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2018

# NEW YORK STATE WORKFORCE CREDENTIALING PROGRAMS COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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**rtc** on community living

INSTITUTE *on* COMMUNITY INTEGRATION | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Prepared for the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

This report was funded by New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota (Grant #90RT5019-01-01 from the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not therefore necessarily represent official OPWDD or NIDILRR policy.

The recommended citation for this report is:

Kramme, J. & Hewitt, A. (2018). *New York state workforce credentialing programs comparative analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration.

Report layout and design by Sarah Hollerich

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## Executive Summary

Competent, qualified, committed direct support professionals (DSPs) are foundational to supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live, work, and participate in the community. DSPs provide an array of supports, including personal care, employment supports, transportation, recreation, habilitation, medication administration, home living and other supports that assist people to lead self-directed lives.

DSPs are vital supports for people with IDD, and competency-based credentialing programs designed to teach the skills, knowledge, and attitudes characteristic of DSPs providing high-quality support have been implemented on an organizational level in a small number of organizations in New York. These credentialing programs have been identified as a promising solution to: (1) increase DSP tenure, (2) reward greater competency with a higher wage, and (3) provide professional recognition and a professional career path for skilled workers.

This report summarizes and evaluates five existing organizational credentialing programs, and is intended to inform efforts to develop statewide credentialing initiatives in New York. Such initiatives have demonstrated the ability to increase the quality of supports provided to people with IDD so they can live more self-directed lives in their communities. Several of these programs are funded or partially-funded through short-term grants, and they are not sustainable without additional investments. Organizational-level workforce interventions, particularly those with an educational component, typically take several years to reach sustainability. State-level investments that are made in competency-based credentialing initiatives to increase the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of DSPs may save money as they are implemented over time and may allow reinvestment to sustain some of the costs of credentialing initiatives.

The names of the five credentialing programs included in this report are listed below along with the names of the organization(s) in which the programs are offered:

1. Conover Scholar - Wildwood Programs
2. National Alliance of Direct Support Professional (NADSP) Certified Initial Level (DSP-C1) - Arc of Orange County
3. NADSP DSP-C1 - Arc of Ulster-Greene
4. NADSP DSP-C1 - Arc of Monroe
5. NADSP Frontline Supervisor Certification - Training Collaborative, which includes: United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/ Adapt Community Network, Services for the UnderServed, HeartShare Human Services, Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State

This report used multiple means and informants to summarize and evaluate these credential programs, including: (1) interviews with program coordinators, (2) interviews with credentialing participants, (3) analysis of costs, and (4) analysis of program outcomes, including turnover, wages, and average retention among credentialed and non-credentialed staff.

All credentialing programs included in this report were aligned with OPWDD's 23 DSP competencies, and/or the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) core competencies for direct support professionals or frontline supervisors (FLSs).

The five credentialing programs used a variety of established learning methods to deliver competency-based curricula. The programs have been implemented for varying lengths of time ranging from less than one year to five years, and all but Wildwood Programs would likely be considered early implementation according to standards from implementation science research. The success of Wildwood Programs credentialing initiative is notable because





more than half of the DSPs and nearly all the FLSs employed in the organization are credentialed. Annual turnover rates varied greatly between credentialed (9.3%,  $N = 107$ ) and non-credentialed DSPs (60.9%,  $N = 87$ ) when examined separately. Across programs, credentialed staff were much less likely to turnover, when compared to non-credentialed staff. Though data collected in four of the five programs is preliminary and would need further monitoring to support causation, the preliminary data supports the notion that participating in a credentialing program is associated with increased retention and lower turnover compared to those who have not participated in a credentialing program.

Each credential program includes a wage increase and/or bonus when the DSP or FLS is awarded their credential. For DSPs, these increases ranged from \$0.30-1.50 per hour per credential level. Some programs made multiple credential levels available, making it possible to receive an hourly wage increase of up to \$5.00 per hour if

all credentials were successfully achieved. Credentialed supervisors were awarded with a bonus rather than a wage increase that ranged from \$500-\$2,000. Organizations offering credentialing programs also often incorporated annual recognition events to recognize and reward years of service.

Interviews with credentialing participants emphasized greater knowledge and application of the Core Competencies and the NADSP Code of Ethics, and greater commitment to providing consistent, high-quality supports than they had previous to participating in the credentialing programs. DSPs and FLSs made positive impacts on the lives of people supported and the organizations in which they worked. Across programs, credentialing opportunities were considered an important workforce investment by both credentialing participants and program coordinators.

## Background

Competent, qualified, committed direct support staff are foundational to supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live, work, and participate in the community. DSPs support people in ways that enhance independence and inclusion in the community. They provide an array of supports, including personal care, employment supports, transportation, recreation, habilitation, medication administration, home living and other supports that assist people to lead self-directed lives. They serve as bridge builders to the community, make ethical decisions and support people with IDD in making choices and decisions each day. DSPs work in a range of settings, including with families, homes owned by the person supported, group homes, community job sites, vocational and day training programs, among others.

Given their day-to-day contact, DSPs have a unique professional relationship with the persons with IDD to whom they provide support. Some of the roles performed by DSPs are

similar to other professionals, including teachers, physical therapists, counselors, nurses, psychologists, occupational therapists, dietitians, chauffeurs, and personal trainers, among others. Despite the overlap with many licensed professional roles, no national or statewide credentialing program has been adopted and implemented for the direct support workforce in New York. However, several national and state DSP-specific competency sets have been identified and refined over the past 20 years. These competency sets are intended to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to support healthy lives and community participation for people with IDD. Two examples of such competency sets that were used within the five credential programs reviewed for this report are the [New York State's Office for People With Developmental Disabilities](#) (OPWDD) and the [National Alliance on Direct Support Professionals \(NADSP\) 15 Competency Areas](#). The OPWDD DSP Core Competency Goal Areas are depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. New York Office for People With Developmental Disabilities Direct Support Professional Core Competencies seven goal areas**







To support implementation of these competencies and ethical standards, OPWDD established Regional Centers for Workforce Transformation (RCWT) through grant funding in 2013 and dedicated state funding in 2016 to continue operation. OPWDD mandates that all DSPs statewide are trained and evaluated on the competencies. The RCWT are networks offering free training, technical assistance, and shared resources to foster DSP development in nonprofit and state agencies. As of February 2018, 73% of providers in the state have participated in meetings, trainings, workshops, or online through the website or other virtual interactions through the RCWT. This was a 26% increase since September 2017, and keeping pace with the RCWT's goal to engage all of the 397 DSP provider agencies in the state. In 2018, the RCWT is preparing to launch an app called DSPconnect. Recognizing the complex decision-making often required of DSPs, DSPconnect is a social media platform that provides a private, online community where people who value supporting people with developmental disabilities can talk to each other, build relationships and understanding, and share ideas about direct support. These efforts of the RCWT are actively supporting the standards of professional development for DSPs that will serve as a foundation for a future statewide credential. This includes participation on the statewide credentialing stakeholder group that will make recommendations to

OPWDD following review of this study and analysis.

DSP positions are often considered entry-level. However the emphasis on supporting implementation of the competencies and ethical standards helps demonstrate that in reality, these employees need training to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of their roles. DSP credentialing creates an opportunity for training, as well as a pathway for professional recognition and support that creates a highly qualified, professional workforce. Credentialing supports a workforce that is committed to the profession, and that stays in their jobs. Like other credentialing programs in human service fields, credentialing typically awards completion of the credential with a wage increase and/or bonus. The wage increase or bonus is intended to distinguish a credentialed employee for his/her development of demonstrated competence and performance in their work.

The direct support workforce is one of the careers in highest demand in the nation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The need for workers is increasing, but compensation and benefits are not provided at commensurate rates to keep DSPs in their jobs. Despite the often-rewarding work, there is high rate of turnover. The statewide annual DSP turnover rate in New York was 31.2% in 2016, and 11.7%

of full-time DSP positions were vacant (HSRI & NASDDDS, 2018). Of those DSPs who left their job, 27.4% had been employed for less than six months. Only 71.6% of staff that remained in their position in 2016 had been with the organization for more than 12 months. In New York it is estimated that nearly \$69 million dollars is spent annually on the 50% extra that is paid to DSPs who work overtime; eliminating these expenditures by reducing turnover and vacancies could result in an annual salary increase of \$1,240 for each DSP (Hewitt et al., 2015). Additional costs are associated with replacing each worker who leaves an organization. Using an estimate of \$4,073 per employee who leaves an organization, an estimated \$79,804,549 was needed to replace the DSPs in NY who left their jobs using turnover rates reported in 2015 (Hewitt et al., 2015; Larson et al., 2016 cited in Hewitt et al., 2015). Eliminating these expenses could add an estimated \$2,000 to the pay of each DSP in the US (President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, 2017). Credentialing programs are a promising solution to increase DSP tenure and decrease organizational turnover. As a means of increasing the skill, knowledge, and attitudes of their current workforce and increasing retention of committed employees, some organizations in New York are implementing workforce credentialing initiatives. These initiatives are paired with a wage increase and/or bonus for completing the credential. These pathways can (1) increase the commitment and professionalism of the current workforce, (2) reduce costs associated with turnover, (3) positively impact organizational culture, and (4) result in higher-quality, community-based supports based in best practice.

The goal of a credential is to invest in highly-qualified employees and provide a career path that allows the worker options for skill specialization and professional development. Aligning the training delivered with established standards or accrediting bodies provides the DSP with assurance that their efforts will be recognized across their state and/or nation. Offering a wage increase associated with the

credential is an important strategy to encourage participation and completion of the program. The average hourly wage of DSPs in New York state was \$13.40 in 2016, and the average starting wage was \$11.99 (HSRI & NASDDDS, 2018). This was significantly less than workers in other human service sectors, such as nursing assistants. In 2015, a series of focus groups in New York identified essential features of successful credentialing initiatives for this workforce from various stakeholder perspectives (e.g. administrators, family members, people with IDD, DSPs, FLSs and managers; Hewitt et al., 2015). Given the low wages paid to DSPs, funding and supporting all aspects of the credentialing program was consistently identified by participants as an essential ingredient to a successful statewide credential. A complete list of the key design elements of the New York DSP statewide credential model recommendations, known as Career GEAR Up, are available in Appendix A.

In addition to those organizational and inter-organizational credentialing programs included in this report, a few other pathways exist for the direct support workforce. Several community colleges (e.g., Dutchess and Ulster Community Colleges) offer a credit-bearing Direct Care Certificate. One organization in the current study (Arc of Ulster-Greene) reported employing DSPs who had received one of these certificates. "Direct Support Professional" is identified as a registered competency-based program with the New York State Department of Labor (DOL) Apprenticeship Program. Participants are paired with a professional mentor and completion awarded with a recognized certificate of completion from the DOL. Other organizational credentialing programs not detailed in this report also exist in the state (e.g., New Horizons, Mid-Hudson FLS development).

Adjusting for inflation, the direct support workforce across the nation has seen its wages actually decline over time (PHI, 2015). The direct support workforce in New York was afforded a wage increase in 2017. When fully implemented, the wage increase will slightly exceed the new mandatory New York minimum wage. While wages will increase for DSPs in New York, they will simultaneously increase for other service

sector positions. As such, recruitment will remain a challenge. Credentialing efforts can work alongside wage increases paid to DSPs to stabilize the workforce. They will also increase quality of supports provided to people with IDD.

Several of the provider organizations interviewed in this report stated that the past year was even more difficult than previous years to find and retain qualified DSPs. The unemployment rate has decreased, and competition for workers in other

entry level positions has increased. As such, the time is right to investigate which effective methods being used across the state hold promise to stabilize the workforce, increase the competence of DSPs, and create professional pathways to keep quality DSPs in the field. Models of implementation and lessons learned from organizations and inter-organizational collaboratives already implementing credentialing programs can provide a basis for scaling to a statewide credential.

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## **Aims of this project**

This report contains a comparative analysis of five existing direct support workforce credentialing programs that are being implemented in the state of New York. With slight variation, the organizational goals sought by all these credentialing programs aimed to increase the competence and professionalism of direct support staff. Additionally, these programs were intended to increase retention and reduce turnover of quality staff by providing opportunities for growth and career enhancement. One program, the Training Collaborative shares the same overall goals for DSPs, but the Training Collaborative focuses on increasing the leadership skills of FLSs so that DSPs receive better support in their jobs. Each program reviewed for this comparative analysis articulated difficulties of keeping quality staff with the low wages paid to DSPs. Credentialing provides organizations a means of increasing the likelihood that DSPs will provide quality supports, and it rewards them with a wage

increase when the DSP successfully completes the credential program. Successful completion of the credential in each of the five programs included in this report was paired with a wage increase and/or bonus for the accomplishment.

To enhance efforts of creating and implementing a statewide direct support workforce credentialing program in New York, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) worked with the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota to complete a comparative analysis of these five workforce credentialing programs in New York. Examining these existing programs will help inform efforts to scale up a credentialing implementation through a statewide program.

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## Method

Information was collected for this comparative analysis between July and November 2017. Several methods and informants were used and are described below.

### Interviews with program coordinators in each credentialing program

Staff in program coordinator or program administration roles were the initial point of contact in each organization. A survey was created and used to collect descriptive information about each credentialing program. Coordinators were asked to provide collateral documents that were reviewed to inform findings. These included: annual reports, marketing information, training materials and other supporting documents. Each program coordinator also participated in a structured interview that lasted approximately 1.5 hours. As available, program coordinators provided available information on costs or estimated costs of implementing and running the program in their organization(s). All data was analyzed and coded for detailed information about each program, and to identify themes across programs.

### Outcomes of the programs

A standardized instrument was used to collect quantitative data from organizations in order to compare credential program participants with non-participants. Data on employee retention, turnover (crude separation rate), vacancy rates, and wages were collected. Data reported were from October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017 unless otherwise noted. Turnover, tenure, and wages of employees who participated in the credentialing program and those who did not participate were examined separately. Organizations were also asked to provide their OPWDD reporting region, the number of people who receive services and supports in the organization, and the number of DSP and FLS positions (full-time, part-time, and vacancies) in the organization. Organizations provided the number of employees who have completed the credentialing program in the organization, and how many of those employees are still employed in the organization.

The following formula was used to calculate annual turnover (crude separation rate):

$$\text{Turnover} = \frac{\text{number of leavers in 12 months}}{\text{number of positions}} \times 100$$

The number of positions in the organization included full-time, part-time, and the total number of vacancies reported. Turnover was considered separately between DSPs and FLSs in each organization. Credentialed and non-credentialed staff were also computed separately.

The following formula was used to calculate average tenure of current employees by organization:

$$\text{Average years tenure of current employees} = \frac{\left( \frac{\text{total sum of months' tenure of all current staff}}{\text{total number of positions in the organization}} \right)}{12 \text{ months}}$$

The number of months of tenure was divided by 12 months, so that years rather than months could be reported. The number of positions in the organization included full-time, part-time, and the total number of vacancies in the organization. Average tenure was considered separately between DSPs and FLSs in each organization, and credentialed and non-credentialed staff were separately computed.

Organizations were asked to report the average hourly wage for (1) credentialed DSPs in the organization, and (2) non-credentialed DSPs in the organization. For FLSs, organizations could report wages of credentialed and non-credentialed FLSs in either hourly wage or annual salary.



Interviews with participants in the credentialing programs

Finally, participants in each of the five credentialing programs were identified by program coordinators to participate in in-depth interviews. Participants in each program and from each organization were interviewed about their experiences with the credential program and its impact on their work. Interviews were intended to identify individual stories of how the credential program impacted participant work performance, the lives of the people to whom they provided support, and both positive and challenging aspects of completing

the credential program. Length of participant interviews ranged from .5 to 1.5 hours with each participant. Most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone, but some were conducted in person. Three groups of participant interviews are summarized in three sections in this report: (1) Conover Scholars from Wildwood Programs (N = 4), (2) DSP-C1 or learners participating in a DSP-C1 program that utilizes the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) pathway to credentialing (N = 5), and (3) FLSs participating in the NADSP FLS credentialing cohort through the Training Collaborative (N = 5).

Descriptive overview of the credential programs

This report provides descriptive information about five direct support workforce credentialing programs implemented in various organizations within the state of New York.

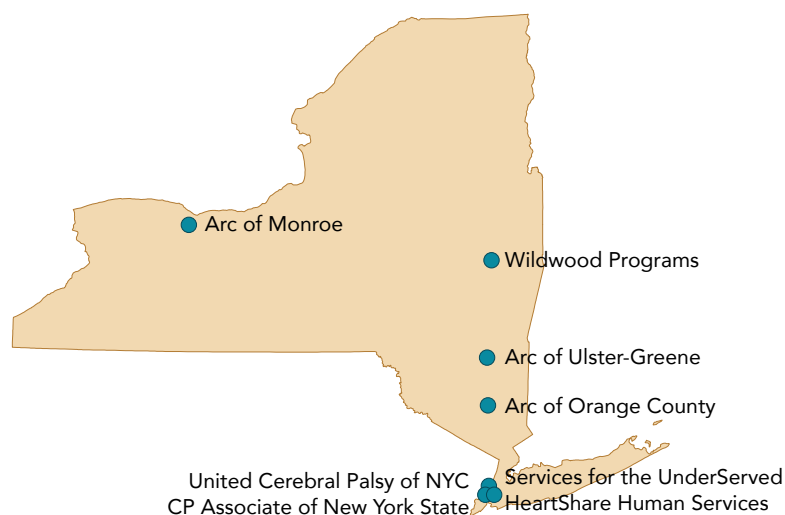
Table 1 includes the name of each credential program, the role of participants in the credential program, and the name(s) of organizations in which the programs are implemented.

Table 1. The five credential programs included in the comparative analysis, roles of participants, and organization names where programs are offered

Name of credential	Role of participants	Organization name
Conover Scholar	DSP, FLS	Wildwood Programs
National Alliance of Direct Support Professional (NADSP) Certified Initial Level (DSP-C1)	DSP	Arc of Orange County
NADSP DSP-C1	DSP	Arc of Ulster-Greene
NADSP DSP-C1	DSP	Arc of Monroe
NADSP FLS Certification	FLS	Training Collaborative, which includes: United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network Services for the UnderServed HeartShare Human Services Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State

Key: DSP = direct support professional; DSP-C1 = direct support professional certified initial level; FLS = frontline supervisor

**Figure 2. Map of New York state depicting the headquarters for the organizations implementing the credentialing programs in this report**



**Table 2. Organizational information for those examined in this comparative analysis**

	Wildwood Programs	Arc of Orange County	Arc of Ulster-Greene	Arc of Monroe	UCP/Adapt	Services for the UnderServed	HeartShare	Cerebral Palsy Association of NYS
OPWDD Region	III	III	III	I	IV	IV	IV	IV
# people served	3,500	1,200	2,913	1,550	8,169	400	3,500	2,225
# DSP positions*	194	309	628	416	873	707	1,051	1,590
# credentialed DSPs employed	107	3	8	-	-	-	-	-
# FLS positions* **	30	-	-	-	190	157	111	102
# credentialed FLSs employed	26	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Year credential implemented	2012	2014	2015	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017

Note. All data were reported as of September 30, 2017. (\*) Positions include full-time, part-time, and vacant positions in the organization. (\*\*) Total number of FLS positions are reported only when credentialing programs are specifically designed for FLSs to participate.

