

## College of Direct Support Pilot Program in Iowa

Through a federally-funded pilot program, Iowa has had access to the College of Direct Support (CDS) curriculum and learning management system since January 2009. A primary goal of this program is to build the capacity of Iowa's direct support workforce to provide home and community-based services by filling training gaps identified by community providers. Since the pilot program began, 44 providers have enrolled more than 1,500 learners in the system, who have completed 13,117 lessons for a total of 11,836 training hours.

The Iowa Medicaid Enterprise secured unlimited access to CDS for agencies and individuals participating in the State's Money Follows the Person (MFP) demonstration grant, which supports the transition of individuals from intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to community settings of their choice. The pilot, which runs through June of 2014, promotes the success of the MFP program and the implementation of the State's Olmstead Plan.

The CDS web-based curriculum and learning management system is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for learners to improve their skills in providing supports for people across disabilities. CDS courses, which are competency-based and align with a nationally accepted set of competency areas and statements, include more than 30 courses and 130 lessons created for frontline direct support workers, supervisors and managers, professional team members, and families and guardians. The CDS learning management system allows managers to create programs of study, assign courses and monitor the progress of their staff. The system's mentoring features, along with its robust data collection and reporting tools, allow the state administrator for the pilot program, and administrator's at individual provider sites, to assess the impact of training on their staff and develop best practices for CDS implementation in the state.

### Courses and Best Practices

The wide variety of courses available through CDS address the problem of the high rate of turnover in the field, and current and future direct service workforce shortages. Providers in Iowa have relied on this variety to develop different plans for rolling out the CDS training for their staff and establishing best practices for Iowa. Following are several examples of provider roll-out of CDS:

- A large urban provider in northeast Iowa rolled out the use of CDS from the top down. Program managers and supervisory staff completed the first phase of training, which included taking a series of courses designed specifically for frontline supervisors and managers. Next, supervisors participated in general courses, which will, in turn, be assigned to the frontline staff who report to them. The frontline staff assignments were chosen specifically for staff working with individuals with intellectual disabilities or brain injuries. In its second year of participation of the pilot, this provider has replaced old methods of training with the CDS online curriculum, and has begun using the system's administrative tools to measure cost effectiveness and staff growth.
- A large agency with provider sites located throughout the state has been involved in the CDS pilot since it began. All new hires complete the entire 7-lesson course on Positive Behavior Supports, and then follow a year-long, individually designed training program. This provider has also initiated an on-the-job mentoring program, using system tools such as gradable checklists and online discussion groups to assure staff are putting into practice what they learn online.
- A small provider in northwest Iowa began using CDS on for training new employees, replacing a limited portion of their orientation training. They have since expanded the use of CDS for their orientation training, and have also developed a training program for frontline managers, both incumbent staff and those new to the position. In addition, the provider recently polled their entire staff to find out which courses they thought would help them do their jobs better. These courses are being assigned as monthly in-service trainings.

In the third year of the pilot, Meredith Field of the Center for Disabilities and Development, who serves as state administrator for the pilot program, is compiling outcome data, including best practices in the use of curriculum and tools, cost effectiveness for providers and increased staff competency. She is also developing a webinar series for provider administrators for training and sharing best practices.

Plans for expanding the pilot program beyond those participating in MFP are also in the works. The Iowa Association of Community Providers will administer this expansion, which soon will allow access to many more providers in the state.