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The NADSP E-Badge Academy:

Integrating Direct Support Professional Knowledge, Skills & Values into a National Career Ladder Program

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Introduction

Today, there is a growing body of research demonstrating the impact of industry shifts away from higher education degrees towards skill – specific credentialing as a means to ensure a competent workforce. According to the Harvard Business Review “education is a misleading to-malignant proxy for economic productivity or performance. Knowledge may be power, but ‘knowledge from college’ is neither predictor nor guarantor of success¹.” Because higher education degrees do not reliably predict skills and competency, many industries are seeking platforms and opportunities for employees to demonstrate standardized skills necessary to their role, such as credentials². Several industries have adopted standardized credentials, including electricians, brick masons, carpenters, and information technology professionals. These careers have been professionalized across society due to the complex nature of the work and the expectation of quality. While credentialing is not the only reason for this professionalism, the credential, across industries, gives credence to the capabilities of these professionals.

While credentialing has many different meanings across industries, developing a national credentialing standard for the direct support workforce is one of the many solutions that are desperately needed to fulfill the promises made by landmark decisions and legislation like the Olmstead Decision and the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is perceived that a standardized credentialing structure, such as the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) E-Badge Academy, would accomplish three key milestones to workforce stabilization:

- 1 ensure that DSPs receive, understand and implement an enhanced & robust training curriculum that is accredited by a national authority that exceeds minimal state requirements and leads to meaningful outcomes for people with disabilities.
- 2 coordinating competency-based credentialing within state reimbursement rate structures for incentive payments based on credentialing to raise DSP wages and linked to skill enhancement to attract qualified workers; and
- 3 introducing a career pathway that is universally accepted, portable and promotes employee tenure by keeping high performing DSPs in their jobs and compensating them with commensurate wages and recognition.

1 Higher Education is Overrated; Skills Aren't. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2010/07/higher-education-is-highly-over>;

2 Your Credentials are Holding you Back. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2013/02/your-credentials-are-holding-y>



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In a report to the President in 1996, John F. Kennedy Jr., the founder of the NADSP, wrote of Quality in the intellectual and disabilities service system as being “defined at the point of interaction between the staff member and the individual with a developmental disability³”. This simple, yet somewhat profound statement has made a deep impact on the vision, mission and guiding principles of the NADSP. We’ve spent the better part of twenty-five years interpreting it, sharing it and incorporating its message into our organization’s culture. We believe that what John Kennedy Jr. and his colleagues likely meant was; quality doesn’t happen by accident, it requires rigor, intention and reflection. Quality happens through the integration of a DSP’s knowledge, skills and

values and when a DSP intentionally infuses these foundational aspects into their work, it can lead to meaningful outcomes, full inclusion, and rich, fulfilling lives for people with disabilities in their chosen communities. As we will demonstrate in this implementation plan, the E-Badge Academy brings this definition of quality to life.

Therefore, quality is the hallmark of the NADSP’s E-Badge Academy. Through a deliberative process that took several years of research and included input from DSPs, people with disabilities, family members, researchers and the provider community, the E-Badge Academy has become NADSP’s most compelling contribution to address a decades-long systemic-failure.

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- 3** Opportunities for Excellence: Supporting the Frontline Workforce. U.S Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. President’s Committee on Mental Retardation, Washington, DC 1996



Designing and Launching The E-Badge Academy

In 2007, the NADSP launched a portfolio-based credentialing program that used the Community Support Skill Standards⁴ (CSSS) as the basis for skill demonstration and required the DSP to produce eight comprehensive “work samples” from the twelve CSSS competency areas that often took more than a year to complete. DSPs were required to do this outside of their work schedules and did not receive any feedback on their work until the portfolio was submitted for review to the NADSP. After a decade of trying to make this credentialing program more accessible and intuitive for DSPs, the feedback from them was overwhelming; it required far too much time to fit in their busy schedules, it was too academic and it intimidated DSPs who were uncomfortable with the amount of time and the amount of writing that was required. Furthermore, the feedback we received from their employers was that this model was too cumbersome and could never be brought to national scale. It needed to be re-built from the ground up.



