



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

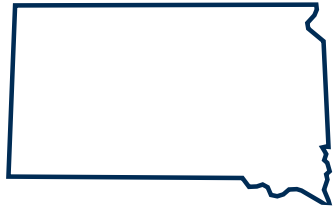
PARTNER PROFILES

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CDS Is Working, Viewed as 'Vital Tool' in Supporting South Dakota's DSPs

"With every lesson, her self-confidence seemed to grow. She has now completed all lessons. I've seen a visible change in this woman's outlook toward training. Rather than losing her due to failure with the lessons, we gained a staff member armed with knowledge!"

– Vicki Kommes, ECCO, Inc., speaking about DSP Janet Schmit.



For South Dakota, a rural state with wide open spaces that covers 75,885 square miles with 10 persons per

square mile, the College of Direct Support is a great fit. As Tom Scheinost, Executive Director, South Dakota Association of Community Based Services (SDACBS), says, "The CDS is the only state-of-the-art training resource that is readily available to all aspects of our State's Developmental Disabilities system, is affordable, is constantly updated, is easy to use and implement, and seems to be able to enhance and/or replace current training resources in a very positive manner... and the fact that our Developmental Disabilities System is so rural, that plays a big part in the usefulness of the CDS."

CDS and South Dakota began their partnership on May 1, 2004. It is used in 20 agencies across the state supporting people with developmental and related disabilities, including 19 community-based agencies, the South Dakota Developmental Center and by people choosing to self-direct their services through participation in PLANS (People Leading Accessible Networks of Support).

Adopting CDS was a huge step for South Dakota, but a step that had to be taken.

In reality, our "journey" with CDS began in 2002, as part of a Workforce Development grant received by the SDACBS, a non-profit association representing community agencies, from the South Dakota Council on Developmental Disabilities (SDCDD). The grant was designed to support the planning, development and implementation of multiple strategies to improve--address recruitment, retention, training and utilization of the provider agency direct support workforce beyond the most obvious solution -- increase wages. The grant activities were led by a Project Workgroup comprised of agency directors, direct support staff, supervisors, state Division of Developmental Disabilities staff, representatives of consumers and families and a representative from the Center for Disabilities (a

University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Services) at the Sanford School of Medicine of the University of South Dakota.

The workgroup's first activity was to conduct a training and job satisfaction survey for direct support staff in which approximately 850 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) were asked to identify the most significant issues and problems they faced in making their jobs more meaningful and successful. Over 600 surveys were returned.

In addition to higher wages, the DSPs' top priorities included:

- To be more recognized, valued and respected.
- To be more involved and be important players in achieving the outcomes of the people they supported.
- A need for high quality, easily accessible, state-of-the-art training.
- To have more knowledgeable/quality supervisors.

During 2002 and 2003 several activities were completed to address the survey results, including the development of a media kit tailored to each agency for recruitment of DSPs; "I Am Only One" training by Jill Westring of the Council on Quality and Leadership; "Removing the Revolving Door" training by Amy Hewitt, University of Minnesota, provided to more than 100 front-line supervisors; and an 8-minute video designed to celebrate both the direct support staff and the achievements of people with disabilities they support. The last principal activity found the Project Workgroup spending significant time researching and reviewing training curricula both from within South Dakota and throughout the nation. The CDS met the criteria identified: high quality, state-of-the-art, accessible and affordable training that would work both for our urban centers as well as in our most rural areas.

As a result, the SDACBS wrote and received a grant from the SDCDD to begin implementation of CDS in South Dakota. SDACBS is the single contracting entity for CDS in South Dakota. We are currently in the fourth year of the grant, which continues to be supported in part by the SDCDD.

According to Scheinost, four major decisions made during the first year were the primary factors resulting in the success we've had with CDS.

The first was to create a South Dakota CDS Project Workgroup comprised of CDS Learning Administrators from participating agencies, the Executive Director of SDACBS, a representative from the State Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), and a representative from PLANS.

The second decision was to work closely with the State DDD office to determine which CDS courses/lessons met their training requirements.

The third, and perhaps the most important decision, according to Scheinost, was to work with the Center for Disabilities to create a part-time (currently 12 hours per week) position for a manager of the South Dakota CDS. The group hired Eileen Van Soest at the beginning of 2004. She works closely with the agencies' CDS Learning Administrators, facilitates the Project Workgroup meetings and provides leadership to implementation efforts state-wide. For 25 years Van Soest was the Vice President of Client Services for Sioux Vocational Services Inc. in Sioux Falls, S.D. She has a Masters degree in Special Education and worked in the field for 35 years.

The fourth decision made was that CDS would be implemented within the South Dakota community provider system as a training tool available to the system to be used in whatever manner best fit the needs of the agencies, but not as a state-mandated training program.

The CDS Learning Administrators are the heart and soul of the CDS in South Dakota and the characteristics of a successful Learning Administrator include: longevity with the agency, clout and respect from the agency CEO and others in leadership roles, experience and passion for training, and being a good manager, motivator, leader and teacher.

Through the efforts of the Learning Administrators many neat and sometimes unanticipated things are happening.

Of the 3,234 earners currently enrolled, 80 are people with disabilities and 19 are family members and guardians. Providing this opportunity for the people we support and their families was not something we thought of when we began. However, after a Learning Administrator met with people supported by the agency to

talk about the benefits of CDS and offered it as an educational tool for anyone willing to try it, a consumer came to her office the next day requesting the opportunity to become a learner. That happened in November 2004. Andrea Terrell, who is supported by ECCO Inc., shared her thoughts about CDS: "I hope that other people, especially people with disabilities and their families, try the CDS. It is a good way for people to improve their lives and gain independence."

Vicki Kommes, the Staff Development Coordinator at ECCO Inc., recently shared the this story: "I do have one story about Janet Schmit, a newly hired DSP. Janet was somewhat hesitant about starting CDS lessons. As a 55 year old with limited computer experience, she was nervous about the minimum requirements for passing the written tests. Her supervisor was concerned that giving her the CDS lessons would set her up for failure, and we might lose a potentially great staff member if she didn't meet success.

After starting the lessons, Janet would occasionally stop in and comment that the lessons were not easy, but made sense. She said she told her husband she was doing college-level lessons and that he was proud of her. With every lesson, her self-confidence seemed to grow. She has now completed all lessons. I've seen a visible change in her outlook toward training. Rather than losing her due to failure, we gained a staff member armed with

knowledge!"

In South Dakota, we believe CDS is a vital tool in our ongoing quest to provide DSPs with the training and the professional involvement and recognition they deserve.

"Primarily as a result of our successes in implementing the CDS in South Dakota, I see a potential for a far-reaching impact and use of this training resource, eventually becoming a greater resource to consumers, families, special education programs, higher education / technical institutes, and a host of other entities that will, in the future, greatly have a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities," Scheinost 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

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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