



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT EVALUATION BRIEF

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Purpose

The College of Direct Support is committed to ongoing evaluation of the quality of its curriculum, its ease of use to learners, the usefulness of its human resource functions and its contributions to the lives of persons with disabilities. A wide range of quantitative and qualitative evaluation activities are being undertaken to provide this information. The Evaluation Brief provides a sampling of findings from CDS data collection activities occurring at the national, state, agency and individual levels. If you have questions about, suggestions for, or requests of the College of Direct Support in the area of evaluation, please let us know at: lakin001@umn.edu

People are saying that...

"The Arc of California has shown national leadership by adopting the College of Direct Support. This brilliant training program allows Direct Support Professionals throughout California to share standards, approaches and a common way of talking about their work. We know the workers will gain a lot. I think families and people with disabilities will be delighted when they see the results. And I think the Chapters of The Arc will notice that CDS helps them provide the best and most reliable services and supports."

--Sue Swenson, Executive Director, The Arc of the United States

Evaluation on the College of Direct Support Continues

Using Evaluation Tools Built into the College of Direct Support

Evaluation is an important aspect of operating any effective and efficient business. Effectiveness and efficiency are especially important in the human services industry where the stakes are high, but the resources are limited. Evaluation allows public officials, agencies, managers, service recipients, and Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) the opportunity to monitor and improve the effectiveness of their services and human resources operations and to share that information more broadly. The College of Direct Support (CDS) recognizes the importance of evaluation, and has integrated into its platform easily managed tools that agencies can use in assessing their programs. With these tools organizations participating in the CDS are able to design evaluation into their programs using the basic online learner management system and other human resources tools. With these tools now in place, organizations have used them in a variety of ways to respond to questions they have about their ongoing programs and special initiatives. The story below is one simple example of the application of the CDS database in program evaluation.

Evaluation Sample from Starkey, Inc. of Wichita, Kansas

When people think of evaluation they often think of research that is difficult to implement and that produces complicated results. However, evaluation does not have to be complex to provide useful information. Starkey, Inc. demonstrated this when evaluating a new training incentive program. Starkey, Inc. created a program of modest, but what they hoped would be significant incentives for their Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to complete their College of Direct Support (CDS) coursework. These included: a) \$25 for DSPs completing half of their assigned CDS lessons; b) another \$25 for DSPs completing the entire CDS curriculum; and c) entry into a monthly drawing for \$20 for DSPs completing a course during the month. Using the CDS learner management system, Starkey was able to retrieve data on the number of lessons completed prior to the incentives and after the incentives. These data established that lesson completion rates had increased very rapidly in the first three months of the intervention. Specifically, Starkey found employees completed 293 lessons in the three months following implementation of the incentives. This compared favorably with 386 lessons completed in nearly two years prior to the incentives. This 85% increase in the rate of lesson completion provided Starkey with evidence-based assurance that their investment in the training incentives was a cost-effective strategy for motivating staff to complete assigned training. Starkey, Inc. provides a simple, useful example of how the learner management and human resources tools built into the CDS platform can provide agencies with easy access to the data they need to manage their operations. For more information on Starkey, Inc. and its training incentive program contact Judy Leiker, at jleiker@starkey.org or at 316.512.4161.

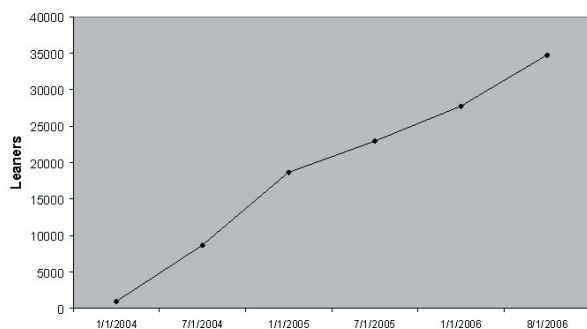
For more information on the use of CDS learner management and human resources tools in program evaluation, please contact Derek Nord at nord0364@umn.edu or 612.624.0386.