In 2017, after a two-day summit that included NADSP staff & board members, people with disabilities, family members, agency trainers and service providers our Education, Training and Workforce Development (ETWD) Committee was tasked to break down the eight “work samples” from the CSSS and create dozens of electronic badges using the new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Core Competency Areas,⁵ which are validated by research design and written for DSPs who work across service sectors, as the framework for a new credentialing model.

While we were building this new paradigm that introduced the CMS Core Competency Areas, other aspects of the portfolio-based credentialing program were also carefully reviewed. The training requirements (knowledge) and the Code of Ethics (values) as used in the portfolio model were given careful consideration during the process because they were either impractical or not reflective of the hallmarks of quality. The training requirements in the first credentialing iteration were stacked with 100 and 200 hours of competency-based training from a NADSP accredited curriculum, which was often challenging for an employer to provide and for the DSP to verify. Meanwhile, the only integration of the Code of Ethics⁶ into the original program was a “read and sign” form of the Code of Ethics to be submitted as part of the portfolio packet. Realizing that ethical practice comprises 1/3 of the quality triad, it must have a much larger role in the new digital badge program that we were building.

⁴ Community Support Skills Standards. Bradley, V. and Taylor, M. Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), Boston, MA (1996)

⁵ The DSW Core Competency Project. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/long-term-services-supports/workforce-initiative/index.html>

⁶ National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics (2016): <https://nadsp.org/resources/the-nadsp-code-of-ethics/>

During this time, we also began to build our E-Badge reviewer cohort, an ever-expanding community of workforce experts, trainers, executives, family members, or people who have expertise in a specific competency area. E-Badge reviewers demonstrate their reliability in passing an annual inter-rater reliability test showing at least 85% consistency in the scoring of sample E-Badge submissions. Reviewers have available NADSP staff support when encountering particularly difficult reviews or when a submission raises concerns of unethical behavior.

After the review of several vendors (and one false start), we selected a company named Web Courseworks in early 2018 to begin building a learning management system (LMS) that has the load capacity to handle millions of potential users at any given time. After writing the E-Badge language using the CMS competency areas, deciding how to stack the badges into three levels of certifications, settling on the visual design of the actual badges and developing a marketing plan, we were finally ready to pilot the initial version of the E-Badge Academy. Building strong, trusting partnerships with the provider community has always been important to NADSP – it's the best way that we've been able to reach DSPs. After much consideration, we selected DSPs who worked in agencies from Maryland, South Dakota, Vermont, and Virginia to test our new credentialing program. During this six-month pilot, we sought regular feedback from our front-end users, participating provider agency local administrators and badge reviewers. After making the necessary modifications, on January 9, 2019, we ready to launch to a national audience.

Results by the Numbers – Accredited Education E-Badges

In order to be well informed of best practices, the DSP seeking certification must have a certain number of hours of nationally accredited, competency-based education. This type of education is far more robust than the basic training that is presently required by any state. Because we believe that training standards, across the board, should be elevated and recognized, DSPs in the E-Badge Academy can earn Accredited Education E-Badges by uploading training transcripts and certificates from approved training programs. To earn any of the three levels of certification via the E-Badge Academy, a DSP must have demonstrated their knowledge through Accredited Education E-Badges.



While the NADSP does offer training curricula in a variety of specialty areas, it's important to note that the E-Badge Academy is *NOT* a training program. We are committed to forging partnerships with training organizations to review and accredit their product. This certification program offers DSPs and their employers' access to a wide range of products to choose one that fits their specific needs. As of October, 2021, the following training curricula have been approved to meet our standards for certification:



