



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

Volume 1 • Issue 2 • May 2005

Heritage Christian Services Increases Retention, Satisfaction and Performance Through DSP Professionalization

The College of Direct Support has become the cornerstone of Heritage Christian's comprehensive effort to professionalize the position of direct support work and to make it a valued career choice...It has, as expected, led to improved job satisfaction and higher staff retention rates.



Heritage Christian Services (HCS) is a New York State non-profit human services agency serving the Buffalo and Rochester areas. Our organization was founded 20 years

ago by a group of parents and today we serve more than 1,200 children and adults with developmental disabilities. At HCS we are pleased to have achieved the status of a New York COMPASS agency in recognition of the quality of our programs and our commitment to the persons with developmental disabilities we support.

A major part of HCS's commitment to the people it supports has been its organizational commitment to professionalize the role of direct support and to demonstrate that the work of direct support professionals (DSPs) can be a valued career choice. Early in 2004 HCS made the College of Direct Support (CDS) a key aspect of our commitment to those we employ and to the people we support. Between April 2004 and April 2005 HCS used the College of Direct Support to train and to certify the professional status and achievement of 180 DSPs. In a case study of our efforts Pam Walker and Bonnie Shoultz of the Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University report that "the direct support professionals state that having a certification makes them feel more professional, more valued, and gives them a thirst for more educational opportunities. Their managers and supervisors note a marked change in their overall performance, and peers

comment on their increased role-modeling skills."

At HCS we have also studied the outcomes of this commitment in the areas of staff retention, satisfaction and performance. With regard to DSP Retention, we found 94% of DSPs participating in the CDS training and certification were retained during the one year evaluation period as compared with 66% of DSPs who did not participate in the CDS-based training and certification. In the area of Job Satisfaction, we found that 98% of the DSPs completing the CDS training reported themselves to be more satisfied with their jobs; and 100% of those who reported higher satisfaction reported that offering professional certification gave them a boost toward higher satisfaction and plans to make human services a career. Regarding Job Performance, our supervisors reported markedly increased job performance ratings among DSPs participating in CDS.

These results were not unexpected. We consider the College of Direct Support and a direct support career ladder as necessary to making DSP roles a valued career. The Center on Human Policy (CHP) case study of HCS reports observations of an HCS administrator on this theme. He told the CHP evaluators that through CDS, "the staff understand with more depth and have greater appreciation of the past of the field of developmental disabilities....They express thankfulness for the opportunity, and it gives them affirmation of the importance of the work they are doing....It gets their minds thinking of possibilities, it stimulates conversation; we have a band of people sharing ideas."

The case study further reports that, "The experience with CDS has been highly positive among both staff who have worked in the field for many years, as well as staff who are new to the field. One staff member commented: 'I'm not a computer person, but it was easy to use.' She described some of the most memorable things that she had learned: 'The history stood out, learning things I hadn't known before about that. And learning ways to empower people to help get them identities other than just mentally disabled.'"

Thomas Maul, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities has praised HCS for its efforts, stating that, "Heritage Christian Services should be commended for your vision and innovative efforts to professionalize the direct support workforce. As you well know, quality services depend greatly on a stable, motivated and well-trained workforce. Creating a career track for direct support

staff will contribute to your agency's excellent record in providing quality services."

Based on our highly positive experience with CDS, we were eager to share it with other agencies. This is being accomplished through the Developmental Disabilities Education Network (DDEN). The DDEN is a consortium of agencies that was established in western New York State in 1986. The DDEN is an independent, nonprofit organization, whose purpose is to share best practices and to pool resources among the 37 member organizations in order to provide educational opportunities for people with disabilities, families, and staff. Heritage Christian Services has been part of this network since the early 1990s. Over the years, the network has been managed and operated by different entities. It was first established and operated by the

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Finger Lakes Developmental Disabilities Services Organization (DDSO) of the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities; later it was operated as an independent board representing member organizations and as of March 1, 2005 it has operated as a division of Heritage Christian Services.

Heritage Christian Services provides the CDS to network members. This bulk purchase makes it available to network members at lower cost than if they purchased it on their own. It also allows HCS to support the use and integration of CDS by participating organizations. Staff at Heritage provide both introductory presentations about CDS and its use within the network, and technical assistance to those agencies adopting CDS. Because of our success with CDS, we at HCS are enthusiastic about now having a network of agencies that are training and certifying their staff, and that can share the lessons and strategies from this experience with each other.

In summary, the College of Direct Support has become the cornerstone of Heritage Christian's comprehensive effort to professionalize the position of the direct support work and to make it recognized as a valued career choice. Using it to provide a professional certification for frontline workers is Heritage Christian taking action to make this a nationally acknowledged credential. It has, as expected, led to improved job satisfaction and higher retention rates.

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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 and managers (FSMs). 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

The College of Direct Support (CDS) and its companion College of Frontline Supervision and Management (CFSM) are internet-delivered multimedia, competency-based training curricula for DSPs and FSMs supporting individuals with disabilities.

The CDS is available for review at: collegeofdirectsupport.com

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

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