



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

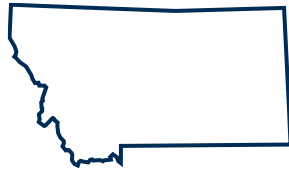
PARTNER PROFILES

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Montana's College of Direct Support Passes the 3,000 Learner Milestone in Just 15 Months

"We realized that this training was appropriate for all our support staff and not just our DD staff. We are using it in our foster care program and letting the foster families, parents and family members use the CDS because they become support staff at some point. And all of our supervisors have taken all or parts of CDS."

– Jenece Sharkey, Opportunity Resources.



Distance learning takes on a whole new meaning in Montana, a land of great distances and a small population.

Approximately 940,000 people are spread across 147,000 square miles, or about 6.4 people per square mile. In Montana, 54 community-based agencies and one state facility serve some 3,600 persons with developmental disabilities. That population is supported by approximately 1,900 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs).

When it comes to training and building a workforce of DSPs, traveling around Montana is unreasonably costly and time consuming.

Four years ago the state of Montana, through its Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP), was approached by a group of Community Service Providers to consider implementing the College of Direct Support (CDS) as a vehicle to enhance training. In 2007 the DDP requested funding from the Montana Legislature to implement CDS statewide and transform its training, its workforce and the quality of supports offered by agencies and their DSPs. The Legislature approved the funding and Montana was off and running with the CDS.

And it is still running.

The Montana-CDS story is an interesting one.

The funding authorization required by Montana's DDP to make the College of Direct Support operational was provided by the Montana Legislature effective October 1, 2007. Once the Legislature appropriated the funding for the CDS, DDP made it available to all agencies and all persons "active" in the field of developmental disabilities, including families and persons served, and other interested parties. A committee with members representing Community Service Providers, DDP Quality Improvement Specialists, and the state Developmental Disabilities Council was

formed to guide the curriculum implementation. That committee designated 15 lessons, from six (6) separate courses as the core, designated "Tier 1."

Between August and the end of September 2007 all agencies submitted their employee lists to the state office for enrollment in CDS. All initial enrollees were assigned the initial Tier 1 module. On October 1, 2007, the CDS Montana website was activated. A total of 2,752 learners were enrolled in Tier 1 at startup. Given the size of the project, it was decided that it would be more effective to roll it out for all agencies at the same time.

On October 3, 2008, Montana and CDS celebrated its one-year anniversary partnership and the numbers reflect a success story. Statistics on CDS use in Montana are maintained by Bill Heinecke, the DDP Training and Development Specialist and the CDS statewide administrator. Some notable accomplishments in Montana in its first 15 months of CDS implementation include:

- A total of 58 community service providers and the DDP regional offices have enrolled 3,030 learners and have assigned them a total of 82,858 lessons.
- A total of 83% of the 2,752 original enrollees completed CDS coursework.
- Montana's enrolled learners have already completed 54.8% of the lessons assigned to them (45,410 lessons completed).
- 2,070 learners have completed the Tier 1 module.

Jeff Sturm, the Developmental Disabilities Program Director, spearheaded the efforts to convince the State Legislature to fund the program and to oversee its implementation. The Montana CDS funding was structured so that there is no direct cost to agencies, and the base rate paid to agencies was increased to help offset the additional costs for employee participation.

"I think the first year of using the CDS has gone quite well," Sturm said. "Generally our agencies like the program and

there is positive feedback coming from the providers. We had very minimal training standards in Montana and every agency was doing their own thing in training.”

The DDP has published a requirement that all DSPs complete at least 20 hours of CDS lessons each year, as their annual training requirement. DDP has created a “Career Track” within CDS. All newly hired DSPs are required to complete the “Tier 1” module within their first six months of employment. Tier 1 has replaced most other state-mandated basic training, and meets the training requirements of the National Association for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) to earn its certificate for NADSP-R (Registered). Completion of all six modules in the Career Track meets the training requirements for NADSP-C (Certified).

Regarding Montana’s experience in implementation of CDS, Heinecke has noted:

- Almost all agency staff, including the top executives, has taken some CDS courses, which creates an important shared foundation of what CDS is, how it functions and the vision it presents.

- “Montana mandated the training. An incentive program that rewards agencies and employees would likely be easier to manage. I recommend rewarding agencies and direct care workers who attain NADSP credentialing – and base salaries on attaining those levels.”

What was the biggest challenge in training this statewide workforce using CDS? “The different administration styles among the agencies – some accepted CDS readily, others balked because the State was dictating to them,” Heinecke said. “Unlike most other CDS agencies, DDP does not employ most of the enrolled learners – it is easy to make decisions that don’t take into account the realities of the employing agency.”

Heather Pleninger, Quality Enhancement Coordinator for Big Sandy Activities in Big Sandy, MT, said their turnover is relatively low. “We have a lot of direct care workers who have been here a long time, but they say the CDS has been a great refresher for them, that they have learned new things by taking the training. CDS is also great for our new employees. And from my perspective having CDS is convenient and available to everyone 24/7

and we don’t have to schedule meetings to get the staff together for training.”

One of Montana’s largest agencies, Opportunity Resources Inc. in Missoula, which serves 400 adults, likes the flexibility of CDS and being able to integrate it into their training program. “The CDS is very appropriate for our staff and the staff feels like it is valuable training,” said Jenece Sharkey, the agency’s Director of Community Based Services. “Its flexibility allows our DSPs to work on it while on shift, so time wise it works well for us.”

Opportunity Resources has about 260 DSPs working in four group homes, in a day program with 70 persons, a sheltered workshop, supported employment, foster care and a large family support program. “We realized that this training was appropriate for all our support staff and not just our DD staff. We are using it in our

foster care program and letting the foster families, parents and family members use the CDS because they become support staff at some point,” Sharkey said.

Charlie Lakin, director of the University of Minnesota’s Research and Training Center on Community Living, which authors the CDS courses, is very

impressed by the Montana model and Heinecke’s work. “That’s really remarkable for the first year. Montana’s including not just DSPs as targeted learners, but individuals with disabilities, family members, host families, state and private agency administrators and others, will, we hope, contribute to shared vision and commitment across Montana regarding the supports people need and deserve to live full, included lives under the Big Sky,” Lakin said.

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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

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