About this Brief
The purpose of this brief is to explore jobs and career paths for people who provide direct support to individuals with developmental disabilities. The primary audience for this brief includes educators and educational institutions that prepare people to work in this field, especially in New York City and the surrounding metropolitan region. This report is also of relevance to policy makers and practitioners who have the potential to make a positive impact on direct support jobs and careers. This paper includes sections on:

- A brief history of the developmental disabilities field;
- Employment in the field;
- Industry profile and trends;
- Current workforce issues;
- Education and training for the Direct Support Professional workforce; and
- Existing and potential role of the City University of New York (CUNY).

Overview

Brief History of the Development Disabilities Field
There has been dramatic change in the field of developmental disabilities in the last 40 years, and it will undoubtedly continue to evolve into the future. The 1972 exposé of conditions and questionable practices at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island was a defining moment and turning point for the field. Until that time, people with developmental disabilities usually lived at home with their parents or in large institutions. They received few services. They rarely worked. Since that time, there have been many positive developments:

- First and foremost, people with developmental disabilities are recognized as complete human beings, and they are supported so that they can become as independent as possible.
- For people with developmental disabilities who do not live at home, New York State has, over time, changed its approach from an institutionally-based system to one in which most people live in small group homes in neighborhoods throughout the City and State. The process of de-institutionalization is taking many years to accomplish.
- People with developmental disabilities can now take advantage of many different types of programs and services. These services are offered at day centers, in people’s homes, or “without walls” in the community.
- The field’s approach to employing people with developmental disabilities has progressively changed. New York State is currently phasing out segregated work settings, such as sheltered workshops.¹ People with developmental

¹ Sheltered workshops are environments that employ people with disabilities separately from others and pay sub-minimum wages, as authorized by the Fair Labor Standards Act.
disabilities are now working in integrated employment settings in the mainstream labor market. They are supported in ways that make this possible.

The entire philosophy of working with people with developmental disabilities is different. As of 2015, the main goal of agencies working with people with developmental disabilities is to give them the tools to be independent while supporting them in their daily lives. Individualized care is stressed; often, service providers meet with individuals and their families in order to assess and address the specific needs of each individual.

The New York State Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the main government agency in New York State that sets policy in this field, has adopted a “person-centered” planning approach, which structures services according to the needs and desires of the individual. This involves actively listening to individuals and learning about their goals toward living a constructive life, and assessing how to effectively support those goals. Person-centered planning exemplifies a shift in the developmental disability field: support and services are now outcome-based and centered around respect for the agency of people with developmental disabilities.

Employment Profile

What are the most common jobs in the industry?

The direct support workforce comprises people who support individuals with developmental disabilities throughout their daily lives — at home, at work and in the community. Staff may assist people in group homes, provide on-the-ground support with day-to-day tasks, provide employment supports, take people to recreational or daily living activities, meet with families and arrange care services, help families navigate the health care system, work with children with developmental disabilities within the school system, or create policies with the interests of people with developmental disabilities in mind.

The two most common jobs in the industry are **direct support professionals** and **job coaches**.\(^2\),\(^3\)

**Direct Support Professional (DSP)**.\(^4\) DSPs are the backbone of the field. They represent the core and vast majority of the workforce. They may work in community residences or day programs. They may work in facilities or outside in the community. All DSPs aim to help individuals integrate into their communities and advocate for their needs and goals. The responsibilities of a DSP are substantial, and the job is increasingly complex, requiring good communication and social skills. Typically, these jobs require a high school diploma or equivalent.

- Many DSPs work in small community residences or in day programs. The number of staff needed depends on how many people live in the house (the average is 4 to 6) and the nature of disability of the people who live there. Because of the need for 24-hour coverage, DSPs work different shifts. In either community residences or day programs, they assist individuals with day-to-day tasks. They may feed or cook for people. They may teach hygiene skills or academic skills. They may accompany people to the doctor, to the bank, or on leisure or recreation activities. They may guide activities in a day program. They are teachers and companions to...
What is a developmental disability?

