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State Chapter Development
Frontline Initiative

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NADSP state chapters

DSPs promoting their workforce

By Jennifer Adams

Joining or starting a chapter of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) gives Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) the opportunity join with others to effect change for the direct support workforce. Each state chapter is unique and their activities may vary widely. State chapters voice the stories of DSPs, they celebrate successes and share best practices. State chapters participate in training and provide training to improve the quality of supports. They offer opportunities to affect public policy and influence public opinion. By starting a state chapter

you can become part of a team that can make a world of difference for individuals with disabilities and the people who support them!

Why you? As DSP, you experience triumphs and challenges every day as you support people in their communities. You are involved in the lives of people whom society often devalues. You face barriers and overcome obstacles that most people can't even imagine. You may be isolated and face these challenges alone. Have you ever wondered about other DSPs? Do they have similar experiences? Are they aware of political movements that could affect DSPs and

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Michigan Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Annual Forum. From Left: Michael Bray, Elizabeth Janks, Barbara Cardinal, & Angela Martin. See the story on page 8.

Frontline notes

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State chapters are the heart of NADSP. Like many national organizations, the national level provides the guiding principles, the mission, and a structure for local organizations. Without this framework it would be difficult for state chapters to thrive. Yet without state chapters, NADSP would not reflect the values of many DSPs driving this grassroots organization. Local and state chapters inform the activities of the national organization, channel the voices of their DSP members, and drive the activities at the national level.

Each NADSP state chapter looks and acts differently. The unique identities of state chapters are defined by the specific needs of their local DSP communities. These diverse voices enrich the organization. At the same time, consistent goals strengthen NADSP's mission.

When DSPs lobby their state representatives on workforce issues, is it more meaningful to be associated with a state and national organization? When NADSP works to influence national policy, is it necessary to have the numbers and voices of the DSP membership behind its statements? Experience tells us it is. The state chapters are the movement's community roots and

NADSP is its national voice: These two aspects of NADSP rely on each other and thrive together.

In this issue, you will find strategies to build and grow a state chapter. You will hear from one state chapter that is new and another that has been in existence for many years. There is much to be learned. Developing a state chapter is not quick or easy but it is worth the time and effort. It is the future of the DSP workforce. It is the voice of DSPs across the country and it reflects the commitment of DSPs to the work they do and the lives of the people they support.

If you have thought about gathering with other DSPs and people interested in DSP workforce issues, now is the time. As Margaret Meade said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." DSPs, speaking with a unified voice and acting both locally and nationally, can make a difference. Hopefully, this issue will give you the encouragement and tools to take those first steps. Good Luck!

The Editors

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Frontline Initiative is available in alternate formats upon request.

NADSP update

I have to smile

By Mark Olson



I am excited to have seen NADSP grow over the years and can see it holds a bright future. We should all be proud of where

we have come in the 12 years of our existence. Policymakers used to view direct support work as a secondary job market, but thanks to NADSP and its many allies, legislators now recognize direct support as a profession. We have developed products that are used regularly by DSPs, agencies, and governmental units to define and guide the growth of the profession.

When I attend industry events, I now hear the term DSP as the primary phrase for those providing direct support. Twelve years ago, a group of DSPs and allies from across the nation sat in a conference room at the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and decided that "DSP" was the only term that truly defined who we are. In order to make this happen, we had to show the world that, as highly-skilled DSPs, the work we do proves what our title says we are: professionals. So when I hear the term Direct Support Professional used as the primary name for what we do, I have to smile.

I also often hear ethics in direct support being discussed and our

NADSP code of ethics being cited in casual conversation. NADSP's work to develop and validate our code of ethics was a labor of love. So yet again, when I hear of ethical practice — the key to our profession — being discussed in casual conversation, I smile.

And when I see DSPs and organizations, from mom-and-pop shops to entire states, embracing our credential as a way to develop the DSP workforce, I smile one more time.

