Direct Support Professional (DSP) Careers for People with Disabilities

August 31, 2022

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Housekeeping II: Questions

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Welcome

Taryn Williams
Assistant Secretary,
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP),
U.S. Department of Labor
Objectives for Today’s Presentation

Learn:

• The importance of customization and accommodation in training and employment for DSPs.
• Care economy career pathways for people with disabilities.
• Benefits of the DSP profession for people with disabilities.
• The need for a labor market culture shift to allow for more flexible and inclusive approaches to accommodate workers’ and clients’ needs.
• Findings from the LEAD Center report and listening session on the DSP workforce.
“I want to help people feel they're worth something”
Today’s Speakers

- **Amy Brooks**, Chief Executive Officer, RCM of Washington, Inc.
- **Susan Brooks**, Chief Innovation Officer, RCM of Washington, Inc.
- Tinesha Gray, Direct Support Professional
- Carlos Hilton Zacarias, Direct Support Professional
- **Leah Cadena-Igdalsky**, Associate, LEAD Center, Social Policy Research Associates
- **Kris Palmer**, Senior Associate, LEAD Center, Social Policy Research Associates
- **Rebecca Salon**, Co-Director, LEAD Center, National Disability Institute
Quick POLL: Who do we have in the virtual room today?
Context: Direct Care Worker Shortages and Undervalued Work

A nationwide shortage of direct care workers adversely affects millions of workers, people who urgently need services, and employers. Of the 4.6 million direct care workers in the US, 87% are women and 53% are women of color.

Among the reasons there is a care worker labor shortage:

- [chronically high staff turnover rates](#),
- [low wages and benefits](#),
- [barriers to collective bargaining](#),
- [surges in demand due to COVID-19](#), and
- a [history of racism and sexism that has led to the direct care segment of the care economy being undervalued](#).
• ODEP and its LEAD Center convened a *Think Tank* of national experts to:
  o Share challenges faced by DSPs.
  o Make recommendations for federal actions to mitigate these challenges.

• ODEP and LEAD also convened a *Listening Session* involving 14 federal agencies following the think tank.
Strategies to Address the Crisis
from the LEAD Center memo

1. Expanding and Improving Training and Career Pathways
2. Facilitating DSP Professionalization Through Improved Data Collection
3. Setting and Raising Standards for Job Quality, Pay, and Benefits
4. Supporting People with Disabilities to Enter the DSP Profession
LEAD Center DSP Memo Recommendations - I

- Create, invest in, and promote/disseminate models that support existing and aspiring DSPs with disabilities.

- Eliminate barriers for people with disabilities becoming DSPs. Replace criteria-based requirements with competency-based requirements.

- Clarify how existing funding sources can be used to support DSPs with disabilities.
Expanding Career Pathways

More opportunities for people with disabilities

People with disabilities are an untapped recruitment resource

Create customized vocational training programs using universal design and incorporating elements of customized employment
Culture Shift

• An inclusive and diverse workforce includes people with disabilities of all races
• Intentional job matching and customized employment
• What unintentional barriers are we creating?
• Raise the bar – set expectations high.
RCM’s DSP Academy: Supporting an Inclusive Workforce

• **Customized vocational training** program for people with disabilities.

• Creates opportunities at the crossroads of two critical issues facing the field.

• Program consists of around **70 training hours** over the course of 6-8 weeks.

• Training both **transition-age youth and adults**.

• Curriculum **adapted to use universal design**.

• **Job development** built into the curriculum.
Benefits

- Increased number of qualified and skilled DSPs
- Increased employment for people with disabilities
- Inclusion
- Decreased people in need of supports
- Better advocates
- Peer supports
Universal Design Approach – Minimize Barriers to Maximize Learning

Universal design is a concept in which products and environments are designed to be **usable by all** people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

www.section508.gov
Partnerships

DC Department on Disability Services (DDS)
- Funding
- Recruitment pipeline
- Marketing

DC Public Schools (DCPS)
- Funding
- Recruitment
- Braided funding
Outcomes

• 47 of 53 participants have graduated – 89% graduation rate

• Employment outcomes
  • Pre-Pandemic – 56%
  • Height of Pandemic – 43%
  • Current – 53%
  • Adult – 66%

• Professional experience
• Capacity building
Tinesha Grey, DSP
Carlos Hilton Zacarias, DSP
Replication

- Replication in other states
- Urban and rural settings
- Model is applicable to other pathways
The Care Economy

- What is the care economy?
- How are DSPs uniquely positioned in the care economy?
DSP Memo Recommendations - II

- Develop a national campaign about employment for people with disabilities in DSP careers to recruit, train, and expand the DSP workforce.

- Raise awareness about the need for/value of DSPs.

- Encourage braiding and blending by state- and local-level entities.
DSP Memo
Recommendations - III

 ➢ Disseminate resources and information about successes.

 ➢ Support research and pilot projects in which people with disabilities successfully enter and advance in DSP careers.
Quick POLL:

Interested in getting more people with disabilities into care professions?

Q: What would you need to get more involved?
Resources

• DSP Think Tank Recommendations Memo
• Direct Support Professional Academy Website
• BBC News Video on DSP Academy
• Washington Post Article on DSP Academy
• RCM of Washington
LEAD Center Website

http://leadcenter.org/

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