These five workforce credentialing programs are offered at organizations across the state of New York. Figure 2 shows the locations of the credentialing programs.



Table 2 includes additional descriptive information about the organizations included in this report, including the OPWDD reporting region, the number of people who receive services and supports in the organization, the number of DSP positions in the organization, and the number of FLSs employed for the organizations that included these workers in the credentialing programs examined. All data were collected in the fall of 2017.

The organizations that implemented the workforce credentialing programs included in this report varied in many ways. They had an average of 721 DSP positions in the organization (range 194 to 1,590; including full-time, part-time, and vacant positions) and supported an average of 2,932 people with disabilities (range 400 to 8,169). Three of the programs have credentialed a total of 190 DSPs and 36 FLSs. Two of the credentialing programs had not yet credentialed their first cohort of DSPs or FLSs at the time of this report’s publication, but several dozen more staff were anticipated to complete the credential in the near future.

The first credentialing program to be implemented was at Wildwood Programs which began in 2012. The remaining were implemented between 2014-2017.

Organizations were asked in which sites they provided long-term services and supports for people with disabilities. These are reported in Table 3.

Each credentialing program was implemented in organizations that provide services in family or individual homes and job sites. Most organizations provide services in agency/facility sites. Other sites where services were offered at the Arc of Ulster-Greene were school, school-to-work, and clinical services. UCP/Adapt also provides services at children’s programs, clinics, and a van for assistive technology.

**Table 3. Settings in which organizations provide supports**

	Wildwood Programs	Arc of Orange County	Arc of Ulster-Greene	Arc of Monroe	UCP/Adapt	Services for the UnderServed	HeartShare	Cerebral Palsy Association of NYS
Agency/facility sites	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Family or individual homes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job sites	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Other			X		X			

**Table 4. Services offered by organizations included in this report**

	Wildwood Programs	Arc of Orange County	Arc of Ulster-Greene	Arc of Monroe	UCP/Adapt	Services for the UnderServed	HeartShare	Cerebral Palsy Association of NYS
24-hour residential (16+ people)	X		X		X	X		
Community-based 24-hour residential (<15 people)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Agency Sponsored Family Care								
< 24-hour residential supports and services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
In-home supports and services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Non-residential community supports (adult day services, rehabilitative services, respite, and medical supports)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Job, or vocational, services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Preschool, education, or transition to work services		X	X		X		X	

Organizations were asked which types of services are offered at their organization. These are reported in Table 4.

The organizations in which the credentialing programs were offered provide diverse services, which is a common characteristic of New York human service organizations. All organizations provide community-based residential services in homes with less than 15 people living there, residential supports where less than 24-hour supports are needed, in-home supports, and job/vocational supports. None of the organizations provided

agency-sponsored family care. Some of the organizations provided 24-hour residential care in sites with more than 16 people living there, non-residential community supports, and preschool/school/transition to work services. An in-depth review of each of the five credential programs is included below, followed by overall evaluation and conclusions of these workforce credentialing efforts in New York.

I. Wildwood Programs Conover Scholars

Wildwood Programs was created in 1967 when a group of parents found that the needs of their children did not fit within existing programs that were otherwise available. The program began with several preschoolers, and has grown into an organization providing comprehensive supports and services for 3,500 people and their families per year. Wildwood supports children from age three through older adults. The organization aims to work collaboratively with families and the community, empowering and enabling children and adults with neurologically-based learning disabilities, autism, and other developmental disabilities to lead fulfilling, independent and productive lives.

Wildwood has long recognized the need to ensure a competent, qualified workforce. For several years prior to implementing the credential program, Wildwood offered the College of Direct Support (CDS) to employees through CDS’s partnership with the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation (formerly New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies or NYSACRA). The CDS is a competency-based, on-line training program that offers interactive learning and on-the-job checklists designed to yield the NADSP competencies. After implementation of CDS, Wildwood staff realized that many staff were beginning but not completing the training courses. Longtime friend of Wildwood, Bart Conover, left an endowment to the organization. As a means to better support and provide incentive for DSPs to complete the training program, Wildwood developed the Conover scholarship program

to encourage DSPs to complete the program. Conover credential recipients are recognized as “Conover Scholars.” Successful completion of CDS modules leads to a wage increase. Since the Conover Scholarship program was implemented in 2012, 179 successful Conover Scholars have completed the program. The goals of the program are to, (1) use existing resources and leverage State reimbursements, (2) build direct support competence, (3) provide a source of pride and status to successful employees, (4) increase pay for commitment to direct support work, (5) memorialize and create a legacy for the program donor, Bart Conover, and (6) preserve the endowment by using earnings rather than principle. Basic information about the Conover Scholars program are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Wildwood Programs Conover Scholarship At-A-Glance

Roles of participants	DSP and FLS (in residential or day programs only)
Credential attained	Conover Scholar
Number of credentials awarded	179 (as of November 2017)
Year the credential began	2012 (spring)
Learning Delivery Method	Online via College of Direct Support
Alignment with core competencies	OPWDD, NADSP
Costs covered	Enrollment fee in CDS, wage increase
Wage increase for credential completion	DSP: \$.30-\$1 per hour, plus annual bonus FLS: \$500 bonus, plus annual bonus
Typical enrollment per enrollment period	10-15 learners (as of August 2017)
Typical time for credential completion	12 months for DSPs

### **Enrollment criteria**

Acceptance into the Conover Scholars requires that interested participants submit a brief application. Enrollment criteria and stipulations were mandated by the endowment. The first criterion is that the DSP or FLS is employed in a residential or day program (Wildwood operates several additional programs that are not eligible for the Conover Scholars credential). Applicants must be a regular employee working at least half time, and they must have been employed at Wildwood for three months in a direct support role. Additionally, all applicants must be current in all required training, and have satisfactory job performance at the time of application.

The Conover Scholars program is marketed to all new employees. Current employees are alerted to the opportunity to apply for the program through emails and/or text messages that are sent three times per year during open enrollment. There is no fee required from the employee to enroll in the program, and there is a wage increase and annual bonus associated with successful completion of the program. The Conover Scholars program has been successful in attracting participants. When asked about annual growth targets for enrollment in the program, the program coordinator indicated that there are approximately 10-15 learners enrolled in the program during each term. In 2017, the number of currently employed credentialed DSPs in the organization was a majority of DSP positions in the organization (55% are recognized as Conover Scholars). Nearly 87% of FLS in the organization are Conover Scholars.

### **Attaining the credential**

Coursework modules are delivered through CDS, a web-based learning platform (see the sidebar description on the partnership between CDS and the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation). DSPs complete three modules on CDS to attain the Conover Scholar credential (modules 1, 2, and 4; see Table 6). FLSs complete an additional module,

for a total of four modules to attain the Conover Scholar credential (modules 1-4). DSPs who have completed the Conover Scholar status and are promoted to a FLS role in the organization maintain their status as Conover Scholars. They can also enroll to complete module 3 and earn the bonus for completing the module. Table 6 details the modules and courses included in each module that are required for the Conover Scholar Credential.

Learners sequentially enroll in the modules, completing module one before proceeding to module two, and so forth. Learners have three months to complete each module (March-May, July-September, and November-January). This allows participants maximal flexibility in the pace they wish to complete the program. Typically, DSPs complete the program in one year, given that they can complete one module in each of three sessions throughout the year.

Wildwood's program coordinator works in close collaboration with the New York Alliance, receiving weekly updates from the New York Alliance coordinator on the learner's percentage completion of courses toward the full module. If a learner falls behind in their coursework, the program coordinator reaches out to the learner's manager or supervisor to encourage them to set aside time to complete the lessons. The New York Alliance also handles enrollment of all participants in the applicable module on CDS. Technical issues and troubleshooting are handled by the New York Alliance or Elsevier (the company that offers CDS and its learning management platform). This minimizes the amount of time that the program coordinator at Wildwood needs to attend to such issues.

**Table 6. Required training for Conover Scholar credential at Wildwood Programs**

Employee group	Module	Required College of Direct Support courses
Direct Support Professionals	1	Cultural Competence
		Introduction to Developmental Disabilities
		Individual Rights and Choice
		Maltreatment: Prevention and Response
		Safety
		Supporting Healthy Lives
		Teaching People with Developmental Disabilities
Direct Support Professionals	2	Community Inclusion
		Direct Support Professionalism
		Functional Assessment
		Person-Centered Planning
		Positive Behavior Supports
		Professional Documentation Practices
		Working with Families and Support Networks
Direct Support Professionals	4	You've Got a Friend
		Civil Rights and Advocacy
		Emergency Preparedness
		Employment Supports for People with Developmental Disabilities Exploring Individual Preferences for Job Attainment
		Everyone Can Communicate
		Home and Community Living
		Introduction to Medication Supports
		Personal Care
		Supporting Jobs and Careers in the Community
Frontline Supervisor	3	Universal Precautions
		Developing an Intervention Plan
		Fueling High Performance
		Preparing for the Supervisor's Job in Human Services
		Recruitment and Selection
		Training and Orientation
		Your First Few Weeks and Months as a Supervisor

Learners are responsible for completing the module in which they are enrolled within three months. Wildwood pays the learner's enrollment fee for access to the module one time. If the learner does not complete the module during that time, they may reenroll in the module at their own cost as many times as needed. In such a case, Wildwood will

reimburse the learner for the enrollment fee when they successfully complete the module, however the learner must front the money until they have completed it. The maximum amount Wildwood will pay in enrollment fees for any eligible applicant is \$600, whether the applicant is a DSP or FLS.

## The New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation and the College of Direct Support

Partnership between the College of Direct Support (CDS) and the New York Alliance for Innovation and Inclusion (formerly New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies or NYSACRA) has existed since 2006. The New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation offers agencies the opportunity to enroll DSPs and FLSs in CDS at a reduced tuition rate. This partnership provides organizations with cost-effective, quality, cutting-edge training for their employees. CDS utilizes curricula aligned with nationally recognized competency sets, as well as OPWDD's established core competencies. It is a web-based platform, administered and managed by the New York Alliance staff. Staff in organizations in this comparative analysis that use CDS as a component of their credential program (Wildwood Programs and the Arc of Orange), reported that the New York Alliance provides credential program coordinators with a weekly update toward course completion. Staff in organizations can use this information to check in with learners seeking credentialing to ensure that they stay on track. When necessary, they can alert a supervisor to encourage the DSP learner to complete their lessons.

Four modules were created from existing CDS web-based content for use in this program across the state of New York. Modules 1, 2, and 4 are aimed toward DSPs. Module 3 includes specialized content for FLSs. The lessons included in each module are listed in Table 6 on the next page. Learners apply for each module through their organization. If their application is accepted, they are enrolled in one of three annual sessions. During that session, learners have 90 days to complete the learning module. Fees associated with each module are \$150 per learner for employees of the New York Alliance member agencies (\$170 per learner for non-member agencies). The New York Alliance handles distribution of learner user ID and password to access the CDS module.

More information is available from [NYSACRA & the College of Direct Support, Investing in a Professional Workforce: A Guide to Core Competency Online Learning](#).

### Wage increases

Successful attainment of the Conover Scholar credential is paired with a wage increase based on the scholar's role in the organization and their base rate of pay:

- Full-time credentialed DSPs whose annual base pay is \$24,000 or less receive an hourly wage increase of \$1.00 per hour (\$2,080 annually). Employees who work less than 40 hours per week receive a pro-rated increase of \$.50 per hour.
- Full-time credentialed DSPs whose annual base pay is \$24,001 or more receive an hourly wage increase of \$.30 per hour (\$624 annually). Employees who work less than 40 hours per week receive a pro-rated increase of \$.15 per hour.

- FLSs receive a \$500 bonus upon completion of the program. FLSs must complete all the DSP modules (modules 1, 2, and 4), as well as a module specially designed for DSPs (module 3).

In addition to these incentives, all Conover Scholars are eligible for an annual distribution that is based on the earnings from the endowment. This is an additional amount that the scholar receives on top of the wage increase from successful completion of the credential. Near the end of the calendar year, each Conover Scholar employed in the organization receives a payout from the endowment's earnings. To date, this payout has typically been several hundred dollars per scholar each year.



### **Learning supports available**

Learners in the Conover Scholar program are allowed to use work computers to complete the lessons in CDS modules on their breaks or after work. They are expected to complete the lessons on their own time, and are not explicitly paid for their time to complete CDS coursework. Applications for program enrollment include a box to check for participants who require assistance with computer access, reading, or learning supports. This has been utilized by only a few learners since 2012, with a few learners requesting assistance with computer skills or reading.

### **Portability of the credential**

A few new hires have come to Wildwood Programs with successful completion of the New York Alliance/CDS modules when they worked for another organization. In these cases, the program coordinator can call the New York Alliance to verify the person's completion. The New York Alliance keeps a database of successful completion of modules at organizations across the state. When completion is verified, Wildwood does not require participants to take the modules again unless the content of those modules had significantly changed. When asked about "portability" of the credential, the program coordinator indicated that it could be portable given the New York Alliance's centralizing of such information. Other courses or work experiences are not accepted toward completion of the credential. Wildwood has never assessed whether Conover Scholar status is recognized by other agencies, but given that CDS is used by many agencies in New York and that the New York Alliance centralizes a database of modules completed, it is possible that the coursework would be recognized by other organizations. It is unknown whether the completion of this coursework would be portable and linked to higher wages in other organizations.

### **Program evaluation**

Wildwood's board of directors evaluates the impact of the Conover Scholars program every year. Enrollment is examined, and turn-over rates are assessed. The high number of learners who have completed this credential is a testament to its successful utilization (see the Outcomes of the Conover Scholars program section). However, the reach of the program at Wildwood has been limited to residential and day programs. Other programs have expressed interest in sending participants through the program, but they have yet to come up with funds to do this. To the program coordinator's knowledge, no DSPs or FLSs from other programs have come up with their own funds to complete the CDS modules.

### **Costs associated with the credential**

Costs associated with obtaining the credential are paid partially through the endowment; but Wildwood pays the enrollment fees for employees to complete the coursework ((\$150 per learner per module, for a total of \$450 for DSPs and \$600 for FLSs) and the wage increases (ranging from \$500 to \$2080 annually). The endowment pays for the annual bonus provided to employees. Learners access CDS content from their home or work computers, and no other specialized equipment or instructors are necessary. There are no fees associated with applying for the credential or assessments. The New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation maintains the database of successful completion of CDS modules, and there is little overhead cost for overseeing and administering the credential from Wildwood administrative staff. These annual costs per learner are detailed in Table 7.

**Table 7. Estimated costs per learner for the Conover Scholars credential at Wildwood Programs**

Itemized cost	Estimated annual dollar amount per learner
Total fees to access three or four online learning modules (via CDS/New York Alliance)	\$450 or \$600**
Wage increase/bonus	\$500 - \$2,080*

Note. \*Wage increases are dependent on the employee's role as a DSP or a FLS, and their annual base rate of pay. Full-time DSPs earning less than \$24,000 per year earn a wage increase of \$1 per hour; those earning \$24,001 or more earn \$.30 per hour more. Employees who work less than 40 hours per week earn half the wage increase, based on their annual rate of pay.

\*\*The maximum Wildwood will pay for CDS access for any eligible applicant is \$600, whether they are DSP or FLS.

### Outcomes of the Conover Scholars Program

Wildwood Programs provides supports and services for 3,500 people with disabilities. As of November 13, 2017, 179 DSPs and 33 FLSs have completed the credential program since 2012.

### Direct Support Professionals

As of November 13, 2017, Wildwood Programs employs 137 full-time DSPs, 27 part-time DSPs, and have 30 vacancies for DSPs (194 total DSP positions). There were 107 credentialed DSPs still employed in the organization, making the majority of DSP credentialed (55%).

**DSP Annual Turnover.** There were 107 credentialed DSPs employed at Wildwood Programs as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, 10 credentialed DSPs left the organization. The credentialed DSP turnover rate was 9.3%. The average tenure of 107 credentialed DSPs still employed on September 30, 2017 was 12.46 years (see Table 8).

There were 87 DSPs positions held by non-credentialed DSPs at the organization as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, 53 DSPs left the organization. The non-credentialed DSP turnover rate was 60.9%. Number of months of employment for non-credentialed DSPs was not available, so tenure of non-credentialed DSPs could not be calculated.

**DSP Wages.** The average non-credentialed DSP wage at Wildwood Programs was \$10.70 per hour. The average wage of credentialed DSPs in the organization was \$11.70 per hour. The wage increase associated with successful completion of the credential ranges between \$.30-1.00 per hour, depending on the base rate. Annual bonuses awarded to DSPs were not factored into this hourly rate.

**Table 8. Wildwood Programs DSP Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed DSPs (N = 87)	Credentialed DSPs (N = 107)
Turnover	60.9%	9.3%
Tenure (in years)	Not available	12.46
Average hourly wage	\$10.70	\$11.70

## Frontline Supervisors

As of November 13, 2017, Wildwood Programs employed 26 credentialed FLSs, two non-credentialed FLSs, and had 2 FLS vacancies (30 total FLS positions). Credentialed FLSs make up 86.67% of the positions, the majority of these positions.

**FLS Annual Turnover.** There were 26 credentialed FLSs employed at Wildwood Programs as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, four credentialed FLSs left the organization. The credentialed FLS turnover rate was 15%. The average tenure of the credentialed FLSs still employed on September 30, 2017 was 15.4 years.

There were four positions held by non-credentialed FLSs in the organization as of September 30, 2017, including two non-credentialed FLS and two vacancies for FLS positions. Data were not available for the number of FLSs who left the organization during the calendar year, so turnover among non-credentialed FLSs could not be calculated.

**FLS Wages.** The average hourly wage for FLSs was the same for credentialed and non-credentialed FLSs: \$17.60 per hour. The wage increase associated with successful completion of the credential among FLS is a \$500 bonus and an annual bonus from the endowment earnings, neither of which were factored into this hourly rate.

