Direct Support Professional *focus*

Stabilization and Beyond, Ohio's Workforce: A Call to Action

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to help the reader understand the landscape and unique challenges facing the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) workforce and to provide recommendations for implementing evidence-based practices with solution-driven outcomes. This will be achieved by building on existing structures in Ohio and integrating, new research-based recommendations, to create true competency-based career pathways within the I/DD field. If structured and supported correctly, these pathways will lead to higher wages based on skills and competency, as well as become the launching pad for a multitude of other areas within the field of I/DD, including supervisory, behavior, and programming support roles.

Ohio acknowledged the workforce shortage in the early 2000s and organized a volunteer workgroup with members from the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA), which began working on solutions. That group of volunteers evolved into the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (OADSP), a 501c(3) non-profit organization. OADSP is recognized throughout the U.S. as one of the leaders in training, development, and support of DSPs. OADSP is cited three times in separate examples of "promising practices" for addressing the workforce challenges in the 2018 President's Committee Report to the President.[i]

This paper has been written to provide recommendations that blend current models with new, innovative practices, leading to a customized, sustainable model for Ohio that centers on an I/DD system in which DSPs are recognized for their value and supported to make a career in the field.

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About the Author

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Bethany Toledo has worked in the field of developmental disabilities for more than 20 years. The first nine of those years were spent as a direct support professional, then as a program director for a small organization, before becoming the first full-time executive director of OADSP in 2017. In addition to her leadership role with OADSP, Ms. Toledo participates in several statewide workgroups, and provides consulting services on major projects both within and outside of Ohio.

Contributors

Executive Summary

Nationwide, the I/DD field has been experiencing a shortage of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) for many years. People have become accustomed to calling the severe nature of the workforce shortage a "crisis." It may sound dramatic at first, but it has numbed people to its true nature.

"A 30-year crisis is not a crisis; it is a systematic and pervasive failure in the long-term services and supports system in the United States that has created a public health crisis. This failure is rooted in the tacit acceptance that, although not ideal, intense competition for public funding seems to translate to a relatively low-wage workforce and "adequate" services for people with disabilities. That acceptance must be challenged and labeled as what it is: a fundamental lack of respect for people with disabilities and the staff who choose careers in providing support to them."[2]

> Ohio is well poised to be the first state to implement a statewide career matrix that supports growth and development within the DSP role and beyond.

Perhaps continuing to call the shortage a "crisis" takes away some of the pressure and guilt from knowing the system, built by the collective "us," is flawed at its roots. There have been many siloed efforts to address the underlying challenges. However, this is not a "silver bullet" challenge. It is a multifaceted challenge, where one change for the positive can ripple out and have larger negative effects. Therefore, it is critical to develop a holistic approach be that is implemented consistently.

It is important to acknowledge that even though the system has failed DSPs, DSPs have not failed the system. Direct Support Professionals were showing up to provide excellent support and services to people with disabilities long before they were recognized as "essential." In the midst of a global pandemic, DSPs worked double and triple shifts to help keep people safe and healthy. Some answered the call to quarantine with the people they support for weeks at a time. While "non-essential" professionals sheltered in place and learned how to use Zoom while working from the comfort of their home, DSPs carried the burden of reducing the anxiety of the people they support in unprecedented situations in which health and safety measures were put ahead of individual choice.

"Low wages, evolving job expectations, and lack of robust training leaves the DSP feeling undertrained, overwhelmed and undervalued. In addition to the effect these challenges have for the DSP, the most significant cost of DSP turnover, vacancies, and inadequate training is the loss in quality of life for the people who need stable and skilled support from people with whom they share understanding, trust, and respect."[3] Ohio is proud to be the only state with a competency-based add-on, however it is grossly under-used.

Now is the time to make it right. Ohio is well-poised to be the first state to implement a statewide career matrix that supports growth and development within the DSP role and beyond. There have been a number of research-based proposals and actions toward addressing workforce challenges over the years, none of which have proven to be a one-size-fits-all" solution.

In this paper, readers find recommendations to reevaluate the delivery of the competency-based add-on, to increase its effectiveness and better serve its original purpose of boosting the attractiveness and growth opportunities of entry-level positions in the I/DD field, thereby decreasing costly turnover, estimated at $2,413 and $5,200 per DSP.[4] This paper outlines a proposal to establish a career matrix that allows DSPs the ability grow within their role, while providing increased wages that reflect additional training and experience gained along the way. Additionally, this paper provides recommendations for defining career paths that support and guide DSPs into other roles in the field, and offers a call to action with reasonable and realistic steps that can be taken to achieve these larger goals.