It has been an honor to serve as a board member of NADSP and to have been president for the past few years. I have officially tendered my resignation and am pleased to pass the baton to Lisa Burck from Mississippi. I also welcome new directors-at-large, James Meadows (Texas),

Joseph Macbeth (New York), and Stephanie Marsh (Missouri).

There is still much to do to bring the profession to its rightful standing in society and NADSP members must be the primary voices in making that happen. As I step down, I challenge the organization's leadership to accelerate growth. It is time for NADSP and its recently-incorporated foundation to raise money to develop and support local chapters, strengthen current alliances, and reach out to form new relationships.

Again, it has been a pleasure to serve NADSP and it will be a pleasure to see it thrive for years to come. I expect to smile often!

Mark Olson can be reached at molson@nadsp.org.

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in peoples' lives



DSP Recognition Week
begins September 14, 2009

Spread the word!
Start planning your events now!

Direct Support Alliance of New York State: The beginnings

By Sean Delaney and Joe Macbeth

The Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State (DSPA-NYS) exemplifies the strength of partnerships. This partnership among DSPs, organization leadership, and a dedicated statewide provider association offers an opportunity for DSPs to have a powerful voice.

For many years, the New York State Association of Community & Residential Agencies (NYSACRA) has been committed to promoting the direct support profession. In 2007, the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities announced a three-year grant focusing on workforce issues. Former board president of NYSACRA, Regis Obijiski, encouraged NYSACRA to take its commitment to DSPs a step further. In response, NYSACRA applied for a grant to develop a New York State Chapter of NADSP. In spring 2008, NYSACRA was awarded the grant. It provides funding to enroll 800 DSPs in NADSP and DSPANYS. It

also offsets some of the start-up costs associated with starting a non-profit organization.

A core group of committed DSPs were nominated as the founding members of our new state chapter. Administrators and directors from these organizations also showed their support. NYSACRA provided staff support. With these partners, we were able to meet regularly during 2008 and early 2009. The early steps were definitely the hardest. Our group struggled with differing views on how to move forward. Ultimately, we broke the development activities into a series of steps.

The first step was to identify our purpose and the NADSP goals that we will endorse. We also created the membership structure of our organization. Over the course of six months, we drafted, amended, and agreed upon our organization's name, mission and vision statements, and by-laws. We then began developing promotional materials, including a membership brochure, logo, and letter-

head. NADSP provided technical assistance to develop promotional materials and support on how to structure membership.

Next, we defined our mission and vision statements. We defined a two-fold priority for 2009: giving DSPs a public voice and strengthening that voice through NADSP membership.

Things were not always easy. We had our challenges. DSPs are often busy working more than one job or have other responsibilities at home. It is not easy to travel from across the state to meetings in Albany. But with the support of the agencies we work for, we were able to meet with each other and build a solid foundation for success.

Public voice: Reaching out to policymakers

In our debut as a statewide advocacy organization, DSPA-NYS presented its position on the proposed New York State budget, addressing direct support workforce issues. More than 300 self-advocates, family members, legislators, and policymakers attended Legislative Day. Two days later, Theresa Laws, a DSPANYS founder, testified on the same issues before a joint hearing of legislative finance committees. This was an exciting opportunity for DSPANYS to have our voice heard.

To our surprise, Governor Paterson's office requested a copy of our testimony. This led to a meeting in February with Executive Chamber staff where DSPANYS



Founding members, Joseph McRae and Ellington Crowe in San Francisco to accept the ANCOR Advocacy Award on behalf of DSPANYS for their advocacy work on behalf of advancing the profession of direct support.

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Michigan Alliance of Direct Support Professionals: Present goals and future direction

By Michael Bray

The Michigan Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (MADSP) was started in 1998 by a group of advocates, persons with disabilities, and DSPs concerned about the future of the DSP workforce in Michigan. Sharing the goal of NADSP, MADSP works to strengthen the quality of human services by empowering DSPs to increase their dignity and respect through the following activities —

- Advocating for increased wages, benefits, retirement plans, and job security,
- Facilitating access to quality education and training, and
- Providing community outreach and awareness about issues important to DSPs and MADSP.