Direct Support Professional Accredited Training Curricula

- **The College of Direct Support** is a multimedia, interactive, web-based curriculum. CDS offers training in content areas that have been identified as critical to successfully supporting people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in the community. For more information go to www.directcourseonline.com/direct-support/
- **The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)** now has a certified apprenticeship program for the occupational title of direct support specialist. Certified apprenticeship programs must meet the federal guidelines and be reviewed and approved by the NADSP. For more information, go to www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20101026
- **Relias** offers online learning, staff compliance training and continuing education for organizations that serve people with developmental disabilities, as well as behavioral health, mental health, addiction treatment, community health, community action and child welfare. For more information go to www.relias.com.
- **PATHS** is the credentialing program of the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (OADSP). It provides a rigorous training and education program based on the principles of self-determination and ethical practice. For more information go to www.ohiopaths.org
- **North Dakota Community Staff Training Program** has provided staff training through a cooperative effort of the North Dakota Department of Human Services, the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University, and community agencies serving persons with developmental disabilities. <https://www.ndcpd.org/projects/cstp/>
- **ARC Broward PATHS Certificate Program** is designed to create a competency based and credentialed career path for Direct Support Professionals. Coupled with mentorship, experiential learning opportunities and placement resources, PATHS will support students to find a career in this high demand field. <http://www.arcbrowardlearning.com/DSPATHS>
- **The Academy for Direct Support Professionals** – *the Center for Disability and Development at Texas A&M University*. Candidates pursuing entry level recognition as a DSP are required by The Academy to take an introductory course in Person Centered Practices along with other requirements. www.nadsp-academy-overview.pdf
- **Star Services** provides engaging online and live curriculum for social service professionals, including photos, video, audio and story-based learning that requires the learner to interact with the content. STAR uses expert experience and examples from the field, person-centered philosophy and evidence-based content in areas of compliance, regulations, continuing education and skills development. www.starsvcs.com.
- **Open Future Learning** is changing the way Direct Support Staff learn. Leading organizations use their resources because they inspire and engage their staff. Direct Support Staff deserve specialized and dedicated training. Open Future Learning is 100% dedicated to the field of developmental disabilities. For more information and to access a free trial visit: www.openfuturelearning.org
- **Human Services Credentialing Program** – *Providers' Council (Massachusetts)* is a statewide association of health and human service agencies. The Providers' Council's Human Services Credentialing Program is a set of curricula designed to develop and implement standards and competencies for Direct Support and Direct Service Professionals within the field of human services. <http://providers.org/pages/human-services-credentialing-program>



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Frontline Supervisor (FLS) Accredited Training Curricula

- **The Training Collaborative for Innovative Leadership** is a shared venture developed by and for community-based organizations. The programs are designed to promote quality excellence by focusing on strategies that enhance personal outcomes for individuals with disabilities.
www.facebook.com/thetrainingcollaborative/
- **Relias Learning**. In addition to their training for direct support professionals, Relias also has a series of courses that is fully accredited for frontline supervisors by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. For more information go to www.relias.com/.
- **The College of Frontline Supervision and Management (CFSM)** is a multimedia, interactive, web-based curriculum. CFSM offers training in content areas that have been identified as critical to successfully supporting people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in the community. For more information go to directcourseonline.com/frontline-supervision-management/

For the first time at a national level, the E-Badge Academy is raising the standards for DSP training. We are now able to review DSP's records of accredited training content, quantify the amount of accredited training that was received and recognize & reward them by offering E-Badges for their professional education that also leads to certification. See the results below:

Accredited Education Hours	Accredited Education E-Badges Awarded
DSP Accredited Education (10 hours)	571
DSP Accredited Education (25 hours)	492
DSP Accredited Education (50 hours)	516
DSP Accredited Education (75 hours)	237
DSP Accredited Education (100 hours)	217
Total Number of Accredited Education E-Badges Awarded as of June 1, 2021	2033

E-Badge Academy users apply for Accredited Education badges by uploading training records from NADSP-Accredited training programs. Badges are awarded when the documentation shows enough hours to meet or exceed the requirements for the badge. The 50- and 100- hour badges are key because they are required for the first and second level of DSP certification, and sometimes DSPs will focus on meeting those certification requirements without applying for the badges representing fewer hours.

While it is difficult to determine exactly how many accredited training hours have been completed in the E-Badge Academy, a conservative estimate would be that at least 36,650 hours of competency-based training have been submitted and approved as of June 1, 2021.



Results by the Numbers

– Core Competency E-Badges

After receiving a deeper knowledge base from the accredited training program, the competent DSP will intentionally apply what they learned in their work with people with disabilities. These skills, which are observable and measurable, are directly aligned with the nationally validated CMS Core Competency Areas.

