



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

Issue 21 • October 2009

Habilitative Services Uses CDS To Solve Logistical Challenges in Training Its Dispersed DSP Workforce

CDS has been a positive addition to HSI. Individualized training is available at any time of the day. Documentation of course completion and individual learner competency is generated automatically. The numerous challenges presented by funding cuts have greatly impacted our training budgets and the costs associated with travel to a training site have been reduced significantly, allowing us to provide more training for the same cost.



A specific challenge led us at Habilitative Services, Inc. (HSI) of Lakefield, Minnesota to the College of Direct Support (CDS). Our challenge was to find a way to provide consistent, high-quality training that typified our instructor-led classes in a way that could accommodate the scheduling demands of our dispersed workforce and would also support and facilitate professional growth. Using our Guiding Principles as a compass we explored many options to help solve these challenges and ultimately selected the CDS as the best overall solution.

HSI is a professional organization founded in 1985 dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of personal achievement and well-being. We support more than 650 individuals in 18 Minnesota counties with a workforce of approximately 1,200 trained professionals. Training everyone in a central location has never been an option.

Historically, HSI has always strived to “go where services are needed.” This philosophy has allowed us to grow in both the number of individuals supported and in the types of services provided. We face unique challenges because the services we provide are spread over a large geographic area covering 6,300 square miles.

Because we serve such a large area, distance has been a significant challenge when it comes to training. Delivering training in a timely and consistent manner has been difficult. Despite eight training locations, our staff in some areas had unrealistic waits for specific training. These scheduling

challenges have been further compounded by a workforce that includes many students and those working more than one job.

Our Guiding Principles provide the framework for our decision making. These principles are:

- Every individual has potential for growth
- Every individual is valued
- We are credible and dependable
- We take ownership
- We maximize resources

These principles were a central part of our decision-making as we evaluated different options to respond to our training challenges. We selected CDS because it was well-aligned with our principles and because it provided consistent, high quality training in a manner that worked for our ever-changing workforce.

We took a unique “back door” approach when implementing CDS. Instead of first using the curriculum for the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), we initially invested our time and resources in our leadership staff. In our company, the Team Lead position provides “front line” leadership and supervision. Our Team Leads function like owners of a franchise, accessing supports from our support departments when needed. If this “new way” of training was to move forward we needed them to be on board prior to rolling it out to our DSP staff. We also felt we needed to strengthen our Team Leads, making sure they shared a common philosophical and programmatic foundation. The College of Frontline Supervision Management (CFSM) courses offered in CDS had the content that would provide a solid foundation.

The first step in this back-door approach was to evaluate each Team Lead’s leader-

ship skills. The Frontline Supervisor Competency and Performance Indicators, along with Frontline Supervisor Self Assessment, were used to identify each individual's strengths and growth areas.

Forty-five Team Leads graduated after completing six months of CFSM courses. These supervisors felt a great sense of accomplishment from the time they spent developing and enhancing their leadership skills. Because of this experience, this leadership group knew firsthand the positive impact of CDS. This process was successful in securing management buy-in, allowing us to expand from the initial group of 100 learners to company-wide implementation. An implementation workgroup was established and pilot sites carefully chosen.

The CDS workgroup compared and customized the CDS lessons to our existing curriculum. The overall goal was to avoid a cookie-cutter training program; we wanted to preserve

the qualities that made us unique. This was accomplished by having our current instructors view CDS courses and make recommendations and annotations to those lessons. We eventually replaced 27 instructor-led classroom trainings with CDS courses. Seven proprietary or company specific lessons were added to CDS using the linked content option. That feature provided another cost effective yet creative way of making the training available at all times while maintaining our unique way of doing business.

CDS pilot sites were selected by their location, each being miles from one of our eight training offices. Each team of DSPs had various levels of computer skills. The pilot sites received all of their required training via CDS with the exception of "hands on" classes such as CPR and First Aid.

To maximize efficiency, we designated the Team Leads as CDS administrators for their specific service sites. Each Team Lead developed specific modules based on the needs of the individuals they support and

the licensing requirements linked to that particular service. We also used technology (Microsoft Go to Meeting) to train the Team Leads in their role as CDS administrators. These two-hour trainings focused on the necessary skill sets such as adding learners and developing and assigning modules. CDS has also become our Learning Management System. Our Team Leads and DSPs are able to access training records on demand, no longer having to wait for a quarterly report to be mailed out to review their training records.

CDS has been a positive addition to HSI. Individualized training is available at any time of the day. Documentation of course completion and individual learner competency is generated automatically. The

Forty-five Team Leads graduated after completing six months of CFSM courses. These supervisors felt a great sense of accomplishment from the time they spent developing and enhancing their leadership skills.

numerous challenges presented by funding cuts have greatly impacted our training budgets and the costs associated with travel to a training site have been reduced significantly, allowing us to

provide more training for the same cost.

We continue to examine the gaps that exist between computer-based and instructor-led training. Our employees continue to place a high value on instructor-led training and some of our classes are built around a discussion format. We are examining the differences between the two types of learning to ensure that any identified gaps are filled. In addition to the conventional classroom setting we are examining how to use newer technologies. In addition to the conventional classroom setting, we are examining how to use newer technologies such as webinars, video conferencing, blogs, podcasting, discussion boards, social networking and Skype.

CDS has made a huge difference in how we deliver education and training to our employees. It has become an integral part of our quest to provide high quality, individualized supports and services.

Written by Brenda Behrends, Education Coordinator at Habilitative Services Inc. She can be reached at 507-662-5236 (Ext. 238) or via email at brendab@habsvinc.com

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

CDS Partners

RESEARCH AND TRAINING
CENTER ON COMMUNITY LIVING

 The College of Education & Human Development
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

 **mc strategies**
MISSION CRITICAL PERFORMANCE NOW