Landscape and Critical Challenges

The Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce provides an array of critical supports making it possible for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live, work, and thrive in their communities.[5] However, not only is there a DSP deficit, and the need is growing, recruiting potential DSPs is harder than ever. The DSP position has been vastly generalized, with weak comparisons to categorizations such as State-Tested Nurses Aides, home health aides, and personal care assistants. Furthermore, not enough has been done to professionalize a job that plays a key role in many facets (including but not limited to healthcare) of an individual's life. The pay is reflective of a low-skilled worker. This is primarily because DSP wages were created for an institutional-based system, and the funding is not reflective of the amount of change that the I/DD system has undergone since deinstitutionalization, which includes increased job role responsibilities of DSPs.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

"In many ways, DSPs are inter-disciplinary professionals. They have job duties that resemble aspects of many different professions."

[4]President's Committee, "Report to the

As defined by the Scope of Practice by the University of Minnesota's Research and Training Institute on Community Living (RTC-CL), DSPs are actually interdisciplinary professionals. They (a) develop and implement effective strategies to teach people new skills; (b) dispense medications, administer treatment plans, document care, and communicate with medical professionals; (c) assess needs, implement specific treatment plans, and document progress; (d) connect people to community resources and benefits; and (e) listen, reflect, and offer suggestions.[6]
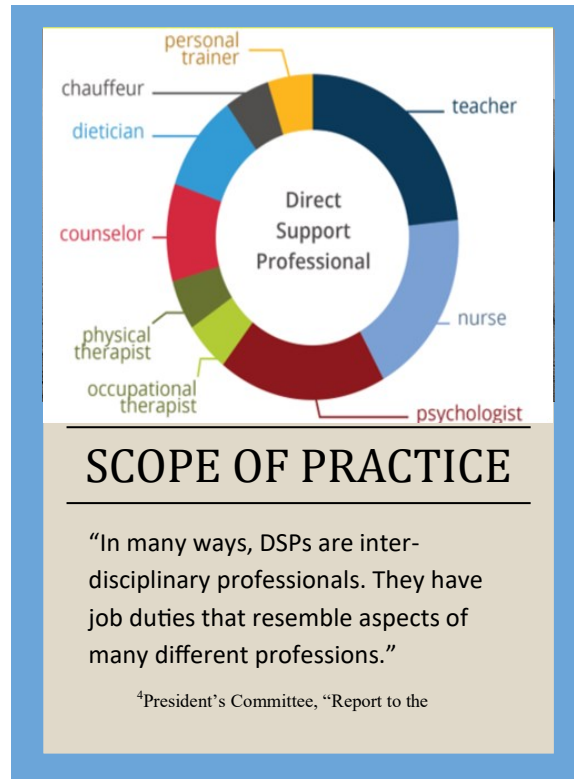
DSPs work in a variety of settings, including residential, intermediate care facilities (ICFs), community living, day programming, and employment support. DSPs are often secluded from their peers as they assist the people they support to successfully integrate with their community at very low staffing ratios. Isolation, lack of recognition, and low pay often make DSPs feel forgotten.

Limited Wages, Benefits, and Career Pathways

Regardless of how much DSPs might love their jobs, they need to be able to support themselves and their families. Low wages and lack of affordable benefits are universally identified by agencies, DSPs, and people who receive supports as the most significant issue. Compounding the wage and benefit issues, distinguishable career pathways do not exist for DSPs. In general, Ohioans recognize the acronyms STNA (State Tested Nurses Aide), HHA (Home Health Aide), and PCA (Patient Care Assistant), and often seek out related certifications/credentials to secure these types of identifiable healthcare jobs. However, people do not readily recognize the term "Direct Support Professional," or its "DSP" acronym. This may correlate to the true reality that, "there are no required credentials that ensure DSPs have met the knowledge requirements and demonstrated proficiency in skills needed for the job, nor to certify a person's commitment to the profession."[7]

With no required credentials, it isn't likely that someone will have the opportunity to learn about the profession in the same manner as STNA, HHA, or PCA jobs. Career and adult education centers provide a great deal of education about STNA and other healthcare-related training and job opportunities because there are associate required certifications/credentials. While there has been reluctance to require certifications/credentials in the past for DSPs due to the low wages, now is the time to revisit the value of certification, which validates competency and sets the stage for a defined career path with commensurate wages.

"One of the greatest challenges to the I/DD field is the low wages paid to its Direct Support Professionals. When accounting for inflation, wages in the Direct Support workforce have actually declined between 2005 and 2015."[8] Companies that provide support to people with I/DD are rate-settlers, not rate-setters. This means that the market does not allow them to set the price of their services, and instead need to fit their provider business model within the rate model set by their state. This has led to an artificial wage ceiling for DSPs that does not reflect the true dollar value of their work. This ceiling creates the "false impression that [DSPs are] not a professional occupation."[9] The ceiling also limits DSPs to two basic options to stay in the field: (1) remain a DSP, and work extra shifts to bring home more pay; or (2) "move up" to a frontline supervisor position. The former option often leads to burnout and lower quality of services, and can increase instances of Major Unusual Incidents (MUIs). The latter option often leaves DSPs turned supervisors in a position of supervising former co-workers, without the necessary skills or training to do so. While moving into supervisory roles should certainly be an option for DSPs, it should not be the only option to earn additional pay. Successful transitions should be planned for and supported with training and development opportunities.