In order to receive Core Competency E-Badges, the DSP provides two-part testimonials that describe an interaction with a person supported in which the skill statement associated with that E-Badge was used to achieve a personal outcome. These testimonials can be uploaded by the DSP into the E-Badge Academy's LMS as a Word document, PDF, or audio file. It's important to note that testimonials are not theoretical. They must be a real interaction that is directly related to the CMS skill standard to which the E-badge is aligned. Furthermore, uploading E-Badge testimonials does not require time away from providing direct support. Our E-Badge Academy users tell us they often complete the testimonials at the end of their shifts while completing other documentation. While a testimonial might represent many weeks of direct support work, the process of writing and uploading the testimonial should only take about 15 minutes. Local Administrators at each participating provider organization assist the DSPs to understand the E-Badge Academy, are able to review their testimonials, and play a major role in supporting their DSP's success throughout the process by identifying potential E-Badges.



The Anatomy of a Core Competency E-Badge

As previously mentioned, each Core Competency E-Badge is associated with one skill statement from the CMS Core Competencies. This skill statement is the starting point from which NADSP generates the prompts for each badge.

Each Core Competency badge has two prompts that the user must address in a testimonial.

- The first prompt asks for an example in which the applicant has used their **skills** in this area to provide quality support that led to a positive outcome.
- The second prompt, which is quite often more challenging for the DSP, asks the DSP to explain how the **values** (Code of Ethics) of the profession are illustrated in their example. This prompt requires the DSP to be reflective about their work and identify how ethical principles may have guided them in their practice, overcome potential barriers for the person with a disability and prepare them with tools for future.

For the first time at a national level, the E-Badge Academy is providing a structure that is collecting tens of thousands of testimonials from DSPs that unequivocally demonstrate that quality is, indeed, being achieved at the point of interaction. All testimonials are reviewed by an objective third party reviewer that has the professional authority to award or deny recognition. This qualitative data is housed in a national database that is maintained by the NADSP. The below chart shows the number of E-Badges for each CMS Core Competency Area that has been awarded to participating DSPs as of June 1, 2021

CMS Core Competency Area	Total E-Badges
Communication	707
Person-Centered Practices	1605
Evaluation and Observation	633
Crisis Prevention and Intervention	1091
Safety	1363
Professionalism and Ethics	787
Empowerment and Advocacy	769
Health and Wellness	1364
Community Living Skills and Supports	791
Community Inclusion and Networking	714
Cultural Competency	476
Education, Training and Self-Development	700
Total CMS Competency Badges	11000

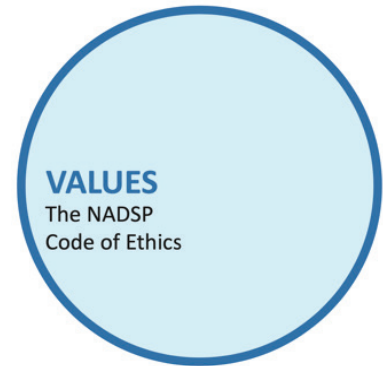
Results by the Numbers

– Values E-Badges

An ethical DSP must continually examine their own values and beliefs while honoring those of the people they support. In order to maintain the promise of partnership and respect that must exist in a supportive relationship, a strong ethical foundation is critical to help DSPs navigate through the maze of influences that bombard them.

As previously mentioned, the DSP testimonials submitted for Core Competency E-Badges must also include a reflective statement on how the values of the profession were illustrated in the example of their work that is being showcased in the testimonial. However, in order to begin earning any E-Badges, the DSP must first make a commitment to provide services which are in line with the NADSP Code of Ethics.

In addition to the required ethics commitment E-Badge and the reflective testimonials required for most Core Competency E-Badges, the CMS Core Competency Areas also includes an area called “Professionalism & Ethics” within which a DSP can pursue the “Ethics Roadmap”, “Respecting Confidentiality” and “Self-Care” E-Badges. As of June 1, 2021, the E-Badges awarded which are directly specific to ethics are:



Competency Area	E-Badge Name	Number of E-Badges Earned
Professionalism and Ethics	Ethics Roadmap	164
Professionalism and Ethics	Respecting Confidentiality	243
Professionalism and Ethics	Self-Care	380
n/a	NADSP Code of Ethics Commitment	1448

Results by the Numbers – NADSP Certifications

The E-Badge Academy provides opportunity for DSPs to demonstrate that they have an up-to-date and relevant skill set, highlight their professional achievements, and document the value that they bring to a partnership with the people they support. E-Badges are stacked together to achieve NADSP's DSP-I, DSP-II and DSP-III level certifications.

