



National Center on Leadership for the Employment  
and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities

# State-Level Cross Agency Collaborations: Stories and Strategies from the Field Designed to Address the Direct Support Staff (DSP) Crisis

LEAD Center  
May 7, 2026

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## Facilitator

### Sarah Loizeaux

Subject Matter Expert on Career Pathways

(Facilitator)

LEAD Center

National Disability Institute (NDI)

# Housekeeping I: Captioning and Recording

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- Click the **“Show Captions”** option in Zoom control to view Captions.
- Alternatively, you may **open a captioning web page** in a new browser tab. **Click the link** posted in the Chat box to [access captions](#).
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**Webinar Archive** – This webinar is being recorded and the archive and supporting materials will be placed on the LEAD Center website under [Recent & Upcoming Events](#) within 10 business days.

## Housekeeping II: Questions

### Content questions?

Click on the Q&A button and type in your question.

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# ODEP

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Office of Disability  
Employment Policy

ODEP is the only non-regulatory Federal agency that promotes policies and coordinates with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities.



# ODEP

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Office of Disability  
Employment Policy

ODEP's mission is to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, that meet the needs of America's employers.

# Welcome and Opening Remarks

**Shelley Hendren**

Senior Policy Advisor

Office of Disability Employment  
Policy

U.S. Department of Labor



# Learning Objectives



Through this webinar, attendees will:

- Understand the role of Direct Support Professionals (DSP) and how DSP work experience can lead to careers in workforce development, health care, education, social services, and other fields.
- Learn how to use the new DSP Career Exploration infographic and Frequently Asked Question on Registered Apprenticeship Programs as practical tools to guide job seekers interested in this profession.
- Hear how North Carolina partnered to launch tuition-free DSP advanced training, build career pathways, and strengthen the DSP workforce statewide.
- Learn how Registered Apprenticeship Programs are being used to expand and strengthen the DSP workforce.

# National TA Center Presenters

## **Leah Cadena-Igdalsky**

Subject Matter Expert,  
LEAD Center, Social  
Policy Research  
Associates



## **Nicole Howell**

Director, Direct Care  
Workforce  
Development, National  
Council on Aging

# Who are Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)?



- DSPs support individuals with disabilities, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in developing and strengthening essential life skills that are self-directed and necessary for independent living, community participation, and employment.
- DSPs support an individual's independence and well-being in a non-clinical capacity. Duties go beyond basic physical care and may include aiding with community engagement, vocational support, and access to community resources.

# A New Home for DSP Resources from the LEAD Center!



National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities

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## Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce

For many people with disabilities, direct support professionals (DSPs) are essential for participation in daily activities, community life, and employment. In addition, the role of DSP is not only critical for supporting people with disabilities but is in itself a career in which job seekers with disabilities may thrive.

DSPs provide people with disabilities with a range of supports, from job coaching and exploration of assistive technology solutions to health care and daily living needs. Job seekers with a variety of skills and interests can make excellent DSPs, and from this role, people can move through many different career paths, including education, health care, and rehabilitation.