“Developmental disability” is an umbrella term that includes conditions that affect physical, learning, language or behavior that begin during the developmental period (birth through age 21) and affect day-to-day functioning. These disabilities can be intellectual or physical, or a combination of both. Developmental disabilities can have a variety of causes, which can occur before, during or after birth. The most common developmental disabilities, as described on the website of the New York State Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) include:

- Intellectual Disability, including Down syndrome and others
- Cerebral Palsy
- Epilepsy
- Autism Spectrum Disorders

The OPWDD website reports that it coordinates services for more than 130,000 New Yorkers with developmental disabilities.* Approximately 40,000 people receive residential services and 90,000 receive non-residential supports.


Other common occupations include:

- **Medicaid Service Coordinator/Care Coordinator.** DSPs who further their education sometimes move into this work. Medicaid service coordinators meet with families, arrange for and monitor services, and can be responsible for other tasks. Medicaid Service Coordinators are now morphing into Care Coordinators, and in all likelihood will have greater responsibilities in the future. This occupation requires at least an Associate degree, but many employers prefer a Bachelor’s degree in a health or human services field.

- **Social Worker.** Medicaid Service or Care Coordinators sometimes go back to school to become social workers. Social workers play a key role in the developmental
disability field and act as “gatekeepers” to services. Goals for the individual are mapped out in plans that are prepared by the social worker, the family, the individual, and in some cases the DSP or job coach. Social worker jobs normally require a Master’s degree in Social Work (MSW) and licensing.

There are people in a host of other occupations that may work with people with developmental disabilities. These occupations include:

- Paraprofessionals in Public Schools
- Recreation Therapists
- Licensed Practical Nurses
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Music Therapists
- Art Therapists
- Psychologists
- Psychiatrists

How many people are employed in this field?

Traditional sources of labor market information do not allow us to say with precision the number of people employed in developmental disabilities industry per sé, as there are no discrete categories in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). People interviewed in the course of research for this brief estimate that between 112,000 and 125,000 people are employed in the field in New York State, including the public and private non-profit sectors. More than half of the total employment is estimated to be in the downstate area. The available employment data suggests that employment in this field has grown over the last 13 years.

Where do direct support professionals work?

The heart of the developmental disabilities service system is a network of approximately 550 nonprofit organizations across New York State. Within the field, these organizations are sometimes called “voluntary agencies.” Many of these organizations run small community-based residences and provide other services. About four in five people who work in the field of developmental disabilities in New York State work for a non-profit service provider. The rest are employed by the State of New York and most of them provide services in smaller, state-run

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5 NAICS includes the following categories: Residential Developmental Handicap Facilities (62321), Vocational Rehabilitation Services (62431) and Services for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (62412). Only the first of these industry categories—Residential Developmental Handicap Facilities—is exclusively dedicated to people with developmental disabilities. The other two industry categories include services to other groups. Vocational Rehabilitation Services are provided to people with any type of disability. And, as the name implies, Services for the Elderly and Persons with Developmental Disabilities also includes services to the elderly.

6 According to the New York State Department of Labor, employment in New York City in the Residential Developmental Handicap Facilities industry grew by 43 percent between 2000 and 2013, from 12,914 to 18,438.
residential facilities operated by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). These facilities mainly serve people with the most intensive needs.

Jobs are located in community-based residences, day centers, private homes, cultural or recreational destinations, schools, and offices. Some services are provided without walls, or between and among all of these places and others. There are a number of supported employment programs that help people with disabilities work in integrated employment settings. The supports and services provided by these agencies may include “supportive and supervised residential living alternatives, day habilitation, pre-vocational and vocational training, family care and respite services, clinical services and educational and preventive education services.”

How much do people earn in this field?

Figure 1 displays real (inflation-adjusted) average annual wages in the three industry categories most closely related to the developmental disabilities service system. Wages in these industries average between $23,000 and $36,000 per year. Workers employed in residential facilities have seen a slight increase in real wages in the past decade. In 2013, the average wage in residential facilities was $35,571. In services for the elderly and persons with developmental disabilities industry, it was $23,330.

Industry Profile and Trends

Who are the major industry players?

