

A collage of blue-tinted photographs of diverse people, including a woman with glasses in the top left, a man in the top right, a woman in the middle left, and a group of people in the bottom right.

# **Opportunity Is Knocking: Re-Building The Direct Support Workforce at the Organization Level**

Joseph M. Macbeth  
President/Chief Executive Officer

A blue silhouette of the United States map with the text 'NADSP' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

**NADSP**

## **NADSP VISION STATEMENT**

A world with a highly qualified and professional direct support workforce that partners with, supports and empowers people with disabilities to lead a life of their choosing.

## **NADSP MISSION STATEMENT**

To elevate the status of direct support professionals by improving practice standards, promoting system reform, and advancing their knowledge, skills and values.



# **Definition of Quality**

“It is defined at the point of interaction between the staff member and the individual with a developmental disability.”

John F. Kennedy, Jr. (1995)  
Chair, President’s Committee for  
People with Intellectual Disabilities & Founder,  
NADSP



# Direct Support Professionals and COVID-19

“

**COVID-19 has lifted the veil on a decades long systemic failure to support the most important resource in the disability services sector – the direct support workforce - which has been neglected for far too long.**

”



-Joseph Macbeth, President  
and Chief Executive Officer





# Is There a Silver Lining?

Policy makers and elected officials are having serious discussions about the workforce at the highest levels of government.

The American Rescue Plan Act invested \$37 billion of short-term funding into HCBS.

Our system's future success will largely depend on how we emerge from this once in a generation of investment and demonstration of successful initiatives.



# About Today

1. Some Data and Context About the Direct Support Workforce
2. The Five Elements of a Profession
3. Thoughts on Workplace Culture
4. Recruitment and Selection Strategies
5. On-boarding and Professional Development
6. Retention Strategies and Career Paths, Ladders and Lattices
7. Long-Term Solutions and Professional Identity

Please Take What You Need and Leave the Rest



# Some National Data About the Direct Support Workforce

SURVEY REPORT

STATE *of the*  
WORKFORCE 2022

National Core Indicators® Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



## PARTICIPATING STATES & AGENCIES

More than **276,119** DSPs with   
 **3,633** provider agencies  
in **28** states & the District of Columbia

This is approximately 18.4% of the I/DD direct support workforce



# A National Snapshot of Current Workforce Demographics

## DSP GENDER IDENTITY



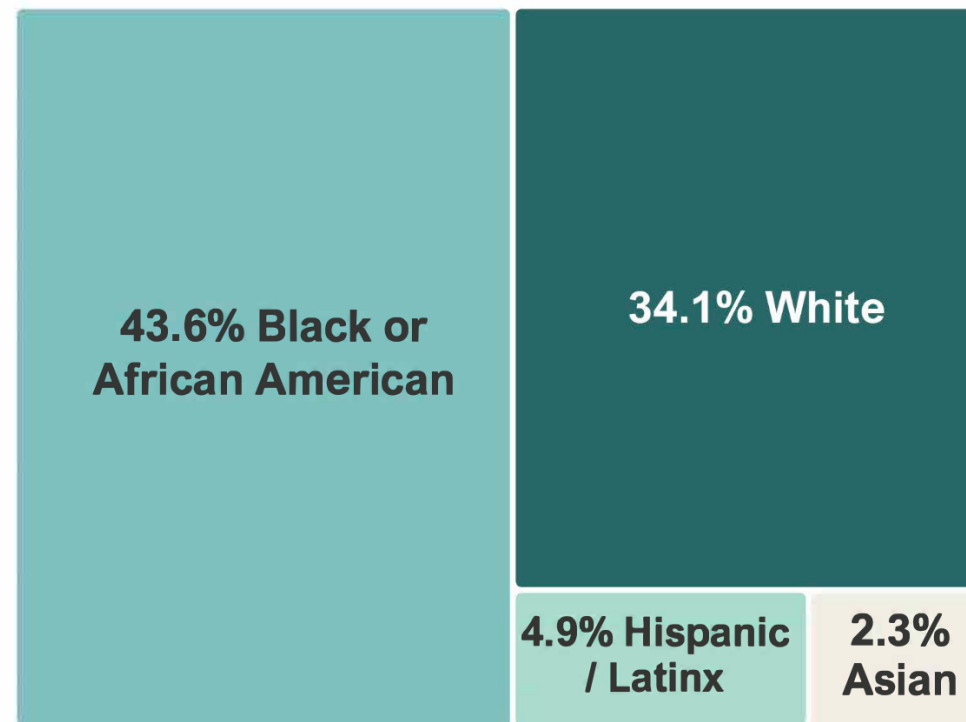
**69.8% Female**

**24.9% Male**

**5.2% Don't know**

**0.2% Non-binary**

## DSP RACIAL/ETHNIC BREAKDOWN



# A National Snapshot of DSP Vacancy Rates

## VACANCY RATES

Vacancy rates for full-time positions ranged from 9% to 21%. Rates for part-time positions ranged from 8% to 31%.

