



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

# PARTNER PROFILES

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## Use Of College Of Direct Support at ECCO, Inc. in South Dakota

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ECCO, Inc. is a non-profit organization in South Dakota. The mission of ECCO Inc. is “Give Me An Opportunity and I Will Succeed”. This mission assists us in supporting and improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities. About a year and a half ago, we started learning more about College of Direct Support (CDS) as a training tool for Direct Support Professionals. We believed that the training would benefit the people we support by providing them with staff members who had mastered the content of the competency-based training. Little did we know what an added benefit it would be to the people we support by making available to them the very same CDS training.

When ECCO, Inc. began to use the CDS, we started by assigning all leadership staff a variety of lessons which fit their job descriptions. We then assigned all supervisory staff one course, Positive Behavioral Supports, which we felt was important to us all. As new staff came on board we utilized College of Direct Support for orientation and training requirements.

Feedback has been good from new support staff. Many new people are college students. Dakota State University is one of the most progressive universities for computer use in the United States; so many of these staff were already prepared to use a computer! Partly because of this, but by no means at the exclusion of

persons with less computer experience, ECCO staff members were quickly engaged in the CDS curriculum. Of the 80 staff members ECCO Inc. employs, 72 are currently enrolled in College of Direct Support with a total of 1431 lessons assigned to them. Currently 994 of those lessons have been completed. We also have one board member is enrolled to better understand the nature of and best practices in the services and supports we deliver.

Our most recent venture is a pilot project for the state of South Dakota. ECCO is one of four adjustment training centers in South Dakota involved in this project. The project goals are to evaluate the benefits of using the CDS as the primary training curriculum for South Dakota, and to compare job performance and satisfaction between CDS training and agencies' traditional training.

All direct support supervisors at ECCO, Inc. have completed the College of Frontline Supervision courses. The supervisors were assigned one course at a time to be completed in a certain time frame. Then they met as a group each month to discuss each course and work on activities from each lesson. For example, after completing the course on Recruitment and Retention, the group began developing recruitment and marketing strategies and also worked on creating a job announcement. Many of the supervisors commented that they now realize how an area, such as recruitment, directly relates to the work they do and how valuable their input is.

In addition we are very excited

about the more recent use of the CDS by the people we support. ECCO Inc. provides supports to 73 people. Currently, 7 of those people have been enrolled in CDS. They have been “assigned” a total 56 lessons based on their interests and they have as a group completed 19 of those lessons.

One member of this group of CDS users is a woman named Andrea. Andrea has lived in Madison for about five months. She moved here from a developmental center (state institution) where she lived for five years. One day ECCO’s staff development coordinator spoke to the local People First group here in Madison about the benefits of College of Direct Support and offered it as an educational tool for anyone willing to try it. The next morning at 8am, Andrea was in the staff development coordinator’s office asking to get signed up. Initially we considered excluding the testing for mastery components or lowering

our criterion score for passing because we were unsure of Andrea’s learning potential. However, in her excitement to get started and our commitment to respond, we neglected to lower those scores. That turned out to be fortunate because we found that Andrea was scoring between 90% and 100% on the post-test exams of every lesson she completed. She became so excited about the process that

she is now planning on a career in web design. Here is Andrea’s story:

*My name is Andrea and I moved to Madison, SD in June. I live in a duplex apartment, on my own, and am only 45 minutes from my mother and*

*brother. Before moving to Madison, I lived in a state institution where I had limited freedom. Now, I set my own schedule, make many choices, and try new things. One of the things I have tried is the College of Direct Support.*

*I enjoy the College of Direct Support courses because it has helped me to learn safety in my own apartment. I have learned not to put things on the stove, unless I am cooking, and how important fire drills and alarms are. I have learned how to eat better and how to choose foods using the food pyramid. It is also helping me with my computer skills, which I will use because one of my goals is to design web pages. The courses are also helping me reach other goals, because I want to be healthier and be a better person.*

*So far I have completed three courses. They are: Supporting Healthy Lives, Safety at Home and in the Community, and You’ve Got a Friend. I*

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Before moving to Madison, I lived in a state institution...Now, I set my own schedule, make many choices, and try new things. One of the things I have tried is the College of Direct Support. I enjoy the College of Direct Support courses because it has helped me to learn safely in my own apartment...The courses are also helping me reach other goals, because I want to be healthier and to be a better person.

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*am looking forward to new lessons. I hope that other people, especially people with disabilities and their families, try the College of Direct Support. It is a good way for people to improve their lives and gain independence.*

Andrea’s story has given ECCO the initiative to move forward with College of Direct Support not just for our staff, but for the people we support and their families. We continue to be committed to new and innovative ways to use The College and hope to see new benefits through the years.

*Written by Vicki Kommes, Staff Development Coordinator, ECCO, Inc., Madison, SD. You may email Vicki at [eccovicki@iw.net](mailto:eccovicki@iw.net)*

#### About CDS Partner Profiles

CDS Partner Profiles highlights the activities of state and local organizations that have integrated the College of Direct Support into efforts to elevate the preparation, performance, status, and compensation of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and Frontline Supervisors (FLS). The purpose of the the CDS Partner Profiles is to identify and describe a variety of innovative and exemplary initiatives and activities into which the CDS has been integrated. CDS Partner Profiles are written by leaders of organizations that are actually engaged in these efforts.

College of Direct Support (CDS)  
[www.collegeofdirectsupport.com](http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com)

The CDS is an internet-delivered multimedia, competency-based training curriculum for DSPs and FLS supporting individuals with disabilities.

The CDS is available for review at: [collegeofdirectsupport.com](http://collegeofdirectsupport.com)

For more information about the CDS, contact Bill Tapp at [bill@collegeofdirectsupport.com](mailto:bill@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or Donna Kosak at [donna@collegeofdirectsupport.com](mailto:donna@collegeofdirectsupport.com) or call toll-free, 877-353-2767

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