## Interviews with credentialed DSPs in the Conover Scholars Program

Four credentialed DSPs from Wildwood Programs were interviewed in person regarding their experiences in the credential program, and how it has impacted their work. The average length of time that these DSPs have worked in the field is 14 years (range 10-20 years), but some of these years for some of the DSPs was spent working in other organizations. One DSP was credentialed in 2013, two were in 2014, and the other was credentialed in 2016. The four interviews are summarized below.

## Motivations for pursuing the credential

Several motivating factors were identified as reasons for pursuing the credential by the four DSPs who were interviewed, including:

- Desire to learn new skills and reinforce skills previously learned,
- Making direct support a career,
- Receiving encouragement from supervisors and/or managers, and
- Achieving a higher rate of pay.

## Strengths and benefits of the credential program

The DSPs identified many strengths and benefits of the credential program. These are summarized below.

*CDS content focused on the population supported at work.* Given that CDS is designed specifically for DSPs providing community supports for people with IDD, several DSPs noted that the content of CDS modules was easy to relate to the people supported at work. One DSP had completed previous college coursework in human services, and felt that the coursework was a good refresher on what was previously learned but better aimed at supporting people with IDD when compared to her previous college coursework. In particular, people with IDD were included as examples or presenters in the lessons, and the person-centered perspective differed from what was emphasized in previous coursework. DSPs described how the emphasis on person-centered services in CDS coursework helped them reflect on ways they support people in the community. For example, one DSP took a woman she supported shopping. Someone in the community approached the woman to try to instruct her on how to spend her money, specifically, they tried to tell the woman that she should not waste her money on the thing she wanted to buy. The DSP stepped in to instruct the community member that, "It's up to [the person supported] to buy what she wants with her money." This diffused the situation. Several other DSPs emphasized that





they have adjusted their overall daily support practices to be more supportive (as opposed to doing things for people that they can do for themselves), and to help people to more consistently make their own choices.

***Learning to communicate more effectively.*** Several DSPs learned to better communicate with the people they support. The CDS modules helped them to recognize the diverse ways that people communicate, and to work harder to listen to people in multiple ways. One DSP noted that they learned to break down verbal communications into smaller chunks. Another DSP worked with a person that had many challenging behaviors and does not communicate with words. After working to listen better to the person through his behavior, the DSP suspected that the person had a sensory issue with softer food, rather than a dislike for the food as had been previously suspected. After this realization, the DSP worked to get the person an appointment with a specialist. The specialist problem-solved with the person and gave guidance for more individualized supports. As a result, many of the person's challenging behaviors rapidly decreased.

***Technology made it easy to access the coursework.*** The DSPs noted that Wildwood Programs made it easy to sign up for the modules, and there was little paperwork involved. Once DSPs received login information, they were able to access the module from home or work. Two DSPs mentioned that they greatly appreciated the flexibility to access the lessons where they wanted, and to go at their own pace. They were able to revisit content several times as needed in order to learn the material.

***Camaraderie to complete training.*** Several DSPs mentioned strong camaraderie with their coworkers in completing the credential. While not required by Wildwood to do so, several worked together, one with their FLS to stay on pace and better understand CDS course content.

### **Challenges of the credential program**

***Finding time to complete the coursework.*** The DSPs reported that their largest challenge in completing the credential was finding time to complete the on-line coursework. One DSP found a good rhythm in completing one lesson per week, and





focusing that week at work on what she was learning. Other DSPs mentioned that they picked up extra work on days when there were open positions, and this was an additional obstacle to finding consistent time to complete the modules on CDS. Another DSP mentioned that she had young children while completing the credential, so it was difficult to squeeze in coursework alongside of family responsibilities. However, she also added that the flexibility of CDS allowed her to be successful in completing the credential on schedule. One DSP worked with their supervisor to break down the components of the credential in order to complete it.

**No follow up with manager.** One DSP stated that they wished they had more support in applying what they were learning from CDS to their work. They did not have the opportunity to follow up with their manager about what they were learning, and wished for these opportunities.

**Some of the coursework was very challenging.** One DSP noted that they had a difficult time with some of the curriculum. Specifically, they could not seem to pass one of the tests.

### Supports provided by the organization

**No paperwork needed and accessibility from anywhere.** The DSPs reported that applying to the program and completing the lessons was very streamlined. There were no complications or paperwork needed to apply for the modules. The modules were accessible as soon as learners received online access.

**Financial investment.** The DSPs emphasized that the opportunity to further their skills and increase their professionalism without personal financial investment was essential. The low wages paid to DSPs would not have made the credential feasible if not for this financial support from the endowment.

**Supervisor support.** Many DSPs emphasized the importance of encouragement from their supervisor or manager in pursuing the credential. The DSPs noted that their supervisors provided reminder emails with the percentage of the module completed that helped keep them on track.

**Offer to use the Internet at work.** One DSP reported that the organization allowed her to stay on-site to complete the modules in her non-work time because she had better access

to the Internet at work than at home. Several other DSPs tried to complete some of their lessons at work, but found that it was too difficult to concentrate. They found they needed time allocated to the lessons.

**Recognition events.** The DSPs noted that they felt recognized by the organization for their achievement in completing the credential. The organization provided them with a certificate of completion and a pin. Each year, credentialed employees are recognized for their achievements and awarded with a pin for another year of service. It was noted that not all DSPs can attend the recognition event because they are working at the time of the event. In these cases, the organization recognizes those DSPs who are working during the event, and that they are working when they could be getting recognized by their colleagues.

### Outcomes for the people supported

**Feeling heard and communicating more readily.** One DSP reported that a person they support has a reputation for challenging behavior. Through training, the DSP recognized that they need to do a better job of listening to this person and respecting her wishes. She learned strategies for listening and communicating effectively. As a result, this person more readily communicates with the DSP, and the DSP respects the person's rights and space. The DSPs emphasized that they learned to emphasize supporting in their work, as opposed to doing things for a person that they can do for themselves. People supported have more opportunities to learn new skills and practice them with this kind of supporting relationship.

Another DSP learned the importance of looking not only at a person's behavior when it is challenging, but also looking at the environment. For example, one DSP noted that a person she supports used to rip off his fingernails. The staff were at a loss with how to help the person. The DSP started trying to understand why the person would engage in this behavior. The CDS training provided a framework of problem-solving skills that the DSP

used. The DSP began to recognize that the person was sensitive to some of his t-shirts he often wore. The DSP worked with staff to modify his wardrobe to ensure that he was not getting irritated by his clothes. The result was that the person was much less agitated, and did not rip off his fingernails.

**Recognizing diverse preferences.** One DSP noted a CDS lesson on race and culture that helped them learn skills to better support and respect a person's traditions that were different from their own. For example, the DSP supported a person to attend church. The DSP talked with the person's mother to get a better understanding of the person's faith so that they could provide better support. The CDS lesson opened the door to recognizing gaps in how they were providing support, and how they could provide more personalized support that honors the person's religious preferences.

**Work alongside of families.** One DSP stated that they learned skills to work alongside a person's family. Previously, the family had a lot of anxiety in letting their loved one do things that might be a risk to the person's safety. The DSP learned strategies to help families better understand their loved one's skills, and to encourage the family to support learning new skills. As a result, this DSP has helped people to learn to hike and kayak, according to the person's ambitions.

**Supporting people to do things on their own.** Many people supported are capable to do many things that they previously relied on DSPs to do for them. In their training, several DSPs recognized there were ways they could support people to increase their independence, including making their own food, doing their own laundry, and buying their own food. Many people supported have appreciated this independence, and it has allowed everyone to learn new things about the people supported. Several DSPs also discussed the importance of supporting people to learn from their mistakes.



The NADSP credentials require a specified number of hours of education. The NADSP DSP-C1 credential requires 100 hours of education. These hours can be delivered in a number of formats, including classroom and online learning, selected from

[accredited training curricula](#). The College of Direct Support, Relias Learning, and the Training Collaborative are three of NADSP's accredited training curricula that are used in credentialing programs included in this report.

### **The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals-Certified Initial Level (DSP-C1)**

The National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) aims to “elevate the status of direct support professionals by improving practice standards, promoting system reform, and advancing their knowledge, skills, and values” (see more on [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org)). NADSP offers opportunities for DSPs and FLSs to seek credentialing opportunities through a multi-tiered credential that requires that DSPs demonstrate knowledge, skills, and values characteristic of highly competent DSPs and FLSs. These are aligned with a nationally validated competency set with 15 domain areas and corresponding skill statements. All learners seeking an NADSP credential commit to [NADSP's Code of Ethics for professional practice](#).

All of the NADSP credentials include the submission of a portfolio that demonstrates the competence of the DSP or FLS through work samples and reflections. When the portfolio is submitted to NADSP, an independent committee reviews each portfolio and determines its acceptability. The DSP-C1 and DSP-C2 each require that DSPs demonstrate four of the 15 DSP competencies through work samples (eight all together). Detailed information about the overall credential program and the construction, requirements, submission, and evaluation of a NADSP portfolio is available on [www.nadsp.org](http://www.nadsp.org).

## **II. Arc of Orange County NADSP Credential**

The mission of the Arc of Orange County is to “create an environment that supports and advocates for people of all ages with unique abilities and challenges so they can live as respected, valued members of their communities.” In 29 locations across Orange County, services provided include day, community and residential habilitation, supported employment, Medicaid Service Coordination, and education services for children. The Arc of Orange County has been a Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) Accredited Agency since May 2014. This organization has long recognized the important role of skilled, consistent support provided by DSPs in affecting the quality of life of the people to whom they provide support. In 2009, DSP turnover in this organization was 40% annually. In an effort to address this high rate of turnover, the Arc of Orange began implementing an organization-wide effort at increasing the competence of their direct support employees. Staff enrolled to complete modules from the College of Direct Support (CDS), administered through The New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation. Completing each module was paired with an hourly wage increase. Successful completers of module 1 received a \$1.00 per hour wage increase, and successful completion of module 2 was paired with a \$.50 per hour wage increase. In assisting employees to access CDS content, staff were also eligible for a no-interest loan to purchase a laptop computer. A regular payroll deduction was utilized until the cost of the computer was fully paid. All registration costs for CDS were also covered by the Arc of Orange. Since 2009, approximately 430 Arc of Orange County employees completed the modules. This initiative aimed to increase competence, but it did not lead to an officially recognized credential.

In 2014, the Arc of Orange expanded its professional development opportunities to its direct support staff to include classroom instruction and development of a credentialing portfolio to submit for one or more multi-tiered credentials through the National Alliance on Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). This credential program is referred to as the DSP Achievement Project. The expanded staff development initiative includes a classroom learning component (four two-hour classes), and access to a learning cohort of students from the organization who are completing the credential. These components further the knowledge, skills, and values that participants learn through CDS modules, and lead to the construction of work samples as a part of compiling a professional portfolio. Completion of the portfolio includes opportunities for reflection on professional practices, and discussion with other professionals in the field.

The credentialing initiative aims to provide professional development for DSPs to enhance their skills and abilities, and to create a career path for DSPs who wish to be skilled professionals in this field. Participants have the opportunity to complete DSP-C1 and DSP-C2 levels of the NADSP credential framework. The Arc of Orange also provides access to the NADSP specialty credential, but the program has not yet existed long enough for successful completers at this level of the credential. The goal of the program is to have participants complete the DSP-C1 credential within 1½ years. Completion of the DSP-C2 also has an estimated equal duration of 1½ years. According to the program coordinators, the credentialing components have increased the effectiveness of training employees toward competence as community navigators. Basic information about the Arc of Orange County NADSP credential program are presented in Table 9. More detailed information is summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

**Table 9. The Arc of Orange NADSP Credential At-A-Glance**

Roles of participants	DSPs and program managers
Credentials offered	NADSP DSP-C1, DSP-C2, DSP-Specialty
Number of credentials awarded	6 DSP-C1
Year the credential program began	2014
Learning Delivery Method	Online College of Direct Support modules (via New York Alliance), classroom training, portfolio development with work samples
Core competencies	OPWDD, NADSP
Cohort model	Yes
Costs covered by the organization	CDS coursework, NADSP application fees, wage increase, classroom instruction, mileage to classroom instruction
Wage increase	\$1.50 per hour for DSP-C1; additional \$1.50 for DSP-C2
Typical enrollment per enrollment period	Approximately 10 participants
Typical time for credential completion	1½ years (for DSP-C1) and 1½ years (for DSP-C2)

## Enrollment criteria

DSPs and program managers are eligible to apply for the DSP-C1 credential. Employees must have been employed for six months and have positive job performance to be accepted into the program. Participants complete two modules through CDS, administered by the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation. After completion, they apply to become part of a classroom cohort to work further toward their DSP-C1. Recently, the Arc of Orange reduced the requirement from one year of employment to six months of employment before applying to be in the credential program. This change was intended to more quickly catch motivated DSPs who have completed their CDS coursework to engage in working on their portfolio. As a part of their application for the program, participants submit a Letter of Interest and Letters of Recommendation from two people who attest to their character and commitment to the Arc of Orange mission.

The first cohort of the credentialing program at the Arc of Orange included participants who were selected by administrators. However, attrition of participants from this credentialing group was quite large, with most discontinuing the program. Since then, the credential program at the Arc of Orange County is voluntary for all DSPs. Employees choose to apply for the program when it fits them. Requirements of the program are clearly presented to interested employees. Twenty-five employees have voluntarily applied for the credential program since 2015. Six have completed the DSP-C1 credential. Four of these are now pursuing the DSP-C2. Nineteen participants in the program are in process of completing the four work samples required in the DSP-C1 portfolio. Work samples take significant time, effort, and oftentimes creativity to overcome barriers. A few learners who began the program are no longer pursuing the credential, but retention of participants in the process increased dramatically when learners voluntarily entered the credentialing process.

## Attaining the credential

Participants accepted in the DSP Achievement Project attend four, two-hour classes led by staff from NADSP. A cohort model is used so that participants can support and learn from one another. Participants are paid for their class time, but they are expected to complete their CDS coursework on their own time. As needed, participants meet with the program coordinators to discuss their portfolio. Getting started on their work samples as soon in the process as possible is an important component to keeping participants engaged. Participants also spend time reflecting verbally in class and through a journal about their work as a way to help them complete their work samples. All coursework is aligned with the NADSP Core Competencies and OPWDD competencies. Work samples are directly aligned with the NADSP Core Competencies and example skill statements. People with disabilities participate in and lead some classroom trainings.

Classroom training is held at the administration building of the Arc of Orange County. Learners are reimbursed for their mileage to class, which is approximately 27 miles one way. Knowledge is assessed in CDS using pre-test and post-test assessments. Ultimately, learner competence is demonstrated in their work samples. Scheduling issues are frequently a barrier to completing the credential. Program coordinators often need to seek the support of supervisors to release employees from their duties so they can attend classes. Program coordinators emphasize the importance in communicating with supervisors and to encourage DSPs to use what they have learned in their training on a daily basis at work.

**Table 10. Estimated annual costs associated with the NADSP Credential at the Arc of Orange County based on a typical cohort of 10 learners**

Itemized cost	Estimated annual dollar amount per learner
Teacher/trainer and additional supervisory time	\$1,200
Total fees to access two online learning modules (via CDS/New York Alliance)	\$300
Classroom supplies	\$25
Transportation reimbursement	\$231.12
Classroom space	\$0*
Credentialing application fees to NADSP	\$60 for DSP-R and \$150 for DSP-C1
Wage increase/bonus	\$3120 for DSP-C1
Pay for in-class time	\$97.68*
Costs for substitute staff while learner is completing credential	Not applicable

### Wage increases

DSPs are provided with incentives for their participation in the credential program. Successful completion of each credential level is paired with the following wage increases:

- \$1.50 per hour wage increase for learners who complete the NADSP Certified Initial Level (DSP-C1),
- \$1.50 per hour wage increase for learners who complete the NADSP-Certified Advanced Level (DSP-C2),
- \$2.00 per hour wage increase for learners who complete a credential in one of the NADSP-Specialist (DSP-S) areas: Inclusion, Health Support, Positive Behavior Support, Employment Supports, Aging Supports.

Learners who have attained all three multi-tiered credentials are eligible to receive a total of \$5.00 per hour wage increase for their efforts. The total cost of the annual wage increase for a typical cohort of 10 learners who completed the DSP-C1 credential would be \$31,200.

### Learning supports available

Staff at the Arc of Orange County recognized after implementing the credential program that some participants who wanted to complete the credential did not possess the necessary written language and/or computer skills. Some participants had never taken an online course, and had difficulty navigating CDS independently. Participants also had difficulties writing and presenting, which were barriers to completing the credential. In response, staff from the Arc of Orange County are assigned to meet with participants and provide individualized supports intended to maximize completion rates.

Support from supervisors was another important component that contributes to participants' successes in the credential. Given the demand for the participants' time to attend classes and complete work samples, program coordinators found it important to work alongside DSP colleagues and FLS to ensure that they recognize how important it is to support the learner. On a day-to-day level, support from the FLS was identified as an important component to keep up the learner's motivation, self-esteem, and confidence.

**Table 10. Estimated annual costs associated with the NADSP Credential at the Arc of Orange County based on a typical cohort of 10 learners**

Itemized cost	Estimated annual dollar amount per learner
Teacher/trainer and additional supervisory time	\$1,200
Total fees to access two online learning modules (via CDS/New York Alliance)	\$300
Classroom supplies	\$25
Transportation reimbursement	\$231.12
Classroom space	\$0**
Credentialing application fees to NADSP	\$60 for DSP-R and \$150 for DSP-C1
Wage increase/bonus	\$3120 for DSP-C1
Pay for in-class time	\$97.68*
Costs for substitute staff while learner is completing credential	Not applicable

Note: (\*) DSPs are paid 8 hours of in-classes time. They are paid at their typical hourly rate (\$12.21 is the average hourly wage for non-credentialed DSPs at Arc of Orange). (\*\*) Classes are held at the agency administration building; no additional costs incurred.

### Costs associated with the credential

Costs associated with the credential program were estimated, and they are detailed in Table 10.

### Outcomes of the Arc of Orange County credential

The Arc of Orange County provides supports and services for 1,200 people with disabilities. As of September 30, 2017, six DSPs have completed the DSP-C1 credential since 2014, and all are still employed in the organization. Three of these DSPs were promoted and now work as an Assistant Director, a Program Manager, and an Assistant Program Manager. Given this information, the rate of pay for the six credentialed DSPs is divided between their current roles as either DSPs or FLSs for comparison with non-credentialed staff.