Note: These are point-in-time vacancy rates, not averages across the year.

**15%**

NCI-IDD average vacancy rate for full-time positions

**18%**

NCI-IDD average vacancy rate for part-time positions

Illinois Vacancy Rates

Full-Time - 15.9%

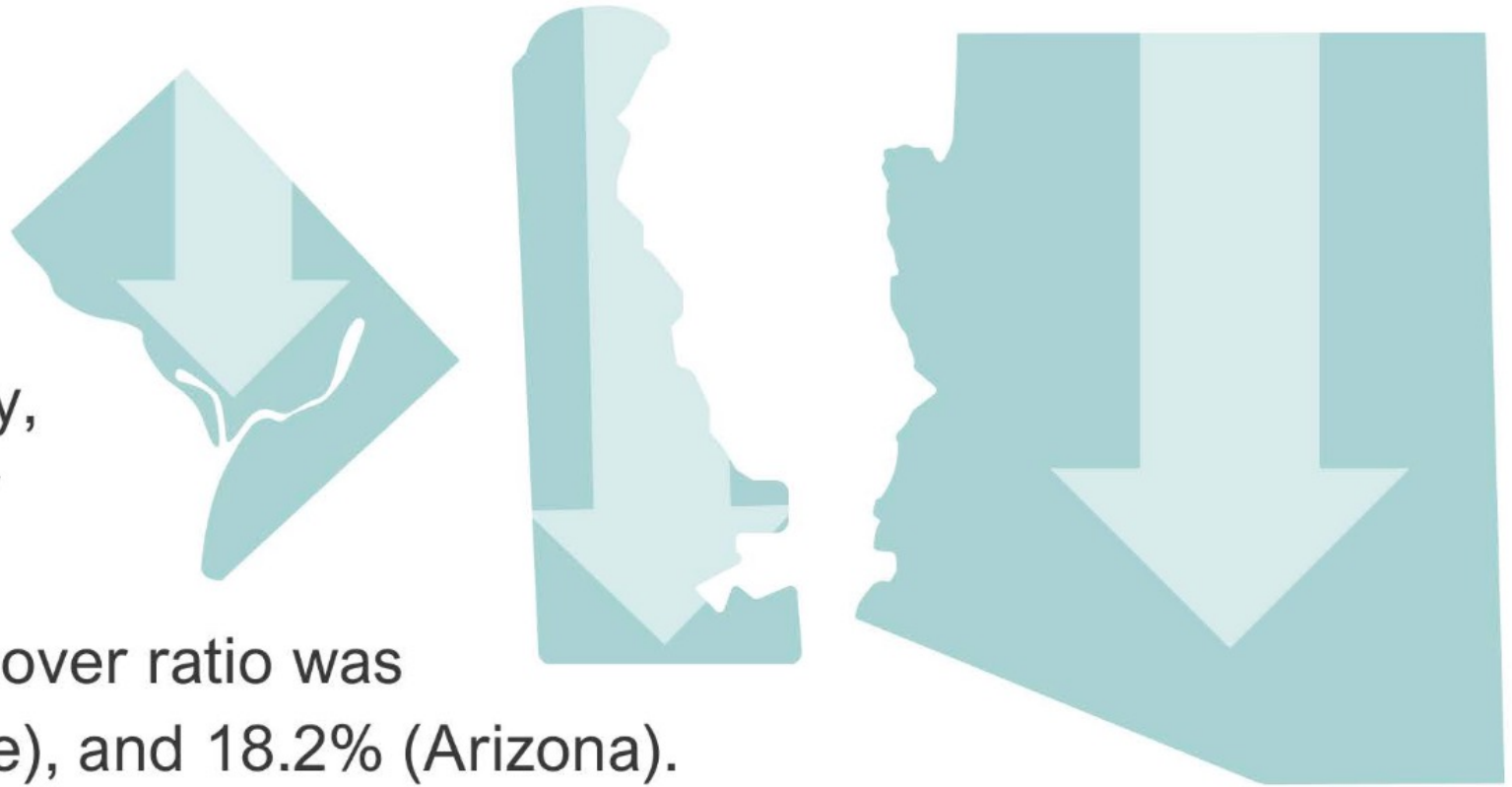
Part-Time – 21.4%

# A National Snapshot of DSP Turnover

## TURNOVER

**Across states, the average turnover ratio was 40.9%.**

Among the 24 states that participated in the 2021 survey, 22 saw a decrease in turnover ratio. In states with the largest decreases from 2021, the turnover ratio was 25.3% (D.C.), 24.6% (Delaware), and 18.2% (Arizona).



Illinois - 37.6%

# A National Snapshot of DSP Wages

## WAGES

**\$14.50**

2021 median  
hourly wage



**\$15.98**

2022 median  
hourly wage

All 24 states that conducted the  
survey in 2021 had an increase  
in median hourly wage in 2022.

*5 states* reported a median hourly wage that is at or above livable wages for 1 adult. However, **many DSPs are caregivers at home too**—and no states reported median hourly wages at or above livable wage for 1 adult and 1 child.

## Illinois

State Minimum Wage  
**\$12.00**

2021 Average Wage - \$15.40

2022 Average Wage - \$16.24



# **CRISIS IN THE DISABILITY FIELD:**

**ESSENTIAL WORKERS  
FACE FOOD AND  
HOUSING INSECURITY**



# Some Important Findings



**There is a “Satisfaction Gap” amongst DSPs — 85% of those surveyed report being satisfied with their work, but only one in four are satisfied with their pay.**

This “Satisfaction Gap” drives turnover amongst current DSPs and deters those looking to enter the field.



**Pay is critical: the nearly universal sentiment from the 4,497 respondents is that the pay is too low for workers to maintain even a minimally decent standard of living.**

Nearly one in three DSPs surveyed reported they often struggle to meet their household’s financial demands.

# Some Important Findings



## **Half of DSPs experience food insecurity. Half experience housing insecurity.**

Half of all DSPs surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity: they lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Half of all DSPs surveyed also reported lacking stable housing or experiencing significant problems related to housing. **The study found that women of color are the demographic most affected by food insecurity and men of color are most affected by housing insecurity.**



## **Low pay disproportionately affects women and people of color.**

Efforts to combat the DSP workforce crisis must also recognize this is a workforce of predominately women, particularly women of color. Gender inequities and racial disparities are present in individual earnings and household income.