DSPs are not simply interchangeable parts of the I/DD ecosystem. They have valuable skills that increase the effectiveness of the supports that people with developmental disabilities receive. While money is a factor in the stabilization of the workforce, "other factors stated for leaving the field include isolation from other workers, high rates of injury, high accountability, insufficient supervision, lack of a career ladder, and insufficient training and professional development opportunities."[10]

Career Matrix and Value Based Credentialing

There are steps that can be taken to improve the DSP experience. "Career paths and credentials such as

certificates are common strategies across industries in the U.S. to improve the skills of workers and to differentiate and reward them for completing training and developing additional skills."[11] Ohio has been on the forefront of DSP training and development, having established the DSPaths credentialing program in the early 2000s. DSPaths is a multi-level program that allows DSPs to build upon their skills and knowledge through classroom and hands-on education opportunities. In 2013, the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) released a toolkit providing strategies and methods that states can use to cover costs of continuing education for the direct support workforce, including training, apprenticeship, credentialing, and certification.[12]

In 2018, Ohio became the first (and still only) state to implement a combined longevity- and competency-based add-on utilizing one of the options in the CMS toolkit. DSPs that provide Homemaker/Personal Care (H/PC) services, are eligible for a $1.00 per hour wage increase after completing 60 hours of competency-based training, provided they have the equivalent of two years' full-time work experience in the field. The actual reimbursement to providers is $1.56 an hour, which takes into account some overhead, and related to training cost and the administration of the add-on.

While the add-on is a giant step in the right direction, there are some fundamental flaws that need to be

addressed to make this a viable and sustainable solution to addressing the workforce crisis. The add-on has proven troublesome for the vast majority of providers that operate day habilitation programs and Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) in conjunction with providing H/PC services, as it means only one sector of the provider's DSPs are eligible for the add-on. This limits a provider's ability to fairly compensate DSPs when they work in multiple settings. The structure puts unfair pressure on DSPs and providers; some DSPs are put in the position to either decline work in non-H/PC settings or accept a lower payrate for those hours worked. Some providers may choose to pay the difference in non-HP/C settings without reimbursement.

Another unintended negative consequence of the add-on is that it edges some DSPs out of receiving public assistance, and does not make up for the loss with a meager wage increase. A more holistic and consistent approach is necessary in order to fairly compensate an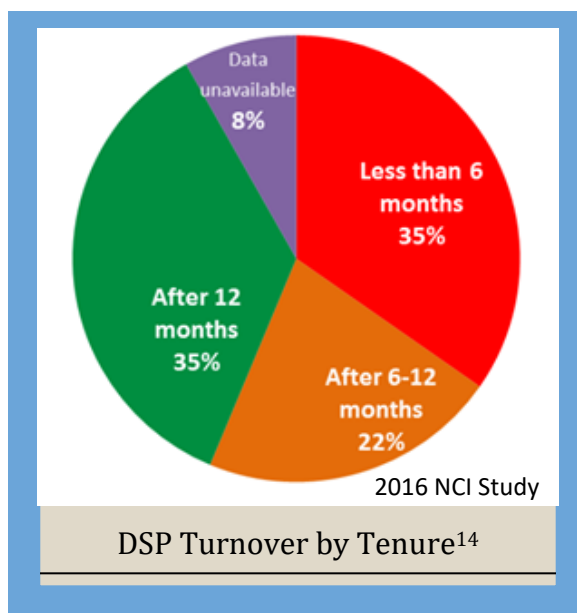d recognize the skills of DSPs. Eligibility requirements of the current add-on do not provide adequate incentive to retain DSPs. When looking at the DSP turnover by tenure rate, most DSP turnover happens within the first 12 months of being hired.[13] This data has remained consistent over the years, and is unlikely to change unless a structure is created that provides incentives for DSPs to develop skills and knowledge, and provides opportunity for growth within the role of a DSP, as well as into other areas of the I/DD field, with both options resulting in a living wage.

Therefore, a re-tooled version of the competency-based add-on is recommended to create a value-based system that demonstrates the importance of training and development at the onset of hiring a DSP.

DSP Turnover by Tenure[14]

2016 NCI Study

Consequences of Inaction

This call to action is ultimately about quality of life for people receiving services. Not only does turnover have a dollar cost associated with it, but there is also a human cost to turnover, including continuity-of-care and support to people receiving services. The Council on Quality and Leadership recently conducted a study that analyzed more than 1,300 Personal Outcome Measures through interviews with people with I/DD to examine the impact DSP turnover had on different aspects of people with disabilities' quality of life. They found that people with disabilities were significantly less likely to have almost every quality of life indicator present when they experienced DSP turnover. Compared to people with I/DD who did not experience change, people who experienced DSP change in the past two years are less likely to experience human security including (a) being safe, (b) having the best possible health, (c) exercising rights, (d) being treated fairly, (e) being respected, and (f) experiencing continuity and security. For example, people with disabilities were 32% less likely to be in integrated environments when they experienced DSP turnover and 17% less likely to participate in community life (Friedman, 2018). For people with I/DD to live in their communities, well trained DSPs must be available to, and provide the individualized supports necessary for, people with I/DD to be engaged in all facets of community life (e.g., home, work, education, faith, family, friendship, activity, and responsibilities of citizenship)[15].

