



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

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Alpha Resource Center Expanding CDS Usage; Says CDS Offers Them 'Competitive Edge' in Hiring

Our biggest challenge as an agency has been securing staff in order to meet the growing demand for services in Southern California. We currently have 57 people on our waiting list for adult services and many families add their names to the list five to six years before their child graduates from high school. Staff recruitment is a common challenge for all other agencies serving people with developmental disabilities in California.



"If you want to be successful, know what you are doing, love what you are doing, and believe in what you are doing." -- Will Rogers (1879 - 1935)

Alpha Resource Center of Santa Barbara provides services and supports for individuals of all ages with developmental disabilities and their families. Founded in the early 1950s, Alpha has evolved into a multi-faceted services center. We provide a wide array of support services, including advocacy, information and resources, technical assistance and personal representation for children and families, teen recreation and outdoor adventures. Also, we offer a broad spectrum of adult services focused on what is important and meaningful in the life of each individual. Our success is attributable to visionary leadership, strong community support and a well-trained and dedicated staff.

Alpha serves 92 adults, 45 teens, and more than 1,200 families per year throughout the Santa Barbara County. We have a staff of 100 with 47 full- and part-time staff providing direct support (14 staff members are in our Children and Family Services division and 33 in Adult Services). The balance of our staff operates two successful thrift stores.

Alpha is committed to fostering a community value system that celebrates all people. It has been a leader of long standing in the development of cooperative efforts with local leaders, agencies and community groups. If people with developmental disabilities and their families have access to other parents, assistance, support, guidance and services which respond to their needs, and if people with developmental disabilities are enabled to participate actively and fully in community life, everyone wins.

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been finding staff to meet the growing demand for services in Southern California. We currently have 57 people on our waiting list for adult services and many families add their names to the list five to six years before their child graduates from high school. Staff recruitment is a common challenge for all agencies serving people with developmental disabilities in California. Because of comparatively low wages, agencies that serve children and adults with developmental disabilities compete with entry-level food service and retail positions.

Yet, the people who choose to work for Alpha are passionate about their jobs and we offer those dedicated staff the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, certification and a career as Direct Support Professional (DSP) through the College of Direct Support (CDS). CDS has given us the competitive edge over similar agencies recruiting from the same pool of applicants.

In early 2006, The Arc of California brought CDS training to California as part of an effort to address our serious workforce issues: recruitment, retention, low wages, and a de-valued workforce. Alpha saw this as a real opportunity to address these issues at the local level and signed on immediately. But it took us a full 12 months of experimenting with various strategies before determining how we would roll this out – the training times and places, assignment of curriculum, the assessment of the staff's individual computer skills and mentoring needs, all while building staff buy-in for the additional training.

In September of 2007, the board of directors adopted Alpha's Implementation Plan for CDS. The plan accommodates our diverse staff of experienced veterans, with more than 10 years of service, and employees who are new to the field. We have taken advantage of the flexibility of CDS to be customized. We have divided the CDS curriculum into five modules and each module is assigned to staff sequentially. Before our new staff members are given hands-on responsibilities they are required to com-

plete our New Hire module. With this basic knowledge they are prepared for their first day in the field. They have additional curriculum they are required to complete within their first 90 days of employment or their probationary status will be extended. Although the first module is mandatory for all new hires, completion of the rest of the curriculum is voluntary. We have provided incentives for staff to stay on track with their training. After the completion of each module, the staff member receives a merit increase, as well. All future promotions are contingent upon completion of specific CDS modules.

Our five modules are grouped as following, with each module covering specific courses that align with specific job responsibilities at each DSP level:

MODULE 1

On the first day of employment before working with participants: Direct Support Professionalism (Becoming a Direct Support Professional; Contemporary Best Practices and Applying Ethics in Everyday Work).

First 90 days of employment: Introduction to Developmental Disabilities; Individual Rights and Choices (Overview); Direct Support Professionalism (Practicing Confidentiality and Working with Your Strengths and Interests); and Safety at Home and in the Community (Introduction and Universal Precautions and Infection Control).

All Module 1 courses must be completed before Module 2. This is the case with each module.

MODULE 2

Safety at Home and in the Community (remaining courses); Individual Rights and Choice (remaining courses); Introduction to Developmental Disabilities (remaining courses); Teaching People with Developmental Disabilities; and Personal and Self Care.

MODULE 3

Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults and Children; Supporting Healthy Lives; Community Inclusion; Positive Behavior Supports; Documentation; and You've Got a Friend.

MODULE 4

Cultural Competence; Medication Support; Person Centered Planning and Supports; and Employment Supports.

MODULE 5

College of Frontline Supervision: Training and Orientation; Fueling High Performance; Developing an Intervention Plan; Recruitment and Selection.

All of our full-time adult services staff (33) is enrolled in the CDS. This past June, before a crowd of 250 at our annual picnic, our first four graduates received their CDS certificates of completion. Since that time we've had another staff member complete the entire course curriculum. We have also given our board members the opportunity to take the CDS courses. In the near future we will be adding learners from our Children and Family Services Division. And we see the value of making CDS available, under the umbrella of Alpha, to small service providers in our area, individuals who self-direct their services and families who hire and train their own staff.

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We are also looking forward to expand-

ing our use of CDS and have plans to take advantage of additional features of the program. CDS allows annotation of the curriculum and we will be able to reference support and behavior plans specific to Alpha participants, include easy access to agency policies and references to regulations specific to California.

Each year Alpha surveys participants and families to solicit feedback on our services. Although we consistently receive high marks for all aspects of our services and supports, the No. 1 complaint from our participants is the impact on their lives created by staff turnover. We know how disruptive staff changes are administratively, but for our participants, the DSPs are their mentors, their confidants, their facilitators for community access, and are attentive to their care and safety and they are their friends. We are in the early stages of tracking staff retention data, but we know that most staff leaves their employment because of moving from our area. Many who plan to stay in the field are grateful that CDS is transferable to any area in the nation!

(Written by Kimberly Olson, executive director of Alpha Resource Center in Santa Barbara, CA. She can be reached at 805.683.2145 or at 877.414.6227 (toll free) or via email at kolson@alphasb.org)

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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