- Anne Grady Corporation
- Arc Northern Chesapeake Region
- Association of Group Homes for Nodaway County, Missouri
- Bost Inc.
- Community Advantage
- Crystal Run Village, Inc.
- Direct Support Professionals of Missouri
- Direct Support Professional Association of Tennessee (DSPAT)
- Irwin Siegel Agency
- Laura Baker Services Association
- MCStrategies, Inc./College of Direct Support
- Melwood
- MidHudson Coalition
- Missoula Developmental Service Corporation
- NYSACRA
- Rise, Inc.
- Special People in Northeast, Inc.
- Welcome House
- Woodfords Family Services

### Start a NADSP state affiliate in your area now!

For more information, contact Don Carrick, NADSP State Affiliate Coordinator, at 660.582.7113 or [dcarrick@nadsp.org](mailto:dcarrick@nadsp.org) or visit the NADSP Web site at

[www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org)

## NADSP State Affiliates

### Arizona

Michelle Noe  
Practical Training Solutions, LLC  
8100 E. Indian School Rd., Suite #7W  
Scottsdale, AZ 85251, 480.945.2930  
[michelle@practicaltrainingsolutions.net](mailto:michelle@practicaltrainingsolutions.net)

### Arkansas

Vanessa Smith  
Partners for Inclusive Communities  
2001 Pershing Circle, Suite 300  
North Little Rock, AR 72114  
501.526.5962, Toll free: 1.800.342.2923  
[SmithVanessaL@uams.edu](mailto:SmithVanessaL@uams.edu)

### California

Melanie Bazile  
Strategies to Empower People, Inc.  
5945 Palm Dr., Carmichael, CA 95608  
916.679.1555, ext. 108, [melanieb@stepsite.com](mailto:melanieb@stepsite.com)

### Connecticut

Kristine E. Foss  
Ability Beyond Disability  
135 Old State Road, Brookfield, CT 06804  
203.775.4700, ext. 0234  
[kfoss@abilitybeyonddisability.org](mailto:kfoss@abilitybeyonddisability.org)

### Florida

Marta Morin  
Miami Cerebral Palsy Residential Services, Inc.  
2200 NW 107th Ave., Miami, FL 33172  
305.599.0899, [marta.morin@ucpsouthflorida.org](mailto:marta.morin@ucpsouthflorida.org)

Sue Gallagher  
Miami Cerebral Palsy Residential Services, Inc.  
2200 NW 107th Ave., Miami, FL 33172  
305.599.0899, ext. 234  
[sue.gallagher@ucpsouthflorida.org](mailto:sue.gallagher@ucpsouthflorida.org)

Cyndi Schumaker  
Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities  
2475 Apalachee Parkway, Suite 205  
Tallahassee, FL 32301, 850.877.4816, ext. 114  
[cschumaker@floridaarf.org](mailto:cschumaker@floridaarf.org)

### Georgia

Lisa Robinson  
Georgia Alliance of Direct Support Professionals  
615 Roswell St., Suite 110, Marietta, GA 30060  
770.499.2172, [lrobinson@sespecialists.net](mailto:lrobinson@sespecialists.net)

### Kansas

Clarence Walker  
Creative Community Living of Winfield Kansas  
622 N. Haverhill Road, El Dorado, KS 67042  
316.320.7531, [semrick@cclcl.org](mailto:semrick@cclcl.org)

### Illinois

Annamarie Whitehouse  
9021 Ogden Ave, Brookfield, IL 60513  
708.354.4547 ext. 255  
[whitehouse@communitysupportservices.org](mailto:whitehouse@communitysupportservices.org)

### Louisiana

Fabra Cain  
474 N. Foster Dr., Baton Rouge, LA 70808  
225.924.7998, [blaney375@aol.com](mailto:blaney375@aol.com)

Nancy Robertson  
LSUHSC/HDC  
1100 Florida Ave. #119, New Orleans, LA 70119  
504.942.8289, [nrober@lsuhsc.edu](mailto:nrober@lsuhsc.edu)

Roni Jo Frazier  
Evergreen Presbyterian Ministries, Inc.  
920 Main St., Pineville, LA 71360  
318.483.9922, [rfrazier@epmi.org](mailto:rfrazier@epmi.org)

### Maine

Roy Gedat  
Maine PASA  
P.O. Box 710, Norway, ME 04268  
207.890.0773, [rggedat@exploremaine.com](mailto:rggedat@exploremaine.com)

### Massachusetts

Marianne Taylor (NADSP At-large)  
HSRI/Bristol Community College  
777 Elsbree St., Fall River, MA 02720  
508.678.2811 ext. 2977  
[mtaylor@bristol.mass.edu](mailto:mtaylor@bristol.mass.edu)

### Michigan

Michael Bray  
Developmental Disabilities Institute  
Wayne State University  
4809 Woodward Ave., Suite 268  
Detroit, MI 48202, 313.577.6684  
[mikebray@wayne.edu](mailto:mikebray@wayne.edu)

### Minnesota

Rita McAninch  
DSP Association of Minnesota (DSPAM)  
3501 Orchard Ave. N., Crystal, MN 55422  
763.588.6312, [rmcaninch@gmail.com](mailto:rmcaninch@gmail.com)

### Mississippi

Lisa Burck, MPA  
Arc of Mississippi  
4101 Gautier Vancleave Road, Suite 103  
Gautier, MS 39552  
[lisaburck@bellsouth.net](mailto:lisaburck@bellsouth.net)

### Missouri

Don Carrick  
DSPs of Missouri  
P.O. Box 454, Maryville, MO 64468  
660.582.7113, [dcarrick@asde.net](mailto:dcarrick@asde.net)

Marci Whiteman  
[marciwhiteman@yahoo.com](mailto:marciwhiteman@yahoo.com)

### Nebraska

Mary Lawson  
P.A.K.S.  
P.O. Box 419, Ogallala, NE 69153  
308.284.2075 ext. 4469, [paksds@atcjet.net](mailto:paksds@atcjet.net)

### New Hampshire

Laura Lassins  
Lifeshare, Inc.  
225 Eddy Road, Manchester, NH 03102  
603.625.8825, [john@lifeshareinc.org](mailto:john@lifeshareinc.org)

### New Mexico

Judith Stevens  
Community Support Alliance  
Center for Development and Disabilities  
Health Sciences Center  
University of New Mexico  
2300 Menaul NE, Albuquerque, NM 87107  
505.272.1853, [judithstevens@yahoo.com](mailto:judithstevens@yahoo.com)  
Barbara Ibañez  
Community Support Alliance (see above)  
505.272.1853 ext. 2, [bibanez@salud.unm.edu](mailto:bibanez@salud.unm.edu)

### New York

William Ebenstein  
Consortium for the Study of Disabilities, CUNY  
535 E. 80th St., New York, NY 10021  
212.794.5486, [wiebe@jfkjrinsttute.cuny.edu](mailto:wiebe@jfkjrinsttute.cuny.edu)

Daniele Lyman  
Heritage Christian Services  
349 W. Commercial St., Suite 2795  
East Rochester, NY 14445  
585.340.2009

Regis Obijiski (NADSP At-large)  
Mid-Hudson Coalition, Inc.  
at New Horizons Resources, Inc.  
21 Van Wagner Road, Poughkeepsie, NY 12603  
845.473.3000 ext 304, [robijiski@nhnry.org](mailto:robijiski@nhnry.org)

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# The Real Scoop

**W**elcome to *The Real Scoop*. Clifford is a self-advocate who has been politically active for years. He's here to give you his spin on how to deal with issues you face as you forge ahead in your role as a Direct Support Professional (DSP). Seth has been a DSP for many years, and he loves to give advice. He may ruffle your feathers, but hey, it's for your own good! Clifford and Seth tackle this one with a few suggestions.

## Why become a certified DSP?

Dear Cliff and Seth,  
Why should I become a registered and certified Direct Support Professional (DSP)? What's in it for me?