According to Staff Recruitment, Retention, & Training Strategies for Community Human Services Organizations, 45% of DSPs leave their organization within the first six months of employment; an additional 23% leave between 6-12 months after hire. Turnover is costly, and ranges between $2,413-$5200

per DSP[16]; however, it is crucial to recognize that the cost of turnover is not limited to dollars and cents. DSP turnover results in a significant loss of knowledge capital.

Knowledge Capital is "an intangible resource made up of a worker's knowledge and skills."[17] DSPs are constantly learning about those they support, gaining valuable insight, and building upon their own problem-solving and teaching skills. "It is impossible for a new DSP to provide the same high quality support as a long-term DSP who more clearly understands the people being supported."[18]

Although *knowledge capital* is currently uncaptured in existing data related to the I/DD field, it stands to reason that the knowledge capital of individual DSPs increases the overall capital of an organization, and provides more stability across the board for people receiving services. A person's knowledge capital naturally grows over time, however, that growth can be accelerated by an employer's investment in in their direct support workforce. Other industries recognize, reward and value knowledge capital as if it is a line item in their budget. It is strongly recommend that the I/DD industry establish a standard mechanism for evaluating knowledge capital and its impact on retention and turnover.

The status of the DSP Workforce has widespread economic ramifications, as "the DSP occupation is one of the fields that will be in the most demand in the coming decade".[19] Still, knowing that the need is rapidly growing, little has been done to recognize or establish the value and importance of the profession itself. As indicated by the DSP Scope of Practice[20] on page four, the Direct Support Professional role is complex, yet it is not recognized by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) as being different than less complex aide-type roles, as they are lumped into the "Personal Care Aide" category.[21] This is problematic because it dilutes the data needed to present to policy makers and rate setters. When the BLS predicts the job growth in an industry, it is an average across all types of titles that are lumped into the specific BLS category, meaning that it is highly likely that the percentage of growth for I/DD support positions (mainly, DSPs), is even higher when considering the increase in autism diagnosis, aging parental caregivers, more people leaving the workforce than are entering, and people with I/DD living longer lives than ever before.

Additionally, not having a standardized code to recognize DSPs impedes recruitment efforts. Not only does the field have to attract people to it, but it first needs to educate them about what a DSP is. The term Direct Support Professional, or its acronym DSP, are not widely known.

Community Impact

The workforce shortage has a great impact on communities. DSP shortages and lack of professional training can lead to the use of more costly community resources. "When there are not enough staff, and when those who are present are not well trained, the people they support use more of the community's police, ambulance, firefighter, emergency department, acute care and other resources. Availability of more experienced and better-trained DSPs could reduce this cost to communities. Additionally, given that nearly half of all DSPs use some form of government-funded, means-tested public assistance, the current

crisis' foundation in low-wage, limited-advancement employment results in communities and taxpayers picking up the costs of income replacement supports for health care, housing, food, child care and other necessities."[22]

While developing a rate structure that rewards competency and experience may seem like a costly solution at first, the overall benefit is less dependence on community resources for people receiving services, as well as DSPs.

Proposal Overview & Justification

The goal of this proposal is to provide an outline to a value-based system that rewards ongoing training and experience, and attracts new professionals to the I/DD field by providing opportunities for growth and development with commensurate pay, along with support and encouragement to explore other opportunities in the field; resulting in increased satisfaction of employees and continuity of care and support for people with I/DD.

In 2019, the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), along with Community Bridges Consulting Group, and the University of Delaware authored a white paper titled, *Moving From Crisis to Stabilization: The Case for Professionalizing the Direct Support Workforce Through Credentialing.*[23] This paper states that professionalizing the field through credentialing will achieve three major milestones:

1. Implementation of competency-based credentialing to ensure that DSPs understand and are implementing competency-based training to enhance the quality of support;

2. Coordination of competency-based credentialing within state reimbursement rate structures for incentive payments based on credentialing to raise DSP wages and linked to skill enhancement and testing; and

3. Introduction of a true career ladder to the workforce, promoting employee tenure. [24]

Creating a statewide value-based credentialing system

that rewards more robust training and experience not only has the potential to address the workforce issues in Ohio, it can serve as an example of an operational model to other states. Simply stated, this is not just an Ohio problem; the need for quality direct support professionals is nationwide.

Another benefit to a statewide system of this nature is that the credentials would be portable, allowing a DSP to move about while continuing down the path of growth and skill attainment.

