



CDS Partner Profiles

New Hampshire's DirectConnect Blends CDS Into Its Unique Approach To Training DSPs

There is a unique initiative underway at the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability. Its name is "DirectConnect" and it was created to help identify and put into place sustainable best-practice models for the recruiting, training, educating and retaining of direct-care workers across four population sectors – aging, mental health, physical and developmental disabilities.

This statewide project has national implications and national funding in the form of a three-year, \$2.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and many eyes will be examining and analyzing the results when the projects ends in the spring of 2013.



Why New Hampshire? Five states are identified as having the fastest-growing aging populations – Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, New Hampshire, and Florida, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. As the population ages, more and more people will need care and supports.

As Bill Tapp, the founder of the College of Direct Support (CDS) says, "If we live long enough we'll all have a disability of some kind and need someone to care and support each of us."

The initial wave of the Baby Boomer Generation born between 1946 and 1964 celebrated their 65th birthdays in 2011. During those 18 years, 77 million babies were born and that first wave is expected to live to be 83 years old. By 2015, those aged 50 and older will represent 45% of the nation's population. It's going to require a huge number of caregivers and

direct support staff to fill those roles. According to PHI, the direct-care workforce in 2006 was more than 3 million strong and the country will need an additional 1 million new positions by 2016, PHI estimates. Today, New Hampshire has approximately 12,000 people receiving services under the state's Bureau of Developmental Services and that number will grow.

New Hampshire decided to try and get ahead of the curve – or the wave perhaps – and DirectConnect became a reality in March 2010. The College of Direct Support is a big part of DirectConnect, a partner in the project so to speak, in the recruiting, training and retaining of direct support professionals (DSPs) to support those in New Hampshire with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That effort is led by Scott Trudo, DirectConnect Project Director.

"The Institute on Disability at the University of NH is pleased to work with the College of Direct Support and other quality training partners to help create a skilled, professional direct care workforce here in New Hampshire. The CDS has proven to be a highly accessible, quality training venue that is being widely adopted in NH community service agencies," said Susan Fox, Co-Director of the University of New Hampshire's Center on Aging and Community Living and Clinical Assistant Professor at the Institute on Disability.

In early 2011 DirectConnect began enrolling staff into the CDS training and in less than a year Trudo says they have approximately 275 staff working on CDS courses, with about 70% working to earn the credential certificate. They are adding about 15 to 20 learners per month. "We expect to have enrolled between 400 and



500 when the grant ends on March 1, 2013," he said.

DirectConnect's approach to using CDS is a unique one. The Institute on Disability decided to create a training process that integrates CDS's online training (an individual experience) with additional group and peer-to-peer activities. "This blended model creates a learning environment that delivers positive outcomes by helping staff to retain more of what they have learned and apply the learning to the work they do every day with the people they support," Trudo explained. "Those

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One of the most dramatic and high-impact results of using CDS is the amazing reduction in staff turnover we have experienced – 53% to 15%.

who take the CDS are given the opportunity to take the necessary courses to receive a Direct Support Professional certificate from the Institute on Disability.”

Trudo says that one of the primary goals of DirectConnect is to create sustainable training models that can be used in New Hampshire after the grant ends. “By combining the flexibility of the CDS curriculum with a series of hands-on, active learning approaches, DirectConnect participants will have the tools, the process, and the skills to continue what has been started,” Trudo said.

Today, there are 8 to 10 agencies in New Hampshire enrolling staff on a regular basis into the CDS credential program that Trudo created. And that number is growing. These agencies include Easter Seals NH, Crotched Mountain, Living Innovations, Great Bay Services, The Moore Center, Lakes Region Community Services, Monadnock Worksource, One Sky and Gateways Community Services.

Here is a look at the three-part integrated training approach that DirectConnect is using:

1. Direct support staff begins by taking a combination of required and elective CDS courses online. The online feature offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of where

and when staff takes the training. Some staff take the training in their workplace during the day, while others may choose to take it at home in the evening. Each course is comprised of a number of lessons, much like chapters in a book. Each lesson contains a post test, which is used as one outcome measure.