MADSP is housed at the Developmental Disabilities Institute (DDI) at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. MADSP's financial home is with the Disability Network in Flint, Michigan. Members of DDI and the Disability Network have been involved with MADSP from the start and continue to work for the chapter's success.

MADSP has always encouraged DSPs to strengthen policy and practice through advocacy, education, and the legislative process. MADSP provides information to DSPs on how to contact and educate their legislators on issues that affect the DSP workforce. Training is also provided on how bills affect not only DSP jobs but also the lives of the people they support.

Education and training has always been an MADSP priority. The vast majority of DSPs in Michigan do not receive enough training or education relevant to the support they provide. This leads to a high turnover rate which adversely affects DSPs and the people they support.

MADSP has tried to meet these challenges by hosting an annual DSP Appreciation and Training Forum. Seven annual MADSP Forums were held from 2001 through 2007. These forums brought DSPs from across Michigan together to network, attend training and information sessions, and most importantly, to be recognized and appreciated by their peers. Too often the work done on the frontline goes unnoticed. The goal of the Forum is to provide a day for DSPs to gain recognition and become energized and invested in the field.

The format of the Forum has changed over the years from one statewide event to several smaller, regionally-based forums. MADSP provides ongoing technical and financial assistance to local and regional service providers and nonprofit groups to host their own DSP appreciation and training forums. These regional events embody the MADSP spirit and give more DSPs a chance to attend. In 2009, MADSP is involved with planning and facilitating DSP Forums in Livingston and Lenawee counties. These events also provide support and encouragement for other groups across Michigan to host their own Forum-style appreciation and training days.

Michael Bray works for the Developmental Disabilities Institute in Detroit, Michigan, and can be reached at mikebray@wayne.edu.

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was introduced. We showed our commitment to advise on policy matters relating to people with disabilities and those who support them.

Membership: Reaching out to other DSPs

DSPANYS also mailed over 700 membership brochures and applications to DSPs.

DSPANYS plans for 2009 include —

- Incorporating as a non-profit association in order to pursue grant funding;
- Participating in NYSACRA-sponsored training programs for DSPs on NADSP's Code of Ethics and the Community Support Skill Standards;
- Convening six regional conferences for DSPs; and
- Continuing outreach efforts for ongoing chapter development.

Building a state chapter takes hard work, a lot of time, and the commitment of all partners. But together we have made a difference. Our ideas are in action!

Sean Delaney is a DSP and founding member of DSPANYS. He can be reached at sdotdiz@verizon.net. Joe Macbeth works for NYSACRA and can be reached at joem@nysacra.org.

Top 10 practical things to help you start a state chapter

By Don Carrick and Jay Mackey

When we started Direct Support Professionals of Missouri (DSPM) in 1997 we discovered that starting a state chapter on direct support advocacy is a long and winding road. To help you on your journey, we've created this handy list for you to review and make sure you're staying on track. We hope this list helps you avoid the pitfalls that many beginning chapters face.