- Men (85%) are more likely than women (76%) to live in households with a spouse or partner who is earning income
- Almost 3-in-4 women of color and over half of white women live in households with income below \$60,000
- Men are almost twice as likely as women to live in households with income above \$125,000

# Some Important Findings



## **Low pay and long hours make work-life balance ‘impossible’ and eventually lead to burnout.**

Low pay and understaffing cause DSPs to work long hours or multiple jobs, causing distress and burnout that creates further problems for retention in a field already experiencing a workforce shortage.



## **DSPs are trained, essential workers, yet they are compensated at a minimum wage level.**

44% of the DSPs surveyed have a college degree, yet 80% make less than \$20 an hour. This reflects a stark imbalance between skills/training and compensation. Apart from postgraduate degrees, survey respondents have higher educational attainment than the population of NYS, aged 25 years and above.<sup>1</sup>





# What DSPs Are Telling Us



**“ My children and husband always ate without worry.  
I never let them know we didn’t have enough for me to eat. ”**

**QUOTE FROM DSP SURVEY RESPONDENT**

**“ Pay is not enough. Pay is not enough. Pay is not enough. People like their jobs  
but literally can’t afford to stay at them because the PAY IS NOT ENOUGH. ”**

**QUOTE FROM DSP SURVEY RESPONDENT**

*Occupation*

**VS**

*Profession*

# The 5 Common Elements of any Profession



Learn



Demonstrate

Earn \$\$\$



BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

A Dynamic Body of Knowledge



Validated Competency Areas  
(Skills)



Adopted Set of Professional Values  
(Code of Ethics)



Universally Recognized & Portable  
Certifications (**BADGES**)



Affiliation with Professional  
Organization

Career Ladders Keep People in a Job – Not Promote Them Into Another One



The image features two interlocking gears. The gear on the left is light gray and has the word "culture" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The gear on the right is yellow and has the word "workplace" written on it in the same font. The gears are set against a dark gray background. The text is positioned along the curve of the gears, following their rotation.

workplace

culture



# Workplace Culture and DSPs



“

Corporate culture matters.  
How management chooses to  
treat its people impacts everything for  
better or for worse.”