Sincerely,  
Just Wondering

## Ask Clifford and Seth

Do you have a burning question about direct support, but don't know who to ask? Submit it to –

Frontline Initiative  
The Real Scoop  
P.O. Box 13447  
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Tel: 612.624.0060  
Fax: 612.625.6619  
E-mail: nmcculloh@nadsp.org

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

Dear Just Wondering,  
*The simple answer? Your future. You will be in on the ground floor of this important movement to recognize the profession of direct support. As more states and agencies buy into the professionalizing of DSPs, DSPs' importance and power through training will increase. As we continue to work toward supporting people in achieving their dreams, you should see better salaries and opportunities. And your family and friends will finally recognize and know what it is you do for a living.*

– Seth

Dear Just Wondering,  
*Becoming registered and certified will improve your standing at work and your professional status in the community. Plus, by taking training to become certified, you will gain the respect of your peers and show that you have the credentials for future advancement. We have been working long and hard to make credentialing a reality at the state and national levels. We have created this opportunity for you – now it's up to you to take advantage of it.*

– Cliff

## NADSP Member Organizations, Continued from page 4

### New York (continued)

Shawn Pike  
Adirondack Arc  
105 Park St., Malone, NY 12953  
518.891.6565, shawnpikenadsp@yahoo.com

### Ohio

Tony Thomas (NADSP Secretary)  
Welcome House  
20575 Center Ridge Road, Suite 200  
Rocky River, OH 44116  
440.356.2330, tthomas@welcomehouseinc.org

### Pennsylvania

Susan Smith  
Hope Enterprises, Inc.  
136 Catawissa Ave., P.O. Box 1837  
Williamsport, PA 17703  
570.326.3745, ssmith@heionline.org

### Tennessee

Earl Foxx, Jr.  
DSP Association of Tennessee (DSPAT)  
1161 Murfreesboro Road, Suite 420  
Nashville, TN 37217  
615.596.5321, efoxxcoinc@bellsouth.net  
Rick Rader, MD  
Orange Grove Center  
615 Derby Street, Chattanooga, TN 37404  
423.493.2936, habctrmd@aol.com

## National Credentialing Framework

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has developed a national credentialing program for direct support professionals (DSPs) working in community human services for people with disabilities. The purpose of this new credentialing program is to provide national recognition for the contributions and competence of DSPs who apply for and meet the credentialing standards. It is designed to provide a portable credential that represents consistency in education, work-based learning, and competence demonstration based on a national job analysis for this profession.

NADSP developed this program following a decade of advocacy, research, and outreach regarding the profession of direct support. Currently, there is greater demand for DSPs, there are not enough DSPs to meet current demand, turnover is high, wages are low, and there is not consistent, relevant, and competency-based training delivered to DSPs.

The national credentialing program consists of three levels: DSP-R (Registered), DSP-C (Certified), and DSP-S (Specialist). Each level provides recognition for the DSP's commitment to the profession and their accomplishments and competency as demonstrated through knowledge and skill development.

### **Level One (now available) Direct Support Professional-Registered (DSP-R)**

This is the most basic credential offered. It is intended to recognize people who have entered the profession and want careers in the field of community human services.

Required elements:

1. Proof that you have passed a criminal background check in the state in which you are employed;
2. A letter from your employer indicating that you have completed all required training and orientation as prescribed by the state and organization in which you are employed;
3. Proof of continuous employment with your employer in community human services (a person with a disability or a provider organization) for six months;

The purpose of this new credentialing program is to provide national recognition for the contributions and competence of DSPs who apply for and meet the credentialing standards.

4. A letter from you which indicates your professional commitment to direct support and which describes your values, commitment to, and purpose of entering the profession, and;
5. A signed commitment by you agreeing to adhere to the NADSP Code of Ethics.

Fee: \$50

Recertification: Not required, one-time fee only.

### **Level Two (now available) Direct Support Professional-Certified (DSP-C)**

This credential is for DSPs who have demonstrated competence (as measured and approved by the NADSP). This credential sets this group of DSPs apart from other DSPs in that they have demonstrated skills that typical entry-level DSPs would not have acquired.

Recommended required elements:

1. You must be a DSP-R;
2. Proof that you have completed an approved educational/training program (200 related instruction hours and 3,000 on-the-job hours);
3. Proof that you have two years of continuous work with an employer (an individual with a disability or a provider organization);
4. A professional resume;
5. An updated and/or modified letter of professional commitment;
6. A letter of support/recommendation from a person to whom you provide service or, in some situations, their family member or legal representative;
7. Portfolio work samples that demonstrate skill and competence in 8 of 15 competency areas as defined by the NADSP, and;
8. A commitment that you agree to adhere to the NADSP Code of Ethics.

Fee: \$150

### **Recertification**

In order to maintain DSP-C status, you must be recertified every two years. The recertification process requires:

1. Proof that you have completed 20 hours of continuing education in the field of direct support in community human services, and;
2. A reaffirmation of your commitment to the NADSP Code of Ethics.

Fee: \$50

### **Level Three (available in 2007)**

#### **Direct Support Professional–Specialist in Positive Behavioral Support (DSP-S):**

The specialist certificate in positive behavioral support is designed to recognize DSPs who have obtained specialized training and have demonstrated competence in providing support to individuals with disabilities who experience challenging behavior.

Required elements:

1. You must be a DSP-C;
2. Proof of completion of approved continuing education in positive behavioral support (40 hours);
3. A portfolio work sample that demonstrates competence in behavioral support;
4. Proof that you have one year continuous work with an individual who displays challenging behavior, and;
5. A letter from your employer in support of your competence and professional integrity in the area of positive behavior support.

#### **Direct Support Professional–Specialist in Mentoring and Supervision (DSP-S)**

The specialist certificate in mentoring and supervision recognizes DSPs who have obtained specialized training in supervision and mentoring and have demonstrated skills in providing supervision and mentoring to DSPs.

Required elements:

1. You must be a DSP-C;
2. Proof of completion of approved continuing education in mentoring and supervision (40 hours);
3. A portfolio work sample that demonstrates competence in mentoring and supervision;
4. Proof that you have one year continuous work as a mentor or supervisor, and;
5. A letter from your employer in support of your competence and professional integrity in the area of mentoring and supervision.

#### **Direct Support Professional–Specialist in Inclusion (DSP-S)**

The specialist certificate in inclusion recognizes DSPs who have received specialized training in community inclusion and have demonstrated skills in supporting inclusion for people with disabilities.

Required elements:

1. You must be a DSP-C;
2. Proof of completion of approved continuing education in inclusion (40 hours);
3. A portfolio work sample that demonstrates your competence in inclusion;

4. Proof that you have one year of continuous work providing inclusion opportunities for people who receive community human services, and;
5. A letter from your employer in support of competence and professional integrity in the area of inclusion.

#### **Direct Support Professional–Specialist in Health Support**

The specialist certificate in health support recognizes DSPs who have obtained specialized training in health support and have demonstrated skills in supporting people with disabilities who have specialized healthcare needs.

Required elements:

1. You must be a DSP-C;
2. Proof of completion of approved continuing education in health support (40 hours);
3. A portfolio work sample that demonstrates competence in health support;
4. Proof that you have one year of continuous work providing support to people with special health care needs, and;
5. A letter from your employer in support of competence and professional integrity in the area of health support.

Fee: Each specialist certificate is \$100

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# Heading Down the Right PATHS in Ohio!

**P**ATHS is an innovative program that is creating a career path for direct support professionals (DSPs) in Ohio. PATHS began in 2001 as an initiative of the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals and has received funding from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council, and the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, as well as significant in-kind support from provider agencies, family members, advocates, and self-advocates. To learn more about PATHS, go to <http://ohiopaths.org/>

Below are profiles of Ohio DSPs who have completed the credentialing program. They reflect on what drew them to the credentialing program and how their work has changed as a result.

## Robin Parent

Robin Parent is a home manager and DSP at Champaign Residential Services, Inc. She went through the PATHS credentialing program and completed the Certificate of Initial Proficiency (CIP). Robin was initially interested in the credentialing program because she wanted to educate herself further and to better serve the individuals that she supports now and in the future. The program gave her a closer look – and some perspective – at her daily work. She put what she learned both into practice and into writing so other DSPs can also benefit from it. She says, “I have always taken pride in my work, but I am now able to express that to

others and give them a true sense of what I do.”

For Robin, the credentialing program has given her a clearer view of how she would like to proceed with her education. She hopes to specialize in dual diagnoses and/or developmental disabilities and the justice system. Participating in the credentialing program has improved

**Robin was initially interested in the credentialing program because she wanted to educate herself further and to better serve the individuals that she supports now and in the future.**

her already-positive attitude and her awareness about how she works, “I am continuously more aware of what I do and how I respond.” In human services, Robin believes it is important to have a passion and desire to help others grow. The credentialing program helps insure you are dedicated to what you do – that it’s not “just a job.” Through the program, Robin also learned something new about herself, that when she speaks to groups, they can feel her passion for her job and understand what she is talking about.