### Direct Support Professionals

As of September 30, 2017, the Arc of Orange County employed 250 full-time DSPs, 1 part-time DSP (they phased out this position and consider employees working 30 or more hours per week as full-time), and they had 58 DSP vacancies (309 total DSP

positions). The three credentialed DSPs who are still working as DSPs make up less than 1% of the DSPs employed in the organization. However, 19 DSPs are actively in process of completing their classroom training and/or work samples. Including these DSPs, 7% of the DSPs employed by the Arc of Orange County are either credentialed or in the process of completing the credential.

**DSP Annual Turnover.** There were three credentialed DSPs employed at the Arc of Orange as of September 30, 2017. All of the credentialed DSPs were still employed on September 30, 2017. The credentialed DSP turnover rate was 0%. The average tenure of all credentialed staff at the Arc of Orange, including DSPs and those working in FLS positions was 15 years.

**Table 11. Arc of Orange County DSP Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed DSPs (N = 306)	Credentialed DSPs (N = 3)
Turnover	19.6%	0%
Tenure (in years)	4.3	15 (all credentialed staff)
Average hourly wage	\$12.21	\$14.74

**Table 12. Arc of Orange County FLS Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed FLSs (N = 32)	Credentialed FLSs (N = 3)
Turnover	15.6%	0%
Tenure (in years)	Not available	15 (all credentialed staff)
Average hourly wage	\$19.33	\$22.69

There were 306 non-credentialed DSPs positions in the organization as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, 60 DSPs left the organization. The non-credentialed DSP turnover rate was 19.6%. Average years of tenure for non-credentialed DSPs was 4.3 years.

**DSP Wages.** The average starting wage of DSPs at the Arc of Orange County was \$10.51, and the average wage was \$12.21 per hour as of September 30, 2017. The average wage of credentialed DSPs was \$14.74 per hour. The wage increase associated with successful completion of the credential program is \$1.50 per hour.

### Frontline Supervisors

As of September 30, 2017, there were 33 FLSs employed at the Arc of Orange County

(including three credentialed staff), and two vacancies (35 positions). Credentialed staff currently make up three of these positions (8.6%).

**FLS Annual Turnover.** As of September 30, 2017, three credentialed staff at the Arc of Orange County work in FLS roles. All of these staff were still employed on September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, five non-credentialed staff turned over for an annual turnover rate of 15.6%.

**FLS Wages.** The average hourly wage among credentialed FLSs at the Arc of Orange County is \$22.69 per hour. The average hourly wage among non-credentialed FLSs at the Arc of Orange County is \$19.33 per hour.

## Using Relias as apart of the NADSP DSP-C1 Credential

The NADSP DSP-C1 credential requires that learners complete 100 hours of related education toward their credential. According to the [NADSP Certification Program Guidebook](#), this can be delivered through one of the [NADSP Accredited Curricula](#), NADSP Provided Trainings, or participating in discussions with mentors or peers. These hours are documented in the application for the credential. Relias Learning is one of the NADSP Accredited Curricula. Two of the five credential programs in this comparative analysis (Arc of Ulster-Greene and Arc of Monroe) use Relias Learning for a portion of the required 100 hours of education. These credential programs also utilize in-class discussion or classroom instruction with NADSP trainers for the other portion of the NADSP DSP-C1 related education hours.



### III. Arc of Ulster-Greene NADSP Credential

The Arc of Ulster-Greene provides support for more than 2,913 people throughout Ulster and Greene counties, including intermediate care facilities, independent residential apartments, supportive apartments, community habilitation, Home and Community Based Services “waiver” respite, early intervention respite, day habilitation, school to work, clinical services, transportation, recreation, and Medicaid Service Coordination. They also serve as a fiscal intermediary for self-directed services. Arc of Ulster-Greene employs about 1,200 staff. In January 2015, they began offering a NADSP DSP credentialing initiative to both DSPs and FLSs. The Arc of Ulster-Greene utilizes a cohort model, and were implementing their third cohort at the time of this report’s publication. The third cohort began in June 2017. Several changes were made to their original credentialing program framework in the third cohort. Basic information about the Arc of Ulster-Greene’s NADSP DSP-C1 credential program as implemented in the third cohort are presented in Table 13.

**Table 13. The Arc of Ulster-Greene NADSP DSP-C1 Credential At-A-Glance**

Roles of participants	DSP and FLS
Credential attained	DSP-C1
Number of credentials awarded	8
Year the credential began	2015 January
Number of cohorts	3
Total enrolled to date	35
Learning Delivery Method	Online via Relias, classroom, work samples
Core competencies	OPWDD, NADSP
Costs covered	Application fees for Relias and NADSP, wage increase, annual credentialing fees to NADSP, mileage to classroom instruction
Typical enrollment per enrollment period	12 learners
Typical time for credential completion	1 ½ years

#### Attaining the credential

Participants in the first two cohorts began in January 2015 and January 2016. After the second cohort, staff at the Arc of Ulster-Greene made some revisions to the program in hopes that it would provide a more streamlined experience for learners. The third cohort began in June 2017. The three cohorts have always utilized a blended learning model, which includes online learning through Relias (an online training program), classroom instruction, as well as work-based learning. They have utilized the NADSP pathway to the DSP-C1 credential, which includes the production of work samples and submission of a

portfolio to be evaluated by NADSP. Work on the portfolio is also incorporated into classroom instruction. The program coordinator arranges one-on-one mentorship and support sessions to ensure that learners are staying on track. As learners work on their portfolios, they are instructed to save the portfolios on an agency-owned shared drive. This allows instructors and facilitators of the program to access learner portfolios. They can check learner progress and offer feedback whenever needed, while also ensuring that files are not lost.

Classroom instruction is delivered at the agency training center two times per month

for two hours per class. Learners are reimbursed for mileage to class if they are coming from work. The average distance one way for a learner to drive to class is 15-20 miles. Classes are taught by the program coordinator, who has degrees in education and public administration. Her role was also to develop the curriculum for the classroom training.

In the first two cohorts, the Arc of Ulster-Greene utilized CDS modules administered by the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation. They were unsatisfied with the restrictions on when the courses could be accessed, the limited length of time that learners had to access the lessons (each module must be completed in three months), and the way that costs were structured to access the modules. In the most

recent cohort, they switched to Relias, another web-based learning package. This allowed them to access courses with flexibility, such that the online content and classroom learning could be more easily aligned. Program coordinators created a schedule for topics covered in class, and they align the Relias coursework with that schedule (although learners can access any of the modules throughout the year). The Arc of Ulster-Greene NADSP Credentialing Program curriculum outline that was developed and implemented for cohort 3 is presented in Table 14. Learners have one year to complete the online coursework, and they must complete it on their own time unless they get approval from their supervisor to access it on their breaks at work.

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**Table 14. Arc of Ulster-Greene 2017 NADSP Credentialing Program Curriculum Outline**

- Class 1:** Welcome, overview of program & expectations, teambuilding/ice-breaking activity/ establish vision of excellence
- Class 2:** Growth mindset, introduction/review of NADSP code of ethics & core competencies
- Class 3:** Core competencies crosswalk, Credentialed DSP panel, Introduction to the Portfolio, brainstorming
- Class 4:** Guest speaker from NADSP; get the DSPs excited & motivated
- Class 5:** Review overview of I/DD, Intro to positive behavior support approaches & communication, person-first language
- Class 6:** Behavior & communication part 2, BSPs, (guest speaker- from behavioral health services)
- Class 7:** Portfolio brainstorming & start of work sample 1, DSP recognition week
- Class 8:** Informed decision making, rights & responsibilities, Person-centered planning
- Class 9:** Sex & sexuality (individual rights, consent, privacy and confidentiality), (guest speaker)
- Class 10:** Feedback/review of DSP conference experience, Ethics & the 'grey areas', abuse/neglect/ restrictions, (guest speaker- Quality Management Coordinator)
- Class 11:** Diversity and culture (guest speaker)
- Class 12:** Culture part 2- cultural competence, holidays and inclusive celebrations, (est. work sample 1- check in point)
- Class 13:** Relationships & community, supporting a full life
- Class 14:** Portfolio work sample review & half year recognition, survey
- Class 15:** Health & risk management, review of dignity of risk
- Class 16:** Portfolio work session (resume, letter of commitment), improving documentation/ documentation language
- Class 17:** Work samples peer-review & help session (est. work sample 2- check in point)
- Class 18:** Volunteer DSP taught training- topic of their choice (optional)
- Class 19:** Emotional Quotient- managing yourself & managing others
- Class 20:** Professionalism, organizational participation
- Class 21:** Work samples peer-review & help session (est. work sample 3- check in point)
- Class 22:** Portfolio work session
- Class 23:** Core competency review activity- "now & then"
- Class 24:** Portfolio work session (est. work sample 4- check in point)
- Class 25:** DSP empowerment & leadership, "now what", end-of-year survey
- Class 26:** Portfolio work sample share & walk-about

A major component of the credentialing process is building the portfolio to be submitted to NADSP. The portfolio includes four work samples. In their application for the Arc of Ulster-Greene credential program, learners specify a potential work sample that they would like to pursue in the credential. They begin working on it right away during class time. One barrier to completing the credential has been the number of work samples required. Program staff indicated that it often takes a lot of motivation to begin the fourth work sample, and some learners get stuck on this requirement for quite some time. Some previously motivated learners require significant coaching to move forward. As a point of reference, program staff at Arc of Ulster-Greene also run the NADSP FLS credential for their employees (this program at the Arc of Ulster-Greene is not summarized in this report), which requires only three work samples for the 11 FLS competencies. The Arc of Ulster-Greene is still in the first cohort of the FLS credential, but all participants are still engaged and the majority are expected to finish on track. The smaller number of required work samples may be an important difference between the two programs that contributes to the learners' continued engagement.

### **Enrollment criteria**

Across three cohorts (the third was in process at the time of interview), 33 DSPs and eight FLSs have enrolled in the credentialing program toward the DSP-C1 credential. Eight DSPs have successfully attained the credential. With the third cohort, the program directors adjusted some of the application requirements. They shortened the length of time that an applicant needed to be employed from 12 months to six months. This was to ensure that they could more quickly engage interested new employees early in their tenure. Applicants must be in good standing, which is defined as no disciplinary incidents within the last two years. They must be a full-time employee, and they must meet or exceed standards in their overall evaluation on their last annual evaluation. They are required to complete a written application that includes a

letter of support from a person they support and their supervisor. No particular services or areas within the organization are targeted for enrollment, but the program area in which a person works is considered when applications are evaluated. Given the positive benefits the training has on the learners' competence at work, program coordinators want to ensure that program areas are evenly impacted by the higher quality supports exhibited by credentialed staff.

Enrollment in the credential program at Arc of Ulster-Greene has become more competitive over time. When the program began, the staff had a difficult time filling the 12 available spots in the first cohort. Over the past two years, competition for these 12 spots has increased greatly. For the third cohort, 22 applicants applied for 12 spots. Program coordinators also adjusted the application requirements to get more information about applicants before enrolling them in the program. This included asking applicants to answer questions on their applications about their long-term goals. They believe that the recent changes in the application have resulted in a very skilled and committed cohort that are excited about the prospect of becoming credentialed DSPs.

Some administrators at the Arc of Ulster-Greene were initially concerned with the high costs of the credentialing initiative. After seeing the impact of credentialing on learners' work, they are more willing to see that the costs involved are an investment. Some program supervisors are so thrilled with the increase in quality in supports of their credentialed staff that the credentialing program coordinators have had to limit for the number of applicants from particular programs to ensure that the multiple programs are able to reap the benefit. They have also found that people who have been through the program are the best advocates for new applicants, as well as providing mentorship to learners completing their portfolios.

### **Wage increases**

Wage increases were restructured in the last cohort based on feedback from learners. The third cohort will receive a \$.50 per hour raise after completion of the online Relias coursework. They will also receive a \$1,000 annual bonus following the achievement of their NADSP DSP-C1 credential. This will be presented at a recognition ceremony for credentialed staff. For the typical cohort of 12 learners, the wage increase will cost approximately \$24,480 per year. The first two cohorts received a \$.50 per hour raise after completing the first CDS module, and an additional \$.75 per hour raise after they achieved the credential. Feedback was that the annual bonus was a greater incentive than the hourly wage increase. Program directors plan to pair the annual bonus with a holiday celebration, where credentialed staff are recognized with their bonus check at the party.

The Arc of Ulster-Greene also employs several DSPs who have completed a DSP credentialing program through SUNY Ulster. This credential was recognized by the organization, and these DSPs earned an additional \$1.25 per hour (the same wage increase as cohorts 1 and 2).

### **Learning supports available**

Learners who do not have access to a personal computer may arrange use of agency computer and workspace when they are off duty to complete their online lessons and portfolio. Carpooling to classroom instruction is arranged as needed. Language and technology assistance are supports that would be provided, but few learners in the program have required this assistance. One participant was an English language learner, and met with instructors before or after class for check-ins. All learners receive support in completing their portfolios from one of three trainers in the organization. Previously credentialed DSPs are another resource used by new learners.

Eliciting the support of each DSP's supervisor

at their work site has become an issue in a few cases at the Arc of Ulster-Greene. Sometimes supervisors would not release the learner for classroom instruction when needed due to vacancies at the work site. In other cases, they would not support the learner in completing their work samples. Beginning in 2016, leadership at the Arc of Ulster-Greene requires that supervisors who manage a DSP who is enrolled in the credential attend an orientation to the credential. The supervisor orientation includes an overview of the credential, an explanation of the work samples, and the expectations for the DSP's schedule. They also describe how the person will be evaluated. This has been a successful strategy.

### **Program Evaluation**

Given the small cohorts, program coordinators closely monitor learners' understanding of the competencies. They utilize worksheets, class discussions, review of learners' portfolios on the shared drive, and hold one-on-one meetings with learners to assess their understanding. Learners complete a self-evaluation of the 15 competency areas at baseline and throughout the program to measure their skills. Annual agency evaluations are also used to ensure that learners are increasing in competence. The Arc of Ulster-Greene utilizes an online survey issued regularly to measure learner investment, impact of the credential on service quality, and progress toward completion. Results from this survey were used to inform adjustments to the program in the third cohort.

### **Costs associated with the credential**

Implementation costs for the credential at the organizational level include staff dedicated to administration of the program and providing instruction in classroom. This is estimated at \$10,000-13,000 annually. Additional per learner annual costs are detailed in Table 15.

**Table 15. Estimated per learner annual costs to implement the NADSP DSP-C1 credential at the Arc of Ulster-Greene**

Itemized cost	Estimated annual dollar amount per learner (based on typical cohort of 12 learners)
Fees to access online learning modules (via Relias)	No additional fees*
Classroom supplies	\$25
Transportation reimbursement	\$70
Additional supervisory time	\$94
Classroom space	\$0
Credentialing application fees to NADSP	\$200 initially, \$50 annually for recertification
Wage increase/bonus	\$2,040
Costs for substitute staff while learner is completing credential	\$0**

Note. (\*) The Arc of Ulster-Greene already uses Relias for preservice and mandated trainings offered to all employees. With this contract, there are no additional fees associated with using Relias modules for the online learning component in the credential. (\*\*) The Arc of Ulster-Greene does not backfill the hours when an employee is in class. These hours are either flexed or managers cover the responsibilities at no extra costs.

### Outcomes of the Arc of Ulster-Greene credential

The Arc of Ulster-Greene provides supports and services for 2,913 people with disabilities. As of September 30, 2017, eight credentialed DSPs have completed the credentialing program since 2015, and an additional two DSPs completed a different credentialing program through SUNY Ulster. The outcomes data below reports only on the eight DSPs credentialed through the Arc of Ulster-Greene's NADSP credential program.

#### Direct Support Professionals

As of September 30, 2017, the Arc of Ulster-Greene employed 448 full-time DSPs, 54 part-time DSPs, and there were 126 vacancies (628 total DSP positions). There were eight credentialed DSPs still employed in the organization on September 30, 2017 (1.3% of total DSPs). More DSPs were in the process of completing the coursework and work samples as a part of the credential. In addition, in the last application period for the third cohort of the credential program, the Arc of Ulster-Greene received nearly double the number of applicants than they could admit. The number of credentialed DSPs in the organization is expected to grow.

**DSP Annual Turnover.** There were eight NADSP credentialed DSPs employed at the Arc of Ulster-Greene on September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, none of the credentialed staff left the organization. The credentialed DSP annual turnover rate was 0%. The average tenure of credentialed DSPs was 9.34 years.

There were 620 DSP positions held by non-credentialed DSPs at the organization as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017, 72 DSPs left the organization. The non-credentialed DSP annual turnover rate was 11.6%. Average tenure of non-credentialed DSPs was 6.36 years.

**DSP Wages.** The average starting wage at the Arc of Ulster-Greene was \$9.70 per hour as of September 30, 2017. The average non-credentialed DSP wage at this same time was \$11.45 per hour. The average wage of credentialed DSPs at the Arc of Ulster-Greene was \$13.62 per hour. The first two cohorts of the credential received a total of \$1.25 per hour wage increase throughout the duration of the credential (the configuration of the wage increase will differ in the third and future cohorts, based on the restructuring of the wage increase detailed in the "Wage Increase" section above).

**Table 16. Arc of Ulster-Greene DSP Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed DSPs (N = 620)	Credentialed DSPs (N = 8)
Annual Turnover	11.6%	0%
Tenure (in years)	6.36 years	9.34 years
Average hourly wage	\$11.45	\$13.62

#### IV. Arc of Monroe NADSP Credential

The Arc of Monroe has been offering supports for people in residential, day services, community habilitation, employment, respite, recreation, service coordination, and clinical operations for over 60 years. The mission of the Arc of Monroe is to, “create an inclusive society where the people we support may live truly integrated lives and reach their full potential as a part of our community.” They wanted to help their employees reach their full potential by evolving and implementing a credential program designed to build competence and retain skilled DSPs. The Arc of Monroe won a competitive grant from the New York Department of Labor (DOL) in order to provide funds for the implementation costs and the NADSP credentialing fees. The grant did not cover wage increases. With the DOL funds, they will run two cohorts through their credential program. The first cohort is currently completing coursework and each learner is preparing a portfolio which they will submit to NADSP for review. The second cohort will begin in January 2018. The Arc of Monroe may apply again for a second round of funding to sustain the program beyond the second cohort. Basic information about the Arc of Monroe’s NADSP credential program is presented in Table 17.