-Simon Sinek

# The Language We Use Is Part of Our Culture: "Community"



# Workplace Culture & Your Organizational Chart

Develop a workplace culture where direct support is no longer seen as an entry-level job, but as a valued and critical job in the organization.

One in which they are regularly recognized for their work and given opportunities to help lead the organization by participating at all levels of decision making.





# Workplace Culture: Mentoring

Mentorship is the influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor. A mentor is someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person. In an organizational setting, a mentor influences the personal and professional growth of a mentee.

Does your organization nurture mentor relationships that promote professional growth?





# Workplace Culture: Involving DSPs

Does your organization promote a more global world-view of direct support?

*Do DSP's see the big picture?*



# Workplace Culture: How Does It Feel to Work Here?



Do You Celebrate  
Do You Share  
Do You Recognize  
Do You Support  
Do You Reflect  
Do You Laugh

Do You Listen  
Do You Empower  
Do You Discover  
Do You Argue (respectfully)  
Do You Hug it Out – Or High-Five

RECRUITMENT

# Recruitment – Let's Adopt A Common Job Title

~~Residence Counselor~~

~~Program Instructor~~

~~Community Bridge Builder~~

~~Disability Aide~~

~~Community Change Agent~~

~~Disability Support Counselor~~

~~Community Connector~~

~~Individual Support Specialist~~



**Direct Support Professional**

The diagram features a central bold text 'Direct Support Professional'. To its left, a vertical list of eight job titles is shown, each with a horizontal line through it. Two arrows originate from this list: one from 'Program Instructor' pointing down and to the right towards the central text, and another from 'Community Connector' pointing up and to the right towards the same central text.



# One Title – Many Settings & Specialty Areas

## **Registered Nurses**

Hospitals  
Doctor's Offices  
Community Mental Health  
Public Schools  
I/DD Agencies  
Nursing Homes  
Hospice Care

## **Direct Support Professional**

Group Homes/Congregate Living  
Day Habilitation Settings  
Employment Services  
Respite Services  
Self-Direction  
Supported Living Settings  
Institutional Settings

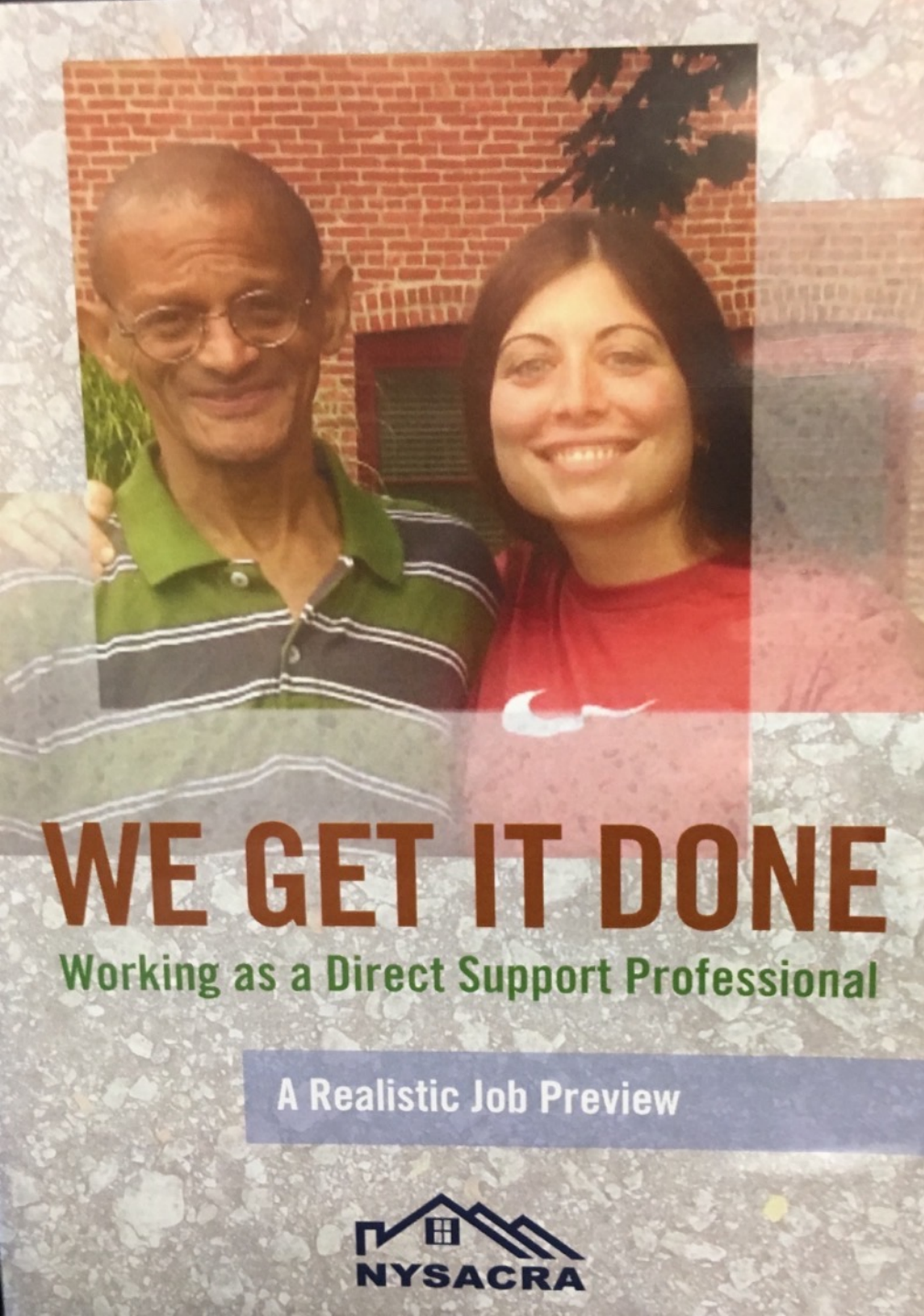
# Recruitment – Let's Adopt A Common Definition

