



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

Volume 1 • Issue 3 • September 2005

MBW Uses the College of Direct Support in Its Innovations and Learning Grants Programs

“The CDS Committee members who examined the CDS material were very impressed with its potential for training and for review of important information and skills.”



MBW Company was started in 1978 by a young couple named Mark and Brenda Wiger in New Ulm, Minnesota. Both Mark and Brenda had been employed at a state institution and were determined to create community residential options for people with developmental disabilities. Brenda and Mark began MBW with a group home for 8 people. Since then MBW has expanded into a wide range of in-home, supervised, and semi-independent living supports. Currently more than one hundred individuals with disabilities are being supported by approximately two hundred full and part-time employees. These employees are the essential carriers of the MBW mission to provide: “individuals support in...achieving valued social roles, discovering and contributing gifts and talents, growing in relationships, having community presence, and making informed choices.”

As MBW matured as an organization the Wiger's became increasingly convinced that commitment to fulfilling the MBW mission must include not only a commitment to the well-being of the people being supported but also to the employees of MBW. A significant part of this commitment was to establish employee ownership of the company. The Wiger's considered this an important reflection of the instrumental role that MBW employees played in the organization's ability achieve its mission. During a 2004 strategic planning meeting MBW staff members shared concerns about the lack of recognition of and

support for direct support work as a professional career option. They discussed the job content and required training and skills needed to maintain high levels of quality support and concluded that more should be done to treat direct support as a professional role. The strategic planning team decided it was important to develop a tangible program of professional and career development and they began exploring different options and resources for doing so.

One of the options MBW investigated was the College of Direct Support (CDS). This was done at the suggestion of Brenda Wiger who had seen it demonstrated at a state conference. In contemplating different options the strategic planning team decided CDS might provide the foundation for what it was trying to accomplish. A committee of MBW employees was established to gather more information about CDS and determine if, and how, employees could best utilize CDS as part of the existing training and staff development program at MBW.

The Innovations and Learning Grant

After careful consideration the “Committee” developed a new program with the goal of supporting professional status and career development for direct support professionals (DSPs). This program would not only encourage the self-development of DSPs, but would also create opportunities to improve the lives of the people they supported through direct application of what they learned. The concept is simple: DSPs independently participate in training through CDS. They are then financially

rewarded for time spent on learning and expenses related to their study, but before doing so they are required to apply for an “Innovation and Learning Grant.” In their application they explain how they will use their new skills to improve the lives of the people they support.

The specific program goal established by the Grant Committee was “to assist the employees to raise their professional standing as Direct Support Professionals.” Among the program objectives identified were: 1) To make access to the CDS available and affordable to all employees of MBW; 2) To reward additional education without jeopardizing work schedules or program budgets; and 3) To reward employees who use learning opportunities to create observable and measurable positive change in the quality of supports and the lives of the people they support. Among the specific features of the Innovations and Learning Grant program are: 1) MBW provides CDS at no cost to any

employee who wishes to independently complete all or part of course work; 2) For those who seek to improve their skills using CDS, a grant option rewards employees for their time in learning and developing innovative ways to use the knowledge

and skills gained from CDS to improve the quality of supports; and 3) For those who wish to develop specific skills in areas covered by CDS content in order to improve skills to work with specific individuals or based upon recommendations contained in employee job evaluations, MBW pays for the time spent on the coursework.

To facilitate application and review of the grant applications, a “CDS Committee” developed a grant application process which asks the applicants to: a) list the coursework completed or to be completed; b) describe the action idea that uses the information from the coursework to improve support services, and c) describe how achievement could be observed and measured. The CDS Committee also developed a rating system to determine invest-

ment vs. impact to assist in determining costs and appropriate financial compensation for the DSP’s project.

Program Effects

CDS Committee members who examined the CDS material were very impressed with its potential for training and for review of important information and skills. In this first year of the Innovations and Learning Grant, two committee members were awarded grants to develop a training video related to CDS content, specifically teaching individuals with varying ability levels about nutrition and meal preparation.

The challenge in implementing the grants program has been helping employees develop realistic expectations of the program and its potential. An early challenge was that some managers attempted to use CDS lessons to strengthen identified weak areas of employee development without having first hand knowledge of the CDS courses. The needed content was

not always in the lessons assigned. With time managers have become more familiar with the content of CDS and assignments more relevant to the employees self-development. MBW continues to work to facilitate more projects and remains optimistic about

future response. MBW Co. Direct Service Coordinator, Rachel Domeier observes that, “... the CDS training was an excellent refresher course. It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day routine and forget why we do our jobs. The information was revitalizing! I especially appreciated the section on the importance of family connections and involvement. As a result, I am re-looking at some issues and trying some different approaches.”

Written by Vicki Sieve of MBW Company who can be reached at:

mbw.vsieve@newulmtel.net

“It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day routine and forget why we do our jobs. The information was revitalizing!”

-Rachel Domeier, Direct Service Coordinator.

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

 **mcs strategies**
MISSION CRITICAL PERFORMANCE NOW