10. **Be patient.** In your work as a DSP, you've learned a lot about patience. Use that sense of patience when developing your state chapter. You will have moments when you feel like you are moving backwards instead of forwards. It is at those times you need to remember your patience.
9. **Don't be docile.** Remember how we said to be patient? Well, there are also times to not be patient. You have to be passionate about DSP advocacy. You must know in your heart that advocacy is important and that you can help make the necessary change.
8. **Make friends.** If you advocate for DSPs correctly, you will meet many new people who can help you now and in the future. Remember names and faces and get contact information on everyone. Have a sign-up sheet at each meeting or training. Then start a database you can use to send out this information; it will save you a lot of time in the long run!
7. **Include, don't exclude.** You're doing direct support advocacy, right? So it makes sense to keep your meetings "DSP only," right? Wrong. If you exclude people from coming to meetings and learning more about your chapter, those on the outside will be left to draw their own conclusions. Be as open about your organization as possible. Post minutes to meetings and send copies to administrators as well as DSPs. Invite "nay-sayers" to meetings so they can see what's going on first hand.
6. **Be thrifty, but not cheap.** The DSPs you meet with are probably on a very limited budget. Try to make meetings and trainings free. Explore the possibilities of local libraries, museums, and schools. It is difficult enough for DSPs to find the time to attend, so fees should be kept to a minimum.
5. **Make your mission clear.** Let's face facts: not many people know what DSP advocacy is, much less know a group devoted to it. Before your chapter name is out there, make sure the mission statement is clear and makes sense. NADSP's mission statement is a great place to start as you develop your own statement.
4. **Be selective.** If you're lucky and work hard, your chapter name will get out there and you'll be asked to help with lots of projects. Whenever you're asked to work on a project or align with another group, take a moment to reread your mission statement. It's better to be selective in what you do then to realize too late that you're stretched thin and can't effectively work toward your own mission statement.
3. **Be active.** It really is important that state chapters are active in NADSP. Your work in NADSP committees and other projects ensures that people hear straight from DSPs working in their communities.
2. **Be nice.** You're going to run into people who don't agree with your state chapter. Ask yourself, are you going to be able to sway this person, or is this going to turn into an argument? Fighting with someone will not win you new friends or influence anyone in a positive way. Sometimes it's best to cut your losses and walk away.
1. **Enjoy.** DSP advocacy is a lot of fun. If you work hard and stay focused, there is no telling where you'll end up and who you'll meet. Enjoy the friendships you make and the situations you find yourself in. Remind yourself that you are working to make life better for DSPs and the people they support.

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Grassroots fundraising

By Bonnie Marshall

The term “grassroots” describes any effort that derives its power from a community, in this case the community of DSPs. The lessons we learn and steps we take in organizing our community are the same for fundraising. They are based in story, relationships, and action.

Story

As DSPs, you have many stories to tell. Every day you serve individuals who need your support and who rely on you to be trained and professional. What stories can you tell that shows the importance of this work? How exactly are you improving people’s lives? If you can tell a compelling story, you can affect change.

Your chapter also has a story to tell. This story — known as a fundraising case — answers the questions of how much money you need to raise and why. As your organization grows, identify what you wish to accomplish. How much will that cost? How does it support the mission of your chapter? When you are fundraising, you are not selling a product, but rather building solidarity for an idea. Crystallize that idea and articulate it as clearly as possible.

Relationships

As you build your organization, imagine you are throwing a pebble into water. You begin with what and who you know and expand from there. First, you should believe in your mission enough to give a meaningful gift

of your time or money. Second, those who make up your internal team should also be asked to give. Grassroots fundraising welcomes and encourages small donations and large donations. Keep in mind that the way you raise your money reflects the values of your chapter.

If your chapter has dues-paying members and volunteers, one way to expand your grassroots fundraising income is to ask these individuals to contribute on a regular basis. For instance, ask them to renew their membership annually. It is important that all members understand the financial and volunteer resources needed to meet your shared goals. Special skills of volunteers also come in handy when raising funds.

From there, the circle grows wider. Loyal support from your inner circle will create momentum as you reach out to the broader community. Remember that most funds that support causes come from people, not from corporations or foundations. Take the time to identify which audiences are most invested in your mission. In some cases, this could be provider organizations, as sponsors of events, for example. Or it may be community organizations that provide grants or the families of those you serve.

Action

There are many ways to plan and carry out grassroots fundraising. Methods that are built on relationships and personal approaches are generally more effective than less personal approaches.

Sitting down with a person you know and asking for a gift is the most effective way to raise money. Of course, it is also the most uncomfortable and labor-intensive. Still, it provides the highest rate of return. You should ask for an amount that seems appropriate for them.

Some people live too far away to ask personally, or are too busy to meet with you face-to-face. In these cases, a personal phone call works well, especially if you know the person. Personal letters followed by a phone call to people that your group knows well, are easy and effective.

Special events are friend-raisers as much as fund-raisers. They are a lot of work, and often result in relatively little money but they can be fun and raise the profile of your organization.