The Future of Training

The hallmarks of any profession in include the ability

> *"Simply stated, this is not just an Ohio problem; the need for quality direct support professionals is nationwide."*

to learn and grow within specific roles, but *how* younger generations learn is changing. "In the past, generations approached learning conventionally. Learning was top-down, on-the-job, and delivered in inside a classroom. In the future, generations will approach learning unconventionally. Millennials and Generation Z have a much different relationship, expectation, and approach to learning. Learning now must be micro, mobile-first, innovative, beautifully designed, relevant, and on-demand to meet the needs of the next generation. These expanding expectations are a primary driving force behind the learning and development shift."[25]

Enter the gamification model.

Considerable research and attention has been devoted to the use of gamification to improve training outcomes. Recent research shows that gamification

enables employees to feel confident with succeeding in tasks, and increases motivation within a learning environment.[26] A 2019 study concluded that gamification can lead to higher acceptance of HR practices, because game design elements such as badges can meet the need for achievement and the desire for technology driven tools at work.[27]

Game design elements such as points, badges, and potential rewards for knowledge sharing are helpful tools to enhance the quality of knowledge sharing and cooperative behavior, when the corporate culture is characterized by feedback and openness.[28] Researchers found empirical evidence that gamification can enhance employee engagement, as well as employee motivation, and job satisfaction.[29]

Gamification as a Recruitment & Retention Tool

"In the past, workers achieved career longevity by going to work for a reputable employer. Workers used to line up at the doorstep of well-established employers eager to make their case as to why the company should hire them. In the future, workers will achieve career longevity by continuously acquiring relevant skills. Employers used to do the interviewing of new workers, but today's workers are more likely to size-up the employer with an emphasis on how the company develops its employees. Tomorrow's worker will be attracted to the employer that enables employees to skill build using (self-serve) platforms.[30]

Gamification and I/DD

Versions of gamification are rapidly developing in higher education and on the job (OTJ) training models, and I/DD is no exception. The University of Wichita is launching a new program in the summer of 2021 that is specifically designed to address the recruitment and retention of direct support professionals. This program will be marketed to three sectors with the following expected outcomes:

1. Degree bound students will take badge courses to learn about I/DD while earning college credit and have the ability to receive internship/work experience.

2. Non-degree bound students (both incumbent and non-incumbent workers) will be able to earn badges that are industry recognized and validate their skills.

3. Lastly, the program will offer dual credits for high school students, allowing them to prepare for a career as a direct support professional, while exploring the possibility of attaining a human service related degree.

Wichita State University has chosen to develop their badge program around the Ohio DSPaths credentialing curriculum, a strong testament to the progressive foundation that already exists in Ohio.

In addition to the higher education model, the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has created a system that enables DSPs to demonstrate their competency and grow within their role through their E-Badge Academy™ (EBA). This system also provides both direct and indirect opportunities for DSPs to identify and explore other roles in the field. The EBA™ provides instant recognition along the way to various established credential levels for DSPs and frontline supervisors.

The success of any gamification model in I/DD will be compromised without the implementation of a standardized credentialing model being established in a state's rate-system. The 2013 Center for Medicaid Services (CMS) tool-kit supports, "formal recognition of specialty knowledge and skill [that are]... associated

with a greater level of specialization in an area and credentialed staff members [receiving] higher wages"[31] This tool-kit was the basis for Ohio's competency-based add-on, however as indicated, the implementation and parameters of the add-on have proven challenging, and the add-on has not had the desired effect of attracting and retaining DSPs. This is, due in large part, to the inability to earn the add-on until 24 months of full-time employment and 60 hours of competency-based training, with the payoff being a one-time raise of $1.00 per hour to the DSP.

This proposal recommends the creation of a tiered system that allows DSPs to grow through training and experience. The training can be achieved through a number of accredited training entities via in-person, online, and hybrid models. The demonstration of competency could be measured through the earning of badges in a system such as the NADSP E-Badge Academy™, with credentialing levels, that when attained, result in pay raises through the Medicaid reimbursement system.

Potential DSP Career Lattice/Ladder

With the current competency-based add-on, an agency is responsible for verifying staff who are eligible for the add-on and billing a code tied to the applicable services provided by that DSP. As a modification to this model, it is recommended that increases be tied to the agency rather than the specific DSP. The rates would be determined by the percentage of DSPs who are credentialed at various levels. This would reduce administrative burden for agencies that utilize the current adaptation of the competency-based add-on, and give agencies the opportunity to increase its overall rates utilizing a value-based payment system.