Robin Parent, Home Manager, DSP, CIP can be reached at [rlparent@who.rr.com](mailto:rlparent@who.rr.com)

## Chris Kraley

As a nurse and DSP, Chris Kraley entered the PATHS program with a home care background supporting people with disabilities and those recovering from illness. She completed the certificate program because it emphasized the importance of direct support care and offered a “package that provides educational support for employees.” In particular, Chris said she learned the importance of maintaining the same staff over time. The program also reinforced what she already knew, such as the value of the NADSP Code of Ethics.

The PATHS program prompted Chris to re-examine her career goals. It also inspired her to better educate herself and to make a greater difference in the lives of the people she supports. The program has given Chris confidence in knowing she is not alone. It showed her a group of positive DSPs who want to maintain high standards. She believes DSPs often get a bad rap and think their opinions don’t matter. “This program helped me to make my voice heard, speak up, and contribute,” she states.

Chris talks about the program with the people she supports and other DSPs and tells them about her experience and the educational benefits. She knows everyone can learn and everyone needs continuing education so she encourages other DSPs to find out more about PATHS. In Chris’s experience, it is important to network, increase skill level, learn new things, and try new opportunities.

Continued on page 18



# Adding Something New with Ad Astra in Kansas

In October 2002, the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities brought together a group of Kansas stakeholders to create statewide systemic change in direct support workforce development. One of the outcomes of this project was the Ad Astra Direct Support Apprenticeship Program. Ad Astra is an educational and job training program. Credentialing and apprenticeship can improve employee skills by offering new opportunities for recognition and career growth. Apprenticeship is a time-honored method of helping initiate employees into developing skills while on the job. The Standards of Apprenticeship for DSPs were registered by the Kansas Apprenticeship Council. To learn more about Ad Astra, go to <http://www.workforce.lsi.ku.edu/Workforce/main/adastra.html>

The following features Kansas DSPs who have completed credentialing programs. They reflect on what drew them to the credentialing programs and how their work has changed as a result.

## Pricilla Walker

Pricilla Walker is a DSP at Individual Support Systems and completed the Ad Astra credentialing program. She believes the credentialing program has improved her overall performance and made her more of a leader among her co-workers. She can now express to the person she supports that she better understands how he communicates. She also sees that the program has helped her find opportunities for the person she supports to be out and about in the community every day. Pricilla is as

dependable and faithful to the job as ever but she feels the program has made her a better DSP and co-worker.

She believes it is important to participate in a credentialing program to gain knowledge, as well as an understanding of the history of services for people with developmental disabilities and how supports might look in the future. She also cites the certificate and a salary increase as additional incentives for participating in the Ad Astra program.

Pricilla Walker is a DSP at Individual Support Systems, Inc. and can be reached at 785.266.3432.

## Seressa McCracken

Seressa McCracken is a Program Coordinator for Individual Support Systems in Topeka, Kansas. She completed the Ad Astra Direct Support Certificate Program in October 2004 and will go through the Advanced Proficiency in Direct Support Program later this year. As a result of the credentialing program, Seressa has become a supervisor and taken on more responsibility and leadership roles. She feels she now has more knowledge to provide better supports.

Seressa shared, "My own belief system has always been to treat people with dignity and respect. Now I am more open about the possibilities in helping the individuals be more independent and making choices for themselves instead of feeling like I have to do everything for them." In terms of incentives for completing the credentialing program, Seressa cites a promotion and being more confident in her abilities and skills in performing her new

job. The program has helped Seressa better understand her responsibilities as a DSP and Program Coordinator.

Seressa McCracken, Program Coordinator at Individual Support Systems in Topeka, Kansas can be reached at [smccracken@isskansas.org](mailto:smccracken@isskansas.org) or at 785.228.9443.

## NADSP's Credentialing Framework, Continued from page 7

### Recertification for DSP-Ss

In order to maintain DSP-S status, the DSP must be recertified every two years.

The recertification process requires:

1. Meet recertification requirements for DSP-S;
2. Proof that you have completed 5 hours of continuing education in positive behavior support, mentoring and supervision, inclusion, or health support, and;
3. A reaffirmation of your commitment to the NADSP Code of Ethics.

Fee: \$10

### Recognition Awards

For each level of the credentialing program, the DSP will receive official recognition, including specialized diplomas and gold pins that clearly indicate the level of achievement the DSP has attained.

For more information on credentialing, visit the NADSP Web site at [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org).

Amy Hewitt works at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration. She can be reached at [hewitt005@umn.edu](mailto:hewitt005@umn.edu).

# Elements of Professional Portfolios

**A**rtists. Designers. Architects... What do these professions have in common with Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in community human services? Portfolios! Professionals such as artists and architects have long used portfolios to show their best work to others. For example, before hiring an architect to design your house, you would want to see some of the homes she has designed. And of course she will show you the homes of which she is most proud. You will get a sense of her style, abilities, values, and beliefs. The same is true for the DSP portfolio. It shows how the DSP's skills, abilities, and values support people with disabilities to achieve their outcomes.

## Tips for Creating Your Professional Portfolio and Ideas about What to Include

*Title Page.* This should be one page that gives the reader basic information, such as your name, employer, and department (or other specifics about your employer), plus the date you completed the portfolio.

*Table of Contents.* This is a listing that includes every document or item in the portfolio with a page number to help the reader locate each item easily and quickly.

*Professional Commitment Statement.* This is a letter of intended professional commitment from the DSP describing his/her values, commitment to, and purpose for entering the profession of direct support.

*Authentic Work Samples.* Work samples are evidence of your competence in supporting people with disabilities to achieve their outcomes.

A work sample does not have to be a written document. It can be pictures, videos, audiotapes, and almost anything else that demonstrates your skills and beliefs as a DSP. Be creative! For example, a DSP might choose to make a photo essay of the steps he took to support someone to attend an ADAPT rally as an example of his ability to empower a person he supports. Or he may include a list of neighborhood groups and clubs he uses to help the people he supports explore their interests as evidence of his ability to support people to access community resources. The possibilities are endless.

Each work sample should include a summary statement that explains the sample and how it relates to the competency area. It should show the reader the process used to address a situation, problem, or goal. The reader looking at the picture of the ADAPT rally may not know anything about ADAPT or what support the DSP provided. The summary helps the reader understand the work sample and how it relates to and impacts the desired outcomes of the person being supported.

For the DSP-Certified level, you are required submit work samples from 8 of the 15 identified competency areas. For the DSP-Specialized level, you are required to submit a work sample for each specialization area.

*Résumé.* This document is usually no more than two pages in length and should include a summary of your work history. This gives the reader a picture of your experience and knowledge in the field.

*Training/Education Records.* This includes any transcripts from

relevant college courses and related training records or certificates. This helps the reader see that the DSP desires to increase his/her knowledge and skills in the field and shows that the DSP has met the educational requirements of the credentialing program.

At the DSP-Certified level, you must submit portfolio work samples that show competence and skill in 8 of the 15 areas of the approved DSP job analysis. You are also required to submit proof that you have completed an approved educational or training program (200 instructional hours and 3,000 on-the-job hours). At the DSP-Specialist level, you are required to submit portfolio work samples that demonstrate competence in the specialization area and proof of completion of an approved continuing education program in your specialization area (40 hours).

*Letter(s) of Support.* All professional portfolios need testimonies from satisfied customers! For DSPs, this means that there should be at least one letter of support from a person you support, their family member, or, if a person is unable to verbally communicate and does not have family members, a member of his/her support network.

*Signed Code of Ethics Statement.* A copy of the NADSP Code of Ethics with the DSP's signature shows you value the profession and are committed to ethical behavior standards in your daily work.

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# Stars' Top Ten Portfolio Tips List

The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region's Stars Program is an incentive program for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). The program links DSPs' achievement of specified experience, higher education, training, and competency requirements to financial incentives. Targeting approximately 100 DSPs employed at The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region (in Maryland), Stars provides a career path for exemplary DSPs.

Stars aims to improve the service quality by: 1) increasing retention of exemplary staff, 2) improving recruitment opportunities, 3) creating a diverse group of future leaders at The Arc and in the field, and 4) facilitating organizational change regarding DSP workforce issues through strategic planning.

