

OCTOBER 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Direct Support Careers in the Developmental Disabilities Field



Executive Summary

The purpose of this workforce brief is to explore jobs and career paths for people who provide direct support to individuals with developmental disabilities. The paper includes a brief history of the developmental disabilities field and discusses current trends. The main focus of the brief is on employment, current workforce issues, and how people are prepared to enter and advance in the field. In preparing this paper, the New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS) reviewed labor market data and other written material, and spoke to a number of experts, all of whom find great fulfillment working in this field. This field is growing and changing and desperately needs people who are interested in and well-suited to this type of work.

Key Findings

- The philosophy of working with people with developmental disabilities has changed over the years. The main goal now is to give people the tools to be independent while supporting them in their daily lives. A key concept is “person-centered planning.” The service transformation in the field implies a need to transform the skills of the workforce as well.
- Approximately 125,000 people are employed in this line of work in New York State. The vast majority work for nonprofit organizations that run community residences and provide a host of other services, including employment

services, to people with developmental disabilities. The rest are employed by the State of New York and often provide services in smaller, state-run facilities operated by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

- The top jobs in the field are Direct Support Professional (DSP) and Job Coach. The brief offers detailed profiles of each. People in these jobs are the backbone of the field.
- The most pressing workforce issues include:
 - Low pay rates in the face of increasingly complex responsibilities
 - Staff retention challenges
 - Limited advancement pathways
 - Need for professional development of the direct support workforce
- Organizations would like to expand the labor pool by proactively reaching out to high school and college students in a more concerted way.
- Several City University of New York (CUNY) campuses offer educational programs related to careers in this field. A chart displaying these offerings is included in the brief.

In addition to changes in the approach to services, structural changes are on the horizon. In all likelihood, payment for services will soon change from a fee-for-service to a managed care model, which will require major adjustments on the part of organizations providing services.

It is imperative that education and training providers, service providers, and policy makers pay attention to addressing current workforce challenges so that quality services can be maintained and improved moving into the future.

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About the New York City Labor Market Information Service

The New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS), housed at the Center for Urban Research at the City University of New York Graduate Center, was founded in 2008. The NYCLMIS helps workforce, education, and economic development professionals and policy makers to make data-driven decisions guided by the conditions in a complex and dynamic labor market. To accomplish our mission, we produce rigorous, multi-method research reports, develop career planning tools, and provide technical assistance and strategic consulting services.

The NYCLMIS team has cultivated a deep understanding of our region's industries and their workforce needs. We remain grounded in practice by maintaining close ties with the professionals we serve.

About the CUNY CareerPATH Initiative

The CUNY CareerPATH Initiative was a low to no-cost program supporting adult workers without jobs and adults workers looking to advance their careers by 1) providing opportunities to earn both industry-recognized credentials and college credits and 2) to find jobs and enter college in one of five fields: Business, Education, Food Service & Hospitality, Healthcare, and Manufacturing. The programs were offered at eight colleges for three years ending in September 2015.

In order to ensure career advancement and successful college transition, CUNY CareerPATH participants were given career-focused academic and English-language instruction, occupational training leading to industry-recognized credentials, and college credits, academic advising, and career coaching and employment assistance.