2. The second part of the training intervention involves peer-to-peer discussion groups. These facilitated discussions correspond with the online courses, providing a forum for staff to discuss the online learning in the context of the work they do supporting people in the community. To help create structure and consistency, the Institute on Disability created a tool known as the College of Direct Support Facilitator's Guide, which contains lesson plans for each of the courses. Based on input from participants, the dynamic created by the peer-to-peer discussions is one of the most enjoyable parts of the training process, Trudo explained. “While many agencies facilitate discussion groups for their staff exclusively, DirectConnect also uses video conferencing as a means to facilitate peer discussion groups between sites statewide,” he added. “Because this approach includes many more participants, each is exposed to more personal experiences, stories and perspectives. Feedback from staff has been very positive.”

3. The third part of the training intervention involves the use of two of the excellent on-the-job training tools contained within CDS -- Portfolios and the Skill Statements. The portfolio tool is used by participants in a variety of ways. It offers examples of activities for staff to engage with the people they support, writing assignments that document how they have applied their learning and a variety of other professional development options. The second on-the-job training tool is a complete set of Skill Statements that directly relate to each online course. The statements reflect national standards, and are well suited to become part of a peer mentoring process. Based on feedback from participants, these tools provide an excellent way to make sure that everyone working with the people they support has the same set of skills to do the job. “Well-trained DSPs understand that it takes more than instinct and a good heart to do their job. They know that it takes knowledge, skills and good judgment – each reinforced using on-the-job tools,” Trudo explained.

This integrated process, Trudo adds, is tied to the amount of knowledge people retain in training. “Research aimed at how adults learn in the workplace has found that adult learners remember as little as 10-30% of what they have learned in training just two weeks after attending,” he said. “That means that participants forget as much as 70-90%. The same research finds that if the learning incorporates active learning approaches like the one we have developed, giving learners the opportunity to actively apply the learning in some way, they are shown to retain as much as 90% of the learning over the same timeframe.”

Trudo also developed a CDS program evaluation survey that is on each learner’s personal page. It gives them the opportunity to evaluate the program and offer suggestions of how it could be improved. “The responses to date have been very, very good,” he says.

A key part of Trudo’s strategy to help this program succeed and remain sustainable after the grant ends was the creation of the CDS Workforce Advisory Group. The group is made up of leadership and management from agencies across the state that meet regularly to explore best approaches to implementing the CDS in a variety of settings. One outcome of the work of this group was the creation of a new, 25-lesson CDS module, that when blended with classroom discussion becomes a cost-effective, standard approach used by agencies for new employee training.

Another aspect of the advisory group’s work is to explore ways to ensure that the CDS initiative lives on once the grant funding ends. And no one

knows exactly what will happen then. “There is a lot at stake,” Trudo says. “We want to help agencies continue the momentum that DirectConnect has started, and at the same time explore future funding alternatives during very difficult financial times.”

To learn more about DirectConnect, you can contact Scott Trudo at 603-228-2084 or via email at Scott.Trudo@unh.edu The project’s website is:

http://www.iod.unh.edu/Projects/directconnect/project_description.aspx

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

About Scott Trudo

Scott Trudo joined the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire as a Project Director for DirectConnect in June 2010. Prior to joining the Institute, he was Director of Workforce Development for Moore Center Services where he led a department responsible for the professional development of staff at all levels within the organization.

Scott was responsible for developing and implementing an initiative to professionalize the direct support workforce utilizing the College of Direct Support. While Scott’s career at Moore Center began as a direct support professional, he has spent the past several years focused on creating efficient, cost-effective workforce development systems.

Prior to joining Moore Center in 2002, Scott had over 20 years of experience in the field of training and development where he worked with organizations throughout the world.



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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 *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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