### Resources and strategies to strengthen the field of DSPs

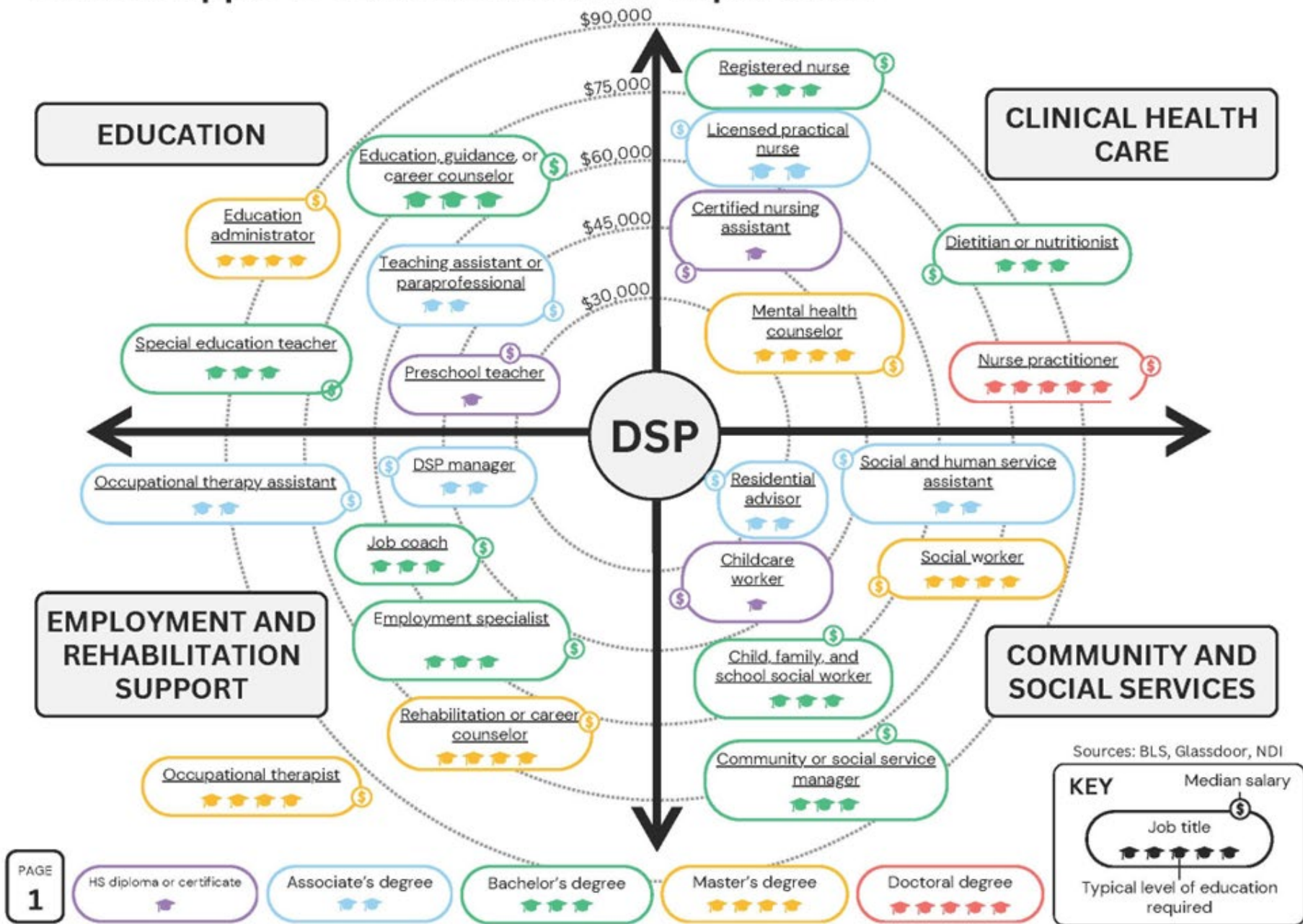
The LEAD Center is pleased to share three new resources designed to strengthen the DSP workforce by increasing awareness, advancing career pathways, and promoting job quality.

[New landing page on the LEAD Center website-one-stop for all DSP resources](#)

# Creating Registered Apprenticeship Programs for Direct Support Professionals

- Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) can help meet the demand for DSPs by recruiting, training, and retaining DSPs in areas of greatest need.
- Growing interest in RAPs as a recruitment and retention strategy for the DSP workforce, but not all providers know where to begin the process or how to engage the workforce system in their community to launch or grow a program.
- This [document](#) provides responses to questions raised by workforce professionals from American Job Centers (AJCs), workforce development boards, employers, and other partners on how to create RAPs for DSPs.

# Direct Support Professional Career Exploration



Sources: BLS, Glassdoor, NDI

**KEY**

Median salary (\$)

Job title

Typical level of education required (graduation cap icons)

# Building national capacity to support community living

Created by the Department of Health and Human Services in 2022, the Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center (Strategies Center) provides technical assistance to help States identify, implement, and sustain efforts that support direct care workers throughout their careers.