**Table 17. The Arc of Monroe’s NADSP Credential At-A-Glance**

Roles of participants	DSPs
Credential attained	DSP-C1
Number of credentials awarded	0 (10 learners in the first cohort)
Year the credential began	2017 June
Number of cohorts	1 (second cohort to begin in January 2018)
Learning Delivery Method	Online via Relias, classroom, work samples
Core competencies	OPWDD, NADSP
Costs covered by the grant or the agency	Application fees for Relias and NADSP, wage increase, annual credentialing fees to NADSP, mileage to classroom instruction
Wage increase after successful credential completion	\$1.00 per hour
Typical time for credential completion	TBD (estimated 7 months)

#### Enrollment criteria

To be involved in the program, applicants must be: (1) employed at the Arc of Monroe for six months, (2) an employee in good standing, and (3) up-to-date on all required training. However, someone with performance issues in the past would be considered for participation if the concern had been

rectified. There is space to support 40 learners from the Arc of Monroe in any given cohort, but the aim for the second cohort is to enroll 20-25 qualified learners.

Recruitment for the first cohort provided an unexpected challenge. Some DSPs that were recruited expressed that they may be



interested in a future cohort, but they did not want to be in the first cohort. Some expressed that they simply did not have time to complete the requirements. The organization is hopeful that participants from the first cohort will help recruit new applicants for the second cohort and serve as mentors to future learners seeking the credential. The first cohort began in June 2017 with 17 learners, but seven dropped out of the program. Reasons for discontinuing were varied, including changes in personal and family responsibilities, and inability to keep up with credential requirements and the pace of learning. All those who discontinued the credential were still employed by the agency at the time of interview. They may participate in a future cohort. At the time of data collection for this report, there were 10 DSPs in the first cohort of the credential program.

### Attaining the credential

The Arc of Monroe engaged the leadership of an existing employee who was already NADSP

faculty to serve as a program coordinator for their funded credential program after they won the grant. Having an existing employee with knowledge and experience about the NADSP credentialing program was important for the rapid implementation of the program after funding was secured. However, other trainers from NADSP primarily lead classes, leaving the program coordinator with the primary role of the coordination for the new credential program.

The Arc of Monroe includes a blended learning model of online learning, classroom instruction/discussion, and development of a portfolio with work samples to submit to NADSP. These components are aligned with the NADSP and OPWDD competencies. Online learning is delivered via Relias. Relias learning is supported through classroom instruction and discussion taught by NADSP. The list of Relias Courses that learners are required to successfully complete as a part of the credential are listed in Table 18.

Table 18. List of required Relias coursework included in the Arc of Monroe NADSP Credential		
Abuse and Neglect of Individuals with I/DD	Employment Support Focused Learning	Overview of Serious Mental Illness for Paraprofessionals
Bon Appetite! An Overview of Safe Eating and Drinking Focused Learning	Fall Prevention Focused Learning	Risk Management for Individuals with IDD
Boundaries and Dual Relationships for Paraprofessionals	Fire Safety	Safety in The Field
Client/Patient Rights	HIPAA Overview	Strategies for Socialization and Integration for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder
Conflict Management	Incident Reporting	Stress Management in the Workplace
Co-Occurring Disorders: An Overview for Paraprofessionals	Infection Control	Supervision and Leadership
Cultural Competence for the DSP	Influenza Prevention and Preparedness	Supporting Quality of Life for a Person with Developmental Disabilities
Cultural Diversity	Managing Challenging Behaviors Focused Learning	Team Building: Introduction
Dental and Oral Health for Individuals with I/DD	Medication Management for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Part 1	Understanding Substance Use Problems in the Workplace
Disabilities Overview	Medication Management for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Part 2	

Learners attend 15 two-hour classes at the organization administrative offices. The NADSP faculty who teach the classes have past experience implementing DSP credentialing initiatives at other agencies. Their experiences have supported Arc of Monroe to build an infrastructure that better supports delivery of the credential for the DSPs. In anticipation of DSPs varied schedules, the Arc of Monroe initially offered three time slots during which DSPs could attend the classroom instruction: 9–11 a.m., 1–3 p.m., and 4–6 p.m. However, there was low attendance for the morning class, so they eliminated that class time. Now there is a near-50/50 split between attendance in the 1–3 p.m. and 4–6 p.m. classes. Learners are reimbursed for mileage to classroom instruction, with seven miles as the average one-way distance. Learners access the Relias course content at work on agency laptops, and learners are paid for their time to complete the online coursework during their work hours.

The first cohort participants are scheduled to finish their classes in December 2017, with submission of their portfolios shortly thereafter. The second cohort is planned to begin in January 2018.

### **Wage increases**

Successful completion of the credential will result in a \$1.00 per hour increase in pay for credentialed DSPs. The Arc of Monroe has allotted funds for this pay increase for the first two cohorts. In a calendar year, this increase for 10 completers will cost approximately \$20,080 for full-time employees.

### **Learning supports available**

Learners in the credential program flex their work schedules in order to attend classes and complete online learning. Relias learning modules are completed at the learners' work sites when there is down time. As of November 30, 2017, all but one credentialing participant has kept on track with their online learning modules by using down time at work (e.g., when people supported have gone to bed, are away at day program)

to complete them. They also have flexibility to access the courses from home or another location. Most learners have electronic devices that they can use both at home and work to complete training requirements.

Retention of learners who applied for the credential and those who have persisted was less than what was hoped by the organization, but it was reported by NADSP faculty that about 50% retention in the first cohort is to be expected. Reasons given for why people dropped out of the program were varied, including a learning disability which made it difficult to keep up with the pace and personal issues. Despite supports being offered, some learners chose to discontinue participation.

### **Program evaluation**

Learners complete a self-assessment of their understanding and use of the NADSP and OPWDD competencies prior to beginning the coursework for the credential. They complete the same self-assessment again during the final class. Learners also complete a post-test on the Relias lessons after completing each lesson. The program coordinator monitors learners' completion data from Relias to ensure that learners are staying on track. Since learners access Relias lessons at their work site, the program coordinator has called a few supervisors to ask them to encourage learners who are falling behind. Submission of their portfolio to NADSP and successful completion of the credential are the most important initial measures that will be used to judge the success of the program at this time.

The Arc of Monroe is still determining which measures it would use to track the success of the credentialing program if it continues offering it on an ongoing basis. Currently, successful and timely completion of learners' portfolios is its main goal. The organization reports a noticed difference in DSPs who are pursuing the credential taking initiative in the ways that they provide support. For example, all of the DSPs in cohort one have asked the person they support if they may participate in their regular Individualized Service Planning meeting. Prior

to participation in the credential, none of the DSPs had ever attended such a meeting, nor had they considered it their place. With consideration of person-centered supports, the DSPs found that this was certainly within the realm of their responsibility and began to change their approaches. The organization has identified other outcomes that will hopefully be impacted by the credentialing program (assuming they are able to offer it on an ongoing basis), such as increased retention of skilled employees, and a positive impact in organizational culture.

### **Costs associated with implementing the credential**

All costs associated with completing and maintaining the credential for the first two cohorts are covered by funds from the New York Department of Labor grant. Given that the first cohort of the program is currently underway, it was difficult to calculate a per learner cost or to determine which costs are typical for administering a full cohort through the credential program. Each class costs \$1,750, and there are 15 classes participants attend for the credential (total of \$26,250). Relias per learner access fees are covered through the organization's access that they already use for delivery of mandated training. Learners are paid for their time in class or accessing the Relias course content at the rate of pay that the learner typically earns when performing their work (average hourly wage \$12.03). This is estimated at 100 hours. Application fees for the credential to NADSP (\$200 per learner), and the total time that the program coordinator spends with learners on their portfolio work samples are also considered but an estimated cost for this was not available given the early implementation point in which this information was

requested. In future cohorts, the organization hopes to increase the size of cohorts to offer the benefits of credentialing to more employees.

### **Outcomes of the Arc of Monroe credential**

The Arc of Monroe provides supports and services for 1,550 people with disabilities. The Arc of Monroe is in the process of completing their first cohort in their NADSP credentialing program, and no DSPs were credentialed at the time of data collection for this report. There were 10 learners in the first credentialing cohort.

### **Direct Support Professionals**

As of September 30, 2017, the Arc of Monroe employed 271 full-time DSPs, 68 part-time DSPs, and had 77 vacancies (416 total DSP positions). The 10 DSPs currently enrolled in the first cohort of the credentialing program are 2.4% of the total DSP positions at the Arc of Monroe.

**Annual DSP Turnover.** There were 416 DSP positions at the Arc of Monroe as of September 30, 2017. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, 159 DSPs left the organization. The annual DSP turnover rate was 38.2%. The average DSP tenure was 3.8 years. Aim of this credential program are to increase retention of competent DSPs, and to decrease the annual turnover rate.

**DSP Wages.** The average starting wage at Arc of Monroe was \$10.20 per hour. The average DSP wage was \$12.03 per hour. The wage increase associated with successful completion of the credential is \$1.00 per hour.



### **Interviews with credentialed DSPs or DSPs participating in credentialing at the Arc of Orange County, the Arc of Ulster-Greene, and the Arc of Monroe**

Five total participants from the Arc of Orange County, Arc of Ulster-Greene, and Arc of Monroe NADSP credentialing programs were interviewed for this report, which included at least one DSP from each organization. Each of these three programs utilized NADSP's pathway to DSP credentialing. Each program utilized a blended learning model of both online lessons (from CDS or Relias) and classroom learning and discussion. Each program included the construction of a portfolio submitted to NADSP with four work samples that represent the 15 NADSP core competencies (and which overlap the 23 OPWDD competencies). The programs differed in the number of hours and content covered in these components. One of the learners was currently completing the DSP-C1 credential, and four had completed the DSP-C1 credential. Two DSPs were in the process of completing the DSP-C2 credential at the time of the interview. The five DSP interviews are summarized below. Among these five DSPs, the average length of time worked in the field was 9.5 years (range 1.5 years to 18 years).

#### **Motivations for pursuing the credential**

The primary reported reasons for pursuing the credential were that DSPs were looking to grow personally and professionally, and they wanted to empower the people they support to accomplish their goals. Other reasons that DSPs offered were,

- The program sounded interesting,
- Wanting to attain a new title and national recognition that accompanies the credential,
- Liking what they learned in CDS modules, and wanting to pursue further opportunity to advance skills in the classroom and completing the portfolio,
- Attain the pay raise that accompanied being a credentialed DSP. However, all who mentioned this stated that it was not the primary reason for pursuing the credential.

The DSPs that were interviewed for this study indicated that they understand that they are on the frontier of a changing profession of direct support, and that it is distinct from





direct care or a caregiver mentality. Direct support is aimed at helping people to achieve their goals, rather than doing things for another person. They also articulated that doing this well for people with IDD requires developing a solid culture of direct support, and that as credentialed, professional DSPs, they play an important role in changing culture and expectations in the field. To this end, several of the DSPs articulated that they are eager to mentor their fellow DSPs through the credential process. Several have already connected or been connected with other DSPs in their organizations pursuing the credential. One DSP has been promoted to a position that involves some supervision responsibilities. This provides a forum and greater visibility to assist DSPs in developing these professional skills.

### Strengths and benefits of the credential program

*Being recognized as a professional.* Several DSPs articulated that one of their greatest challenges in their work is dealing with the perception from others that their work is menial, rather than skilled and important. Performing work of

professional quality entails developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes required in the field. These skills were taught and honed through the credential program. The work samples were reported as important opportunities to develop and reflect upon their competencies.

*Changing the ways that DSPs interact with people supported.* The credential provided opportunities to reflect on professional practices. Through this, one DSP who works in a residential program recognized that there were ways she interacted with the people she supported that did not uphold their rights. Prior to participating in the credentialing program, the DSP would always knock before entering a resident's room, but she would not wait for the person to give her permission to enter their room. She was going about her job, and therefore she would just do it. Now she recognizes that a small gesture of waiting for the person to give her permission to enter their space is an expression of respecting the person's privacy. This enhances the relationship she has with the people she supports and they feel more respected by her; thus, changing the quality of their relationship.



Another story offered in the interviews had to do with empowering people supported to share their own skills. One DSP supports a person who runs PowerPoint for an agency meeting. When the DSP had to learn to use PowerPoint for the credential program, she sought the help of this person she supports to teach her. She often works to increase the skills of the people she supports, but this was an opportunity for her to learn from the people she supports. This gesture was recognized by the person supported, and both the DSP and the person supported appreciated this opportunity. The DSP continues to look for other opportunities to learn from the people she supports.

**Learning about a variety of communication styles.** One of the NADSP competencies involves understanding a range of effective communication strategies, and several DSPs stated that they have been challenged to recognize alternate ways of communicating among the people they support. One DSP is pursuing a career in medicine while working as a DSP as she is completing school. At work, she assists a person to medical appointments. She recognized how frequently clinicians expect her to speak for the person she supports, rather than turning to the person to express themselves. Now when this happens, she redirects clinicians to the person so that they can communicate on their own behalf. The DSP believes that the person, regardless of their ability to communicate with words, knows best how they are doing. If the person is hurting, they are best able to answer for themselves. She believes that clinicians should be attentive first to the person themselves.

Another DSP reported working with some individuals with challenging behaviors in a residential setting. With some strategies learned in the credential, she has reflected on these challenging behaviors. By trying to understand the intention of the behavior, and better responding to the person, there has been a significant decrease in the incidence of challenging behavior at her work site. For example, one person she supports does not communicate with words, but is

very expressive. The person supported was consistently causing conflicts by smacking the dinner table while eating alongside other residents in the group home. This excited the other people in the home, sending them into a frenzy. The DSP reflected on this person's behaviors, and recognized that the person would smack the dinner table because they liked the food. The DSP helped the other residents to understand the person's behavior, and in this, she was able to redirect the other persons' responses to more appropriately affirm the person's communication that they liked the food. This shared understanding of the person's behavior created a much more pleasant dinner environment for everyone in the home.

Another DSP supported a person who fell frequently when he was out in the community. This caused the staff to be worried about taking the person out in the community, and they attributed the falling to seizures as the person had seizures in his medical history. This person supported did not use words to communicate. Upon reflecting on this person's circumstance, the DSP recognized that when the person fell, he did it intentionally because he wanted people to pay attention to him. More specifically, the person was communicating that he did not want to do the thing that he was being led to do. The falling got him out of the activity. The DSP worked with the person to communicate in a different way, so that he got the attention he wanted and the opportunity to express himself. As a result of this new functional assessment of the person's behavior, other staff felt more confident to take the person out in the community.

**Opportunities for reflection.** Several of the stories previously shared emphasize the importance of self-reflection and reflection on professional practice, which are required components of the NADSP credential program. Through the credential program, the DSPs began incorporating regular time for reflection into their work. Even when too busy to spend much time reflecting on their practices and interactions with people supported, they

developed a practice of jotting down ideas for further reflection later. Many DSPs mentioned how valuable this skill and practice is for their professional practice.

***Experience advocating for people and overcoming barriers.*** Several DSPs learned to advocate for people experiencing barriers impacting their quality of life. One DSP noted that in the credential program she was often challenged to think “outside the box” when supporting a person to problem solve in order to achieve what’s needed or desired. One DSP supported a person who had just made a life transition, and wanted desperately to use the DSP’s cell phone. The DSP worked with the person’s family to get the person her own phone, and then to support the person to learn to use it appropriately.

Another DSP supported a person who uses a wheelchair and encountered some difficulties in accessing activities at her day habilitation site. Her wheelchair bumped into the table when she tried to come close to the table where they activity was happening. Because of this, she was sometimes left out of activities in which she wanted to participate. The DSP sought an occupational therapist who works with the person in order to request that a tray be fitted for the person’s chair. This purchase had to be navigated through a number of channels, but the DSP persisted and used her cohort to help understand the barriers she encountered along the way. Prior to the credential program, the DSP did not know how to help secure something like this for the people she supports, nor did she view it as her responsibility.

### Challenges of the credential program

***Time consuming.*** Most of the credential participants reported difficulties balancing work and classwork associated with the credential. Several DSPs also had commitments to family, other jobs, and classes they are pursuing for other degrees. Strategies used to overcome these challenges included: (1) balancing activities at work to allow for more time, (2) regularly communicating with supervisors

about credentialing requirements, and (3) working early in the morning, late at night, or on weekends. One DSP tried to use small amounts of time wherever feasible, recognizing that “every half hour adds up.”

***Challenges with family members of people supported.*** One DSP reported that a person she supports was part of a club that required him to attend regular meetings a long distance away from his home. The person did not know how to navigate transportation for a distance that far. This lack of skill could have limited his participation in the club. As part of a work sample, a DSP who supports the person taught him to navigate community transportation with incremental levels of independence. For example, she first rode the train with the person she supported. Then she sat separately on the same train with him. Then she took the person to the train station, but let him ride independently. Then, she let him find his own ride to the train station, and so forth. She considered this increasing level of independence for the person a victory, but it was not seen this way by the person’s family who was concerned for his safety. She encouraged the person to communicate with his family, by helping them understand how important it was to participate in the club and to report to them when he successfully used public transportation. Across interviews with the DSPs, families generally recognized and appreciated their loved one’s increasing independence and quality of life over time.

***Challenges in the community.*** As a work sample, a DSP assisted a person they support who loves animals to volunteer and contribute to their local animal shelter. The DSP first helped the person to collect money and goods to support the animals at the shelter. The DSP then organized a group of people from the residential community to take a trip to the shelter to deliver what they had collected, and to visit the animals. Staff at the shelter had an unfortunate response. They begrudgingly let the people visit the animals. When the people wanted to come back to the shelter to volunteer, the shelter staff responded that the people with developmental



disabilities would need to complete separate training that was not needed from people who do not have disabilities. The DSP who was supporting this process recognized that she could fight this battle, but instead wanted the people to have a positive and sustained place to contribute to their community. She instead decided to find another shelter, and easily located one in the next town. This shelter welcomed people of all abilities to volunteer, and to contribute to the shelter.

**Challenges with colleagues.** One DSP did not receive support from her supervisor. She had difficulties securing time off of work to attend class and to complete her work samples. When the DSP wanted to spend time talking with people to support them to learn new skills and make their own choices, the supervisor reprimanded the DSP to do her chores (e.g., laundry). The DSP began responding to situations like this by emphasizing her professional responsibility: she used person-centered language and cited the Code of Ethics. She expressed that her first responsibility was to the people she supports; therefore, she needs to listen to them first, and get to the chores after. After several instances of these types of interaction, the

non-supportive supervisor backed off. The DSP elicited support from administrative staff, program staff, and other DSPs in the credential program in responding appropriately to her supervisor.