For the past three years DSPs participating in Stars have been developing professional portfolios. Below are some helpful tips for creating your portfolio, based on their experience:

10. **Don't panic!** Work on one piece of your portfolio at a time, starting with the part that seems the easiest to you. Your confidence will grow once you have completed a part of it, no matter how small! It will energize you to tackle the next part.
9. **Seek help.** The best and brightest in any profession don't do it alone – they seek the advice and ideas of other people. Get a friend who is a good writer to review your work and help edit it. Get together with co-workers to brainstorm good examples of community and service networking. Talking it through with others may help you clarify your

understanding of that competency area and find your best example.

8. **Don't take feedback personally.** When you receive feedback and suggestions on your portfolio, don't take them personally. Even professional writers have their work returned to them with lots of red editor's marks! We all get better by accepting and learning from constructive feedback.
7. **Persevere.** Most of us have many time commitments and responsibilities, so developing your portfolio may take time. Commit to working on it every week. Find a mentor or a co-worker who will encourage you when you get discouraged, and offer others the same support when they are struggling.
6. **Pretend the reader doesn't know you.** In all likelihood, at least some of the readers of your portfolio won't know you or may not even work in the field of community human services! Write as if they do not know the people you support or what you do. If you use jargon or acronyms, explain what they mean. Have someone who does not work in community human services review your work occasionally to see if they understand what you are trying to communicate.
5. **Improve your skills.** Some participants in the Stars program discovered that they were not as proficient in certain areas as they wanted to be. After hearing their co-workers' examples, they had a greater understanding of the

competency area and improved their practice of that skill. Some replaced the example in their portfolio with a better one or worked on another area of their portfolio until they had a better work sample. Your portfolio doesn't have to be perfect, but be willing to admit that you can do better....Then go out and do it!

4. **Focus on results.** To make the work sample complete, the reader needs to know if you made a positive difference for the person you support. Many people fall into the trap of discussing what they did in their work summary or journal without ever saying how their skills or actions impacted the person(s) being supported.
3. **Concepts first, then writing.** Spend time thinking through your ideas, either alone or with others, before trying to write or record them, especially if you are intimidated by the act of writing. The idea is the most important part. Doing this part first may also help you find creative ways to demonstrate your competency – photographs, videos, etc.
2. **Remember confidentiality.** Remember to get written permission before using the names and likenesses of anyone you support in your portfolio. Be sure to get permission from the legal guardian if applicable (but you should still ask the person for permission as well).

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# PATHS –

## Ohio's Voluntary Credentialing Program

**PATHS Mission:** To create a competency-based and credentialed career path for direct support professionals (DSPs).

**PATHS Vision:** A sufficient, highly-skilled human service workforce encouraging and supporting people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives.

### What is PATHS?

- A collaboration of providers, advocates, individuals with disabilities, family members, state and county representatives, and others committed to improving the direct support workforce in Ohio.
- Ongoing funding and support from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. Additional funding from The Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, The Ohio State Apprenticeship Council, and The Department of Labor.
- An opportunity for individual and organizational providers to participate in a high-quality affordable training and development program for DSPs.

### What is the current status of PATHS?

- Training and credentialing activities in four regions in Ohio.
- Agencies and individual providers participate in classes, develop portfolios, and receive support from skills mentors.
- Instruction, support, portfolio evaluation, and instructors provided by regions.

- Statewide PATHS provides organization, funding, coordination, and administration.
- Curriculum developed for Certificate of Initial Proficiency (CIP) and Certificate of Advanced Proficiency (CAP).

### Why is PATHS important?

- Candidates report a change in their attitude toward their work and the people they support.
- The cost of DSP turnover continues to rise, and is currently over \$2,500 per leaver. Candidates are likely to remain with their agency as they become credentialed. Such programs thus provide cost benefits to government, funders, and providers.
- Such programs foster the development of a professional identity for DSPs and skills mentors.

### About the PATHS Credential

- Based on the Community Support Skills Standards, The NADSP Code of Ethics, and the Minnesota Frontline Supervisor Standards
- Competency and performance outcomes
- Clearly articulated guiding principles
- Skills mentor and portfolio
- Credential at three levels: DSP-Registered, CIP, and CAP. Advanced certificates in development.

### PATHS Outcomes

- Over 160 DSPs have been awarded CIP or CAP credentials (as of September 2005).

- Over 100 candidates currently in training.
- Promotions, pay raises, and increased competency.
- The program received the 2004 Moving Mountains Award from NADSP for exemplary practice in direct support credentialing efforts.
- Enhanced status and professional identity for DSPs and frontline supervisors.
- Collaboration and recognition by the U.S. Department of Labor for apprenticeship.
- Changes in the lives of the DSPs, frontline supervisors, and people being served.

### PATHS Next Steps: Working Together

- Increased collaboration with other government and private organizations committed to a highly-qualified DSP workforce.
- Increased accessibility by people needing support, family members, independent providers, and those with other disabilities and needs.
- Increased awareness and acceptance of apprenticeship.
- Development of a long-term, sustainable funding base.
- Increased collaborations with community colleges, vocational high schools, and Workforce Investment Boards.

For more information, contact Amy Gerowitz, PATHS Project Director, at [agerowitz@ohiopath.org](mailto:agerowitz@ohiopath.org) or 513.871.0835.

# NADSP DSP-Registered Application Instructions

## What is the DSP-Registered Credential Level One?

The DSP-Registered Level One is the first level of credentialing for direct support professionals (DSPs) offered through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals' national credentialing program. This level of credential recognizes people who have entered the direct support profession and desire to have long-term careers in the field of community human services.

## Why is it important that I apply for DSP-Registered?

By applying for and receiving DSP-Registered status, you acknowledge your commitment to the profession of Direct Support. You become part of a national group of professionals committed to the mission and goals of NADSP and the values of the NADSP Code of Ethics.

## How do I apply to become a DSP-Registered?

- Read more about NADSP's national credentialing program at <http://www.nadsp.org/credentialing> or in this issue of *Frontline Initiative*.
- Download (from <http://www.nadsp.org/credentialing>), complete, and sign the application form.
- Review and sign the NADSP Code of Ethics Commitment letter.
- Write a letter of commitment to the field of direct support.
- Pay the registration fee.
- Gather and submit all required documents (e.g., letter from your employer, proof of completed training requirements, and passed criminal background check) with your application to:

National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals  
P.O. Box 13447  
Minneapolis, MN 55414  
Attn: NADSP Credentialing Program

## What happens after I apply?

Your DSP-Registered application packet will be reviewed by the NADSP within 2-4 weeks. If found to be complete, you will receive your DSP-Registered recognition package in the mail. The recognition package includes: a printed certificate that personally identifies you as a DSP-Registered; a lapel pin that reinforces the achievement of the DSP-Registered credential; and a personal letter from the NADSP congratulating you on receiving your new credential and your commitment to the profession of direct support.

Once you become credentialed at the DSP-Registered level, you will then be eligible for additional levels of credentialing that recognize your skill-based competency in providing direct support to individuals with disabilities.

## Commitment to the NADSP Code of Ethics

I have reviewed the NADSP Code of Ethics and make a commitment to uphold and honor the NADSP Code in my daily practice and to follow the guiding principles contained within the Code. These principles include:

**Person Centered Supports:** I pledge that my first allegiance is to the person(s) I support.

**Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being:** I am responsible for supporting the emotional, physical, and personal well-being of the individuals receiving support.

**Integrity and Responsibility:** I support the mission and authenticity of my profession.

**Confidentiality:** I will safeguard and respect the privacy of the people I support.

**Justice, Fairness, and Equity:** I affirm the human rights, civil rights, and responsibilities of the people I support.

**Respect:** I respect the human dignity and uniqueness of the people I support.

**Relationships:** I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain meaningful relationships.

**Self Determination:** I will assist the people I support to direct the course of their own lives.

**Advocacy:** I will advocate with the people I support for justice, inclusion, and full community participation.

I commit myself to incorporate the ideals of this Code of Ethics in my daily practice.

---

Signature

Date

# NADSP DSP-Registered Application

Date of Application:			
<b>Direct Support Professional Information</b>			
First Name:		Middle Name:	Last Name:
Address 1:			
Address 2:			
City:		State:	ZIP Code:
Date of birth:	Phone: (   )	Cell: (   )	E-mail (as available):
DSP Employment History: (enter the number of years and months you have worked as a Direct Support Professional)		Years:	Months:

<b>Current Employer Information</b>		
Name of Current Employer:		
Employer address 1:		Length of Employment:
Employer address 2:		Date of Hire:
City:	State:	ZIP Code:
Phone: (   )	Fax: (   )	Continuous employment: Yes No (circle one) If no, explain gaps.

