



COLLEGE OF DIRECT SUPPORT

PARTNER PROFILES

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Orange AHRC Graduates 340 DSPs In First 2 Years Of Using CDS; 'It Opened Our Eyes,' One Staffer Said

"For me, the CDS was refreshing, and it was especially nice to see how the individuals we serve are getting more and more choices given to them over the years," said DSP Leigh Schulz.

"Though it will never be enough, I like the fact that as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) I am a part of opening more doors for the people we serve," said Leigh Schulz, a DSP for Orange AHRC in Newburgh, N.Y., a suburban area 50 miles north of Manhattan.

Leigh is one of 340 graduates of the College of Direct Support (CDS) in the two years Orange AHRC has offered it to employees who work with adults who have developmental disabilities. "For me, the CDS was refreshing, and it was especially nice to see how the individuals we serve are getting more and more choices given to them over the years," she said.

Executive Director Christopher Fortune credits CDS graduates with being the people who deliver the agency's mission: supporting and advocating for people of all ages with unique abilities and challenges so they can live as respected and valued members of the community. "You are the experts on the people we serve, you are teachers, you're the friends, you support them to become members of the community, you help them live their dreams," he said, "We need to listen to you when we discuss plans and services."

Established in 1954 by parents who needed services for their children, Orange AHRC has evolved from a fledgling education program to a countywide service for 1,500 people with developmental disabilities -- including infants, children, adults and senior citizens. The non-profit agency is the seventh largest employer in the county, with 650-plus employees.

AHRC programs include two preschools, a K-12 school, 18 residential homes, supervised apartments, day habilitation job training and employment, respite care, recreation and service coordination.

Today Orange AHRC is in the enviable



**Orange
AHRC**
Celebrating Abilities

position of having cultivated a tremendous number of long-term, dedicated employees. Turnover is below average, and many staff members have worked at a variety of direct support positions in the organization. "Now, with such a large percentage of the employees having completed the CDS, we are implementing much richer, personalized planning components agency-wide," said Lynn Sereta, Assistant Director of Training.

"Orange AHRC has sent more learners through the Direct Support Professional course than any other organization in New York State," says Joseph Macbeth, Vice-President of NYSACRA (New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies).

As he addressed the crowd at Orange AHRC's 2010 graduation ceremony he said, "You had an 84% completion rate compared to the rest of the state's 68%." Macbeth challenged the graduates to go on to achieve national credentialing, saying only three DSP's out of the 75,000 DSPs in New York State have it. The CDS curriculum qualifies as a component toward national credentialing through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).

Staff willingness to enroll in CDS was enhanced by offering a set wage increase per hour for finishing each of two training modules. Staff also were paid to attend the four "live" classes for each module. "We felt that investing in our staff would be a win-win situation," explained Fortune. "The better they are equipped, the better the supports,

teaching and community integration they can offer the people we serve.”

The option of taking CDS was offered to all DSPs, even to transportation drivers who transport the people to and from their homes. All supervisors of DSPs were required to enroll as well.

Many staff also took Orange AHRC up on its offer to finance the purchase of a home computer with repayment to AHRC via payroll deductions. This enabled staff to afford to buy a computer for their own and their family’s use at home, plus allowed them the freedom to study at their own pace at home.

Kim Pelfrey and Jim Cappadora, co-directors of Orange AHRC’s residential program, each took the DSP course, as well as the CDS Frontline Supervision and Management curriculum. “We both have Master’s Degrees and many years of experience in this field, and CDS still opened our eyes about alternate ways of doing things,” said Pelfrey.

“The course went into details about the disabilities the people we serve have,” said Cappadora.

Orange AHRC and its employees also benefit from the majority of the staff’s increased comfort with using computers thanks to the CDS online training program. “I am technologically challenged,” admitted DSP Helen Zippili of Canterbury residence, “but once a co-worker got me started on it and showed me how user-friendly the CDS software was, I even got my own laptop for home. As a DSP, the course content amazed me too: there were so many alternative ways of looking at things and implementing changes.”

Families of people Orange AHRC serves have complimented DSPs and spoken to administrators and managers about the newfound insights staff have had since taking the courses, and the positive effects of that insight on their family member’s progress and outlook.

The excitement of the CDS has spilled over to the people served by Orange AHRC. “One 25-year-old man is pursuing

his G.E.D., just passed his learner’s permit test for driving, and is determined to get ‘out of the system’ to help others like himself. He views CDS as a way he can work toward his goals,” said Pelfrey.

“I would definitely recommend CDS to everybody who is a DSP,” said Michelle Goudreau, manager at Maplewood residence. “We learned about supporting the individuals, getting to know them on a deeper level, recognizing cultural diversity, and finding different ways to understand their needs or wishes, whether through facial expressions, verbal cues or body language. It was awesome.”

Charles Smith, manager of Residential Habilitation and In-Home Respite for Orange AHRC, had never been a DSP. He found the courses enlightening.

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CDS was a career stepping stone for two DSPs. Darrell Griffin was named to the board of DSPANYS, the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State, and Yolanda “Peaches” Conquest serves as the Mid Hudson Regional Vice President of DSPANYS.

John F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime advocate for people with developmental disabilities and for those who support them, observed in a statement that might be used to describe the power of the knowledge contained in the College of Direct Support: “It’s time for direct support professionals to look beyond their own walls, and to let the world know that the skill, knowledge and attributes it takes to excel at direct support work are the same attributes that make for better parents, neighbors and citizens.”

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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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