The value in this case is being added by DSPs who are investing in their own development and growth, as well as the agency that supports their career path.
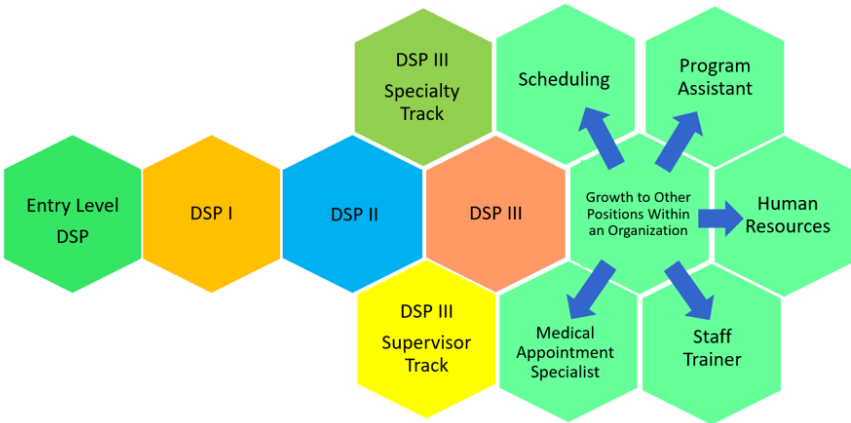
To simplify the billing process, a system would need to be developed and approved by CMS that increases payments to providers for percentages of staff meeting certain credential levels. The methodology for this exists in the CMS toolkit.[31]

This model would be partially funded by the reevaluation of the competency-based add-on. Additional funding would need to be secured through legislative action, as well as investment at the county and provider levels.

The proposed structure would have four tiers. The first being a DSP as it is known today, a worker who has had enough training to be certified and able to provide services as described in rule. The next tier, DSP-I, would require six months of full-time experience or equivalent, plus a 25 hours training badge and a combination of competency demonstration badges through a gamification evaluation system such as the NADSP EBA™. Once a DSP I status is achieved, the DSP would receive a raise. The next tier, DSP-II, would require the DSP to have 12 months of full time experience, or equivalent, plus an additional 25 hours of training and a combination of competency demonstration badges. Once the DSP II status is achieved, the DSP would receive a second raise. The final tier, DSP-III, would require 24 months of full-time experience, or equivalent, plus an additional 50 hours of competency-based training and a combination of competency demonstration badges. Once the DSP III level is achieved, the DSP would be entitled to a raise, as well as have the ability to specialize in certain areas that may garner additional raises in the future. Along the way, should a DSP become interested in becoming a supervisor, they can elect to earn training hours and badges toward a supervisor credential after earning the DSP II certification.

This type of system will be sustainable once the cost of overtime and turnover decreases enough that a provider is able to support DSP career paths with commensurate pay. One example of cost for a system of this nature is the NADSP EBA™, with cost established at approximately $65 per employee, per year. This allows a DSP or frontline supervisor to earn unlimited badges and credentials during that time. They can drop into and out of the system and never lose anything they earn. While there may be some initial sticker shock with the cost, it pales in comparison to the cost of turnover. If an agency has 100 DSPs that are all enrolled in the EBA™, the cost would be $6500 per year, which is comparable to the cost of turnover for a single DSP.

Joshua's Story

The effects of providing opportunities for DSPs to lead and grow cannot be overstated. Joshua Peterson, a DSP at RHDD in Coshocton, Ohio has a story not unlike others in the field. The following excerpt is from a book under development titled, *Turning the Tide: Strategies for Individual and Collective Action Toward Workforce Stability,* being published by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

"I came to the I/DD field of direct support without any particular career goals or expectations. I knew I enjoyed my interactions with people with disabilities (having two parents that worked in the field), and I needed a job with full time hours. However, I had no concept of how what I did could be a career, there was no clear professional identity to develop and build upon. I would go to social events and when asked what I did, I would use euphemisms or compare it to other jobs. Generally, I did not want to talk about work outside of work-- it did not feel like something that others would understand, and I had internalized society's quiet dismissal of what I did, so why bring it up?

It was a job, not something I could invest in personally. This perception, ultimately, was one of how we've allowed the work DSPs do to be framed. Fortunately for me, that perception was shattered on a single day in 2014, when I attended my first professional conference,

the OADSP Summit. This opened my eyes to what a professional identity for a DSP could look like and how the field at large was much more dynamic and full of opportunities. My enthusiasm was reignited, and I began to look for chances within my own organization to develop and grow, which led me to participate in the DSPaths credentialing program. Now, years later, I feel as if I have really carved a career out of what began as simply a job. I also now realize that up and coming DSPs have the potential to begin engaging their career from the onset. Professional identity and development is crucial to transforming this field. I believe this is a field where thriving careers can be formed and major impact can achieved. And in many cases, the first step towards that can be taken in a single day."

#DSPsAreEssential

From Lisa Reed, Executive Director of RHDD also remarks on Josh's rise understanding about his role as a DSP:

"When Josh started working with RHDD in 2003, he was shy and relatively reserved. He was always very polite and professional, but his true self had not yet been set free. That wouldn't happen for several years, while he was developing as a DSP. He has now evolved from that shy DSP who never missed a shift, into a strong leader and vocal advocate for his fellow DSPs. He enjoys speaking out about the stressors and the unconditional love that his career has brought into his life.

The turning point for Josh took place in April, 2014 when he attended his first professional DSP event; the

Many of Ohio's I/DD leaders began their careers as Direct Support Professionals.