## Strategies Center offerings support the direct care workforce and the people they serve:

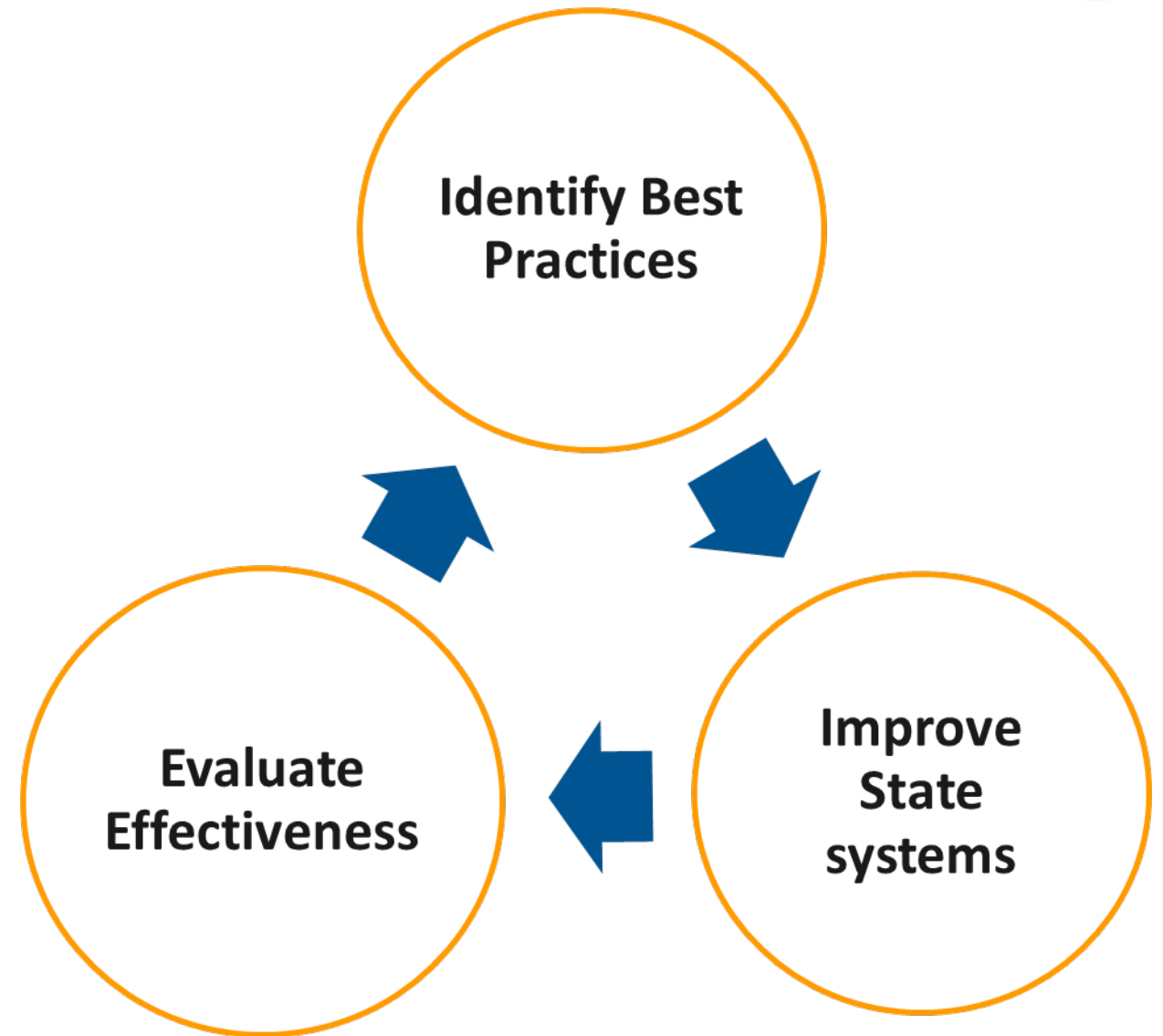
**Tools and training to assist State systems and service providers**

**Peer-to-peer sharing of lessons learned and promising systems-change practices**

**Clearinghouse of resources and promising practices**

# DCW Strategies Center Objectives

- Identify evidence-based, promising, and innovative practices.
- Catalogue practices and models.
- Leverage best and promising practices to provide technical assistance (TA).
- Assess the effectiveness of TA models.
- Use data and evaluation to drive continuous improvement.



# Strategies Center Partners



# Technical Assistance Offerings

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## State Advancement Lab (SAL)

- States receive up to 250 hours of support from a dedicated TA coach and SME team for up to 12 months. SAL states will join PLC meetings related to one of their milestones.

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## Peer-Learning Collaboratives (PLC)

- Cohort learning sessions designed to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and enhance the application of insights gained during technical assistance.