To earn the DSP-I Certification, a DSP must meet the following criteria:

- **15 total E-Badges which must include:**
 - The Code of Ethics Commitment badge
 - The 50 hours of Accredited Education badge
 - At least one Core Competency badge from the following Core Competency Areas:
 - Crisis Prevention and Intervention
 - Safety
 - Person-Centered Practices
 - Health and Wellness



To earn the DSP-II badge, you must meet the following criteria:

- **30 total E-Badges which must include:**
 - The DSP-I badge
 - The 100 hours of Accredited Education badge
 - At least one Core Competency badge from:
 - Evaluation and Observation
 - Communication
 - Professionalism and Ethics
 - Community Inclusion and Networking



To earn the DSP-III badge, you must meet the following criteria:

- **50 total badges which must include:**
 - The DSP-II badge
 - At least one Core Competency badge from:
 - Empowerment and Advocacy
 - Community Living Skills and Supports
 - Education, Training and Self-Development
 - Cultural Competence



For the first time at a national level, the E-Badge Academy is providing a structure that is **flexible** and works with all NADSP accredited training programs. DSPs have the freedom to select which E-Badges they will seek and can explain how their individual work met the standards set forth in the wide variety of skill statements.

The E-Badge Academy is also **practical** where DSPs are asked to apply their learning on the job and provides an extra incentive to take a best-practices approach to their work. Unlike our portfolio-based credentialing program, the E-Badge Academy is highly **informative** and provides prompt and clear feedback to the DSP within three business days of submitting a testimonial. Lastly, each DSP's badge collection provides a visual representation of their skill set that is portable and can be easily shared with prospective employers, who in turn can hire with confidence that the DSP has demonstrated the highest level of direct support practice.

The below chart shows the number of national certifications that have been awarded to participating DSPs and Front-Line Supervisors as of June 1, 2021:

NADSP Certifications	Currently at Level	Have Reached Level
DSP-I	207	383
DSP-II	66	176
DSP-III	110	110
Front Line Supervisor	40	40
Total NADSP Certificates		709

**The E-Badge Academy also includes a badge and certification program for Front-Line Supervisors based on the UMN FLS Competency set. For purposes of this paper, we determined to solely focus on the DSP program and not complicate matters for the reader.*



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Applying the E-Badge Academy in Provider Organizations

When an organization contacts us about the E-Badge Academy, we provide detailed information about implementation strategies that work. We learned from our 2018 pilot program that support from executive leadership and buy-in at all levels is important. Time is a valuable commodity in DSP work, and to be successful, a DSP needs to be given the time to attend advanced training and practice being more intentional on the job.

Organizations must also develop an in-house workforce champion (local administrator) to provide on-going user support, provide financial incentives and other recognition to make this work. When organizations merely purchase seats in the E-Badge Academy without a structure that supports the DSPs throughout the process, they are left to fend for themselves. Highly motivated, high achieving DSPs can be successful with little support, but it will not have a broader impact without organizational support.

Therefore, it is critically important that a career ladder program using this model be incorporated into the culture of an organization that values and promotes professional development. These best practices are like oxygen to a career ladder initiative, it will not survive without them.

For the purposes of this paper, we've asked three "early adopter" provider organizations that have developed best practices in implementing and sustaining the E-Badge Academy into customized career ladder programs to provide detailed information about their organization, the incentives they provide DSPs to pursue certification and the impact the E-Badge Academy has had on DSP turnover and quality of services.