There are several organizations that together serve as the industry’s infrastructure and

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7 New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies, [www.nysacra.org/about](http://www.nysacra.org/about), accessed on May 4, 2015.
influence its direction and operation in New York City and State.

- The OPWDD coordinates services for people with developmental disabilities throughout New York State. In addition to directly operating some residential facilities, OPWDD manages funding streams for programs for people with developmental disabilities and creates policy that affects services.

- The New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies (NYSACRA) represents more than 200 non-profit service providers statewide, with a combined employment of approximately 70,000 employees. NYSACRA provides a “public voice, representing the needs of its members at the federal, state, and local levels.”

NYSACRA also works in partnership with OPWDD on many issues, including workforce development.

- The Interagency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc. (IAC) is an organization that plans, coordinates and integrates voluntary-operated services in the greater New York City metropolitan area. Members include organizations that provide direct services as well as parent groups, advocacy groups, and other similar community groups. The IAC works with both NYSACRA and OPWDD on workforce development and other issues.

Parents and other family members of people with developmental disabilities and self-advocates play key roles in all of these organizations.

**Who pays for services and supports for people with developmental disabilities?**

According to people interviewed in connection with this research, approximately 90 percent of the cost of programs and services for people with developmental disabilities is paid for through Medicaid, under various waivers. For example, the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Service Waiver pays for many services, including those provided in the home. The waiver also funds day programs and a variety of work programs, including supported work. In addition to Medicaid, services are paid for by Supplemental Security Income (SSI), State funds, private insurance, and personal finances.

**What are the current trends in the industry?**

According to several people interviewed, the trends most affecting the industry are listed below.

**Civil Rights.** The desire for civil rights for people with developmental disabilities is embodied in OPWDD’s newest Statewide Comprehensive Plan. Many people interviewed mentioned person-centered planning, and noted that this approach is having a great impact on the workforce. In the past, many jobs were task-driven with oversight from supervisors. Now, in a more decentralized system, DSPs are expected to think for themselves and make complicated judgments.

**Cost factors.** By all accounts, the current system is very expensive and is largely funded by Medicaid. One person interviewed estimated that it costs $100,000 per person per year for residential services. The feeling is that there is an imperative to change the way services are provided as there is simply not enough money to continue as is. At the same time, there are waiting lists for services, and there is concern about the system’s inability...
Inevitability of managed care. Although New York State has not yet moved to managed care for programs that serve people with developmental disabilities, most people interviewed believe that it is on the horizon, perhaps three years away. One person referred to the onset of managed care as a “slow-moving glacier.” Even though the contours of managed care for this population are not known, most people interviewed believe that managed care will bring different payment methods, new outcome measures, and a new model for providing services. Some people in the field wonder how a managed care model (referred to as the “medical model” by some) and a person-centered approach can be reconciled. Also, many people in the field believe that managed care will mean giant networks whose primary goal will be to cut costs. There is uncertainty on the part of agencies and their staffs, and many parents of people with developmental disabilities are overwhelmed and confused. Some believe that managed care will lead to consolidation of voluntary agencies.

Workforce transformation initiatives. Within New York State, there is currently a great deal of attention being paid to training and credentialing the direct support workforce. The imperative for this workforce development derives from the service transformation in the field itself. There is more emphasis on supporting people with developmental disabilities to be as independent as possible, which requires different sets of skills. OPWDD has adopted new standards for DSPs and is encouraging agencies to provide or arrange for training that will enhance and develop the skills of this workforce and lead to credentialing. OPWDD has created six regional collaboratives around the state to plan for this workforce transformation. The approach is a gradual one, and OPWDD hopes that five percent of the DSP workforce will be credentialed within two or three years. These credentialed workers could potentially serve as skill mentors to others. OPWDD is also considering establishing registered apprenticeship programs. There is also some hope that a higher skilled workforce might command a higher wage.

Current Workforce Issues
The transformation of the field has brought with it the need to transform the workforce. The major workforce issues mentioned by the people interviewed are discussed below.

