

## Supporting *individualized access*

### IDEA 3: FINDING GOOD FITS BETWEEN DIRECT SUPPORT STAFF AND THE PERSON SERVED



*Today, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) partner with people who utilize community human services to live self-directed lives with dignity and pride. DSPs support people receiving services to realize their dreams and enjoy the daily liberties and human rights that others take for granted.* -National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals



#### **IN A NUTSHELL:**

The support a person receives can have a

fundamental impact on his quality of life. As a result, we are always looking for new ways to recruit and hire the best direct support employees we can. Sometimes a direct support staff member enhances a life that is already full. However, for many New Mexicans with disabilities, staff serve as the person's primary link to the rest of the world.

The process of cultivating quality direct support staff cannot be reduced to a formula. And as we all know, hiring great staff requires organizations to both make broad, strategic decisions and to take simple, everyday actions toward building

a workforce and organizational culture that encourages person-centered support.

#### **LIVING IT: A SUCCESS STORY Harry Now Hires His Own Staff!**

Tobosa has begun supporting the people it serves to interview and hire their own staff members. One person, Harry, requested that he develop the interview questions and conduct the interview since the new staff person would be working directly with him. Harry wanted to assure that his new staff person would share some of his interests and would be able to provide the support Harry requires. Tobosa agreed and worked with Harry to assure he understood the legal parameters involved. Harry successfully hired a new staff member and is now working on developing assistance for other people to learn to hire their own staff members!

### ***Individualized Access selection, Idea 3, Page 1***

## **BRINGING IT TO LIFE:** **THOUGHTS AND IDEAS**

### **The Impact of Organizational Values on Direct Support Staff**

- The qualities of direct support staff employees often mirror the culture and workplace in which they work. If the organization emphasizes protocols and formality, the direct support staff will likely prioritize these things as well.
- Consider the words we in human services often use to describe a person who uses services: client, consumer, patient. These words suggest *taking* or *needing* something from another person. These words don't reflect the contribution a person makes to others in her community. While these words apply to *all* of us from time to time (we may be our barber's client), these identifiers are rarely our primary identity. Yet, these words are often used to describe the entire identity of a person with a developmental disability. When described this way, a person is seen as more likely to see himself as part of the organization instead of part of his community.

For some suggestions on changing the language an organization uses to describe people with developmental disabilities, take a look at *Language Matters* in *And Yet More*.

- An organization's values must be lived, discussed and reflected in the organization's budget for the framed "Vision Statement" on the wall to really matter.

### **Ideas for Direct Support Staff Job Descriptions**

- Think about the qualities that direct support staff need in order to cultivate relationships for people: creative, reliable, positive, comfortable meeting people, respectful of the person served. After thinking about the qualities you hope to attract in direct support staff, take a look at your organization's job description for direct support staff. Does it match?
- Take a look at the job title, does it sound technical? If the title is something like *residential tech* consider a less formal, more people-oriented description like *John's companion*.

## ***Individualized Access selection, Idea 3, Page 2***

- If you don't already, consider making individual job descriptions around each person served. This provides potential direct support staff with a more accurate sense of what the position will include and what the person's interests and desired outcomes are.

**Examine the Direct Support Staff Skill Requirements: Do They Prioritize Community Building as Much as Personal Care?**

For people with significant support needs, it's critical to have staff who are competent at providing personal care. However, sometimes job requirements focus so much on personal care that they exclude creative, community-oriented applicants who have never provided personal care to anyone before. While some staff who are highly experienced in doing personal care are also great community builders, some of the best community builders have never done "this work" before. They may be artists, farmers, waiters, college students, teachers, lifeguards, horticulturalists, receptionists, lawyers.

Personal care skills can be learned. But it's harder to teach creativity and community-building. We need to make sure that as we increase our emphasis on supporting people to build relationships in their communities, our job requirements encourage people from all walks of life to become a committed staff person to a person using services.

**Recruiting Ideas:**

- Many people think word-of-mouth is the most effective way to recruit. For some suggestions on potentially new ways of recruiting, go to *Try it Out*.
- For some potentially new twists on the standard newspaper recruitment ideas, go to *Try it Out*.

**✓ CHECK IT OUT:**  
**GOOD RESOURCES**

- National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals at [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org)
- National Alliance for Direct Support Professional's *Code of Ethics* at <http://www.nadsp.org/library/code.asp>

## **TRY IT OUT: ACTIVITIES, EXERCISES AND COMPELLING QUESTIONS**

### **Word-of-Mouth Recruiting Ideas:**

- Invite people you serve, their families, friends, guardians, case-managers to identify potential employees.
- Network and present with people with disabilities at groups within community: civic clubs, churches, sororities, fraternities, softball games, job fairs, etc.
- Recruit people at places the person likes to go: the coffee shop, the YMCA, the library.

### **Newspaper and Web-Based Recruitment Ideas:**

- With the person's permission, consider writing person-specific ads: "Cool 26 year old guy with autism seeks companion to support him at his job, take him to concerts and make new friends. Must be energetic, creative, and dependable.

Knowledge of autism helpful but not required."

- In addition to the mainstream local newspaper, consider advertising in culture-specific, university and alternative newspapers.
- Consider posting on Craig's List ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)) and other web-based classifieds.