Black Hills Works, for more than 60 years, has provided homes, employment, recreation, and social outlets for adults with disabilities. Today, they support almost 600 people with a wide array of disabilities, creating a community where everyone participates to achieve a life of full potential. Above all, Black Hills Works is a person-centered agency. They put the people they support at the center of their agency and the decisions and planning that impact their lives. To help people self-direct their lives, they provide education, exposure, and experiences so that they can determine their own goals, and provide the supports they need to achieve their dreams.

Penn-Mar Human Services for nearly 40 years, Penn-Mar has been providing high caliber services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). With a mission to transform life into living for adults with disabilities, they offer a range of services that reflect the needs of the women and men they support who are seeking to fulfill their potential for a better life. Penn-Mar supports people in living their best lives, whether that is securing a job, learning to grocery shop or getting married. Their services include Community Living Options, In-Home Supports, Transportation Services, Case Management, and Meaningful Day Services including Employment Services, Center-Based Supports, Virtual Supports, and Employment Services. All services follow a person-centered model, empowering individuals to take the lead in their personal growth.

The Arc Mid-Hudson is a not-for-profit, voluntary organization that supports people with intellectual and other disabilities in Ulster, Greene, Putnam and Columbia Counties in NYS. Their supports include residential, day habilitation, community habilitation, waiver respite services, vocational and school-to-work programs, clinical services, and two schools. They serve over 1400 individuals and employ about 1600 employees, about 900 of whom are DSPs. They are accredited by the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL).



The following chart provides how each organization customized their career ladder program, using existing budget funds to incentivize DSPs to pursue certification using the E-Badge Academy.

Black Hills Works	Penn-Mar Human Services	Arc Mid-Hudson
<p>How it works:</p> <p>E-badge at Black Hills Works is paid for by the agency and the time they are working on it is considered paid work hours. Enrollment is open to any DSP or Frontline leader who has completed their orientation requirements, is in good standing with the agency, and has maintained ongoing training requirements. They have a one-page application that interested staff complete and it is signed by their leadership. They offer a variety of training tools to help them through the process, including flow charts, short videos, and handouts for getting started on the process. They have also developed a training spreadsheet to assist staff with tracking and submitting their Open Future Learning hours.</p>	<p>How it works:</p> <p>Penn-Mar uses an annual open enrollment period with an application process. To apply, each applicant must have worked at Penn-Mar for a minimum of 6 months in at least a Part Time or Full-Time position. Direct support work must be a main function of their position and they must be in good standing with Penn-Mar with a previous evaluation of at least “fully competent”. The application also requests they provide at least one letter/video of support from someone they support, family member, or someone in their support network. Each applicant must watch the NADSP E-Badge Academy webinar and answer questions regarding their dedication to the direct support field, their strengths as DSPs, and prospects for the future.</p>	<p>How it works:</p> <p>EBA are selected through a simple application process; the requirements are that they are in current good standing without significant disciplinary actions in their recent file, and we require a recommendation from their supervisor. There is no seniority requirement. They have 2-3 cohorts each year with an “open enrollment” period of about a month for each cohort; they encourage DSPs to complete the program within a year. They offer an initial orientation session to teach them how to navigate the system, brainstorm badge ideas, and show them a badge sample. In addition to this, they offer a monthly virtual “workshop” and 1:1 counseling session as requested. Prior to issuing their bonus, they conduct a final 1:1 meeting with each DSP to give them an opportunity to talk about their badge work.</p>