Low pay rates in the face of increasingly complex responsibilities. The job of a DSP is becoming increasingly complex, but the pay rates remain modest, with average wages well below the New York City median. By all accounts, this is a serious issue. A review of job listings in New York City indicates that DSPs command between $21,000 and $31,000 per year, depending on the agency and job requirements. Some agencies have better benefits than others. Workers in state facilities operated by OPWDD earn up to 30 percent more than people who work in the non-profit or voluntary sector.

Many DSPs work multiple jobs or extra shifts to earn extra income. One employer noted that,

10 See http://www.workforcetransformation.org

11 There is precedent for this, as the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) and the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) established a Direct Support Professional Registered Apprenticeship Program that was approved by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration’s Office of Apprenticeship in 2010.
“The DSPs that stay love what they do but can’t live on the salary.” Another said, “We do not pay a living wage.” One DSP interviewed for this report said, “They don’t pay us enough for what we do.” Many people believe that the current salary and benefits may not be sufficient to attract the type of candidate agencies want and need. One person interviewed called it a “perfect storm” of low salaries and high levels of responsibility.

This is a complicated issue. Reimbursement rates are tightly controlled by the applicable Medicaid Waiver, and there are strict rules and regulations dictating required staffing ratios. Although pay has increased slightly in the past few years (2%), it is not likely to change very much in the next few years. In general, nonprofit organizations can only afford to pay DSPs more if they have endowments or if they raise dedicated funds from private sources. While reducing administrative costs is another option, this is not realistic for most agencies.

High rates of staff turnover (or retention challenges). Every person interviewed in connection with this report mentioned major issues with recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. While the precise turnover rate is not known, one expert interviewed estimated that the DSP turnover rate might be as high as 50 to 70 percent within the first 12 to 18 months. Another said that people usually know within a month of employment whether they are willing to make a long-term commitment. There are numerous vacancies for DSPs at all times. Turnover is disruptive to agency operations and to relationships with the individuals with developmental disabilities. It is also expensive, as agencies are constantly in recruitment, screening, and training mode. Many agencies have per-diem people on call or contract with staffing services who have access to pre-screened and certified candidates.

Many people interviewed mentioned low pay as an issue related to staff retention, but also noted that it is difficult to raise pay due to Medicaid reimbursement rates.

Several agencies have begun to analyze the elements within their control that affect retention. They have found that while turnover is partially a matter of pay, it is also related to the work environment and the quality of supervision. There are non-economic reasons that people stay on. Based on this type of analysis, some agencies have adopted new models that provide more supports for DSPs. Some agencies are helping DSPs address their own work-life balances by, for example, allowing DSPs to use sick leave when family members are ill or take time off for family-related reasons.

Another approach is to focus on supervisors who can give DSPs support and guidance with issues as they arise. This is particularly critical as some DSPs have a fear of doing something wrong that would subject them to scrutiny by the New York State Justice Center or other compliance agencies. A collaborative of several downstate agencies is currently developing a set of competencies for supervisors.

Still other agencies find ways to engage and involve DSPs in the organization and on multi-disciplinary teams that work with individuals.

One person interviewed suggested that the answer to turnover is not recruitment, and that organizations need to create the conditions that lead to greater retention. This person observed that people will work at lower pay if it is a supportive and professionally challenging culture and went on to say that if people are treated as temporary or replaceable, they will feel expendable. A more positive organizational culture may involve tuition assistance, professional development, and expressions of respect for DSPs.

Limited advancement pathways. Several people interviewed observed that the field has
done a poor job of creating career ladders (“the career ladder is missing rungs”). For many DSPs, the career ladder has two-steps: Direct Support Professional to supervisor. Other jobs, such as Job Coach or Medicaid Service/Care Coordinator, require additional education, usually a two- or four-year degree. Other jobs in the field, such as Social Worker or Occupational Therapist, require a graduate degree.

Several people interviewed said that many DSPs, especially long-standing employees, have limited educational skills but are not interested in pursuing higher education. Others believe that career paths can be defined, especially by encouraging DSPs to pursue an Associate degree in Human Services. Agencies expressed the need to value the DSPs without postsecondary degrees that are already on staff while they recruit and retain new DSPs who have them.