### **Supports provided by the organization**

**Strong relationship with the program coordinator.** Most DSPs articulated having a strong sense that the program coordinator for the credential in the organization was there to support them throughout the credential process. This included things like answering questions and emails, looking up answers to specific questions, responding to questions after-hours, and putting forth energy to make classes energizing. DSPs reported that class sessions helped to pump them up, and inspire their work.

**Allow time off to attend class.** Several DSPs mentioned that they felt supported by the agency through supporting their time in class: specifically, arranging staffing to cover their time off for class or preparing for portfolio submission. DSPs reported that their supervisors sometimes helped to cover shifts while they were in class.

**Paying expenses.** Expenses were mentioned by a few DSPs as potential barriers that

could have inhibited their participation in the credential. Each of the programs pay students for in-class time, although not all of the programs paid students to complete online learning modules. Nevertheless, DSPs articulated feeling invested in by their organization due to their support in paying credential expenses.

**Recognize milestones.** DSPs noted that organizations recognized milestones throughout the completion of the credential, as well as in the overall successful awarding of the NADSP certificate. These milestones helped DSPs to pace themselves throughout the process for the ongoing demands of the program.

**Manager or supervisor expressing support.** Several DSPs had strong relationships with their supervisor. One recalled bringing a question that arose in class to their supervisor, and the supervisor breaking it down in steps as they explained so that the DSP could understand. Another DSP completed the credential in the cohort that followed her supervisor's credentialing cohort. This DSP noted that the credentialed supervisor was particularly encouraging in helping her to complete the requirements of the credential, given that she understood and recognized the value of the credential. This supervisor went to great lengths to ensure that there was ample support for the work-based components and time to complete them. The DSP noted that this support was offered in the midst of being short-staffed at work, and that the supervisor would take on shifts herself. She stated that the supervisor believed strongly that completing the credential would dramatically increase the quality of supports the DSP would provide. Other supports mentioned were helping to complete paperwork and getting permission forms signed from family members.

## Outcomes for the people supported

Several positive outcomes have been noted already in the stories offered in this section, such as people learning to more effectively communicate, to have more positive relationships with others in their home, to more independently navigate

public transit to participate in a meaningful activity, and to have their privacy honored. Several other stories illustrated the delivery of person-centered and individualized services that focus on increasing a persons' independent living skills in pursuit of that person's preferences and goals.

For example, one DSP working in a residential setting reported that when she began working for the agency, none of the residents in the group home where she works were attending church. In conversation with a resident, she recognized that she did not know the religious preferences of that individual or for any individual in the group home. She began asking people if they wanted to go to church, and she realized that everyone did. However, not everyone wanted to go to the same church, nor did everyone want to attend with the same frequency. Staff from the group home began coordinating efforts to support people to attend church, and every one of the people has chosen to attend church. Asking people what they wanted and listening to them was key in making this happen. The persons' preferences were heard and DSP supports changed.

Another man supported liked to have a regular, clean shave. Without this, he would get agitated. However, staff could not often give him the individualized attention needed to give him the frequent shave he wanted. Staff were also uneasy about getting the person a razor. When DSPs would not attend to his needs, the person would get agitated. One DSP who was pursuing the credential worked with the person to pick out an electric razor, and she taught him to safely operate the razor himself. She noted that the person felt very accomplished when he could do this thing on their own and when they wanted. After this, she also taught the person to make his own toast in the toaster. Prior to this, the person did not understand that toast takes time, and he would get agitated with staff because he thought they were ignoring him by making him wait for his toast. When the DSP worked with him to make his own toast, it cut down on his agitation in waiting for toast because he just learned that he needed to wait.



## V. Training Collaborative for Innovative Leadership NADSP Frontline Supervisor Credential

The Training Collaborative represents a shared effort among four community providers in or near New York City: United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, Services for the UnderServed, HeartShare Human Services, and Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State. The credential is exclusively focused on credentialing FLS rather than DSPs. The aim of this credential is to impact the quality of work and retention of DSPs, by providing solid leadership and support through a credentialing program for FLSs. In addition to the four organizations in New York City who have implemented the credentialing program, another cohort was launched for the first time using the Training Collaborative curriculum in Rochester, New York.

### National Frontline Supervisor Competencies

The National Frontline Supervisor Competencies (NFSC) are an evidence-based set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that reflect best practice in the supervision of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who work with individuals with disabilities in residential, work, and community settings. They were developed at the University of Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living. Competencies are considered a foundation for workforce development and standardization in all fields and at all levels. When rigorously developed and effectively implemented, competencies serve the important function of providing individuals with information about the requirements of a given profession, and they provide a basis for training, orientation, and continuing staff development. The utilization of competencies in the direct service workforce reinforces shared values of all service providers' skills and growth (Hoge, McFaul, Calcote, & Tallman, 2008). Nationally recognized and validated competencies also serve to promote the recognition of the role of the FLS, the development of career ladders, and the development of a more competent, stable workforce to meet the growing demand of long-term services and supports.

The NFSC are designed to be used as a tool to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities in an FLS within approximately one year of employment, or other established time frame as determined by an organization to achieve the highest quality service delivery and supervisory skills. It is not intended to suggest an incoming FLS would be competent across all areas to start, but that an organization would use the competencies as a way to develop professional development goals. The NFSC are utilized by the National Association of Direct Support Professionals' (NADSP) as the foundation of the FLS credential.

The NFSC competency areas describe the knowledge and skills FLSs must have, including:

- Direct Support
- Health, Wellness and Safety
- Participant support plan development, monitoring and assessment
- Facilitating community inclusion across the lifespan
- Promoting professional relations and teamwork
- Staff recruitment, selection and hiring
- Staff supervision, training, & self-development
- Advocacy and public relations
- Leadership, professionalism and self-development
- Cultural awareness and responsiveness



By December 2017, across all participating organizations, the Training Collaborative expects to have trained 375 FLSs in their leadership training curriculum. The leadership training curriculum has been typically delivered to cohorts of 40 learners each (10 learners from each of the four New York City organizations). In May 2017, a cohort of Training Collaborative graduates began the process to complete a NADSP FLS e-portfolio that would lead to the NADSP FLS credential. Twenty-two FLSs completed the training and submitted their portfolios to NADSP for the FLS credential on September 7, 2017.

The requirements of the NADSP FLS credential are similar to the NADSP DSP-C1 credential in the requirement of education or training from an accredited curriculum (totaling 50 hours) and the completion of work samples (three work samples are required). However, both of these components are aligned with the 11 national FLS competencies rather than the 15 DSP competencies. Like the portfolio for the DSP-C1 credential, learners create and submit an e-portfolio to NADSP for evaluation. The portfolio includes demonstration of education/instruction, letter(s) of support, commitment to the NADSP Code of Ethics, and work samples to demonstrate competence in three of 11 national FLS competencies, among several other requirements. Application for submitting a FLS credentialing portfolio to NADSP is \$200, and \$50 annually for recertification.

The Training Collaborative represents a partnership among organizations whose executives have known each other for many years. They embrace a shared philosophy that emphasizes: (1) building effectiveness among FLS, (2) supporting quality culture, and (3) developing emerging leaders who will train and mentor DSPs. A major aim of the Training Collaborative is to foster such leadership in order to reduce the high rate of DSP turnover. A premise of the shared belief is that if DSPs feel supported, they will work to provide quality, reliable services, and more likely to remain in their job (Mittal, Rosen & Leana, 2009; Larson & Hewitt, 2012). The classroom components of the Training Collaborative curriculum are aligned with the National Frontline Supervisor competencies, OPWDD's Core Competencies, and NADSP's Code of Ethics.

In May 2017, the Training Collaborative began its first credentialing cohort of learners who had successfully completed the leadership training curriculum. The Training Collaborative utilized grant funds provided by a federal Balancing Incentives Program through New York's Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to pay for the program. Basic information about the Training Collaborative FLS NADSP credential program is presented in Table 19.

**Table 19. The Training Collaborative's NADSP Credential At-A-Glance**

Roles of participants	FLS
Credential attained	NADSP FLS
Number of credentials awarded	0 (anticipated 22)
Year the credential program began	2017 May
Number of cohorts	1
Learning Delivery Method	Classroom, work-based learning, portfolio
Core competencies	OPWDD, National FLS Competencies
Costs provided to learners	Classroom instruction, assessments, NADSP submission
Current enrollment	22 learners
Anticipated time for credential completion	5 months
Wage increase for successful completion	\$2000 bonus

**Enrollment criteria**

Participants in the first cohort of the FLS credentialing program were recruited from a pool of FLSs who had already completed the Training Collaborative leadership training curriculum. This served as a pre-requisite of the credential program for this first cohort. The leadership training takes about 1½ years to complete and includes training in supervision, communication skills, and leadership. Ten FLSs are selected from each of the four New York City organizations in each cohort to participate (total of 40 learners per cohort). Participants who successfully completed the leadership training were eligible to apply for the credentialing program. In addition to having completed the leadership training, participants must have been employed in their organization at least two years (the tenure of current participants was between 4-6 years).

**Attaining the credential**

All learners in the first cohort of the credentialing program have been in one of the previous cohorts that completed the leadership training from the Training Collaborative. This includes classroom instruction and completion of the first work sample that will be included in the portfolio submitted for review by NADSP. The curriculum for the FLS credential program included further classroom

instruction and completion of the additional two work samples for the portfolio. There was no online learning component associated with this credential program. Classroom instruction for the credential included five classroom sessions of 7½ hours each. These included many opportunities for reflection, with self-reflection being an important skill honed by learners throughout their training.

Classroom instruction was held at City University New York (CUNY), which is located off of the metro line. Learners were reimbursed for transportation costs and given a release from some of their typical responsibilities in order to attend classes. Class was taught by one of trainers from the organizations that represent the Training Collaborative. The lessons were devised, and trainers were assigned following the development of the curriculum schedule.

**Wage increase**

Successful completion of the credential results in a one-time \$2,000 bonus. This is currently funded through a federal Balancing Incentives Program grant through OPWDD. The Training Collaborative is looking for ways to continue this program after the OPWDD grant ends.

### Learning supports available

Learning and technology supports were available upon request. Learners had access to computers and tablets through their organizations. Portfolios were compiled and submitted electronically, and a number of learners utilized resources and support for increasing technology and computer skills.

### Portability of the credential

The portability of the NADSP FLS credential is a major question being considered by the leadership team of the Training Collaborative. OPWDD has not adopted a specific credentialing vehicle for FLSs. If OPWDD does not utilize the NADSP pathway, the Training Collaborative will align with OPWDD. Their aim is ultimately to increase the professionalism of their employees. Currently, the credentialing portfolios are not directly accepted at any college or community college for credit, but program directors are also seeking out such opportunities to continue making the training an appealing and worthwhile pursuit for their staff. It is possible that the portfolio could be a bridge to post-secondary credit in management or human services, and program directors want to pursue such opportunities for learners. FLSs who have completed the program and then continue their post-secondary education have reported that the creation of the portfolio in the leadership training program helped them fulfill other portfolio requirements in college.

### Program evaluation

Learners' progress in classroom instruction is monitored informally by instructors. The completion of the portfolio is ultimately the gauge of the participant's credentialing successes. Prior to submission of the portfolio to NADSP, learners present their work samples to the chief executive officers at each organization. This is an opportunity for the emerging leaders to share with executives their ideas that will impact organizational change. Learners' progress is also assessed using the Leadership Practice Inventory, which

is an established, multi-informant tool that helps inform learners about their progress in evolving qualities that the organizations' leadership staff hope for in their employees. DSP turnover in organizations, FLS retention, and career advancement are monitored by the program directors.

### Outcomes of the Training Collaborative NADSP credential

Four organizations that are part of the Training Collaborative separately provided information on employee positions, tenure, turnover, and wages. All of this information is presented below. At the time of data collection, none of the 22 FLSs who participated in the credential program were officially credentialed, but all had submitted their portfolio to NADSP for review and were expected to be credentialed. The FLSs who had submitted their portfolios are reported upon separately as "credentialing participant FLSs." Successful completion of the credential entitles each FLS to a one-time \$2,000 bonus when their portfolio is approved by NADSP. This bonus is *not* included in the wage increases reported below for credentialed FLSs. Given that one aim of the Training Collaborative and the credential program is to stabilize the DSP workforce by means of providing quality leadership and support to DSPs, data on DSPs were collected and are reported below along with the FLS data.

### United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network

United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network provides supports and services for 8,169 people with disabilities. In the first cohort of the credential program, seven FLSs participated. See Table 20.

**Table 20. United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network FLS Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed FLSs (N = 183)	Credentialing Participant FLSs (N = 7)
Turnover	31.7%	0%
Tenure (in years)	23	21.3
Average hourly wage	\$24.24	\$36.06

**Table 21. Services for the UnderServed FLS Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed FLSs (N = 167)	Credentialing Participant FLSs (N = 5)
Turnover	44.3%	0%
Tenure (in years)	1.76	4.27
Average hourly wage	\$17.84	\$23.65

#### *Direct Support Professionals*

As of September 30, 2017, United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network employed 679 full-time DSPs, 194 part-time DSPs, and they reported no vacancies. This is a total of 873 DSP positions. There were 184 DSPs who left the organization in the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017. The annual turnover rate was 21.1%. The average hourly DSP wage was \$12.32.

#### *Frontline Supervisors*

As of September 30, 2017, United Cerebral Palsy of New York City/Adapt Community Network employed a total of 190 FLSs, including seven who participated in the credentialing program (3.7%). No FLS vacancies were reported.

**FLS Annual Turnover.** None of the FLS who participated in the credential program left the organization as of September 30, 2017 resulting in a 0% turnover rate. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, 58 non-credentialed FLS left the organization. The non-credentialed FLS annual turnover rate in the organization was 31.7%.

**FLS Tenure.** The average tenure of non-credentialed FLS was 23 years. The average tenure of FLS who participated in the credential was 21.3 years.

**FLS Average Wages.** The average hourly wage of non-credentialed FLS was \$24.24 per hour. The average hourly wage of FLS who participated in the credential was \$36.06.

#### *Services for the UnderServed*

Services for the UnderServed provides supports and services to 400 people with disabilities. In the first cohort of the credential program, five FLSs participated. See Table 21.

#### *Direct Support Professionals*

As of September 30, 2017, Services for the UnderServed employed 556 full-time DSPs, 54 part-time DSPs, and reported 97 DSP vacant positions. A total of 707 DSP positions exist in the organization. There were 207 DSPs who left the organization in the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017. The annual turnover rate was 29.3%. The average hourly wage for DSPs was \$12.08.

#### *Frontline Supervisors*

As of September 30, 2017, Services for the UnderServed employed 157 FLSs, including five who participated in the credentialing program (3.2%). Fifteen FLS vacancies were reported, for a total of 172 FLS positions.

**FLS Annual Turnover.** None of the FLS who participated in the credential program left the organization as of September 30, 2017 resulting in a 0% turnover rate. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, 74

non-credentialed FLSs left the organization. The non-credentialed FLS annual turnover rate was 44.3%.

**FLS Tenure.** The average tenure of FLS who participated in the credential program was 4.27 years. The average tenure of non-credentialed FLSs was 1.76 years.

**FLS Average Wages.** The average hourly wage of non-credentialed FLS was \$14.55 per hour. The average hourly wage of FLS who participated in the credential was \$13.47.

HeartShare Human Services

HeartShare Human Services provides supports and services to 3,500 people with disabilities. In the first cohort of the credential program, eight FLSs participated. See Table 22.

Direct Support Professionals

As of September 30, 2017, HeartShare Human Services employed 553 full-time DSPs, 388 part-time DSPs, and they reported 110 DSP vacancies (1,051 positions). There were 215 DSPs who left the organization in the calendar year ending on September 30, 2017. The annual turnover rate was 20.45%. The average hourly DSP wage was \$11.76.

Frontline Supervisors

As of September 30, 2017, HeartShare Human Services employed 104 FLSs, including eight who participated in the credentialing program. Seven FLS vacancies were reported (111 total FLS positions).

**FLS Annual Turnover.** None of the FLS who participated in the credential program left

Table 22. HeartShare Human Services FLS Outcomes Summary

	Non-credentialed FLSs (N = 103)	Credentialing Participant FLSs (N = 8)
Turnover	6.8%	0%
Tenure (in years)	9.7	10.29
Average hourly wage	\$22.75 (\$47,330 annually)	\$26.54 (\$55,205 annually)

the organization as of September 30, 2017 resulting in a 0% turnover rate. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, seven non-credentialed FLSs left the organization. The non-credentials FLS annual turnover rate was 6.8%.

**FLS Average Salary.** The average hourly wage of FLS who did not participate in the credential program was \$22.75. The average hourly wage of FLS who participated in the credential was \$26.54.

**FLS Tenure.** The average tenure of FLS who participated in the credential program was 10.29 years. The average tenure of FLS who did not participate in the credential program was 9.7 years



**Table 23. Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State FLS Outcomes Summary**

	Non-credentialed FLSs (N = 104)	Credentialing Participant FLSs (N = 2)
Turnover	9.6%	0%
Tenure (in years)	9.3	10
Average hourly wage	\$23.00 (\$47,840 annually)	\$26.44 (\$55,000 annually)

### Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State

Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State provides supports and services to 2,225 people with disabilities. In the first cohort of the credentialing program, two FLSs participated. See Table 23.

#### *Direct Support Professionals*

As of September 30, 2017, Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State employed 1,200 full-time DSPs, 220 part-time DSPs, and they reported 170 vacancies (a total of 1,590 DSP positions). There were 200 DSPs who left the organization during calendar year ending on September 30, 2017. The annual turnover rate was 12.6%. The average DSP hourly wage was \$14.50.

#### *Frontline Supervisors*

As of September 30, 2017, Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State employed a total of 102 FLSs, including two who participated in the credentialing program (1.9%). There were four FLS vacancies reported, for a total of 106 FLS positions in the organization.

**FLS Annual Turnover.** None of the FLS who participated in the credential program left the organization as of September 30, 2017 resulting in an annual turnover rate of 0%. In the calendar year ending September 30, 2017, 10 FLS who had not participated in the credential program left the organization. The FLS annual turnover rate among those who had not participated in the credential program was 9.6%.

**FLS Tenure.** The average tenure of FLS who had not participated in the credential program was 9.3 years. The average tenure of FLS who participated in the credential was 10 years.

**FLS Average hourly wage.** The average hourly wage of FLS who did not participate in the credential program was \$23.00. The average hourly wage of FLS who participated in the credential was \$26.44.

### Interviews with NADSP credentialing participants from the Training Collaborative

Five FLSs who are pursuing the NADSP FLS credential in the first cohort that this program is offered through the Training Collaborative were interviewed, which included at least one FLS from each participating organization. The FLS were directors or coordinators in a variety of settings, including group homes and day habilitation centers. Their number of years working in the field ranged from seven to 21 years, with an average of 13.1 years in the field. All had submitted their portfolio to NADSP for review in September 2017.