**Direct support professionals (DSPs)** assist people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in realizing their full potential and becoming valued and participating members of their communities. Their work is complex and goes well beyond caregiving, requiring skills including independent problem solving, decision making, behavioral assessment and prevention, medication administration, health and allied health treatment, teaching new skills, crisis prevention and intervention and more. The job duties of a DSP may resemble those of teachers, nurses, social workers, counselors, physical or occupational therapists, dietitians, chauffeurs, personal trainers, and others. Their work requires strong communication skills and the ability to build relationships with the people they support and their families. DSPs may work in family or individual homes, intermediate care facilities, residential group homes, community job sites, vocational and day programs, and other locations. Their work is determined by the unique needs and preferences of the individuals they support and they are held to high ethical and professional standards.

# Recruitment & Selection: RJP

**Use Realistic Job Previews (RJP) that adequately addresses the rewards and challenges of the work:**

- Research shows that realistic job previews are a highly useful tool to recruit prospective employees for challenging and misunderstood jobs.
- Pausing to ask the prospective employee meaningful questions derived from the RJP.
  - What appealed to you the most about what you saw?
  - What concerned you the most?
  - How do you feel about providing intimate personal supports?
  - What did you think about the part where they discussed challenging behaviors?
  - What other things about what you saw didn't you know about this work?





# Recruitment & Selection: Caregiver or Change Agent?

**Give prospective direct support professionals  
information on the historical nature of our work**



- A DSP's responsibility to uphold and promote the civil & human rights for people with disabilities.
- A DSP's responsibility to underscore the significance of life in and of the community.
- Assist people to access opportunities and resources of the community that are available to everyone.
- Facilitate the expression and understanding of one's rights and responsibilities.
- Understand guardianship or other legal representation and work in partnership with legal representatives to assure that the person's preferences and interests are honored.

# All Prospective DSPs Should Know...



**Throughout history, people with physical and intellectual disabilities have been:**

- abandoned at birth
- banished from society
- used as court jesters
- drowned and burned during the Inquisition
- gassed in Nazi Germany
- and still continue to be segregated
- institutionalized
- tortured in the name of behaviour management
- abused
- raped
- euthanized
- and murdered.

