

Kansans Mobilizing for Direct Support Workforce Change: Executive Summary

Background

Assuring the adequate recruitment, retention, and competence of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is widely reported as a significant barrier to the growth, sustainability, and quality of community services for people with disabilities in Kansas and across the United States. The creation of acceptable DSP wage and benefit packages continues to be an ongoing challenge and is critically important. However, it is also essential to acknowledge other aspects of the direct support workforce crisis in Kansas. The difficulties of developing a sufficient and well-prepared workforce are complex and multifaceted. The need to develop effective responses to these difficulties is immediate. Few opportunities for pre-service training exists and many DSPs are ill-prepared for the diverse skill sets they need to effectively do their jobs in supporting the state's most vulnerable citizens.

In October 2002, the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD) brought together a group of stakeholders within Kansas to create statewide systemic change in direct support workforce development. Committed to this initiative, the KCDD awarded a grant of \$600,000 managed cooperatively by the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities (KUCDD), and Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) from Cambridge, Massachusetts. This advisory committee included stakeholder representatives from the following groups: Community Development Disability Organizations (CDDOs), community service providers, self-advocates, families, Social & Rehabilitation Services (SRS), InterHab, The Alliance, KUCDD, Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Workforce/Labor and others.

Major Initiatives

The Advisory Committee for the Kansans Mobilizing for Direct Support Workforce Change (KMDSWC) project and the consulting partners have been working on major initiatives over the past 18 months and intend to discuss implementation of these initiatives with all community service providers and families throughout Kansas. These initiatives include a variety of strategies designed to improve recruitment and increase retention of DSPs. The following is a list of products and initiatives developed through the Kansas project—

Products

- *A Realistic Job Preview* — a recruitment video used to give potential

employees detailed and balanced information about job expectations, the employer, and the worksite.

Job candidates use the information to make an informed decision about a job offer from the employer.

- *Direct Support Professional Recruitment Toolkit* — a set of marketing tools and techniques for attracting and recruiting quality staff into direct support roles.
- Supervisor training curriculum — *Removing the Revolving Door*, focuses on recruitment and retention; *Power of Diversity*, addresses multicultural issues to help create and retain a diverse workforce; and, *Peer Empowerment Program*, organizes a peer to peer mentoring program among direct support staff.
- Credentialing and Apprenticeship of Direct Support Professionals — an educational and job training program currently being piloted by two community service providers.
- *College of Direct Support* — an on-line, multimedia, interactive, competency-based training program for DSPs, that is currently available to grant participants.

Initiatives

- A Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has been created. Direct support staff throughout Kansas are encouraged to join and help develop the group's mission, initial goals, and a plan for its future.
- The Advisory Committee, in addition to the above accomplishments, is working on —
 1. Obtaining official state recognition of a Direct Support Professional Day.
 2. Establishing a "Day-at-the-Legislature" for DSPs.
 3. Advocating at the state legislature for increased wages and benefits for DSPs.
 4. Expanding opportunities for individuals, families, and organizations to participate on the Advisory Committee and its work groups to make a difference in the lives of DSPs and the individuals they support.

How to Get Involved?

The advisory committee is committed to making presentations about the Kansans Mobilizing for Direct Support Workforce Change project to any providers, families, or other agencies, organizations, or associations. Please contact Michele Heydon at Sunflower Supports Company 785-273-1493 or Kathy Olson, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities, 620-421-6550 ext. 1771, to arrange for a presentation or to obtain further information.