### Motivations for pursuing the credential

Participation in the credential was voluntary for all supervisors, but after hearing of the opportunity to participate, most believed it was an important professional development program in which they should engage. They also typically discussed the opportunity with their own supervisor prior to signing up. All of these FLSs had previously completed the leadership training program through the Training Collaborative, and had a positive experience in it. The following reasons were also offered by one or more of the FLSs as motivations for participating in the credentialing program:

- Opportunity to further develop leadership skills;
- Better understand the core competencies in order to teach them to others;

- Hone communication skills to better train others;
- Have space to try out some creative ideas for providing support;
- Learn more about NADSP and their resources;
- Continue developing skills to work in an organization that helps people achieve their independent living goals; and Family connection to developmental disability that motivated them to want to invest in an organization that supports people to live in the community.

The application required that each FLS solicit letters of recommendation from several sources. This was a motivating factor in pursuing the credential for one FLS when they received a letter of support from a person they support. The person supported had complex medical needs that had caused her to pass up many opportunities in the community over the years because her support needs were substantial. The emphasis on making healthy choices and changing the person's self-care behaviors in supports provided by the DSPs and FLSs in home changed everything for her. She articulated that she believed she would not be alive if the support staff had not worked with them to change her behaviors. The FLS attributed this to the skills learned in the credentialing program, as well as the platform to do their job in this way. Hearing this story motivated the FLS to take the credentialing opportunity as a way to continue increasing their professional skills and to provide even higher-quality support.

Two FLSs expressed anxiety about the future of funding for supports for people with IDD with recent threats to Medicaid. They recognize that changes to the field may be coming, and they wanted to take the opportunity when available to learn more about best practice in the field. These FLSs are worried that funding cuts to Medicaid and other funding sources will impact peoples' lives and limit their independence. When they have seen people gain independence such that they can live with relative independence in their own apartment, they want to do everything

to ensure that people maintain that independence rather than move backward because they do not have the support they need.

### Strengths and benefits of the credential program

The primary strengths and benefits of the credential articulated by the FLSs was to support DSPs to feel more empowered in their jobs, and in turn to help people with disabilities to feel more empowered in their lives. Other strengths are summarized below.

*Impacting organizational change.* Several supervisors utilized opportunities to reflect on practices in the credential, and to initiate new practices in their organization that ensure higher-quality supports. For example, one supervisor recalled reading a story during training about a person living in a group home whose privacy and preferences were not respected by support staff. This helped the supervisor to think about the ways that they interact with the people they support. The supervisor initiated two important changes in the organization that she believes impacts people receiving supports in the organization. First, when a new DSP is hired by the organization, the supervisor ensures that the person supported is introduced to the new DSP by a DSP who is already familiar with the person's routines and who has earned the person's trust. This ensures a greater chance of continuity of quality supports. Second, people supported are always included on hiring teams for new DSP and FLS positions. People supported are given the final say in determining whether or not the agency will hire the person being interviewed. This has created an atmosphere that more appropriately upholds the rights and dignity of the people supported.

Another FLS worked with people supported to create a photo board and a video that depict the patient bill of rights for people who cannot read. The FLS engaged people supported to participate and "own" this project with his support. These resources are now used throughout the organization to ensure that people with varying levels of communication skills can understand these important documents.



***Focus on teaching skills.*** Several FLSs used opportunities to increase skills and health of people supported when creating work samples for the portfolio. For example, one FLS initiated a healthy cooking and eating program in the group home where she works. This increased the health of both DSPs and people supported, while also ensuring that people supported continued to have choices in what they were eating for meals and snacks.

One FLS supported a person who has a hearing impairment and who does not communicate with words to have materials to communicate about his preferences among several support staff. The FLS worked with the person to use technology to find photos and logos that represent things for him. The person now uses these to communicate about his preferences.

***Collaboration with other agencies and professionals.*** Several FLSs mentioned that the coursework in the Training Collaborative provided unique opportunities to connect with professionals from other agencies, as well as other professionals that work in other sites in their own agency. One FLS shifted her job in

the midst of completing the credential. She found it helpful to collaborate with others within her agency to make a smooth transition to her new site. She also relied on some support from her colleagues to complete the requirements of the portfolio. She found it helpful to have time to work and reflect alongside of others.

FLSs from one site reported that they began some healthy competition among supervisors at other sites. One area that they compete in is to judge which sites throw the best parties for a variety of holidays. The one on the supervisors' minds at the time of the interviews was the Halloween parties that were being put on at several sites. Each site determined a theme, made decorations, and activities that aligned with the theme. People supported are part of committees for planning, they help with themes, decorations, and running activities.

### **Challenges of the credential program**

***Time needed to complete.*** Most commonly, FLSs noted that they struggled to find time to complete the requirements of the credential.





They often needed to maintain a very regulated schedule in order to complete the requirements within a short time frame. Supervisors often noted that they were getting up early in the morning or staying up late at night in order to complete requirements.

**Self-reflection.** A few supervisors found that the self-reflection activities were challenging. However, this was also often noted as one of most beneficial components of the FLS credential program. Taking time to reflect on practices ultimately made them better supervisors.

**Technology.** A few supervisors noted that they had difficulties with technology related to the e-portfolio system. There was a transition of some of the software components during the time when supervisors needed to access it. There were glitches in the system that resulted in slower than necessary completion of portfolio materials, and sometimes materials were lost. This was described as frustrating by some participants.

**Policy limitations.** One supervisor noted that they sometimes feel limited by state or organizational policies when providing support for people.

Sometimes they want to provide support for a person in one way, but are concerned with how the decisions they make will be perceived by others. For example, a person supported who falls frequently in the community, but who wants to continue going out in the community, or regulations of a person's money or credit cards. The FLS believes that change is possible.

### Supports provided by the organization

Several organizational supports for completing the credential requirements were noted by supervisors who were interviewed. All of the supervisors interviewed felt supported by administrators and managers in the organization to pursue the credential, and to increase the quality of supports they were providing. Specific ways that administrators and managers demonstrated support included:

- Allowing time off to complete requirements and prepare for presentations;
- Review written work and oral presentations and provide feedback;
- Feeling recognized by agency administrators and the supervisors for pursuing and achieving the credential;

- Monitoring completion of credentialing components to help supervisors stay on track; and
- Investing in FLSs to complete the credential signals that the agency values their work, and wants them to grow professionally.

Despite working in very large organizations, several FLSs noted that administration at their organization recognizes them, knows them by name, and knows in which sites the FLS works. When they see one another, administrators will often stop and ask about work. This helps affirm the importance of what the FLS is doing in the lives of people supported.

### Outcomes for people supported

Many positive outcomes of the credential program have already been noted among the stories summarized above, including people spending time in the community, peoples' voices being heard when making hiring decisions in their own homes, people receiving supports that affirm their choices, people learning to make healthy decisions, and people participating and making decisions about the life and activities in their day habilitation center. A few additional important stories were offered.

*People accomplishing their dreams.* One FLS noted that some people they support

wanted to take a vacation to the beach, but they had always heard about the barriers involved in this. Staff in their home helped people to organize craft and bake sales to raise money for the vacation. They also supported people to plan their vacation, and went along on the vacation to support as needed. Another FLS noted that a person supported wanted to see his favorite musician in concert, and they were supported in getting tickets to this show just months before the person passed away.

One FLS has a second job where he operates his own business as a deejay on nights and weekends. He recognized that one of the people he supports was interested in the same things, and that he had inclination and skill to be able to get his own business. The FLS arranged a few opportunities to introduce the person to some of his professional contacts in the deejay business. He continues to work with him in appropriate ways to try to identify some opportunities. The person was hired as the deejay recently at an event, and the FLS attended to support this opportunity.

*People taking part in planning and initiating activities.* One FLS noted that they recognized through the credential that many of the activities they offered at the day habilitation center were quite bland, and that they could do better. They began





to think about the skills available in the support staff and the interests of the people supported to be able to more appropriately and resourcefully individualize the programming. They began offering a variety of different groups that people could be a part of, such as cooking, science and technology, and language classes taught by some of the bilingual DSPs. Senior citizens in the program vocalized that they wanted their

own group that was geared toward activities of their choice, such as reading the newspaper, drinking coffee, mediation, and playing jeopardy together. There was more conversation at the site for people to speak about their preferences and to let them drive the activities provided at the site. Staff have learned to be better listeners, and to more attentively respond to peoples' needs.

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## Discussion

This section integrates what was learned in examining the five credentialing programs included in this report. Credentialing programs' impact on DSP retention and wages are discussed, a summary of barriers to successful credential program implementation are provided and a summary of strategies for successful program implementation are identified. Finally, each of the credential programs reviewed in the report are compared to the key design elements from the Career GEAR Up Recommendations for a New York statewide direct support workforce credential (Hewitt et al., 2015; Appendix A).

### Credential impacts on DSP retention and wages

Each of the credentialing programs is intended to result in greater workforce stability measured by longer retention and lower rates of organizational annual turnover among direct support staff. Successful completion of each credential is awarded with higher wages or a bonus. These organizational-level data collected in this report suggest that credentialed staff have longer retention and lower rates of organizational turnover when compared with non-credentialed staff. A number of factors should be considered in interpreting these data.

*Early stages of implementation.* Implementing organizational-level change typically takes years of intentional implementation efforts to reach acceptance and sustainability (Ogden & Fixen, 2014). Many frameworks exist to describe implementation stages of an organizational-level intervention, but stages often include, (1) exploration and adoption of an intervention, (2) program installation, (3) initial implementation, and (4) full implementation. This process also tends to be characterized by periods of refinement, making implementation nonlinear.

Full implementation takes many years, and can be negatively impacted by high rates or turnover and staff instability such as those experienced in the direct support workforce (Fixsen et al., 2005). Of the credentialing programs included in this report, only Wildwood Programs has been implementing its credentialing program for more than five years (implemented in spring 2012). The other four credentialing programs have noted ways in which they are continuing to refine their processes with each cohort. This may indicate that the outcomes assessed in this report do not represent the impact of the credentialing program when fully implemented over time (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). In these cases, outcomes should be considered preliminary; they may underestimate the impact of the credential program. For this reason, it is useful to also consider the impact of the credential on individual learners and people supported. These were quite notable in the participant interviews sections of the report.

*Diverse programs.* Credentialing programs included in this report are diverse on many factors, notably: (1) which educational components were included in the credential, (2) number of hours associated with each

learning component, (3) delivery methods used in instruction, (4) length of time in which the credentialing initiative has been implemented, (5) number of learners who have successfully earned the credential, (6) wage increases associated with the credential, and (7) the role of participants who completed the credential. The number of credentialed and non-credentialed staff in each organization was widely disparate in every organization, except for Wildwood Programs (where 55% of DSPs are credentialed). These factors may impact the outcomes data. Research should explore these different aspects of the credential programs to inform best practice.

*Preliminary data reflects better outcomes for credentialed staff.* Keeping these interpretive points in mind, preliminary outcome data are presented in Table 24 for the programs that had learners who had successfully completed the credential program by the time of data collection. Observing the trends in Table 24, credentialing is associated with less turnover and longer retention for credentialed

employees as compared to non-credentialed DSPs. From these data, one cannot conclude causation (meaning the credential program caused turnover reduction and better retention) and certainly other factors might play a role. However, trends reflect longer retention and reduced turnover among credentialed staff. Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that credential programs were a contributing factor to these differences. Average wages for credentialed DSPs are also higher, as should be expected from the wage increase associated with successful completion of the credential. The combination of increased competence and higher wages may be important factors keeping DSPs in their job. These preliminary data support the notion that participating in a credentialing program is associated with increased retention and lower turnover compared to those who have not participated in a credentialing program, although these data should continue to be monitored to increase the confidence in the findings.

**Table 24. Summary of outcome data on credentialed DSPs and non-credentialed DSPs in organizations that are implementing a DSP credentialing program**

	Credentialed DSPs	Non-Credentialed DSPs	Credentialed Annual Turnover	Non-Credentialed Annual Turnover	Average Credentialed Retention (yrs)	Average Non-Credentialed Retention (yrs)	Average Credentialed hourly wage	Average Non-Credentialed hourly wage
Wildwood Programs	107	87	9.3%	60.9%	12.46	Not available	\$11.70	\$10.70
Arc of Orange County	3	306	0%	19.6%	15	4.3	\$14.74	\$12.21
Arc of Ulster-Greene	8	620	0%	11.6%	9.34	6.36	\$13.62	\$11.45

*The aim of the Training Collaborative.*

NADSP FLS credentialing program is also intended to increase DSP retention by investing in highly trained FLSs providing high-quality support to DSPs. Turnover rates of both DSPs and FLSs by organization were summarized in the Training Collaborative outcomes section of the report. However, none of the FLS had officially received their credential by the time of this report's data collection. Tracking this information after the FLSs earn their credential will be an important indicator to assess the outcomes of that credential program.

### **Preliminary barriers to implementing a credentialing program**

Several organizational barriers to implementing a credentialing program were noted in this report. These are summarized below, and should be attended to in continued implementation of existing programs, in newly implemented programs throughout the state, and in a coordinated statewide effort.

**Costs.** Only the Arc of Orange County, the Arc of Ulster-Greene, and Wildwood Programs have allocated organizational funds to implement and sustain the credential program. The other programs utilize endowment or grant funds to cover the costs of the programs. If these funding options are no longer available, the programs may not be viable.

**Staff shortages.** Credentialing program participants who attend classroom instruction may be met with challenges when support hours need to be covered. Several DSPs mentioned that their FLS filled in their shift in order to allow DSPs relief time to attend classroom instruction. Many FLS were happy to do this, recognizing the benefit of how DSPs' professional practices are enhanced through the classroom instruction and interaction. However, work priorities and high vacancy rates in organizations made it difficult at times to release DSPs to attend class. Additionally, some DSPs reported that they did not have this support from their supervisors. Consistent relief opportunities have to be available to any DSP who is accepted into a credential program.

*Lack of administrative and supervisor buy-in.*

Lack of support from managers and supervisors negatively impacted participants' class attendance, completion of work samples, and availability to complete educational requirements. Conflicts with supervisors as DSPs shifted their practices to more person-centered services were noted in a few cases. These were often overcome through support from administrators, credentialing program coordinators, and use of the Code of Ethics to direct professional practices.

*Lack of available expertise to develop and deliver a curriculum.*

Implementing a credentialing program in an organization can take extensive coordination and oversight, depending on the required components of the credentialing program. The credentialing programs included in this report employed staff with strong understanding of credentialing and program administration. Organizations without such leadership may experience difficulties in implementation without support. Using online educational modules or technology to deliver some or all instructional content was used in four of the credentialing programs in this report. Only the Training Collaborative did not use an online educational component (although they did use technology designed to help streamline completion of the portfolio). To deliver classroom instruction, the Training Collaborative utilized a unique collaboration between local organizations. The Arc of Orange County and the Arc of Monroe partially relied on NADSP faculty hired to teach classes. However, bringing in staff to teach classes may result in higher costs. Developing inter-organizational capacity and/or utilizing technology or online learning may be valuable strategies to implement credentialing programs.

*Mandatory participation in the credential.*

Several credentialing programs noted that they experienced great difficulty in retaining committed participants in the credential when learners did not voluntarily enroll. Making the credential program voluntary was an important feature that appears to impact participants' success in completing the credential.



**Wage increase.** The credentialing programs varied in the dollar amount they used to reward successful completion of the credential. The structure of the payment also varied by base salary and the role of the credentialed employee (i.e., DSP or FLS). It is unclear how much of a wage increase is needed to incentivize completion. However, formalizing the structure of the credential and including a wage increase at important milestones in the credential process increased the completion rate of learners through the training modules at Arc of Orange County and Wildwood Programs. Including a wage increase with completion of the credential should be considered necessary in implementing a successful program, but further exploration of amount and frequency of wage increases may be questions for further exploration.

### **Strategies for successful implementation in organizations**

Several strategies to support successful implementation can also be drawn from the credentialing programs included in this report. Those strategies are summarized below.

**Utilize ready-made curricula and/or those already in place.** Several of the credentialing programs already implemented training in their organization to increase the competence of their workforce. For example, the Arc of Orange County already utilized CDS, and the Training Collaborative already utilized their leadership training program. Each added coursework and the construction of the portfolio to submit to NADSP to enhance the strategies they already used. The Arc of Ulster-Greene and Arc of Monroe utilized Relias coursework in their credential because they already used Relias for other mandated trainings in the organization. Several established pathways were drawn upon by organizations for the coursework component, including the modules developed through the partnership between CDS and the New York Alliance. NADSP's credentialing pathways have been successful in several parts of the country, and provide a platform for national recognition of the credential. For these reasons, NADSP's credentialing pathways were used in four of the five programs examined in this report.



**Collaboration among organizations.** Organizations that are implementing successful credentialing programs can play an important role in increasing service quality by sharing their experiences with other organizations wishing to complete a credential. The model in the Training Collaborative is a useful reference for organizations. Four organizations work together to deliver classroom training. NADSP also provides pathways, resources, and opportunities for collaboration that organizations can utilize to implement a credential in their organization. Using collaboration and agreed-upon competency sets, organizations can work together toward common goals. They can also potentially save costs by partnering and drawing upon successful strategies and lessons learned from other organizations. The Regional Centers for Workforce Transformation are another avenue and opportunity for organizations to participate in discussions regarding credentialing.

**Appoint a person in the organization to promote and administer the program.** Each credentialing program was managed primarily by one or two people in the organization whose role was to promote the program, and ensure that participants remained on track toward completion of the credential. Strategies to ensure that participants remained on track were varied among the organizations, including regularly sending emails to credentialing participants and storing work samples and portfolios on an organization's shared drive so that progress could be referenced as needed. Having this committed coordinator was also helpful to serve as a point person when learners needed support or help resolving conflicts as they pursued the credential in their professional setting.

**Ensure administrative and supervisor support.** Organizations used several strategies for eliciting support, including regularly looking at and summarizing data from the credential to show its impact. Some organizations in this project also formalized their communication with credentialing participants' supervisors to ensure that they understood the credential program, its requirements, and how they were to support participants who were completing

the requirements (Arc of Ulster-Greene). In the DSP and FLS interviews conducted for this report, many DSPs and FLSs mentioned this was vitally important that they felt supported by their administrators and supervisors when pursuing the credential.