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## On Demand TA

- Targeted, short-term technical assistance provided to states to resolve particular questions or fulfill specific deliverables.





# DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGIES CENTER

# Speaker Panel

**Tina Lanier Barrett**

Assistant Director,  
IDD, NC  
Department of  
Health and Human  
Services



**Melissa Smith**

Senior State Director of  
Health Science Programs,  
NC Community College  
System Office

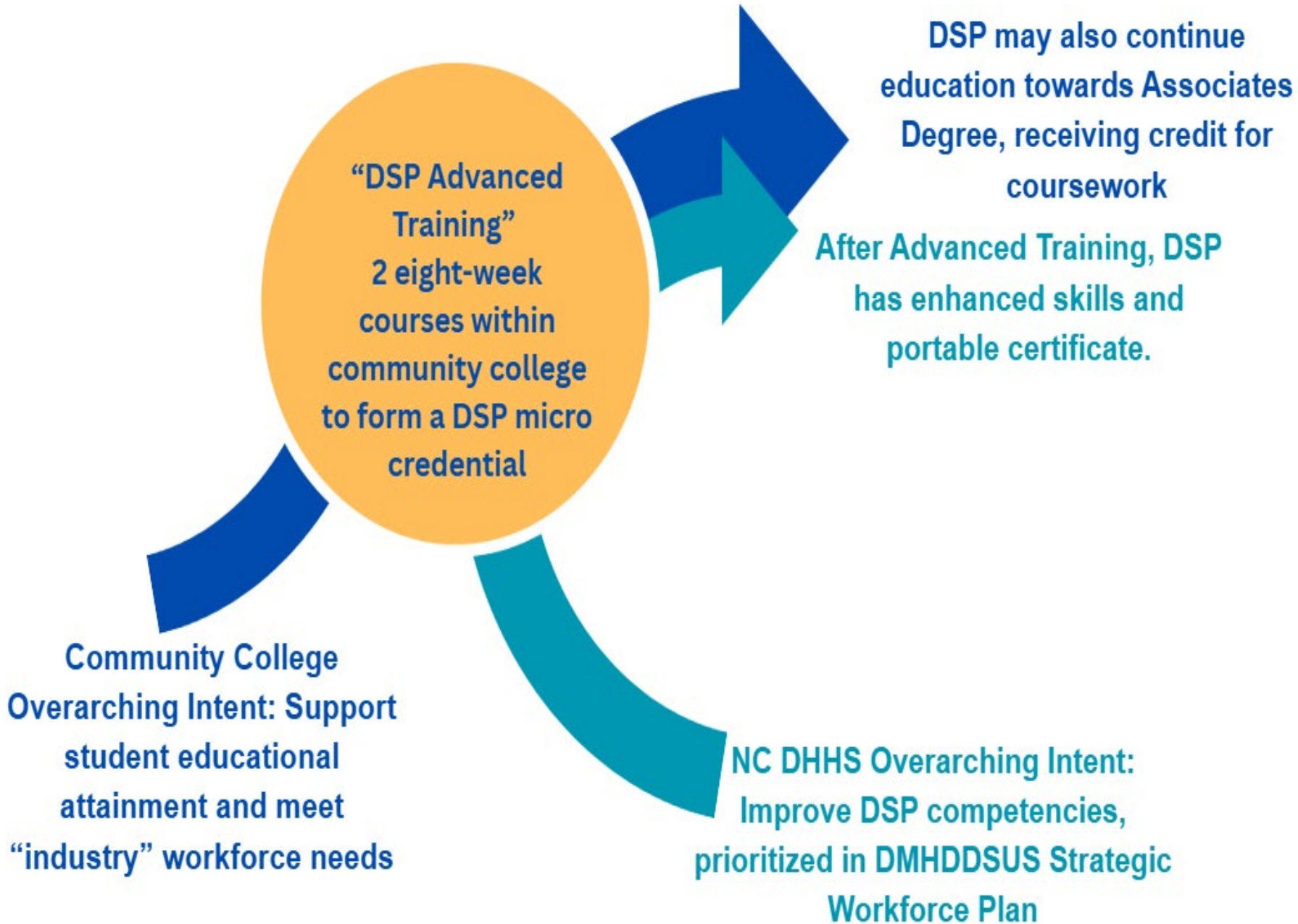
# How Partnership Came Together

2024

- NC DHHS learned about community college coursework through Secretary-level collaboration.
- Community colleges and DMH started coming together “in the same room” to plan.

