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 kinds 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.