*A Credo for Support*

*1995 © Norman Kunc and Emma Van der Klift*

# Recruitment & Selection: Job Matching



## Job-Matching

**Adequately match a prospective employee's interests, personality and strengths with those who will be receiving support**

- Use what we've learned about the prospective employee from our realistic job preview discussion.
- The human resources employee, or whomever is responsible for job placement must know the people who receive support; their interests, personalities and what works best for them.
- The human resources employee, or whomever is responsible for job placement must also have a deep understanding of the direct support duties.
- Bad job matching leads to early turnover
- Good matches may lead to ongoing relationships after a DSP leaves their job – the only good turnover that exists.



# Recruitment & Selection: Lived Experience

**Include the people who will be receiving support in the interview and hiring process**



- This is not a new idea and when done right, has proven to be highly effective
- Often easier said than done
- The person should be a full member of the hiring team
- The person must have an understanding of the big picture and a basic understanding of the legalities of the hiring process.
- Best used in a group interview process.
- A great paid employment opportunity for people with disabilities!



**TRAINING &  
DEVELOPMENT**

# On-Boarding & Professional Development: Your Trainers

**Conduct dynamic trainings that stimulate adult learners to engage, provoke and pursue critical discussion.**

- Whomever is engaged to lead orientation training for your organization is key to employee retention:
  - Often gives the new employee his/her first impression of the organization's workplace culture.
  - Able to give management objective information on the new employee's interpersonal skills, ability to develop professional relationships, learning & communication styles.
  - Should have the authority to remove an employee from the training room and make recommendations for dismissal from employment.
  - Use adult learning modalities; group activities, role play scenarios, facilitated critical discussion groups.
  - Limit the read & signs, policy manual readings and lectures



# On-Boarding & Professional Development

## State Requirement Training vs. Competency-Based, Values-Based, Foundational Professional Development

- State requirements for training vary greatly
- Most states require training related to health and safety such as first aid, CPR, bloodborne pathogens, corporate compliance and HIPPA.
- No state, has training requirements that cover all the skill areas outlined in the NADSP Competency Areas or the Code of Ethics.
- Of the states that do require training or certification, few require workers to demonstrate competence in these skills.
- The bar is set very low.





# On-Boarding & Professional Development: Networking

**Provide access for direct support professionals to engage with their colleagues via professional conferences**

**Annual Conference  
2023**



**Pittsburgh • Pennsylvania**

**NADSP**

**Annual Conference Attendee**

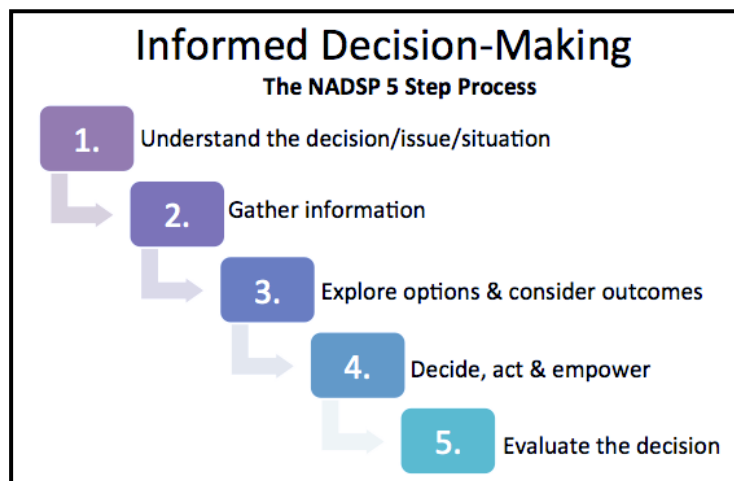
- Few direct support professionals are given the opportunity to attend professional conferences – especially more than one-day.
- Professional conferences allow direct support professionals the opportunity to build a community of practice, share best practices and have fun.
- It demonstrates to the direct support professional that they are valued, respected and the return on the investment is significant.
- They should not be required to write a report about what they learned.
- Obviously, subject to COVID-19 restrictions!

# On-Boarding & Professional Development: The Foundation



Use the NADSP Tools that are available to enhance professional development

- Use vetted and accredited training curriculum.
- Incorporate the Code of Ethics into daily practice and encourage direct support professionals to reflect on ethical dilemmas.
- Base job descriptions and performance reviews on validated competency areas, skill standards and ethical behavior.
- Help direct support professionals understand the importance of Informed Decision Making (IDM) and helping people make their own decisions.





