On September 15, 2015, The New Jersey Partnership for Direct Support Professional Workforce Development held a Recognition Ceremony to honor Direct Support Professionals across the state. The event was marked by a series of speeches and educational sessions presented by state leaders, advocates, experts in the field of developmental disabilities, and partners dedicated to the professionalism of the direct service workforce.

Presentations that morning shared stories of devoted Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) across New Jersey, commended DSPs statewide for their dedication to those they support, and highlighted the progress New Jersey has made in the area of workforce development over the past decade—including availability of the College of Direct Support (CDS) statewide for the 3rd year. The CDS is an online educational program that provides more than 30 courses focused on the field of direct support.

Deborah M. Spitalnik, PhD, Executive Director of The Boggs Center and Chair of The Partnership’s Leadership Council, opened the event with welcoming remarks, and NJ Department of Human Services Acting Commissioner Elizabeth Connolly presented a proclamation from Governor Chris Christie designating September 13-19, 2015 as Direct Support Professional Recognition Week in New Jersey.

Loretta Claiborne, athlete and Board of Directors Member for Special Olympics Inc., gave an outstanding speech on “Making a Difference in the Lives of Others” that focused on the importance of support in achieving goals. Claiborne’s life and achievements are chronicled in “The Loretta Claiborne Story,” a Walt Disney Productions film.

Educational sessions were offered throughout the day on the topics of: supported employment, community connection and capacity building, DSP career paths and competency building, supporting self-advocacy, and multicultural perspectives.

Several DSPs were honored for completing the NJ Career Path in Developmental Disabilities, a combination of coursework through the CDS, peer mentoring, and portfolio activities. Career Path DSPs recognized included: Amie Bank-Keyser, Stephanie Bunting, Shayla Favorite, Rose Gibbons, Marilyn Gomez-Jablonski, Ellen Halloway, Shadea Johnson, Monique Jones, Sheri Malloy, Randall Page, Nicole Pene, Elaine Punch, Christina Song, Corey Thomas, Sharon Witner, and Lori Scudder. Monique St. Clair was recognized for achieving DSP-Certified Initial Level credentialing through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP).

The NJ Partnership for DSP Workforce Development is a collaboration between: NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities; Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities; The Arc of NJ; The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities; NJ Association of Community Providers; NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities; DSPs; and People with Disabilities and Families.
Frontline Supervisor Competencies

Human service organizations face staffing challenges that are costly to the organization and have a big impact on the quality of the supports and services that individuals receive. The Frontline Supervisor (FLS) plays a critical role in the recruitment, development and retention of Direct Support Professionals (DSP), and works to build a highly competent team through mentoring, encouragement, and professional development. The FLS’s job responsibilities range from hiring, training, and supervising staff to program oversight and ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals receiving supports. In addition to making sure these basic needs are met, the FLS ensures that person-centered supports are implemented effectively to help people achieve their life goals.

The National Frontline Supervisor Competencies (NFSC), from the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, are an evidence-based set of knowledge, skills and abilities that reflect best practice in the supervision of Direct Support Professionals working with individuals with disabilities in residential, employment and community settings. Comprised of 11 competency areas and a total of 120 skill statements, this resource can help organizations to identify the knowledge and skills Frontline Supervisors must have to achieve high quality service delivery.

For more information on the National Frontline Supervisor Competencies, visit: https://www.nads.org/library/frontline-supervisor-competencies.html

College of Direct Support Course Highlight

Supporting Healthy Lives

This time of year many of us eat too much, move too little and either ignore or procrastinate on seeing the doctor about changes in our overall health. The good news is that many of us also use the start of a new year to make changes for the better in these areas. Supporting people to live healthy lives in not just about adhering to a diet or making sure that they take their medication on time. Living a healthy life means making smart choices in a variety of areas to help maintain or prevent overall health related issues.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play an important role in helping the people they support in achieving optimal health. As supporters, DSPs can help those they work with to understand their health, and how to maintain and improve it. DSPs are also expected to recognize the signs and symptoms of illness that may not be verbalized by the individual they are supporting.

Supporting Healthy Lives, available through the College of Direct Support, provides an overview of information needed to understand what it takes to lead a healthy life and how to support people with disabilities in making good choices related to their health.

Lessons in this course include:

- Living Healthy Lives
- Health Across the Lifespan
- Individual Health Needs
- Care of Common Health Conditions
- Signs and Symptoms of Illness
- Working with Health Care Professionals

CDS Administrator Tip

Did you know that three out of five of the required Pre-Service training for Day/Residential staff are now available online through the College of Direct Support? It’s true! The following courses can now be taken either in-classroom (onsite at a provider agency) or online (through the CDS with a competency assessment followup by the agency): Preventing Abuse and Neglect, Overview of Developmental Disabilities and Medications.

More information can be found in “Using the College of Direct Support for Pre-Service Training: An Agency Guide to Requirements & Procedures”: http://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/StatewideUtilizationofCDS.html

Any questions about the College of Direct Support can be sent by email to the CDS Central Administrator (CDSTA@rutgers.edu).