**The following documents must accompany this application for DSP-Registered:**

- Copy of current (within last 12 months) completed Criminal Background Check showing proof of clearance
- Letter from community human service employer or individual indicating:
  - o completion of required employer and state-level training,
  - o verification that the DSP is an employee in good standing and legally able to work in the United States, and
  - o confirmation of six months of continuous employment.
- Letter from the Direct Support Professional applicant (you) that describes your:
  - o reasons for working in the field of direct support,
  - o values related to direct support work, and
  - o professional commitment to the field of direct support.
- Signed NADSP Code of Ethics Commitment form
- Application / Registration Fee:   \$50.00
- Application proof of payment:
  - o Check attached (check number: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - o Charge (Pay Pal confirmation number, for online registrations only \_\_\_\_\_)
  - o Purchase order (purchase order number: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Please initial *one* of the following two statements.**

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to NADSP to verify my status as a DSP-Registered to all  
 Initial here current and future employers who may inquire about my status. I understand that no personal information will be released.  
*I understand that this release of information may be revoked by me at any time after NADSP receives a written notice that is signed and dated by me. If I choose to revoke my release of information, I understand that no verification of my DSP-Registered status can be released to employers who make such an inquiry.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission to NADSP to release information regarding  
 Initial here my status as a DSP-Registered.

I verify that all information on this application and attached documents is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of the Direct Support Professional

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

----- **Do NOT write below this line** -----

<b>For Office Use Only</b>	
<b>Date Application Received:</b>	
DSP-Registered Identification / credential number assigned: (non-repeatable)	
Date payment received:	Date DSP-Registered status awarded:
Date DSP-Registered credential sent:	



# Ad Astra Direct Support Professional Certificate Program in Kansas

With help from the Kansas Council on Developmental Disability, Kansans concerned with the longstanding problems in recruiting and retaining quality direct support professionals (DSPs) to support people in community human service programs formed a planning team to design and produce a skills certificate program, the NADSP-Kansas Program and Curriculum Framework, over a nine-month period (November 2002 – July 2003). This group included the views of families, people with disabilities, employers, policymakers, DSPs, advocates, and others with a stake in assuring that people with disabilities and other life challenges receive high-quality direct support to enable them to achieve their life goals.

Each planning meeting was arranged to give participants information about the way different skills certificate programs work in different places and even in different industries and to shape group consensus on what was right for Kansas. In this way, the members of the Credential Action Team gained sufficient background information and knowledge to make informed decisions about the framework for the state.

This framework is a map or blueprint for a relevant and practical skills certificate program in Kansas. It describes the features that are necessary to any robust and credible skills certificate program and customizes these to be useful as an employee/trainee development program for DSPs.

The planners have identified four levels that have become part of the

Kansas-NADSP certificate framework. The first level is the “Registration” level, where a candidate begins to work on a skills certificate. At this level the candidate has completed basic orientation training and other requirements. The candidate is then eligible to work on the Initial Proficiency Certificate (IPC) in Direct Support. After completing these requirements, the candidate goes on to the Advanced Proficiency Certificate if she or he chooses. If the candidate achieves the Advanced Proficiency Certificate (APC), she or he will receive the Ad Astra APC and the U.S. Department of Labor Certificate for Direct Support Specialist.

The purpose of the program is to offer a clear career path to people entering community human services that is both practical and welcoming to all who wish to develop their skills and careers in this field.

## Credential Program Structure

Here is a sketch of the nature and operational structure for the NADSP–Kansas (it isn’t an NADSP program) program that fits with the

environment in community human services and in Kansas.

The Kansas Ad Astra Credentialing Program will be:

1) **A direct support skills certificate program** for DSPs. Employees or training interns sponsored by employers to participate in the program enter the program voluntarily. This means that employees are not required by regulation or statute to enter the program. The purpose of the program is to offer a clear career path to people entering community human services that is both practical and welcoming to all who wish to develop their skills and careers in this field. The program is not intended to exclude people or make it difficult for people to become DSPs. People can work in direct support without pursuing the Certificate, but those who choose it are likely both to acquire skills their employer will value and to enhance their job satisfaction and effectiveness.

2) **A representative body of stakeholders** steers the program. These stakeholders include DSPs, employers, people with disabilities, family members, educators, trainers, and policymakers. As a voluntary self-regulating Council, the program is not subject to regulation by state agencies. The Ad Astra State Council in Kansas functions to assure statewide fidelity to the Curriculum Framework across regional locations to assure the credibility of the skills

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certificate over time and to assure equitable treatment of candidates. The Council issues certificates and issues the Advanced Proficiency Certificate on Direct Support in collaboration with the U.S. and Kansas Departments of Labor. As the program grows within a specific region or location, a regional NADSP Council will form to provide local support and a connection point to the State Council. Each local council will be represented on the state council.

- 3) **An employer based training (EBT) program** – this means that employers provide training consistent with the Ad Astra principles and requirements in agency (employer) classrooms and/or learning stations (such as computer terminals), using instructors they have selected and trained, and curricula and materials selected or designed to align with the Ad Astra outcomes. Human service organizations, either alone or, ideally, in collaboration with other employers where possible, provide training to their employees or training interns. Employees are paid for their time in training. Employers and others are guided in program execution and fidelity by the statewide and regional council(s) who will use the Ad Astra Framework to assure local program fidelity to the mission and requirements of Ad Astra.
- 4) **A nonprofit organization** where the statewide council will begin as a committee associated with a credible nonprofit organization such as InterHab, the Kansas Developmental Disability Council, the University of Kansas, or some similar entity. Eventually, the Ad

Astra credentialing program will grow into a separate nonprofit organization upholding the mission and principles defined in this document. Regional Councils will be represented at the statewide council and will collaborate with the statewide council in the administration of the program.

### Curriculum Design and Training Model

Here is an outline of the types of awards that will be offered by the Ad Astra program and the educational methods and approaches that will be used.

Kansas Ad Astra Credentialing Program is a program that builds in quality by using up-to-date adult learning approaches and focuses on expert practice in community support through the following characteristics:

- a) Creates a scaffold for direct support career advancement in community based human services by offering multiple skill certificates spanning a range of levels of mastery in direct support.
- b) Uses effective adult learning strategies – 75% interactivity; no more than 25% lecture (interactive activities can occur in a computer-based modality).
- c) When convened in classrooms (other than computer learning stations), class sizes should be sufficient to support small group activity but not so large as to present learning challenges (ideally 10-30).
- d) Is competency based (see NADSP Learner Outcomes) using the following validated practice guidelines as core content: The Community Support Skill Standards, the NADSP Code of Ethics, and the Minnesota Frontline Supervisor competencies.
- e) Is aligned with national standards for DSPs (see U.S. Department of Labor Direct Support Specialist Standards)
- f) Provides each learner with a “skills mentor” who has mastered NADSP competencies to assist them in applying knowledge and theory to real work situations.
- g) Offers local flexibility in selection of curricula and learning arrangements (e.g., class hours, instructors, location, and curricula materials) as long as the local training entity provides adequate preparation for candidate mastery of NADSP Program and Curriculum Framework.
- h) Incorporates regular evaluation to examine quality and promote continual improvement.
- i) Uses effective instructors who have recent experience working in a community human service agency or equivalent environment.
- j) Provides a method for candidates to receive program credit for relevant past experience.
- k) Promotes professional identity and professional growth through supporting self-directed learning with synchronous learning and through opportunities for reflection and discussion of work experience. Ideally, candidate cohorts will meet every 2-3 weeks and no less than once per quarter.
- l) Seeks articulation agreements with postsecondary schools and facilitates award of college credit for EBT for those who want it.
- m) Designs the Direct Support Initial Proficiency Certificate program to take from 8-12 months (including registration level) to complete. The Direct Support

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# You want to be the best!

Together, the College of Direct Support and  
NADSP will make you a pro.

The College of Direct Support is an approved curriculum for NADSP's national credentialing program.

With more than 40,000 learners in 23 states, this multimedia, interactive, web-based curriculum is your answer to having a satisfying career in community human services.