The College of Direct Support is an internet-delivered, multimedia competency-based training curriculum for Direct Support Professionals and frontline supervisors supporting individuals with disabilities. The College of Direct Support is available for review at <http://collegeofdirectsupport.com>. For more information about the College of Direct Support contact Bill Tapp (bill@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or Donna Kosak (donna@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or call the College of Direct Support (toll-free) at 877-353-2767. The College of Direct Support is a program of Elsevier/MC Strategies and the University of Minnesota

College of Direct Support Reaches 35,000 Active Learners in August 2006

Chart 1 presents the growth in active College of Direct Support (CDS) learners since January 2004. It shows how the CDS continues to grow in the number of active learners participating in the program. As of the beginning of August 2006, the CDS had 34,735 active learners in 23 states. In the first 7 months of 2006 the total number of active learners increased by just over 25%. Current learners have completed 241,130 of the 1,114,351 lessons assigned to them in their training programs. The greatest number of CDS lessons had been completed by learners in Pennsylvania (82,307) and Virginia (57,429).

Chart 1. Growth in Active CDS Learners, January 1, 2004-August 1, 2006



Qualitative Evaluation of the College of Direct Support

The College of Direct Support (CDS) is currently engaged in a qualitative study of its implementation being conducted by Pam Walker of the Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University. The purpose of that study is to obtain information about how organizations are using the CDS, the benefits they perceive themselves to be getting from it and the challenges and limitations that they experience in its use. To date, data gathering has been conducted in five organizations, all of which support individuals with developmental disabilities. Within these organizations, interviews have been conducted with Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), supervisors, and administrators regarding their experiences with and perspectives regarding the College of Direct Support (CDS). Preliminary findings have revealed that:

- Overall, CDS is most effective when not used in isolation, but as part of a larger agency-wide effort to increase effectiveness, career-orientation and recognition of DSPs.
- DSPs are more likely to see benefits in CDS training when they feel it yields a more comprehensive understanding of their job role and requirements and when it leads to career-related benefits such as incentives, promotions, job title changes, and college credit.
- When participating in CDS courses, DSPs seek more than just independent learning. They also value time for group discussions and questions about course content. When learning is entirely independent, there is a possibility for DSPs to rush through the material and to have greater difficulty retaining it. Discussion is considered an important aspect of retention and

application of learning. Managers and trainers, on the other hand, struggle to schedule group discussions because of staff schedules, new staff orientations, and staff working on different courses in the curriculum.

- High proportions of DSPs rate CDS training as consistently applicable to what they do in their daily work. However, DSPs in larger and more highly structured environments are less likely to report that the lessons of the curriculum can be easily applied.

- At the administrator and supervisory level, managers consider it important to lay a positive foundation for CDS within the agency. Leaders noted that their completion of some or all of the CDS courses conveyed the benefits and value of CDS to DSPs and supervisors. They also stressed the importance of CDS being connected to larger agency-wide efforts to elevate the status and professional orientation of DSPs.

- Supervisors reported that overseeing the implementation of CDS in their work teams was a manageable task.

These preliminary evaluation findings provide insight as to what agencies and employees are encountering with respect to their CDS use. For more information on these results, please contact Pamela Walker, from Syracuse University at Pmwalker@syr.edu.

Get Involved in the College of Direct Support Evaluation

The College of Direct Support (CDS) is committed to being a highly effective, easy to use program to assure that Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) have the knowledge and skills they need to support the persons with disabilities who need their assistance. But such an expression of commitment is meaningless without evaluation. Evaluations of CDS are ongoing, attending to DSP satisfaction with training, knowledge acquisition, staff stability and job satisfaction and job performance. To continue and expand evaluation activities, CDS is seeking participation from all interested organizations. CDS evaluators would like to invite all interested agencies to participate. To do so, agencies must minimally meet the following criteria:

- Have a CDS administrative license
- Allow the evaluator access to their administrative site's online CDS training records
- Allow time for selected CDS users to complete two, 10-15 minute surveys
- Allow time for selected front-line supervisors, trainers, and other agency leaders to participate in an interview (approximately 30 minutes for each interview)

If you or your agency might be interested, please contact Derek Nord to discuss how you can get involved. Derek can be reached at 612.624.0386 or nord0364@umn.edu. If you have specific evaluation questions or challenges we will be pleased to assist in identifying the CDS evaluation tools that may respond to your needs.