**Management stretched thin.** As discussed earlier, many people interviewed for this report believe that hands-on support to frontline staff would increase retention and improve the quality of service. However, people in supervisory and management positions have many responsibilities and often do not have the time to provide the type of support needed by the staff.

**Need to expand labor pool.** Many organizations struggle to find enough suitable candidates, and some are in constant recruitment mode. Non-profit organizations recruit through their websites, go to job fairs, have relationships with colleges, rely on word-of-mouth, and sometimes give bonuses to existing staff for referrals. Some have internship arrangements with local colleges. Several people commented that there are not enough people entering the workforce to meet the demand. Some agencies feel that the competition for labor will get even stiffer, as the field competes for talent with elder care, home healthcare, and other healthcare and social service fields.

Several people interviewed would like to expand the labor pool by proactively reaching out to high school students and college students in a more concerted way.

**Lengthy hiring process.** Many people said that the screening and background checks required by the State are time consuming, often delaying the hiring process by four to eight weeks.

In order to work as a DSP, candidates must be cleared by the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs, which maintains a “Staff Exclusion List” of individuals who have been found responsible for the abuse or neglect of a person with special needs. They must also be checked against a statewide central register for child abuse and mistreatment and one for abuse or neglect under Section 16-34 of the State’s Mental Hygiene Law. In addition, there is a required criminal background check, including fingerprinting, and there are certain medical requirements, including a tuberculosis test.

**Limited tuition assistance.** Within tight budgets, there is limited tuition assistance available. Several people mentioned the Kennedy Fellows Program at CUNY’s School of Professional Studies, which offers support for higher education and career advancement for “exemplary staff,” but the numbers of people served is modest and the future of the program uncertain.

**Lack of recognition for the staff.** Many people interviewed believe that what matters most to DSPs is being respected and having their work valued. This sometimes expresses itself as

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12 This requirement applies to people who work with “vulnerable persons” who are receiving care from a facility or provider within the systems of the State Oversight Agencies, including the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health, The Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, the Office of Children and Family Services, the Department of Health, and the State Education Department. (http://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/about/faq, retrieved on May 11, 2015)
being part of a team, having good supervisors and mentors, supporting one other, and encouraging team decisions. Based on the interviews conducted for this brief, it appears that not all agencies have developed organizational cultures that demonstrate appreciation for DSPs.

Taken together, the workforce issues described above are formidable and sometimes difficult for agencies to deal with. They present a major challenge to the field moving forward.

Education and Training for the Direct Support Professional Workforce

What type of preparation is needed to get a job as a Direct Support Professional?

Most of the entry-level DSP jobs require no more than a high school diploma, although many employers prefer additional training or education. In order to secure a position as a job coach, employers often require a Bachelor’s degree, or at least an Associate degree, normally in a human services discipline. To move into management positions, a Bachelor’s degree is usually required.

What training and education do agencies offer Direct Support Professionals after they are hired?

Training for the DSP workforce is not uniform across agencies. Some organizations have more established and comprehensive training programs than others.

Initial training after hire is usually provided by the employer. Some courses are required, as all organizations must satisfy OPWDD requirements. For example, DSPs must take and pass the Pre-Approved Medication Administration Provision (AMAP) course in order to be allowed to administer medication. They must also obtain up-to-date certifications in First Aid and CPR. Within the first six months after hire, DSPs must take a course in Strategies for Crisis Intervention and Prevention (SCIP). SCIP is being replaced by a new five-day curriculum developed by OPWDD called Positive Relationships Offer More Opportunities to Everyone (PROMOTE). DSPs must obtain recertification in AMAP and SCIP/PROMOTE every year. Several people interviewed mentioned that because many DSPs have limited educational backgrounds, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to complete the mandatory training. Some agencies offer more than others in terms of support for additional training and education.

What are the OPWDD Code of Ethics and Core Competencies for Direct Support Professionals?