Through your work, you have touched the lives of many people with disabilities and you can probably find others who share a common conviction: a belief that individuals with disabilities are entitled to live full lives in our community, and to support these individuals a strong, competent professional workforce is needed. If this is at the heart of your grassroots actions, you will raise the money you need to further your mission.

Bonnie Marshall is the director of individual giving for Arc Greater Twin Cities in St. Paul, Minnesota. She can be reached at bonniemarshall@arcgreatertwincities.org.

Bridging the gap

From state chapters to National

By Tony Thomas

NADSP has been presented with an interesting opportunity as a part of its growth. State chapters, a long-time source of support and leadership for NADSP, are faced with differing positions on issues that affect their DSP constituents. What does it mean when a state chapter and the national organization have different views on critical issues? State chapters are immersed in the day-to-day work of supporting people in the community and promoting workforce development initiatives on a grassroots level while the national organization surveys the big picture. This can be a challenge or an opportunity. How can we most effectively work together to bridge this gap?

We have been on a growth curve at NADSP, especially when it comes to encouraging the growth of state chapters. If you think about it, there is no other place for NADSP to gain members. As a national leader on DSP issues, the national organization must be fueled and eventually sustained by state chapter development.

We now have over 20 state chapters or state affiliations. Some state chapters have become incorporated and have their own policies and procedures that make them unique and distinct state organizations. At the national level, NADSP must be aware of and respect these differences that make each chapter unique. As the national level strengthens its policies and practices, it is important to recognize not only the com-

monalities but also the distinctions across chapters. Naturally, the context of each chapter will look different, yet the driving force is the creation of a common voice of DSPs in this country to work toward building a well-trained, competent, recognized direct support professional workforce.

At the NADSP Board level, a great mix of national leaders, DSPs, and self-advocates are listening and considering the various issues that arise. We have all committed to working with state chapters to encourage their growth and development. Some of the issues that the NADSP and state chapters must deal with are a natural by-product of growth. This is to be celebrated, for it is only through this growth that our voice will be recognized in important places like the statehouse committee meetings and the halls of Congress in Washington D.C.

As national and state chapters of NADSP all work toward our common goal, we are committed to partnering with state chapters in the following ways —

- 1. On a communication level.** Always be aware that certain issues will influence our respective directions. Discuss these differences openly and honestly and try to reach consensus on those issues.
- 2. On a critical issue level.** Work towards a common agenda on critical issues that DSPs face daily, like wages and benefits.
- 3. On a practical level.** Invite the leadership groups of the state chapters to NADSP national meetings.
- 4. On a contact level.** Have NADSP board members “reach out and touch” the contacts at the state level through conference calls and participation in state meetings.
- 5. On a policy level.** NADSP recommends policy and practice to states but does not dictate their actions. NADSP encourages state chapters to consider the national policy agenda in its effort to promote the DSP workforce as a whole.
- 6. On an involvement level.** NADSP encourages all state chapters to gain members and DSP experience on their boards at the state level. From these ranks our future NADSP leaders will emerge.

As a founding member of the NADSP board and a person who is also committed to the development of state chapters, I would like to hear your feedback. To share your thoughts or recommend practices, please e-mail me at tthomas@welcomehouseinc.org.

Tony Thomas is President of the Ohio Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (OADSP) and is a former NADSP Trustee.

Your journey as a grassroots advocate

By Beth Fondell

Grassroots advocacy is the most basic form of citizen action DSPs can take. It gives each of us the privilege of shaping public policy by working together. Establishing good public policies without gathering citizen interest and involvement is like trying to enjoy a bubble bath without the bubbles! There's no pizzazz.

Solid public policies make sure children and adults with disabilities, and their families, have the same quality of life that people without disabilities enjoy. This only happens when citizens who care get involved. Each one of us is responsible for helping our representatives fully understand what matters to people with disabilities.