**CAREER PATH**

Create Standardized Career Ladders & Career Lattices

# Create Standardized Career Pathways, Ladders & Career Lattices

- That are embraced and funded by state and federal government.
- That keep direct support professionals in the jobs that in which they excel and earn higher wages as they demonstrate higher skills.
- To rely less on busy and overworked supervisors.
- To promote lifelong learning and professional development.
- To reduce turnover and improve job satisfaction.
- To improve personal outcomes for people we support.
- Enable employers like Heritage Christian Services to hire with confidence.



# Standardized Career Ladders & Career Lattices: The E-Badge Academy

The NADSP E-Badge Academy offers Direct Support Professionals the ability to earn electronic badges to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and values on the job.

These electronic badges recognize and celebrate the professional development that might otherwise go unacknowledged.

Human service organizations can establish administrative accounts, while users can upload testimonials of their accomplishments for review by NADSP, and then share the resulting E-Badges with others.





# E-BADGE ACADEMY IMPACT

The E-Badge Academy (EBA) is a credentialing program using stacked, digital badges that lead to three tiers of DSP certification. and FLS certification.  
The EBA was launched in January 2019

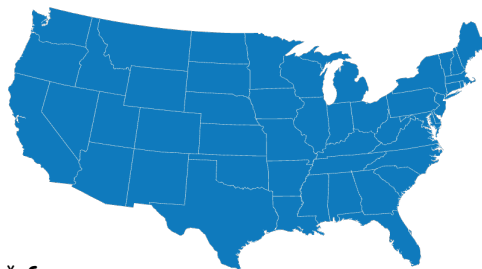


## Participating Organizations

2019 - 2024

188

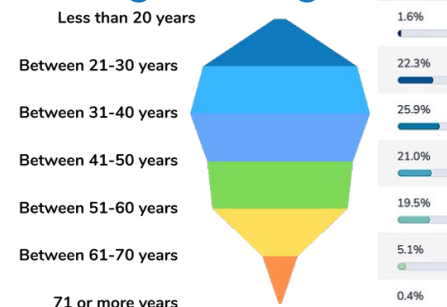
Active organizations\* from  
29 different states + 1 Canadian province



10,000

Approximate unique users

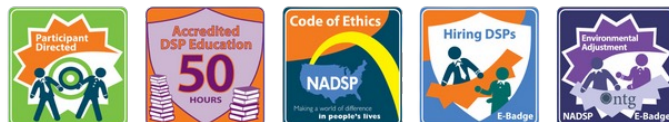
## Average User Age



## Badges Reviewed

2019 - 2024

118,785



69%

E-Badge approval rate

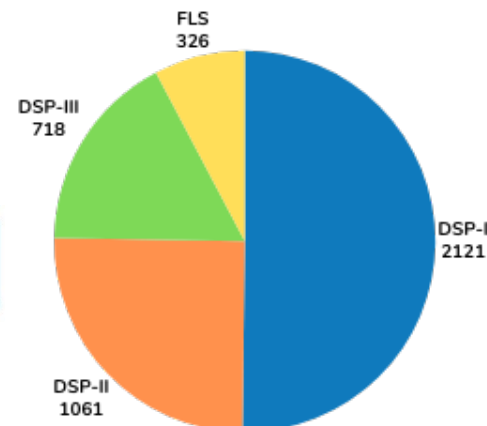
- Received 118,785 submissions
- Denied 36,259 submissions (30.8%)
- Approved 81,588 submissions (69.2%)

## Impact of Credentialing

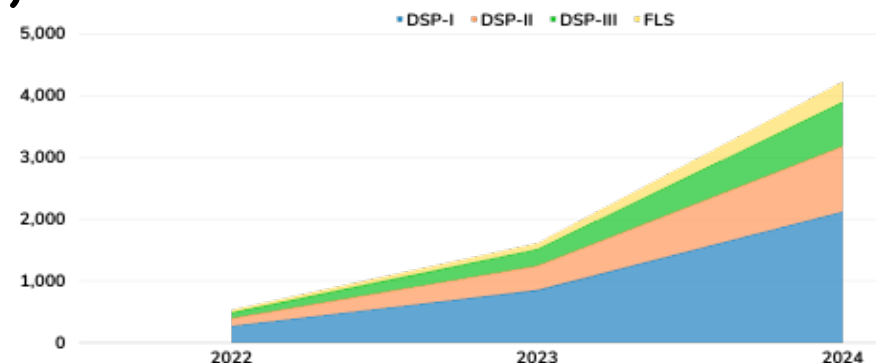
“Credentialing the direct support workforce is a meaningful, significant step in professionalizing this workforce of 1.3 million and growing [...] it is projected that introducing a credential at a local, state or national level can have significant reductions in administrative costs associated with recruiting, hiring and training new workers, but also have real impacts on providing better supports to people with I/DD who utilize services.”