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Black Hills Works	Penn-Mar Human Services	Arc Mid-Hudson
<p>Financial Incentives:</p> <p>Upon completion, DSPs receive one-time bonuses:</p> <p>DSP-I is \$100 DSP-II is \$200 DSP-III is \$300</p> <p>Certification is also the first required step in getting credentialed at Black Hills Works. Once credentialing is complete, staff are eligible for raises, increasing their earning capacity over \$10,000 per year.</p>	<p>Financial Incentives:</p> <p>Upon completion, DSPs receive one-time bonuses:</p> <p>DSP-I: .50 premium wage, \$1,500 certification bonus and \$500 annual retention bonus</p> <p>DSP-II: \$2,000 certification bonus, \$750 annual retention bonus.</p> <p>DSP-III: \$3,000 certification bonus, \$1,000 annual retention</p>	<p>Financial Incentives:</p> <p>Upon completion, DSPs receive one-time bonuses:</p> <p>A \$500 bonus is provided at the time a DSP receives the credential and then annually for as long as they retain their credentialed status. They receive \$800 annual bonus if they get DSP and FLS certifications. This is tracked using their LMS to ensure DSPs keep up on their re-certifications and receive their bonuses on time.</p>
<p>Other Forms of Recognition:</p> <p>DSPs are recognized through signage, agency emails, social media, and the agency newsletter. They also are encouraged to use their credentials in their email signature block.</p>	<p>Other Forms of Recognition:</p> <p>An all-staff email is sent across the organization to recognize each level of certification achieved by the DSPs. This email has a picture of each DSP holding their certificate and typically includes a quote from them about their experience in EBA. This shows insight into the program and allows members of leadership and their peers to reach out to congratulate them. They also post these milestones on social media for further recognition by the community.</p>	<p>Other Forms of Recognition:</p> <p>Upon receiving their credential, they celebrate publicly with a surprise visit from their credentialing "champions" with balloons and big whiteboard check for the amount of their bonus. They share their pictures on internal and external social media sites. They enjoy agency perks throughout the year, such as being considered to be VIPs at the agency employee recognition dinner. Pre-COVID, they held bi-annual, in-person orientation/graduation celebrations where old cohorts came together with the executive team to share their badge work and mentor the next cohort.</p>



Black Hills Works	Penn-Mar Human Services	Arc Mid-Hudson
<p>What impact did the E-Badge Academy have on your DSPs?</p> <p>The biggest impact we have seen is in the confidence of our DSPs. They see their work differently, recognizing their own value. They begin to see their role and are more engaged in the organization, more willing to share ideas and opinions and help create positive change. For the agency as a whole, it has added a level of opportunity and accountability. The career ladders that include the NADSP e-badge certification, coupled with internal credentialing classes, provide a way for staff to build their skills, knowledge and wages. It is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to ongoing learning and a growth-mindset, which are key to professionalizing the DSP position.</p>	<p>What impact did the E-Badge Academy have on your DSPs?</p> <p>This program has influenced their workforce through a change in perspective and understanding of what it means to be person-centered and how to implement it through their role, approach, and behavior as DSPs. As participants go through this program, they are shifting how they see their work and why they do what they do. With this type of self-awareness, you start to see DSPs change how they support people. By implementing what they have learned, we increase the quality of support across the organization as they offer informed choice, listen better, and promote independence. The DSP is also encouraged and motivated to do the work as they feel valued by both the people they work with and work for.</p>	<p>What impact did the E-Badge Academy have on your DSPs?</p> <p>Supervisors report that DSPs who are credentialled show increased confidence and empowerment, which improves both their performance as DSPs and contributes significantly to the overall quality of their program. Certified DSPs indicate that they feel more empowered and competent in their jobs and they are more likely to apply for (and get) promotions, volunteer to sit on committees, request additional training, attend conferences, and become natural mentors for new hires and co-workers in their programs. All certified DSPs mentor new hires OTJ for up to 6 weeks and they have a positive impact on the retention of new hires, as well as the overall workplace culture of the programs in which they train.</p>



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The E-Badge Academy and its Impact on DSP Turnover

Finding creative ways to keep high-performing DSPs in their jobs has plagued this system for decades. The costs of replacing a DSP in I/DD services have been reported to be between \$2,413 and \$5,200⁷. With nearly a 50% turnover rate nationally, these costs are estimated at \$2,338,716,600⁸. So, it's not surprising that the most frequent question potential E-Badge Academy customers ask is, "how will it reduce my DSP turnover"? As our three organizations clearly demonstrate in the following chart, certified DSPs through the E-Badge Academy remain in their jobs at a significantly higher rate than their non-certified colleagues, providing a significant return on an organization's investment and saving scarce financial resources.