So how does one person develop and continue partnerships with elected representatives? Here are ten basic actions you can take to start your journey as a grassroots advocate —

1. VOTE! To refrain from exercising this basic right is to silence your voice and your values.
2. Find out who represents your state, county, city, and school district so you can personally introduce yourself.
3. Determine what public policies affect your life and get in touch with organizations that focus on what you care about. For example, if you care about policies that impact the lives of people with disabilities, sign up to receive Action Alerts from your state chapter of The Arc.
4. Develop a personal story to share with policymakers that addresses why you care about a certain issue. For example, tell the story of working as a DSP for someone with a disability to promote the value of that relationship and the support the individual needs.
5. Keep in touch with your elected representatives to encourage their support of certain actions or to thank them for working on something you wanted.
6. Write letters to the newspaper or blog on issues and decisions that policymakers are considering and you feel strongly about.
7. Attend legislative hearings, town hall and/or school board meetings and speak up about the issues you care about.
8. Organize gatherings for your neighbors and friends to meet the elected representatives in your community and set an agenda to discuss specific topics.
9. Mentor another person to help develop their confidence in becoming a grassroots advocate.
10. Join a coalition of people who are drafting policy so elected representatives can review the draft and introduce it into law. For example, join the special education advisory committee in your school district or your city's human rights council.

Many groups and institutions nationwide encourage citizens to advocate and actively participate in public policy. To get involved, type "grassroots advocacy" and the location that interests you into your Internet search engine. From there it's all about making choices and taking action. And remember what Horace Mann wrote: "A different world cannot be built by indifferent people." One person really can make a difference in the lives of others.

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NADSP supporting organizations & state chapters and affiliates

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 —

- Adults & Children with Learning and Developmental Disabilities, Inc.
- Alexandria Community Services Board
- Catholic Charities Disabilities Services
- College of Direct Support
- Crystal Run Village, Inc.
- Grace Community Services
- Greystone Programs, Inc.
- HeartShare Human Services of New York
- Innovative Learning, LLC
- Koinonia Homes, Inc.
- NYSARC, Inc: Jefferson Rehabilitation Center
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- New Horizons
- Ohio PATHS
- SECOH
- Services For the UnderServed
- Special People in Northeast, Inc.
- The Adirondack Arc
- Ulster-Greene Arc
- Woodfords Family Services

State chapters and affiliates

(*) Denotes state chapters with due-paying memberships.

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NADSP state chapters: DSPs promoting their workforce

continued from page 1

the people they support? As a DSP myself, I have asked all these questions.

I quickly discovered that being a part of a state chapter NADSP offers new and rewarding opportunities. Through local chapters you will find the camaraderie of sharing your experience with other people who provide direct support. Nobody understands the job you do like another DSP. Right now there are many DSPs facing the same challenges that you face. Imagine all the new and interesting ways that people are addressing these and finding success. Whether you are facing budget cuts, having problems with your supervisor, or advocating for the people you support, there is a good chance that another DSP has had a similar experience. Sharing stories, recognizing the value of direct support work and empowering each other, are all reasons to be part of a state chapter.

Another important aspect of being part of a state chapter is becoming involved with public policy. To change public policy, DSPs must form a united front. DSPs from across the country need to step forward and demand to be recognized for their valuable work. Politicians do not want to hear from CEOs that their agencies need more money for direct support workers; DSPs should speak up for themselves. Politicians must see the faces of the people who will be impacted by budget cuts, and those are the faces of DSPs and the people you support. Being part of a DSP organization gives you the opportunity to make a difference on a local, state, and national level. There are many reasons to join a state chapter of NADSP. If there isn't a chapter in your state, think about starting one!

Jenifer Adams is NADSP Secretary in Hermon, Maine. She can be reached at jadams@nadsp.org.

Frontline resources

State chapter development

National Council of Nonprofits

www.councilofnonprofits.org

The National Council of Nonprofits provides information and resources for new and growing nonprofit organizations.

National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals

www.nadsp.org

NADSP's website provides tools and information to develop a state chapter. Click on the "Membership" tab on the left side of the page and then scroll down to the "Chapter Development Toolkit."

Frontline resources

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