Jeff Davis, Director, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

Kelly Miller, Deputy Director, Office of System Support and Standards (OSASS), DODD

Nick Miller, DSP Development Specialist, DODD

Kelly Petty, Superintendent, Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities (CBDD)

Lisa Reed, Executive Director, RHDD

Tina Soller, Program Coordinator, Muskingum Residentials, Inc.

Jamie Steele, Executive Director, Ohio Valley Residential Services (OVRS)

Jason Umstot, Superintendent, Licking CBDD

Pam Walters, Medicaid Service Manager, Union CBDD

...and the list goes on.

2014 OADSP Summit. The summit revealed opportunities and experiences for Josh that he wasn't aware existed. He went on to take the OADSP DSPaths Basic Certificate course, and joined the DSP Council, where he helped design themes, graphics, and tag lines for subsequent summits and DSP recognition events. Josh's passion was further fueled when he attended the 2017 OADSP Leadership LAUNCHpad© Retreat, and was subsequently recognized for his leadership skills and professional growth by being presented with the Amy Gerowitz Leadership Legacy Award. The man he is today is the result of dedication and willingness to learn from experiences. This would not have been possible without the opportunities provided by an accessible professional association tailored to meet the needs of DSPs. Josh is a treasure to the people he supports, to his co-workers, and to management of this agency. He is the model of what a DSP is meant to be."[32]

Unfortunately, Joshua's story, and those like it are often overshadowed by the workforce shortage. Without DSPs like Joshua, the future of the field would be bleak. DSPs can easily become discouraged and leave the field before they have an opportunity to see their ability have an impact and a life-long career in the field. Many of Ohio's I/DD leaders, including executive directors and superintendents, started their career as a DSP.

It is time that we invest more in current DSPs by giving them opportunities to learn, grow, and prosper in the field. This will take support from providers, associations, county boards, and DODD; all working together to advocate for a funding system that supports the concepts outlined in this paper.

Call to Action

Macro Level: What can be done through system partnerships and engagement?

- Legislation to establish a Standardized Occupational Classification (SOC) in Ohio.

- Examine and establish the value of knowledge capital in I/DD.

- Create a value-based payment system by retooling the Competency Based Add-On that supports a career matrix in I/DD.

It is highly recommended that a *workforce innovation taskforce* is established to draw a blueprint that builds upon the recommendations outlined in this paper. This taskforce should include representation from the DSP and frontline supervisor communities, forward-thinking industry leaders, as well as experts in major system transformation from other industries.

Micro Level: What can individual leaders do?

- Use the term Direct Support Professionals, or DSP, any time you are speaking about people that are paid to directly support people with I/DD. Any other term diminishes the role of a DSP.

- Instead of generalized comparisons, use the DSP Scope of Practice language and graphic to describe the work DSPs do.

- Recognize the value of knowledge capital and help create an environment of mutual trust and respect by continually investing in DSPs.

- Advocate for value-based payment systems whereby the value is added by the quality of the staff supporting people with disabilities.

- Allow and encourage DSPs to be part of the solution. Work in partnership with them to increase the return on investment for agencies, people receiving supports, and individual staff.

> It is vitally important to acknowledge the value that DSPs bring to the I/DD service industry in meaningful ways that promote retention and provide opportunities for growth.

Conclusion

How can the experience of DSPs be improved so that they feel valued, recognized, and compensated in such a way that dedication to supporting people with disabilities is sustained for a lifetime, regardless of where their career path may lead?

Elevating the image and status of DSPs is a key piece of the puzzle to increase the capacity to and sustainability of a qualified DSP workforce. This paper challenges leaders to imagine and engineer a future where resources are invested in retention rather than turnover. If built correctly, the system would spend pennies and save dollars, which, in turn, could then be reinvested in the workforce.

A value-based payment system has three main components:

1.) Competency-based training

2.) Demonstration of skills and knowledge with a human evaluation component

3.) Recognition through status level achievements commensurate with pay

The framework proposed in this paper calls for building a culture of mutual respect where investments in DSPs lead to a higher ROI. In turn, this will result in people with I/DD and those that care about them feeling extremely satisfied with their services and DSPs feeling valued and encouraged to make an impact.

"The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

- Mahatma Gandhi

Perhaps this quote should be followed up by, "…and the Direct Support Professionals that support them."

Reflections

The following reflections have been shared in support of *Stabilization and Beyond, Ohio's Workforce: A Call to Action*

Joseph Macbeth, President/CEO, National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals:

"If anything, COVID-19 has lifted the veil on a decades long systemic failure to support the most important resource in the disability services sector – the direct support workforce – which has been neglected for far too long. If there is a long-term silver lining on the other side of this pandemic, it may be that our direct support workforce will finally be given the attention and opportunity that is long overdue and clearly described by this paper. Lead on, Ohio. The nation will follow".