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or visit our web site:

**[collegeofdirectsupport.com](http://collegeofdirectsupport.com)**



# Mentoring DSP Apprentices

**F**or 18 years I have worked at New Horizons Resources (NHR) in New York State, providing services and supports to adults with developmental disabilities in a residential setting. In the time that I have worked here I have served as both Residential Counselor and Assistant Residence Manager. In addition, I am a journey worker and mentor in the agency's Direct Support Professional (DSP) apprenticeship program.

In 2004, NHR, in collaboration with the New York State Department of Labor, added DSP to its list of apprenticed occupations. NHR was the first to start an apprenticeship program. The reasons for establishing the apprenticeship program were to advance the formal recognition of direct support work and to create an opportunity to develop statewide guidelines for what DSPs need to know and do to become more effective in their jobs. Apprenticeship is a practical way to apply what you learn to what you do. Like any other apprenticed occupation, there must be specific training curricula, on-the-job training, and certification. The direct support apprentice must both complete classroom instructional hours and be able to demonstrate on-the-job skills.

A mentor/journey worker is someone who acts as coach by applying a method of teaching and learning. The mentor pairs up with an apprentice for the purposes of: 1) helping the apprentice feel supported, 2) welcoming and supporting their growth, and 3) helping them to develop specific skills that they will use on the job. Mentoring occurs when an experienced DSP helps

someone with less knowledge and skill reflect on their own experiences as an employee, current practices, culture, and values, for the purpose of expanding, refining, developing, and building new skills that they will need in their work. As a result of this partnership, growth can occur in other ways as well. I have found that as a mentor, I have also strengthened my skills as a leader, and have developed good, positive relationships with those whom I have mentored.

As a mentor, I am responsible for a variety of duties as established in a mentorship agreement. In regard to the apprenticeship program, my role as a mentor includes initiating frequent (at least weekly) contact with my apprentice. This can be done by either a phone call or a one-on-one meeting, and it is, in my opinion, the most important aspect of my work as a mentor.

As part of the program, an apprentice/mentee must keep a "blue book," a requirement of the New York State Department of Labor. The blue book contains a record of training hours – both educational and work training – that must be signed off on by a mentor.

A mentor must also possess certain qualities that will foster positive relationships. A mentor must be able to provide recognition and commendation to the apprentice for quality work performance. I have found that it is hard to provide constructive feedback regarding work performance, but it is necessary. Honesty is always the best way to approach this. Sharing your own experiences in a given situation will help soften the impact of hearing

that there are some things that can be done better. All communications and conversations between mentor and apprentice must remain confidential. This is helpful in establishing and developing a level of trust. Trust goes a long way toward maintaining the strong relationship you have built.

In conclusion, the mentor must be able to exercise these roles and perform a variety of re-responsibilities in order to help the apprentice develop his/her skills, expand on those skills, and grow as a DSP.

Mike Wheately is a Journey Worker at New Horizons Resources, Inc, based in Poughkeepsie, New York. He can be contacted by e-mail at [grosbeak38@aol.com](mailto:grosbeak38@aol.com) or by phone at 845.877.3203.

**Kansas' Ad Astra program,**  
Continued from page 14

Advanced Proficiency Certificate program will take from 6-8 months to complete (this assures that candidates meet the national standards within the 18-month period required to be awarded the Department of Labor certificate as a Direct Support Specialist).

Adapted with permission from the Kansas Skill Certificate Framework document developed by the Kansas Credential Action Team and Human Services Research Institute.

# New Hampshire DSPs Complete National Apprenticeship Program

In a special ceremony recently held at Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center, Jack Jarvis, of the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, congratulated Jan Bevacqua and Jon Dash for becoming the first two individuals in New Hampshire to complete the national apprenticeship program for direct support professionals (DSPs).

DSPs play a vital role in enhancing the daily life of individuals with disabilities by serving as connections to community resources, personal care assistants, and providers of residential, employment, leisure/recreation, and social/interpersonal/behavioral supports. During a typical day, these staff will support those who need help with activities such as getting dressed, personal grooming, preparing meals, and supporting them in the workplace. Beyond these tasks, DSPs model and teach appropriate social behaviors, and build communication skills and support in personal relationships.

According to Director of Residential Services Jon Eriquezzo, Crotched Mountain employs more than 200 DSPs who work either at the rehabilitation center in Greenfield, New Hampshire or in local communities throughout the state. "Within the community human services field, there is a general consensus that DSPs do not always receive proper training," Eriquezzo explains. He identifies this problem as contributing to a high turnover rate nationwide. "Crotched Mountain," remarks Jarvis, "is taking the lead here in New Hampshire to address this ongoing concern by investing considerable time and effort to

establish a registered apprenticeship program for DSPs. Jan and Jon can be proud of their accomplishments and dedication to the profession. Everyone benefits from this program – especially the individuals who receive support from organizations and DSPs who are committed to quality training and education."

The apprenticeship program for DSPs is comprised of 144 classroom hours of instruction and 2,000 hours of on-the-job training experience. Upon successful completion of the program, Crotched Mountain rewards its employees with an increase in salary. The criteria to earn certification is based upon the national Community Support Skill Standards that were set forth by the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Jan Bevacqua, of Antrim, New Hampshire serves as manager of

Hawthorn Heights, one of 15 residences for students attending Crotched Mountain School. She joined the organization in 1994 and has dealt extensively with the process of transitioning students from residential care to community settings. Jon Dash, a residential counselor at Dogwood Manor residence, also lives in Antrim. He has been employed by Crotched Mountain since 2002 and serves as an apprenticeship supervisor as well as a mentor for new employees. In June 2006, Bevacqua and Dash travelled to Atlantic City, New Jersey to give a presentation at the Eastern Seaboard Apprenticeship Conference about their experiences.

At present, two more Crotched Mountain employees are working to complete the requirements for the apprenticeship program. "Our

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Continuing Education Coordinator Lisa Miller joins Jan Bevacqua and Jon Dash in receiving congratulations from Jack Jarvis of the U.S. Department of Labor.

# Professional Journey

**M**y journey on the road to becoming a Direct Support Specialist began when I enrolled in the Wyoming Department of Labor (DOL) apprenticeship program at Ark Regional Services in Laramie, Wyoming. I am a full-time supervisor in charge of two Day Habilitation programs and am a part-time student at the University of Wyoming, working towards a Bachelor's degree in social work. My decision to go into social work was based on my work experience at Ark. When I had the chance to be a part of the DOL program, I saw it as an opportunity to enhance my knowledge and skills as a Direct Support Professional (DSP).

As a direct support supervisor, I work side-by-side with eight staff in two Day Habilitation programs. I am responsible for making sure staff have the skills they need to do their jobs effectively. Prior to entering the DOL program, I had average skills in training and giving feedback, but I lacked the confidence needed to be a successful supervisor.

The DOL apprenticeship enhanced my skills and confidence as a DSP. I developed a better understanding of how to effectively educate staff and give feedback on their skill development. I have capitalized on my strengths as a role model and have learned to observe staff as they practice and apply their skills.

Key to my success in this program was the support I received from the program facilitators and my assigned mentor who partnered with me through the journey. The education and support I received from these individuals included education and modeling of skills, ob-

servaion and feedback on my skill performance, a written skills test, and my final project and presentation to both my fellow apprentices and a professional committee.

My training began with an overview of the history of the organization and was followed with classroom instruction on specific skill areas needed for success as a DSP. Following classroom instruction, the teaching process focused on modeling, observation, and feedback on the skills, and then practice and application on the job. My mentor supported me through observation and feedback as I practiced my skills. This method of instruction was effective for me as it combined both classroom education and practice on the job. I concluded my apprenticeship with a presentation of my individual project, which demonstrated the knowledge and skills that I had gained over the course of my apprenticeship.

I must admit that throughout the apprenticeship program I found myself challenged, stressed, and at times overwhelmed, but also excited by my new understanding of what quality supports mean to people with disabilities. I can also state with confidence that I am now able to effectively train the DSPs who work for me with confidence as a result of my apprenticeship.

I believe that the DOL program positively impacts Ark Regional Services as an organization, its staff members, and most importantly, the individuals being supported. It has created a partnership between employer and employee in which each party has a greater understanding of the organization's philosophy and

expectations. It gives DSPs an opportunity to gain valuable skills and knowledge, and creates career paths for continuing professional growth. I am excited about the opportunity to become a nationally-credentialed DSP in order to enhance the status of the profession.

