



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

Issue 18 • April 2009

NYSACRA Describes College of Direct Support As 'Mainstay' for Use by 70 of Its 200 Member Agencies

The College of Direct Support (CDS) became a mainstay in these educational efforts beginning in the summer of 2006 when NYSACRA developed its Disability Studies Certificate program. The program, funded in part through grants from the State Departments of Health and Labor, offers DSPs a tuition-free opportunity to begin, resume, or continue college level studies relating to disability issues.



The New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies

(NYSACRA) is a grass-roots organization, born of necessity in the 1970s. During that era, New York State — prompted by litigation, in part, and the vision and advocacy of service recipients, families, professionals, and public officials alike — embarked on a course of downsizing, and eventually closing, most of its state-operated institutions for individuals with developmental disabilities.

In that effort, the State turned to non-profit agencies, typically organizations created by families seeking alternatives to institutional care, for assistance in developing community-based programs, a matter with which the State had virtually no experience.

In 1975, when the Willowbrook Consent decree was signed committing New York State to a program of community-based service development for individuals with developmental disabilities, more than 20,000 individuals resided in 20 State Developmental Centers. Today, a majority of these institutions are closed and most individuals with developmental disabilities requiring supports and services receive such in their home communities through programs operated by non-profit agencies.

The truth is, though, these agencies had only slightly more experience in this area than did the state. Although the agencies had advocated for the development of community-based services, funding constraints had thwarted their development and very few existed in the early 1970s. In embracing the opportunity and challenge

presented by the state, non-profit agencies turned to each other for mutual support and guidance in developing the programs for which they had long advocated. Some agencies had more experience than others and served as mentors; some had particular areas of expertise from which many learned.

These networking alliances were formalized in 1977 through the creation of NYS-CRA, an association of agencies dedicated to advocacy on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and the organizations which support them in living life to the fullest in the community. With nearly 200 member agencies supporting over 55,000 individuals living in the community, NYSACRA has served as a leader and a catalyst for change in improving lives for individuals with developmental disabilities. In addition to providing year-round training opportunities for its members, NYSACRA has served as their voice on statewide budgetary, regulatory, policy, and programmatic issues which have a direct impact on the daily lives of the individuals they support. These issues have run the gamut from housing options and home ownership, to person-centered planning and non-traditional program development.

No one issue, however, is as central to the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities than that of the need for a present, stable, and professional direct support workforce.

New York, like most other states, is facing a direct support workforce crisis. Neither adequately viewed nor compensated as professionals, the men and women who constitute this workforce, and upon whom so many rely, are far too often leaving jobs that they love. And few are drawn to the

vitaly important work of direct support as they seek a life-time career. Just like its genesis, NYSACRA has embraced this crisis out of necessity and, beginning in the mid-1990's, has made professionalizing the noble, important and demanding work of direct support a priority.

In this regard, NYSACRA has acted on many fronts – from advocating on both the state and national levels for improved salaries and health insurance benefits for direct support professionals, to offering educational opportunities, including regional training conferences across New York State attended by more than 700 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) each year.

The College of Direct Support (CDS) became a mainstay in these educational efforts beginning in the summer of 2006 when NYSACRA developed its Disability Studies Certificate program. The program, funded in part through grants from the State Departments of Health and Labor, offers DSPs a tuition-free opportunity to begin, resume, or continue college level studies relating to disability issues.

CDS is a key component in the three-part program which leads to a Disability Studies Certificate. In addition to participating in a preparatory "Bridge to College" class and taking 12-16 credits of course work at a local college within the New York State University system, learners must complete the on-line CDS.

NYSACRA, however, recognized that many staff want to hone their direct support skills, but may not have the time or the inclination to attend classes through the State University system. As such, after launching its Disability Studies Certificate program, NYSACRA became an administrator for CDS and offered open enrollment sessions for DSPs of member agencies who wished to take this path.

Between 2006 and 2008, approximately 600 DSPs and frontline supervisors from 70 NYSACRA member agencies completed CDS through either the Disability Studies Certificate program or open enrollment session. An additional 500 learners are currently enrolled and taking on-line classes.

Those completing CDS have consistently touted the breadth and depth of the issues covered, the utility and applicability of the information presented in their everyday work lives, and its availability and flexibility as an on-line training vehicle which allowed them to study and learn at their own pace or when their busy days allowed. When asked, in evaluations, to rank what they felt more qualified to accomplish now that they had

Between 2006 and 2008, approximately 600 DSPs and frontline supervisors from 70 NYSACRA member agencies completed CDS through either the Disability Studies Certificate program or open enrollment session. An additional 500 learners are currently enrolled and taking on-line classes.

completed the on-line curriculum, learners consistently placed "supporting people to make their own choices and decisions" at the top of the list. Isn't that what the profession of direct support is all about?

With 2009, NYSACRA is taking its efforts to advance the profession of direct support

to the next level. It is incubating a state chapter of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State (DSPANYS). As CDS is accredited by NADSP to offer training leading to the national credentialing of DSPs, it will continue to play a central role in NYSACRA's work. And it will continue to elevate the profession of supporting people to make their own choices and decisions.

For more information, contact either Joseph M. Macbeth, Assistant Executive Director of NYSACRA, or Tom Harmon, Advisor, the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State. Macbeth can be reached via email at joem@nysacra.org or by phone at 518.449.7551. Harmon can be reached via email at tomh@nysacra.org or by phone at 518.449.7551

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