Pete Moore, CEO, Ohio Provider Resource Association:

"We would like to thank OADSP for their serious effort to take on the workforce crisis and for making the case for a developmental disability system that appreciates the vital role of the DSP. Ohio's provider community believes the workforce crisis is the biggest threat to the sustainability of quality services in our system. We must consider system innovations and system reform as OADSP's "call to action" illustrates. We know there is not one solution to this crisis, it has to be fought on many fronts. At OPRA we are anxious to join with all of our partners, including OADSP, to explore the best possible solutions and intentionally address this threat to our system."

Bridget Gargan, CEO, Ohio Association of County Boards:

"We agree with OADSP that the DSP workforce crisis threatens the very foundation of our state's service delivery system. While many meaningful efforts have been made in recent years to provide DSPs with better financial compensation and professional recognition, we believe that more can and should be done to demonstrate our commitment to these essential frontline workers. While there are no easy solutions, we applaud the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals for proposing ways to address one of our system's most pressing and complex issues with the new and innovative proposals in this white paper."

Fatica Diana Ayers, Policy Analyst/Planner, Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council:

"The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council has been a partner in addressing the issues surrounding Direct Support Professionals since 2001. Council has dedicated over $860,827.00 in finding ways to professionalize and support DSPs in Ohio. ODDC realize the importance of what DSPs contribute to supporting people with disabilities to live self - determined lives and being a part of the community."

Smart Investment:

DSPs Help People with Disabilities Bridge the Gap and be Successful Members of the Community

Key Points

1.) Direct Support Professionals were showing up to provide excellent support and services to people with disabilities long before they were recognized as being "*essential*."

2.) A Direct Support Professional's access and ability to find a path that fits their passion should not be left to chance.

3.) A more holistic and consistent approach is necessary in order to fairly compensate and recognize the skills of Direct Support Professionals.

Reflections

Nate Kamban, Superintendent Tuscarawas County Board of Developmental Disabilities

"This white paper reflects well Ohio's commitment to innovation and partnership. OADSP is embodying these ideals by exploring the development of forward-thinking and holistic strategies to meet the needs of our communities. I look forward to the outcomes developed by the workforce innovation task force as we continue to pursue excellence in the IDD field."

Tim Neville, President, President/CEO & Executive Leadership Team, Echoing Hills Village, Inc.

"We can all confidently agree that Direct Support Professionals are vital to our industry, and we know we cannot provide quality services without them. They are critical, and our industry's sustainability is in jeopardy unless we figure out today how to recruit, train and retain tomorrow's DSP. This will take a new and innovative approach. An approach rooted in the application of person-centered theories to our employees. Imagine a workplace where each employee had their own person-centered plan for employment that included their strengths, desires, goals, and how we will support them to achieve victory in the workplace."

Dave Rastoka, Owner/CEO Advancing Abilities Inc.

"I have been blessed to be working in this field since 1981 and over the past 40 years have seen a lot of changes, specifically with the workforce crisis in the DSP position. The Direct Support Professional is our foundation and, in my opinion, is the most important facet in a person with a disability's life. As OADSP states in this document – there is a systematic problem throughout our great country with obtaining and maintaining a DSP workforce and the DSP Career Ladder is an absolute must, if we want to maintain quality services with highly competent employees."

Jamie Steele, Executive Director, OVRS

"One thing that the past year's pandemic has shown is that "the system" has taken for granted the vital role the DSP plays in the everyday support of people with disabilities. Besides not paying DSP's what their skills deserve, we as a system have forgotten to reward the joy and satisfaction of the work. We forgot that to give joy, one must be joyful and rewarded for that unique skill. Congrats to OADSP for studying and coming up with solid recommendations."

Sherry Steinman, Retired Public Information Officer, DODD; OADSP Board Member

"In support of this white paper, as a communications professional in the DD field for mor than 20 years, I say "Halleluiah"! It is time that DSPs become fully recognized for their work and dedication, and offered a clear path forward, complete with commensurate monetary rewards."

Tony Thomas, Executive Director, Welcome House
Past President, OADSP and NADSP Board of Directors

"I loved the elements of this paper as it reflects a clear understanding of the challenges we have for attracting and retaining quality staff. We must, as the paper says, continue to push the agenda of tying wages to credentialing and rewarding continued growth in our field. We want to build our field in the right way, not just with the fastest method. These types of efforts and solutions will get us to the finish line."

Jason Umstot, Superintendent, Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities

"Direct Support Professionals (DSP) fill the most important role in the DD system. It is absolutely essential that DSPs receive the tools they need to do their work so the most desired outcomes can be achieved for the people they support. While there are many ways to support DSPs, quality training must be a priority."

Becky Watson, Vice President of Community Services, St. Joseph Home
President, OADSP Board of Directors; Member, NADSP Board of Directors

"It is undeniable that the DSP workforce is the backbone of the DD system and that change is needed to help address the workforce crisis our entire field is facing. While we have made some steps forward in Ohio, there is much to do to develop long term system solutions that will work to stabilize and professionalize this very vital workforce."

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