OPWDD has established both a code of ethics and core competencies for DSPs. The code of ethics was developed by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) and was adopted by OPWDD in 2012. It outlines professional ethical principles.13 The New York State DSP Core Competencies specify competency areas and the skills within these competencies by which performance is measured. The core competencies were developed by a work group as part of the New York State Talent Development Consortium. They are similar to, but not exactly congruent with DSP competencies developed by the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the University of Minnesota’s Research and Training Center.14 OPWDD’s core competencies are framed by seven goals:

- Putting People First;
- Building and Maintaining Positive Relationships;
- Demonstrating Professionalism;

14 Each federal competency crosswalks neatly to one of New York State’s. Both are based on the Human Services Research Institute’s Community Support Skill Standards of 1996 and the U.S. Department of Labor’s DSP competency-based standards of 2010.
Supporting Good Health;
Supporting Safety;
Having a Home; and
Being Active and Productive in Society.
Each goal is associated with competencies and skills that should be demonstrated by a DSP. Service providers are expected to ensure that the performance standards for DSPs are consistent with New York State’s core competencies.
Agencies are also expected to compare the training they currently offer to the core competencies and determine whether they are addressing all competencies. If agencies need to develop additional training, OPWDD has prepared a DSP Competencies Tool Kit that includes many resources.

What is the status of a DSP Credential?
OPWDD recently contracted with the University of Minnesota to create a DSP Credentialing Design that will be completed and submitted for the Commissioner’s review and disposition with the Governor’s office and legislative leadership.15

What training and education prepares people to begin and advance in direct support careers?
CUNY. Several CUNY campuses offer educational programs related to careers in this field.16 The continuing education division at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) offers a Direct Care Counselor course that prepares people with a high school diploma or the equivalent to work as DSPs. Those who complete this training receive three credits towards BMCC’s Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in Human Services. New York City College of Technology (“City Tech”) also offers a Direct Care Professionals course that prepares students to work in the developmental disabilities field. City Tech’s course is available to people with a high school diploma or the equivalent and to students enrolled in the college’s Associate Degree program in Human Services.

Degree programs. For those who want to pursue a degree specifically in disability studies, the School of Professional Studies (SPS) offers a Disability Studies Program at the Bachelor’s, Master’s and Post-baccalaureate Certificate levels. Lehman College and the College of Staten Island offer minors in Disability Studies. City College offers a concentration in Disabilities Studies within certain Bachelor’s degree programs and also offers a credit-bearing Certificate in Disabilities Studies. As part of its interdisciplinary minor in disability studies, the College of Staten Island offers an internship in which students are assigned to work for an agency devoted to the care and supervision of students with developmental disabilities (currently AHRC of New York City through the college’s Riggio Program). Many CUNY colleges offer Associate and Bachelor’s degree programs in Human Services or related fields that prepare people to work in the field of developmental disabilities.

Colleges outside New York City. Hudson Valley Community College offers a 28-credit Disability Studies Certificate program. Niagara University offers a Bachelor’s degree in developmental disabilities that includes field experiences in community agencies.

College of Direct Support. The College of Direct Support, a private organization owned by Elsevier, offers an online curriculum for DSPs and others who work with individuals with disabilities. These courses were developed in collaboration with the University of Minnesota, which over the last 20 years has taken the lead in shepherding the development of skill standards for direct support workers. The curriculum is built

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15 The Credentialing Design project includes three main parts: 1) an environmental scan researching different kinds of credentials in New York State, e.g. Association for Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE), Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), National Association for the Dually Diagnosed (NADD), and nationally, e.g. National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP); 2) focus groups that included service recipients, DSPs, families, frontline supervisors, and administrators; and 3) a 34-page online survey of service providers. Some of this work was contracted out by the University of Minnesota to groups in New York State, such as NYSACRA and the New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA).

16 A complete listing of CUNY offerings is displayed in the tables at the end of this report.
on the 15 core competencies developed by the University of Minnesota and approved by the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals. It is endorsed by NYSACRA. While some people in the field feel that the curriculum is not ideal and does not address all issues, most believe that it provides some uniformity in staff development. They like the fact that it is offered in a convenient, on-line format. Despite the name, it is important to note that the College of Direct Support is not a credit-bearing institution and students receive no college credit for these courses. The non-credit nature of these courses is a concern for some professionals in the field. Some educators believe that the non-credit nature of this offering keeps DSPs “ghettoized” into lower-paying work.