2025

- Developed contracts between NC DHHS/DMHDDDSUS and each partnering community college for Advanced Training coursework development.
- Coursework refined for “Advanced Training” content.
- Courses launch.



## **NC DSP Advanced Training Program: Overview**

## About the Advanced Training Curriculum

- Two 8-week courses
  - Core Skills for Supporting Individuals with I/DD
  - Advanced Skills for DSPs
- Each class is 48 hours in length
- Online, asynchronous
  - Synchronous course added Spring 2026
- Launched at 3 community colleges during Fall, 2025 semester
- Tuition free to student

Students will explore topics such as promoting independence and inclusion, effective communication, documentation and ethics, crisis prevention, supporting health and safety, and implementing individualized support plans. The program emphasizes real-world application, self-reflection, and strategies that uphold dignity, respect, and self-determination for individuals served.

- online description from partnering community college, Forsyth Tech

# Rachel's Experience



# The DSP Career Ladder: Key Analytics at Every Phase of the Student Journey



# How the DSP Advanced Training Program Fits into the Larger Picture

- **Advanced Courses-48 Hours Each**

- DDT-3110 Core Skills for Supporting Individuals with IDD
- DDT-3120 Advanced Skills for DSPs



- **Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities-Certificate AAS in Social and Human Services**

- DDT 110 Intellectual/Dev Disabilities 3 SHC
- DDT 120 Direct Service Skills 3 SHC
- DDT 220 Individualized Service Planning 3 SHC
- DDT 230 Supported Employment 3 SHC



- **Associates in Applied Science: Social and Human Services Degree**

# Challenges

- We spoke different languages
  - “Pilot vs. Early Adopters”
- Challenges were more administrative than substantive
  - Curriculum creation was effortless, executing contracts more challenging (different payment structures, etc.)
- Gathering perspectives from all interested parties
  - Working DSPs, Family Members, Provider Agencies
- “Free course” = possibly results in less buy in?
  - Review of data to determine next steps
    - Synchronous courses, wrap around supports

# Moving Forward

- Fall 2025 semester demonstrated strong interest in model.
- Cohort Data
  - Fall 2025-79 enrolled; 47 completed
  - Spring 2026-23 enrolled
- Sustainability Considerations
  - Initial scholarships have been funded by grant that community colleges received
  - Subsequent funding to be funded by state one-time funds.
  - Training bonuses in development



Questions?

## LEAD Center Resources: Direct Support Professional Workforce

Resources designed to strengthen the DSP workforce by increasing awareness, advancing career pathways, and promoting job quality.

- [DSP Career Exploration Infographic](#): DSP Career Growth and Potential: highlights the salary potential and career development opportunities available to DSPs.
- [FAQ: Registered Apprenticeship Programs for DSPs](#): answers questions about using registered apprenticeship programs to address DSP workforce shortages.
- [Memorandum – Advancing DSP Career Pathways](#): outlines evidence-based strategies to strengthen recruitment and retention in the DSP field.

# LEAD WIOA Technical Assistance (TA) Center

- The **National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD)** is a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) TA center, grant funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.
- The LEAD Center helps states, workforce development professionals, and American Job Centers (AJC) implement WIOA, in service to Americans with disabilities.
- Through its resources, tools and TA, the LEAD Center:
  - increases career pathways for people with disabilities that ensures employers have access to the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy;
  - supports financial literacy training and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities; and
  - improves coordination and collaboration of workforce development system partners, contributing to a more effective system.

# Stronger Workforce, Smarter Solutions — Powered by LEAD Center Technical Assistance

**Do you serve people with disabilities? Is your team ready to:**

- Learn strategies that improve employment outcomes?
- Harness data-driven planning and cross-agency collaboration to advance policy adoption?
- Support individuals with a wide range of disability experiences?

**If so, the LEAD Center can help!**

State workforce agencies, AJC teams, and WIOA partners are invited to request LEAD Center Technical Assistance (TA). Targeted and intensive TA engagements begin with a formal request and signed agreement.



**Scan QR code or visit this link  
to learn more:**

[LEADCenter.org/Technical-Assistance](https://LEADCenter.org/Technical-Assistance)

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