### **Seek credentialing participant input during and after program completion**

In order to make decisions about improving the credential program and the experience of pursuing the credential, program coordinators at a few organizations regularly surveyed participants about how to make the credential better. This resulted in changes such as shortening the required length of employment in the organization before applying for the credential program, the curriculum used for credentialing, and the financial incentives associated with successful completion of the credential.

**Provide supports for credentialing participants.** Many kinds of supports were offered in the credentialing programs, including use of work computers, space, paid mileage or subway to class, assistance with technology or learning supports. All of the program coordinators responded that they would work with any eligible learners' circumstances to help them achieve their goal of completing the credential. Additionally, many credentialed DSPs or FLSs interviewed stated that they are now working in their organization to mentor new learners in the credentialing process. As credentialing programs grow in organizations, drawing upon previously credentialed employees could be an important strategy for ensuring that sufficient supports are provided.

**Plan to implement for several years.** Only one credentialing program included in this report (Wildwood Programs) could likely be considered a fully implemented credentialing program, based on the time investment typically needed for an organization-wide intervention. Program coordinators noted that the first year of implementation was the most difficult, and the program shifted in several ways over the first few years of implementation. Attrition of



participants in the program in the first cohort was often high, and recruitment for the first few cohorts was sometimes difficult. Planning for and funding implementation over several years is an important strategy to ensure the success of a credential program. Implementation efforts can be aided by regularly collecting and reviewing organizational data, and eliciting feedback from participants.

### Comparison of the credential programs to Career GEAR Up key design elements for a statewide workforce credential

Each credential program included in this report was compared on the extent to which it aligned with the recommended key design elements for a New York statewide DSP

workforce credential (Hewitt et al., 2015). These recommendations are included in Appendix A and were designed by a representative stakeholder group for a statewide program. Organizational-level credentialing initiatives may be similar to or different from necessary components in successful statewide efforts. In order to continue informing statewide efforts to fund and implement a direct support workforce credential, Table 25 compares the five New York-based credentialing initiatives included in this comparative analysis to these recommendations from the OPWDD comprehensive statewide study that was completed in 2015 that was intended to provide a basis for implementing a statewide workforce credential.

**Table 25. Comparison of the five credentialing programs with the 2015 OPWDD Career GEAR Up recommended components**

	Wildwood Programs	Arc of Orange County	Arc of Ulster-Greene	Arc of Monroe	Training Collaborative
Credential program	Conover Scholar	NADSP C1, C2	NADSP C1	NADSP C1	NADSP FLS
Multi-tiered for specializations	DSP/FLS	Yes	Yes*	Yes*	No
Hybrid model of learning methods	Online only	Online, classroom, work samples	Online, classroom, work samples	Online, classroom, work samples	Classroom, work samples
Aligned with competencies	OPWDD FLS	OPWDD, NADSP	OPWDD, NADSP	OPWDD, NADSP	OPWDD, NADSP
Voluntary enrollment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individuals with disabilities deliver some coursework	-	Yes	No	No	No
Incremental annual enrollment growth targets utilized	No	No	No	No	No
Funding source for associated costs	endowment/organization	organization	organization	DOL grant/organization	OPWDD grant
Learners paid for in-class time and mileage	Not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Wildwood Programs	Arc of Orange County	Arc of Ulster-Greene	Arc of Monroe	Training Collaborative
Credential program	Conover Scholar	NADSP C1, C2	NADSP C1	NADSP C1	NADSP FLS
Learners paid for online learning time	No	No	No	Yes	Not applicable
Wage increase or bonus after successful completion	\$.30-1.00/hr + annual bonus (FLS \$500 bonus)	\$1.50-5.00/hr	\$.50/hr + annual \$1,000 bonus	\$1.00/hr after DSP-C1	\$2000 bonus
Independent third party assesses written tests and/or skill demonstration	CDS	CDS NADSP	Relias NADSP	Relias NADSP	NADSP
Independent third party governs curriculum	New York Alliance/ CDS	New York Alliance/ CDS, NADSP	No	No	No
A board of directors informs the independent third party on curriculum and assessments used	No	No	No	No	No
Grand person clause	No	No	No	No	No
Regular evaluation of program impacts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Current cost sustainability	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Note: Competency sets – [OPWDD](#), [NADSP](#), [FLS](#). An asterisk (\*) indicates that these programs do not currently have participants in a multi-tiered credential, but they have the potential to do so given the structure of the current credential program used in their organization.

**Voluntary enrollment.** All of the credentialing programs included here are currently voluntary, although they were not always voluntary. This was an important lesson learned about the viability of the credential initiatives in the organizations. Participants were reported to be more motivated to continue and complete the credential when they opted into the credential, when it worked with their schedule, and was meaningful to their professional goals.

**Aligned with competencies for the workforce.** All of the credentialing programs included in this report aligned their learning components with OPWDD DSP Competencies. The aim of the NADSP credentials was

also to increase learners' skills, knowledge, and attitudes included in its 15 core competencies. The FLS credentials offered by Wildwood and the Training Collaborative are aligned with the National Frontline Supervisor Competencies. All curricula used by programs in this report were designed specifically to be aligned with the specified competency sets.

**Learners paid for in-class time and mileage, and online learning time.** The four programs that required completion of in-class learning and discussion paid learners for their time and transportation. Programs differed on whether learners were paid for time spent completing online learning components. The only program that explicitly covered this for all

learners was the Arc of Monroe, where learners completed lessons in their “down time” at work. They weren’t paid extra for completion of modules at home. Programs often judged that given the flexibility with the online learning modules, learners could make time to complete this requirement. Successfully credentialed DSPs and FLSs noted specific strategies used to complete the online learning modules, but that it was oftentimes difficult to come up with the time in their schedule to complete these requirements given that they often juggled family and overtime work responsibilities. Explicitly funding this time may increase the success of a statewide credential, but further examination of this component can be explored to inform statewide implementation efforts. Program coordinators often noted that reasons why learners discontinued the credential program was because of their inability to complete all the requirements alongside competing responsibilities. If online learning time cannot be paid or completed during work hours, programs may be able to fund this component through a bonus given at completion, or another strategy that incentivizes learners to devote the time alongside of competing priorities.

***Multi-tiered credential program available.***

The majority of the programs reviewed include an option for a multi-tiered credential. However, the length of time that programs have been implemented have yet to allow for many participants to participate in more than one credential program. Wildwood Programs and the Arc of Orange County are the only programs with employees who have participated in more than one credential, and only Wildwood has participants who have completed more than one credential. The aim of this element in a statewide program is to allow professionals in direct support to advance in specific skills over the course of their career. By completing components of the career ladder, learners can gain more competence for a continually refined skillset that retains them as a highly-qualified professional in the field. As such, this creates a professional pathway

intended to further increase the stability of the workforce.

***Hybrid model of learning methods.*** All programs except for Wildwood Programs utilize a hybrid model of learning delivery methods. The CDS does include discussion and work-based learning components that can be implemented, but these are not actively tracked or required in their program. The rationale to include work-based learning components is to provide opportunities for learners to try out and refine their skills. Research on knowledge acquisition supports such opportunities for learners to generalize their skills in a real-life context. In interviews, many learners drew specifically upon completion of their work samples as they described the impacts of their work on people they support. They noted that these provided opportunities to increase their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in person-centered services, and to impact organizational change. However, online learning modules provide an opportunity for maximum flexibility to access important core knowledge in an age where computers and electronic devices are typically readily available for nearly all employees. The classroom learning environment was reported as an important point to discuss what was learned in the online modules, as well as to collaborate with other professionals in and between organizations.

***Individuals with disabilities included in delivery of some coursework.*** Only the Arc of Orange County included individuals with disabilities in the delivery of some coursework. This was an important component vocalized by stakeholders in the statewide survey for the credential recommendations. Including individuals with disabilities provides an important avenue for people receiving supports to speak for themselves, and to impact the delivery of services.

***Pairing credential completion with wage increase or bonus.*** All of the programs provide a financial incentive for the completion of the credential. Organizations varied in the amount of wage increase associated with

this milestone. This may be a function of the different locations in the state where the programs were offered, or another reason. For DSPs, the wage increase ranged between \$.30-1.50 per credential, with the potential increase totaling an additional \$5.00 per hour for a DSP who has attained the NADSP DSP-S credential at the Arc of Orange County. For credentialed FLSs, wage increase was in the form of a one-time bonus from \$500-2,000. In addition to the wage increase or bonus associated with the credential, Wildwood Programs and the Arc of Ulster-Greene also offered employees a re-occurring annual bonus that is delivered at a recognition ceremony. This rewards each credentialed employee financially and with recognition for every year of credentialed service. Further assessment of ways to incentivize credentialed employees should continue.

***Incremental annual growth targets.*** Growth targets for organizations in this study tended to be based on what could be supported through current instructional capacity. Organizations tended to have a set number of participants that could be accepted to the credentialing programs each year, rather than incremental growth targets. However, as programs have gained a reputation and popularity in organizations, more of the workforce have been inclined to apply for the credential. Successfully implementing programs that can sustain growth in number of participants should be attended to in implementation of a statewide credential. One strategy that could be explored is utilizing previously credentialed staff to mentor and support new learners through the credential. This may allow a larger number of participants in future cohorts. Many credentialed staff interviewed in this report articulated their value of doing this: the investment the organization placed in them made them want to give back to the organization by providing such a service for new learners. The infrastructure being built by the RCWT, including the new DSPconnect online platform may provide opportunities for DSPs to learn from and support one another

in credentialing even when they do not work in the same organization.

***Funding source and cost sustainability.*** Two of the organizations in this report have devised ways of sustainably funding their credentialing efforts, but the other three programs do not have a sustainable means of implementing their credential over time by utilizing their operating budget. Two programs utilize grant funds that will run out. Wildwood's endowment is a unique scenario to sustainably fund some program costs. The necessity of additional funding to support implementation and scaling up these efforts are essential. [A toolkit to help State Medicaid Agencies with rate setting for direct support force continuing education and training](#) was developed in 2013. Additionally, the cost of hiring and training new staff may be decreased if organizations experience longer retention of skilled employees and reduced turnover. These funds may be reallocated to implementing and operating credentialing programs, especially to support wage increases for highly-skilled employees. The longest implemented credential program in this report was Wildwood Programs, which reported an annual turnover rate of 9.3% among credentialed DSPs. This is compared to 60.9% annual turnover rate among non-credentialed DSPs. These data provide some rationale to support this discussion about cost savings due to longer retention that may be reallocated to professional development opportunities among the direct support workforce in organizations.

***Grand person clause.*** No program operated a "grand person" clause that would allow experienced professionals to earn the credential equivalent. A few programs are exploring opportunities to partner with community colleges or high schools to allow learners to earn credit toward an established human service degree. However, NADSP does not currently endorse coursework from venues other than their approved list. The Arc of Ulster-Greene has employed several DSPs who were credentialed through SUNY Ulster community college, but they have not attained the NADSP

credential due to this limitation. Support exists to recognize additional pathways involving high school, vocational schools, and community colleges.

*Regular evaluation of the program impacts.* Each organization operated a regular evaluation of program impacts, but the measures used differed between the organizations. Organizations tracked turnover and retention data, as well as number of employees credentialed. These were used, along with more subjective evaluations that were used to inform delivery of the credential to future cohorts. Regular evaluation is an important feature of many successful organization-level interventions. [A return on investment form was created in the New York Statewide Study for the Career GEAR Up credential](#), but none of the organizations reported using it to evaluate the credential programs.

*Independent third party governs curriculum.* All of the in-class content for each organization were devised by the organization and/or its partnership with NADSP and NADSP faculty. Online modules for CDS used by Wildwood Programs and the Arc of Orange County were created in a partnership between the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation and representatives for CDS. Program coordinators tended to appreciate the opportunity to tailor course content to the needs of their organization. On the other hand, it required significant staff effort and expertise to do this well. Program coordinators reported that they often used core competencies as a basis for devising the curriculum, but course schedules were often refined as cohorts progressed in the materials. The

Training Collaborative is a unique, established relationship among administrators in organizations, where efforts are aimed across organizations to increase the capacities of leaders within the organization on the front line. A statewide pathway could streamline some of these efforts by querying existing programs, and continuing to refine educational content based on program successes. This could be a major activity of an independent third party.

*Independent third party assesses written tests/and or skill demonstrations.* Credentialing programs differed in the ways that they assessed learners' skills, including pre- and post-tests associated with online lessons, self-assessments of the competencies, and assessment of portfolios by NADSP. For all NADSP portfolios, the portfolio submission and evaluation tended to be the defining feature in determining learners' successes. Successful completion of CDS lessons and passing post-test scores in each module defined completion of the Conover Scholar credential. These strategies took the burden of assessment off of organizations, and is likely to be another helpful feature in a statewide credential strategy.

*A board of directors informs the independent third party on curriculum and assessments used.* None of the programs were informed on an organizational level by a board of directors that was specifically established for informing the curriculum and assessments, although program coordinators were often responsible to regularly report on the credentialing programs to other administrators.





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## Conclusion

DSPs are essential to successful inclusion of people with IDD in their communities. Providing quality support requires that DSPs are trained in and can utilize knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote inclusion. In New York, these knowledge, skills, and attitudes are defined in the OPWDD DSP Core Competencies and the NADSP Code of Ethics. FLSs draw upon the National Frontline Supervisor Competencies.

This report explored five existing credentialing programs that include DSPs and FLSs. The basis of each program was the respective competency sets. Positive stories of professional change were reported by credentialed learners or learners who have participated in each of the credential programs. OPWDD can draw upon the successes of these programs as they seek to further its efforts to implement a statewide credential. Key aspects of that task are (1) identifying funding and (2)

detailing which pathway(s) will be used for credentialing of the direct support workforce. This analysis found that in the last year, credentialed staff or employees pursuing a credential were less likely to turnover and more likely to have longer retention in the organization when compared with non-credentialed staff. These outcomes support the notion that when implemented over several years, funds that were previously used for hiring and training new employees may be reallocated to support professional development opportunities for the direct support workforce.

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# Appendix A



# Career GEAR Up

Growth, Education, Advancement, and Respect



## Proposed New York DSP Credentialing Model

1. The credential model instructional design is a hybrid model, which includes on-line training, interactive classroom learning and work-based learning opportunities.
  - a. DSP Credential I: 20 on-line, 10 classroom and 20 work-based learning
  - b. DSP Credential II: 40 on-line, 20 classroom, 40 work-based learning
    - Includes a specialization emphasis in Supporting Older Adults, Behavioral Support, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Complex Medical Needs.
  - c. DSP Credential III (Mentor): 12 on-line, 8 classroom, 20 work-based learning.
    - Includes training in Person Centered Planning.
  - d. Frontline Supervision and Management Credential: 20 on-line, 5 classroom, 15 work-based learning
2. The competencies used as the basis of the credentialing program are —
  - a. The New York State Direct Support Professional Core Competency Goals
    - Putting people first
    - Building and maintaining positive relationships
    - Demonstrating professionalism
    - Supporting good health
    - Supporting safety
    - Having a home
  - b. Being active and productive in society
  - b. The National Frontline Supervisor competencies, also used in NADSP Credentialing for Frontline Supervisors
    - Direct support
    - Health, wellness, and safety
    - Participant support plan development, monitoring, and assessment
    - Facilitating community inclusion across the lifespan
    - Promoting professional relations and teamwork
    - Staff recruitment, selection, and hiring
    - Staff supervision, training, and development
    - Service management and quality assurance
    - Advocacy and public relations
    - Leadership, professionalism, and self-development
    - Cultural awareness and responsiveness

These competencies are the identified outcomes of the credentialing program. They will be assessed during different levels of training across the credential program.
3. Participation in the credential is voluntary, with targeted annual enrollment rates. Annual enrollment growth targets are incremental for DSPs statewide —

Estimated growth —

1<sup>st</sup> Cohort = Yrs. 1 & 2 = 3% of DSPs statewide

2<sup>nd</sup> Cohort = Yrs. 2 & 3 = add 2% of DSPs statewide

3<sup>rd</sup> Cohort = Yrs. 3 & 4 = add 5% of DSPs statewide

4<sup>th</sup> Cohort = Yrs. 4 & 5 = add 5% of DSPs statewide

5<sup>th</sup> Cohort = Yrs. 5 & 6 = add 5% of DSPs statewide

The DSP Credential I, DSP Credential II, and DSP Credential III (Mentor) Credentials must be taken in sequence.

The DSP Credential II includes an allotted number of hours for a “specialized focus.” These specialized foci may include supporting older adults, autism spectrum disorders, behavioral supports, or complex medical needs.

The DSP Credential III includes an emphasis on person-centered planning and the creation of a person-centered plan. This will include skills mentoring, preparing mentors to support other learners through the credentialing process.

The Frontline Supervisor & Management Credential may be completed after the DSP Credential III is completed.

4. Credentialing is a multi-year process with provider rate incentives after each level.
5. DSP eligibility for credentialing is at employer discretion, after the DSP completes the employer's required probationary period.
  - a. DSP Credential I Assessments may be completed only after the DSP has clocked at least 1 year of full-time employment as a DSP.
  - b. DSP Credential II Assessments may be completed only after the DSP has clocked at least 2 years of full-time employment as a DSP.
6. Individuals with disabilities must be involved in the on-line and classroom educational components of the credential program.
7. An independent, third-party, objective credentialing program body will be established and will provide recommendations for assessment at each level of the credential. Assessment will include on-the-job skill demonstration by the supervisor or a skill mentor (initial, proficient and advanced levels), response to scenario testing (initial and proficient levels) and written test (advanced and specialized levels). The credentialing program governing body will also provide guidance on curriculum by identifying required instructional criteria for an approved instructional program.
8. A Board of Directors (including direct support providers, frontline supervisors, provider organizations, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members, content experts and individuals with expertise in credentialing/certification and instructional design) will govern the independent third-party credentialing program body.
9. OPWDD could release an RFP to determine credentialing organization.
10. Provider will only receive incentive (cover costs and increased wages) if they meet pre-determined threshold (e.g. 3%, 5%, 10% enrollment).
11. A Grandperson Clause will be developed that allows existing DSPs and FLSs who have passed their probationary period two years prior to the implementation of the credential program to “test out” at each level of the credential by completing the assessment package for each level for which they want to achieve the credential.
12. Certified DSPs must provide evidence of 36 hours (also referred to as units) of acceptable continuing education. This is at a rate of one hour per month over the three-year period. The continuing education requirement will not apply to newly certified DSPs but will go into effect after they renew their registration for the first time. Acceptable continuing education units are those whose topics are directly aligned with the content of the Core Competencies for New York Direct Support Professionals published by the NY Office for People with Developmental Disabilities inclusive of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics.