Dionna Lanich is a Full-time Supervisor at Ark Regional Services in Laramie, Wyoming. She can be contacted by e-mail at [dlanich@arkregionalservices.org](mailto:dlanich@arkregionalservices.org).

**Right PATHS in Ohio,**  
Continued from page 8

Overall, Chris thought the program was very good and especially liked the portfolio piece. She thinks it is important for the people she supports to participate in some way and know that their employees care; the people she supported were excited when she told them about the program. Chris also admired the agencies involved in the program because they went out of their way to explain issues and answer questions. And last but not least... Chris had fun!

Chris Kralej is a DSP and nurse. She holds a Certificate of Initial Proficiency from the PATHS Program.

## Neil Ferencak

Neil Ferencak, a "Find a Way Direct Support Assistant" at LADD, Inc., completed the PATHS Program at the Certificate of Initial Proficiency (CIP) and Certificate of Advanced

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# Maine PASA Becomes an NADSP State Chapter

**A**t the beginning of my career as a Direct Support Professional (DSP), the people I supported were totally dependant on staff for activities of daily living. Often, staff would stay long enough to become familiar with the likes, dislikes, and things that brought joy to the lives of the people we supported. Then they would find another job and the cycle of new staff would begin again. I researched what I could do to lower the turnover rate. In my search, I stumbled onto the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), and thought, “Wow, someone is doing something about quality supports.” At the time, there were no associations in Maine representing direct care or support workers.

At this time, NADSP was creating their Code of Ethics. They asked people to vote on items which most closely described their individual ethics. Shortly thereafter, NADSP’s Amy Hewitt came to the DSP conference in Bangor, Maine to talk about the development of the Code of Ethics. After meeting her, I became actively involved in the NADSP, including being on the steering committee.

My employer at the time was very supportive about getting a DSP group going in the state. They provided me with resources like meeting space and whatever other support they had to offer. Unfortunately, I just didn’t have any experience or knowledge to really get a group going.

A few years later, I met Elise Scala from the Muskie Institute for Public Policy here in Maine at a Speaking Up for US (SUFU) self-advocacy conference. She introduced herself and proposed the idea of getting a group going again. She invited me to a breakfast to discuss the formation of what would become the Maine Personal Assistance Services Association, or Maine PASA. Then, seven people who had been at this meeting began to develop the framework for PASA.

NADSP is an organization of and for direct support professionals. It was recently organized into a nonprofit organization to further its mission. About a year ago, NADSP began inviting groups to join as state chapters and affiliates. The requirement for membership was that each chapter had to take on a couple of the goals that the NADSP Board had laid out in their strategic plan.

At a meeting this spring, Maine PASA members voted to join NADSP as a formal state chapter, focusing on advocacy for a voluntary credentialing process. We encourage DSPs to attain a knowledge level in the field that will earn them professional recognition through a formal credential. It’s essential that we change public perception about the skill level required for this profession. Providing a formal credential lets people know that being a DSP requires a high level of skill.

Being part of the formation process was a significant learning experience for me. It’s remarkable to

watch a disjointed group of people unite into a front advocating for more respect professionally, better pay, and most importantly, quality support for individuals with disabilities.

Julie Moulton is a DSP working for Speaking Up For Us, Maine’s self-advocacy network. She lives in Winthrop, Maine and can be reached by e-mail at [juliemoulton@gwi.net](mailto:juliemoulton@gwi.net).

**Portfolio Elements,**  
Continued from page 10

*Releases.* Be sure to get a signed release of information from the people you support or anyone else included in the portfolio if you use their name or likeness in the portfolio. If there is a legal guardian, remember to seek his/her permission as well. If the person does not agree, you should not include any identifying information in the portfolio, including but not limited to, pictures. This shows that you value the people you support, their families, co-workers, and the Code of Ethics in your work.

While these elements will be included in most DSP’s portfolios, use the experience of assembling your portfolio to really let your unique personality and style shine through! Individualize it and make it a reflection of who you are. Nobody provides supports quite the way you do!

Kathy Pitrat is the Director of Workforce Development and Support Strategies at The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region. She can be contacted at 410.879.6785 or [kpitrat@arcncr.org](mailto:kpitrat@arcncr.org).

# NADSP-Approved Training and Education Programs

In order to receive a direct support professional (DSP) certified or specialist credential, DSPs must complete an approved training program. The training program approval process includes an application, site review, and NADSP review of curriculum. To date, the NADSP has approved two existing curricula that meet the education/training requirements of the NADSP national credential.

The first approved curriculum is the U.S. Department of Labor certified apprenticeship program for the occupational title of Direct Support Specialist. Any certified apprenticeship program for Direct Support Specialist is an approved curriculum.

The second approved curriculum is the College of Direct Support (CDS). The CDS is a multimedia, interactive, Web-based curriculum. It is designed to be used in conjunction with employer-based training. CDS courses include:

- Supporting Healthy Living
- Safety at Home and in the Community
- Cultural Competence
- Positive Behavior Support
- Introduction to Disabilities
- Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults and Children
- Supporting Friendships and Relationships
- Direct Support Professionalism
- Introduction to Medication Support
- Person-Centered Planning and Support
- Teaching Skills

- Documentation
- Community Inclusion
- Individual Rights and Choice
- Personal and Self Care

Employers and postsecondary programs that do not have an existing DOL-approved apprenticeship program and do not use the CDS can apply to the NADSP to have their programs reviewed and accredited so that their graduates can apply for the national credential. To inquire about this review process, contact NADSP at [credentialing@nadsp.org](mailto:credentialing@nadsp.org).

Amy Hewitt works at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration. She can be reached at [hewit005@umn.edu](mailto:hewit005@umn.edu).

**Right PATHS in Ohio,**  
Continued from page 18

Proficiency (CAP) levels. After six years as a DSP, Neil decided to enter the credentialing program at his supervisor's recommendation. The idea of a direct support credential and putting standards into practice in the field appealed to him. Neil feels that the biggest change in his work since earning his credentials is that he has more options and ideas to help him deal with situations when they occur. Neil stated that the health and safety of the individuals he works with are always at the forefront, but going through the program has instilled in him the idea that he and others can take chances to find out what works instead of just providing the same services that may not be what the individual really wants or needs.

Because of his participation in the PATHS Program, Neil has become very confident in sharing best practice in all aspects of supporting an individual's life. For Neil, the PATHS program brought together many skilled and dedicated professionals. These experiences provided him with ideas about how to look at situations and deal with them in the most appropriate and creative way. When reflecting on the credentialing program's impact on his career, Neil says it strengthened his love for working directly with people. The PATHS credential makes Neil feel he grasps all aspects of life for an individual with a disability. This gives him confidence and good ideas about how to deal with common situations, while stressing the importance of ethical and respectful everyday interactions with those he supports.

Neil's personal incentives for completing the PATHS CIP and CAP credential include providing more professional and complete services to all individuals. He believes that a credentialing program is very important and that embracing standards can only help people working in this field and lead to better services for people with disabilities.

Neil Ferencak is a Find a Way Direct Support Assistant at LADD, Inc. He can be contacted by e-mail at [nferencak@laddinc.org](mailto:nferencak@laddinc.org) or by phone at 513.631.4223 ext. 212.



# Many DSPs Without Formal Credentials Provide Quality Support

I received my Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maine, which is located in a small, potato-farming community. The degree was not in special education, and yet I have supported individuals with disabilities for 25 years.

After I graduated from college, an acquaintance suggested that I might be interested in working in an institutional therapeutic aquatic setting. As supervisor of the therapeutic pool program, I implemented water exercise classes, swimming instruction, one-on-one therapy, and open recreation swims for people with severe developmental disabilities.

Working with individuals with various strengths, skills, and challenges provides me with the opportunity to explore uncharted territory in my “day-to-day” assignments. It presents clarity about how this “world goes ’round” and about the direct support workers who choose to make it a better place to live, work, and play – even without the formal credentials of a Direct Support Professional (DSP). I have had no other career convey this to me so beautifully.

I constantly evaluate my service so I consistently provide quality instruction and support as an exemplary role model to the individuals I support and the community in which they live. What an opportunity it has been to be a part of the progressive movement toward supporting the enhancement of the lives of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in the community! Today, we DSPs can direct our energies in positive, proactive, and supportive ways. I have been given the opportunity to create, revolutionize, transform,

and reorganize the support I provide in order to promote higher quality services to individuals with different abilities. DSPs are an integral part of the movement to help individuals with disabilities become included in our community and be valued as members just like the rest of us. I am proud to be a part of making their dreams come true.

