

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

DIRECT SUPPORT CAREERS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES FIELD OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE

What is a direct support professional?

Direct support professionals (DSPs), also known as Community Support Workers or Habilitation Specialists, are the backbone of the developmental disabilities field. They have daily contact with people with developmental disabilities and build relationships with them. Direct Support Professionals may work in small community residences, day programs or “without walls” in the community. They may also provide services to people who live with their families, or who are in their own apartments. They may work in State facilities operated by the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

What do they do?

Depending on where they work, DSPs may feed or cook for people with developmental disabilities. They may help people bathe or toilet. They may teach hygiene skills or academic skills. They may take people to the doctor, to the bank, or on leisure or recreation

Working for New York State

To work as a DSP for a facility operated by the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), candidates must first apply to become a Direct Support Assistant in Training. New workers typically work during evening hours. The salary offered by the state for this traineeship ranges from \$29,000 to \$36,000. The program lasts anywhere from six to 15 months depending on qualifications and demonstrated ability. Trainees who successfully complete the program graduate to a Direct Support Professional and enter at a higher salary level.

activities. They may take people to a park, a library, or a museum. They may administer medication. They are teachers and companions to the people they support. The exact tasks depend on where they work and the needs of the people they support. This field is 24/7, so jobs may be during the day, in the evening, overnight, or on weekends.

What qualifications do they need?

At a minimum, candidates must have a high school diploma or equivalent. For the jobs providing services in the community, more education is usually required. DSPs must undergo extensive screening. Some agencies require or prefer a valid Driver’s License and a good driving record. Employers prefer candidates with postsecondary education. Some employers look for people with certain certifications, including Strategies for Crisis Intervention and Prevention (SCIP), CPR or First Aid certifications, although other employers will train people on the job for these certifications. Some jobs require physical strength. Candidates who are flexible with their schedules will have more options. DSPs applying to work in state-operated facilities must also pass a civil service exam.

What do they earn?

According to PayScale.com, annual salaries for DSPs in New York City range from \$17,000 to \$35,000.

What are some typical career paths for DSPs?

DSPs may become supervisors or Assistant Site Managers and then advance to become Site or House Managers. In order to move further ahead, DSPs must get at least an Associate degree, preferably in Human Services or a related field. With an Associate

degree in Human Services or similar major, they may be able to become Job Coaches or Medicaid Service Coordinators. DSPs can also move into paraprofessional work in the public schools with Special Education students in grades K-12. Like DSPs, paraprofessional Teacher Assistant jobs do not have to have a college degree, but they are required to take some training workshops and a certifying exam.

How many job openings in the New York City Metropolitan Area were advertised online in the past few months?

From April 2015 to August 2015, there were 283 advertisements posted online.

Which employers advertised for the most DSPs?

The top 10 advertising employers were:

- AHRC
- SCO Family of Services
- Services for the Underserved
- Adults and Children with Learning and Developmental Disabilities (ACLD)
- Birch Family Services
- YAI/National Institute for People with Disabilities
- Evelyn Douglin Center
- Devereux
- QSAC, Inc.
- United Cerebral Palsy

What types of jobs were advertised?

There is general demand for full-time, part-time, on call and per diem workers. Because this type of work requires around-the-clock care, most postings are for shift-work.



What kind of skills and competencies were the employers seeking?

They were seeking:

- Good oral and written communication skills;
- Good listening skills;
- Willingness to work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities;
- Ability to analyze problems and determine corrective measures;
- Good organizational and teaching skills; and
- Compassion.