## Certifications Awarded

Since Launch



4,226 Total Certifications





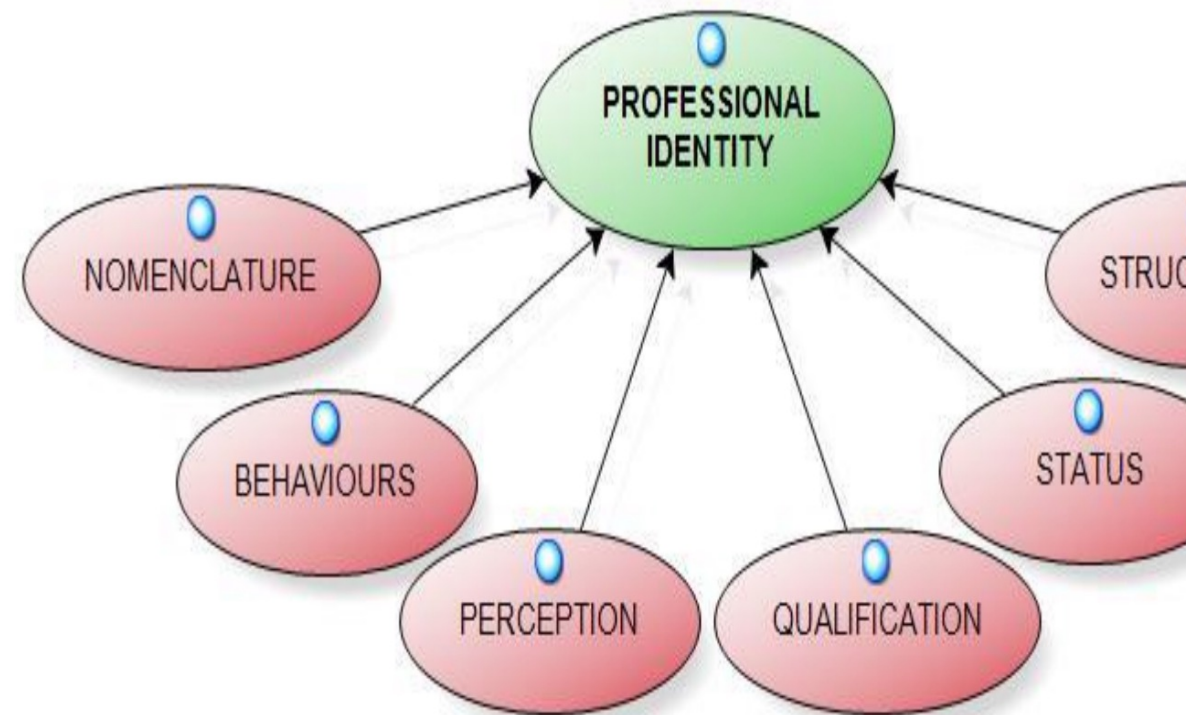
We Must Focus Our Attention to  
Long-Term Solutions that Leads to Systemic Change

# Securing a Professional Identity with a Standard Occupational Code

If direct support workforce issues are the highest priority for I/DD service providers (and those who rely on them)...

Then establishing a standard occupational code within the US Bureau of Labor Statistics is the highest priority for the direct support workforce.

Nothing we do is as important as this...





# Securing a Professional Identity with a Standard Occupational Code

The 2018 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is used by Federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data.

All workers are classified into one of 840 detailed occupations according to their occupational definition. To facilitate classification, detailed occupations are combined to form 461 broad occupations, 97 minor groups, and 23 major groups.



# All "Direct Care" Jobs Are Not the Same!

NADSP Competencies	DSP	NA	HHA	PCA	LPN
Participant Empowerment	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assessment	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓
Community and Service Networking	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facilitation of Services	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐
Community Living Skills and Supports	✓	✓	✓	☐	☐
Education, Training and Self-Development	✓	✓	☐	☐	✓
Advocacy	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocational, Educational and Career Support	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Crisis Prevention and Intervention	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐
Organizational Participation	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Documentation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Building and Maintaining Friendships and Relationships	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provide Person-Centered Support	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supporting Health and Wellness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Making a world of difference  
**in people's lives**



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