Jeanne Desjardins is a DSP in Albuquerque, New Mexico and can be reached at [jdesjardins@arc-a.org](mailto:jdesjardins@arc-a.org).

## If You Build It, They Will Come

Continued from page 1

identity for direct support, and drive the development of educational and training opportunities for those who wish to build and excel in careers in direct support. Furthermore, with access to the enrichment and recognition that results from earning a credential, people currently in direct support will “come” to a deeper understanding of their practice.

We visited with direct support professionals (DSPs) across the country while developing the Community Support Skill Standards, and they were unanimously in favor of earning a credential for the important work they do. When the NADSP adopted its slate of priorities in 1997, the DSPs at the meeting embraced the goal of developing a voluntary national credential, stating, “We want to be held to a clear and high standard.” Now, in 2006, the 32 affiliate chapters of the NADSP – with DSPs as leaders and advocates at the local level – approve of and are excited by the NADSP credentialing program.

The NADSP credentialing program will help people outside of human services see that direct service, like other professions, has a name as well as a body of skills, knowledge, and ethical principles. It will also provide us with a tool to market the role to prospective workers. “Direct Support Professional” will become a career track taught in school programs along with cosmetology, auto mechanics, graphic design, etc.

The NADSP credential will ensure that those who pursue it will learn the most important aspects of the work in programs of study and experience in school or through on-the-job training (OJT). What we currently teach DSPs on the job is mostly health and safety skills and those required by state regulation. The complexities of current best practices – such as facilitating community inclusion, supporting participant empowerment, and honoring dreams and preferences – are often neglected.

The NADSP credential will help DSPs feel valued and take pride in direct support. People will come to the profession because it is interesting and meaningful work. The NADSP credential can build linkages among secondary, postsecondary, and OJT classrooms, and people will “come” to the profession because they see clear and explicit career and educational paths with a promising future. In addition, the NADSP credential can improve the quality of support, and people with disabilities and their families will be confident that the people they must rely upon every day are well prepared to achieve desired outcomes.

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# Frontline Resources

## **National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Web Site** <http://www.nadsp.org/>

The official Web site of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) offers a variety of resources for direct support professionals and others working in the field of human services. The site contains information about NADSP, past issues of *Frontline Initiative*, links to tools and resources (including the NADSP Code of Ethics), membership information, and more information on credentialing.

## **National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics** <http://www.nadsp.org/library/code.asp>

In 2000, the NADSP convened a panel of direct support professionals (DSPs), advocates, families, professionals, and researchers from across the country who drafted the NADSP Code of Ethics. Focus groups and surveys regarding the draft language were conducted throughout the nation, and their findings were integrated into the final Code.

The NADSP Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a straightforward and relevant ethical guide for DSPs, shedding light on the shared path to a self-directed life. It is intended to guide DSPs in resolving the ethical dilemmas they face every day and to encourage them to attain the highest ideals of their profession.

The Ethical Statements included in the Code address topics including: Person Centered Supports;

Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being; Integrity and Responsibility; Confidentiality; Justice, Fairness and Equity; Respect; Relationships; and Self-determination and Advocacy.

## **The Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) for Direct Service Workers in Human Services**

<http://www.nadsp.org/training/csss.asp>

Today's direct support workers face a variety of challenges and situations in a swiftly changing work environment. They are being expected to handle community support situations with creativity and understanding while simultaneously having less supervision and support than ever before. The Community Support Skill Standards (CSSS) are useful in developing job descriptions, performance evaluations, and training programs for direct support workers in this new service environment.

The CSSS provide comprehensive descriptions of worker roles in the following 12 critical areas:

- 1) Participant Empowerment
- 2) Communications
- 3) Assessment
- 4) Community and Service Networking
- 5) Facilitation of Services
- 6) Community Living Skills and Supports
- 7) Education, Training, and Self-Development
- 8) Advocacy

- 9) Vocational, Educational, and Career Support
- 10) Crisis Intervention
- 11) Organizational Participation
- 12) Documentation

To order a hard copy of the CSSS, contact the publications office at the Human Service Research Institute at 617.876.0426.

## **College of Direct Support** <http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com/>

DSPs play an incredibly important role in the lives of the people they support – as caregivers, teachers, mentors, counselors, community connectors, and friends – and the College of Direct Support (CDS) provides education to enhance these roles. CDS is an educational resource for those who provide direct support to individuals with developmental disabilities. It is an Internet-based curricula offering a wide variety of online training opportunities for DSPs.

The site is a collaborative effort of WebInservice, a division of MC Strategies, Inc. (Elsevier); the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the Institute on Community Integration; and the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

*Frontline Initiative* thanks the Quality Mall ([www.qualitymall.org](http://www.qualitymall.org)) for some of the resource descriptions printed here.

## How is the NADSP credential built?

It is built with quality support and competency-based skills in mind. Here is a list of things to look for in a quality credentialing program:

### Benchmarks of a Quality Credential Program

- Competency-based – draws from a relevant validated set of competencies based on comprehensive job analyses
- Transportable – parallel curricula and identical awards at different sites across the country
- Guided by a coalition of stakeholders – educators, employers, employees, consumers
- Accessible – cost, location, support
- Articulates to other educational awards (AA, BA)

- Adds value – higher wage, college credit, expanded career opportunities
- Uses valid, reliable, fair assessments
- Incorporates a method of revising standards
- Calls for periodic recertification/renewal

### From Dreams to Reality

In the past, we've had unfair expectations of DSPs. We asked staff to facilitate change by embracing new approaches to support but we did very little to prepare them to become competent in these newly defined ways of working. We invested in "case managers" and "service coordinators" to do this work, which added more layers of bureaucracy, distant from the day-to-day lives of the people we support. Then we wondered why it was so expensive and so hard to help people get closer to their dreams and achieve the outcomes they desired.

It is simply unfair to expect DSPs to master the complex best practices of the new century without providing them with the appropriate educational tools to take on such challenges. It is time for us to face the reality that it is also disrespectful to people with disabilities and their families to ask them to share their dreams and believe in community inclusion without providing them with the support necessary to help make their dreams come true.

We are very excited about the transformation we are creating as we seek to blend natural and paid support, and to work in highly individualized frameworks where individuals with disabilities direct their lives. NADSP has built the credentialing program; now we need DSPs to come and participate.

Marianne Taylor is the Director of Grant Development at Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts. She can be reached by e-mail at [mtaylor@bristol.mass.edu](mailto:mtaylor@bristol.mass.edu) or by phone at 508.678.2811 ext 2977.

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goal is to enroll up to 20 DSPs each year,” Eriquezzo states. “The apprenticeship program will greatly improve the quality of life for individuals being supported by providing a career ladder and well-deserved recognition for DSPs. In time, these heroes will no longer be unsung.”

Crotched Mountain is a charitable organization employing more than 900 DSPs. Its mission is to serve individuals with disabilities and their families, embracing personal choice and development, and building communities of mutual support. Crotched Mountain provides specialized education, rehabilitation, community, and residential supports for more than 2,000 individuals with disabilities and the elderly, living in New England and New York. For more information about Crotched Mountain, visit <http://www.crotchedmountain.org>.

1. **Don't panic!** Yes, we mentioned this already. But it can't be said enough. Those who have completed portfolios often say that it was overwhelming and scary at first but then it became energizing to work with others and to feel a sense of accomplishment when it is completed. You can do it!

Kathy Pitrat is the Director of Workforce Development and Support Strategies at The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region. She can be contacted at 410.879.6785 or [kpitrat@arcncr.org](mailto:kpitrat@arcncr.org).

## Notice

**The Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota is looking for organizations interested in participating in a research project on staff recruitment and retention interventions. We would work with the organization to gather information about turnover and other outcomes, and to implement one specific intervention in selected sites. Eligible organizations provide 24-hour residential supports to persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities. To inquire, please have the executive director or a designee with the authority to make decisions about changing human resource practices for at least some sites within the organization contact Sheryl Larson at [larso072@umn.edu](mailto:larso072@umn.edu) or by phone at 612.624.6024.**

Visit the NADSP Web site at <http://www.nadsp.org>

## Frontline Initiative Newsletter

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