E-Badge Academy Organization	Location	Average Annual Turnover All DSPs (2019-2020)	Average Annual Turnover Certified DSPs (2019-2020)
Black Hills Works	Rapid City, South Dakota	47.15%	10.45%
Penn-Mar Human Services	Glen Rock, Pennsylvania	36.55%	7.50%
Arc Mid-Hudson	Kingston, New York	45.95%	4.41%

⁷ Hewitt, A., & Larson, S. (2007). The direct support workforce in community supports to individuals with developmental disabilities: Issues, implications, and promising practices. *Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13, 178- 187. doi:10.1002/mrdd.20151

⁸ Report to the President, 2017. America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis: Effects on People with Intellectual Disabilities, Families, Communities and the U.S. Economy, President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Full%20Report_0.PDF



What Our E-Badge Academy Earners of the Month Are Telling Us?

Based on recommendations from the E-Badge Reviewer Community, each month the NADSP selects one DSP as its “Earner of the Month” for submitting one, or more, exemplary testimonials that demonstrate high performance, effort, and exceptional outcomes. As part of this recognition program, we interview the awardee and share a description of their work and interview responses across our network and on social media. Here’s what they’re telling us:

“The E-Badge Academy allows me to reflect on my work and examine what I learned. It lets me share this experience and show my competencies. I can grow professionally this way and feel more confident about the work I am doing.” *Giselda Bracco, Families First Vermont, Brattleboro, VT*

“Wow, the whole process is really deep. The NADSP E-Badge Academy reviewers read every competency with a critical focus. They make corrections where work does not align with the NADSP Code of Ethics and ask me to review and resubmit. So, to earn this competency was not a one goal thing. The process was really helpful for me.” *Alaba Owolabi, Penn-Mar Human Services, Freeland, MD*

“E-Badge Academy has benefited our agency by helping to create a workforce that thinks critically about their jobs: the ethics, the practices, the foundational elements of what it means to be a DSP. It has required our team to reflect, grow, and learn and has been invaluable in their ongoing development.” *Nick Filarelli, Core Services of Northeast Tennessee, Johnson City, TN*

“NADSP E-Badge Academy benefits my agency by providing all employees with a great foundation with the Code of Ethics and then provides them with the opportunity to demonstrate how they have applied what they have learned with the competencies.” *Brookley Garman, Black Hills Works, Rapid City, SD*

Conclusion

Since its launch in January 2019, the E-Badge Academy has improved DSP practice standards and provided much needed recognition for the complexity of direct support services. It has significantly reduced turnover for DSPs who achieve certification in agencies that built career ladder programs. Most importantly, it has led to meaningful and improved outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the United States.

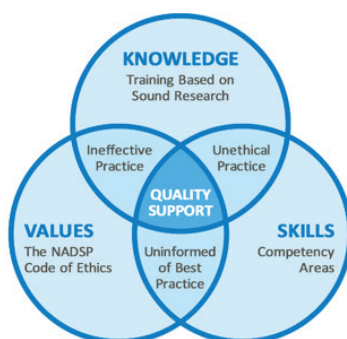
Based on sound research, stakeholder collaboration and state of the art technology, the E-Badge Academy is built for growth. By using the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Core Competency set, the E-Badge Academy can be used by the direct service workforce across service sectors to include mental health, substance use disorders, developmental and physical disabilities, and the aging population that requires long-term services and supports in the home and community.

Using other specialty-area competency sets that currently exist, our vision is to expand and create a true on-line academy where the fastest growing occupation in the country - the caregiving workforce - can learn, practice and be recognized for their complex and demanding jobs.

By creating more specialized E-badges and certifications to include dementia support, dual diagnosis support, employment supports, and autism spectrum supports, we will continue to provide much needed avenues to professional development and raise standards for those who seek expertise in specialty areas. Of course, this will require strong collaboration with industry experts, the self-advocacy community, family advocates and provider networks to create a cross-sector, digital learning, and certification community.

Lastly, it will also require government support and political will to boldly address this decades-long systemic failure in developing our caregiving workforce in the 21st century by incorporating funding strategies to incentivize career ladder programs that lead to wage enhancements. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it should be that these workers have always been “essential”, and they deserve much more than praise during a time of crisis. They deserve a pathway to a career with professional credentials, professional-level wages and professional recognition.

Afterall, quality is defined at the point of interaction and the E-badge Academy has shown that quality can be enhanced through the application of a DSP's knowledge, skills, and values.





Making a world of difference
in people's lives