**Regional Centers for Workforce Transformation.** New York State’s OPWDD has created six regional centers, or collaboratives, for workforce transformation. Each collaborative can develop workforce initiatives based on what is needed in its particular area. For example, in the New York City area, the NYC Training Collaborative (United Cerebral Palsy of NYC, Heartshare Human Services, and Services for the Underserved) has developed a nationally accredited credential program for frontline supervisors.

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**Recommendations for Education Providers and Other Intermediaries**

CUNY and other education systems and providers can play a key role in preparing people to both enter and advance in careers in the developmental disabilities field. Based on this research, the following six actions are recommended:

1. **Increase knowledge among students and potential students about the developmental disabilities field.** Almost all agencies want to expand their labor pool. They are especially interested in partnering with high schools and colleges to increase students’ awareness of this field. As the emphasis on employment grows, there is a particular need for qualified job coaches who can work with employers and provide employment supports. Efforts should be made at high schools and community colleges to introduce young people to opportunities in this field. Because this field may also be of interest to more seasoned people interested in making a career change or entering a second career, community and four-year colleges should inform all types of students about the field.

2. **Offer courses that help DSPs meet the new core competencies and prepare them for a managed care environment.** Virtually everyone interviewed is concerned about preparing the incumbent workforce for the new competencies. Not all agencies have the capacity to provide this type of staff development in-house. Many people interviewed stressed that it is important to make it convenient for people to learn, by scheduling classes when DSPs are available and by offering the courses online. In a managed care environment, it is likely that DSPs will be expected to observe and report symptoms around health status. They might also be involved in interdisciplinary team discussions with the client.

3. **Offer continuing education or job training programs that prepare people to enter this field.** There is great labor market demand for DSPs, and only two CUNY campuses – BMCC...
and City Tech—currently offer this type of program. New programs should offer credit articulation to appropriate degree programs like BMCC does.

4. Offer additional degree programs that prepare people for this field. CUNY already possesses in-house expertise in this field in SPS’ Disability Studies Program, BMCC, City College, City Tech, Lehman, and the College of Staten Island. Interestingly, CUNY has no Associate degree program that offers a concentration in disability studies even though many provider agencies are positive about this credential, especially for the job coach position and others. This may be an opportunity for one or more of the CUNY community colleges. There is also the possibility of offering a credit-bearing certificate program at SPS, which would articulate to the SPS Bachelor’s degree program.

5. Maximize programs that prepare people who are currently working in the field to advance. Several CUNY programs in disabilities studies are geared to working adults. For example, the SPS Disabilities Studies Bachelor’s Degree is fully online. City College's Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center for Worker Education offers in-person classes in the evening and weekends, and classes meet only once per week. City College also employs online and hybrid instructional models. Built-in program features—such as tutors, technology fellows, and an advisement structure—are all designed to increase retention of these working adult students.

Achieving a degree opens up advancement opportunities within the developmental disabilities field. The CUNY system should work together to refer people into these and other similar programs.

6. Offer leadership development training and strategic planning assistance to Board chairs, chief executives, and financial managers of the community organizations or “voluntary” agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. This is a time of change in the field and more change is on the horizon. People interviewed for this paper said that the leaders of these organizations are currently struggling to remain informed and need assistance in thinking strategically. Others expressed concern that some agencies may not understand how managed care will change billing and payment practices from the current fee-for-service structure. There may be a role for CUNY colleges or consulting firms that specialize in non-profit management to step in and provide much-needed assistance.

Summary
The field of developmental disabilities is undergoing transformation in many ways. In New York State, the goal of services is now to support people with developmental disabilities to grow and live richer lives. This person-centered approach demands new and different skills from the workforce, and especially from direct support professionals. At the same time, in all likelihood, service provision will soon change from fee-for-service to a managed care model, which will require major adjustments on the part of the non-profit organizations providing services.

