



CDS Partner Profiles

Pennsylvania was the First in the Country to Adopt Online CDS Curriculum Statewide

For nearly a decade, Pennsylvania’s Department of Public Welfare Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) has continued to provide self-advocates, families and direct support staff with access to DirectCourse/College of Direct Support (CDS). Pennsylvania became the first state in the country to adopt the CDS online curriculum as a method for uniform education across the entire state.

Seeking a convenient, cost effective, accessible, and around-the-clock tool for Pennsylvania’s direct support community, the ODP first

discussed purchasing a statewide license to administer online courses through the CDS at the Reinventing

Quality Conference back in 2002. CDS representatives worked with members of the ODP and its stakeholders, who were impressed with the course flexibility, affordability, and especially by its content, which they felt was some of the best in the world.

“The content was developed by national and international experts,” said Jacqueline Epstein, Training and Communications Director for the Office of Developmental Programs. “And it was managed through the University of Minnesota, who already had an

excellent reputation in the field of intellectual disabilities. How can you replicate that?”

Epstein continues, “One constant in our licensing regulations is that the provider must be able to meet the individual needs of the person. CDS has such a wide variety of topical areas that it helps to address that issue.”

She also noted that, at the time of the conference in 2002, CDS was the leader in the field, being the first and, at the time, only online training system specifically geared toward direct support professionals working in the field of intellectual disabilities. Now the DirectCourse overbrand that initiated with CDS, offers curricula for employment services and personal care assistance.

CDS is a nationally recognized online curriculum developed by both national and international experts, updated frequently, based on best practices, and is accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. In Pennsylvania, as with the rest of the United States, direct support professionals work varying hours, have increased responsibilities, and face geographical challenges, such as working in rural areas, far from sites that might be ideal for training. The CDS proved to be an ideal fit for Pennsylvania’s training program, as the web-based curriculum gives learners the freedom to work at any hour of the day, in any location, and at their own pace.



Even better, Pennsylvania’s CDS curriculum was tailored to meet that state’s particular regulations. The staff at ODP and community stakeholders from every corner of the state—including self-advocate, family members, disability advocates, families, providers, and county representatives, among others—worked diligently with CDS, to customize the content. The state of Pennsylvania also encourages learners to periodically weigh in on the coursework, and the feedback is closely

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monitored by ODP to enhance the learners’ use of CDS. It is a constantly evolving process.

Furthermore, the CDS staff also took a hands-on role in helping to administer the curriculum for its clients, working closely with the state to make sure its varying needs were met. “One of the most critical things for us in making the decision to adopt The College of Direct Support is how engaged the interested parties were right from the very beginning. CDS came out, showed us what they were developing, and there was a total buy-in from the start, as they were represented in the decision-making.”

Funded at both the state and national levels, the learner’s cost of enrolling in the CDS is shared, with the state absorbing the licensing fee and the agency absorbing the learners’ administrative costs.

As of this writing, Pennsylvania has seen over 30,000 learners registered with the CDS online program, from over 200 enrolled individuals and organizations. These numbers include, of course, direct support professionals, but also self-advocates and family members who use the courses in the state’s self-determination initiative.

Ms. Epstein is emphatic when discussing the merits of the CDS for direct support professionals. “Why would we want multiple providers creating overlapping training, when we can draw from training developed by the leaders in the field? This creates consistency of knowledge development.”

From a letter welcoming learners to Pennsylvania CDS, the goal of this program is stated perfectly: “We hope that by using the College of Direct Support curriculum, we will begin to build a common language, which will enhance communication and help us better support the people we serve.”

For more information about the DirectCourse/ College of Direct Support curriculum call 1-888-526-8756 or email directcourse@elsevier.com.

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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 *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* is written by leaders or organizations that are actually engaged in these efforts.



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