Both service and structural changes require a transformation of the workforce at a time when there are already major workforce challenges. It is imperative that education and training providers, service providers, and policy makers pay attention to the workforce challenges, as it is only by addressing them that the quality of services can be maintained or improved, and that the desired structural changes can be effective.
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 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.
What is a job coach?

A job coach, also called an Employment Specialist, assists individuals with disabilities to find and keep jobs. Job coaches also work with employers. They provide on-site support to individuals in order to help them adjust to the workplace and the routine of getting to and from work. Once the individual becomes acclimated to their job and environment, job coaches spend less time on site, but continue to evaluate and monitor the site and offer support when needed.

What do they do?

- Network with local businesses/employers to develop employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities;
- Provide vocational counseling and job coaching to individuals;
- Complete job/task analysis; including developing and implementing job training plans;
- Monitor job placements with a goal of 90-day retention;
- Visit job and internship sites and meet with individuals with disabilities on-site, as scheduled; including evenings and weekends;
- Provide intensive skills training and employment adjustment counseling at the job site;
- Monitor individuals’ work adjustment through direct observation and through meetings with employers and supervisors;
- Meet with individuals for follow-up counseling at the agency site;
- Develop and prepare written assessment of individuals’ adjustment to work and file them in case records; and
- Attend case conferences or interdisciplinary team meetings and training and development workshops.

What qualifications do they need?

Employers seek candidates with at least an Associate degree, but many prefer a Bachelor’s degree in a relevant area, such as Human Services. Candidates who have prior job counseling experience, especially experience working with special needs individuals, have a competitive advantage. In general, employers are seeking candidates who are able to work flexible schedules and visit multiple job sites in a day.

What do they earn?

According to PayScale.com, the median annual salary for job coaches in New York City is $44,000 and ranges from $35,000 to $59,000.

What are some typical career paths for Job Coaches?

Job coaches can become supervisors or coordinators of employment programs and can move on from there to be program directors with greater responsibilities. Some might move in the direction of marketing within a non-profit organization. Higher-level management positions usually require at least a Bachelor’s degree and substantial experience.
How many job openings were advertised in the New York City Metropolitan Area in the past few months?

From April 2015 to August 2015, there were 53 advertisements for job coaches posted online.

What employers advertised for the most Job Coaches?

- YAI
- AHRC
- Universal Resource Institute
- SCO Family of Services
- Services for the Underserved
- ResCare

What kind of skills and competencies were the employers seeking?

Employers looking for in Job Coach candidates sought:

- The ability to work independently;
- Strong written, verbal and computer skills;
- Prior experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities;
- Valid driver’s license; and
- A willingness to travel.

What types of jobs were advertised?

Most of the job ads in the past few months were for full-time and part-time permanent positions. Almost all demand a flexible work schedule.

Where were the advertised jobs located?

Most ads were posted by Manhattan-based employers. Other employers were based in Brooklyn, Queens, and Long Island. The jobs themselves may be located elsewhere in the region where these employers have facilities or where the individuals they serve are employed. Job coaches that help their individuals assimilate into work settings in the community can expect to travel on a circuit to many job sites. This is why most advertisements require or prefer candidates with a valid state driver’s license.
## CUNY Offerings Related to the Developmental Disabilities Field

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<th>College</th>
<th>Certificates</th>
<th>Degree Programs</th>
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\(^1\)Post-baccalaureate certificate.
\(^2\)Three credits can be applied to the school’s Associate degree in Human Services.
\(^3\)Credit-bearing certificate.
\(^4\)Post-baccalaureate credit-bearing certificate.
## CUNY Offerings Related to the Developmental Disabilities Field

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*Post-baccalaureate certificate.*

*Three credits can be applied to the school’s Associate degree in Human Services.*

*Credit-bearing certificate.*

*Post-baccalaureate credit-bearing certificate.*

5Concentration within BA and BS programs in Early Childhood Education and Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences
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<tr>
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<th>STATE-MANDATED WORKSHOPS</th>
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\(^3\text{Preparation for Teaching Assistant Certificate}\)
Acknowledgments
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Sources


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1 A list of interview respondents and attended meetings is available from the author at nyclmis@gc.cuny.edu