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# OHIO PATHS INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

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## Draft

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## I. Project Context:

### Overview

The Ohio PATHS Project is a participatory research and demonstration project initiated in the Fall of 2001 that has designed and tested the specifications of a high quality, voluntary credentialing and training program for direct support professionals serving individuals receiving home and community based supports (HCBS) through waiver funding in the state of Ohio. At the present time (February 2004), the PATHS professional certificate is offered through educational consortia of human service employers established in three regions of the state, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Toledo. Representatives of these regional PATHS Councils participate in a statewide council to oversee quality, sustain the program and share curriculum and resources. The first cohort of PATHS certificate candidates has been awarded the Certificate of Initial Proficiency in Direct Support Practice in January of 2004. Another cohort is currently enrolled in a second round of the PATHS Certificate of Initial Proficiency in Direct Support (CIP) program in each of the three regions. Planning is underway to initiate the PATHS Certificate of Advanced Proficiency (CAP) in all three regions in September of 2004.

The purpose of the project is to strengthen the direct support workforce in Ohio and improve the quality of support they offer to people with developmental disabilities. Corollary goals include building career PATHS, improving public perceptions of the human service field and enhancing the direct support occupational image and profile, enhancing the commitment of incumbent workers to the field and their jobs. These factors are linked with improving recruitment potential and longevity in the critical frontline human services direct support workforce. The project is organized to achieve these goals through the creation and implementation of an employee based skills credential program that offers several award levels linking skill acquisition to pay increases.

The successful implementation of a credentialing framework has the potential to provide significant benefits to the direct service occupational image by offering a professional status anchored in solid and challenging sets of skill, knowledge and ethics that provide the basis for the program of instruction. One important goal of the PATHS effort is to increase the status and visibility of the direct support occupation throughout the state and to enhance the industry image as a whole, making it more likely for people to choose careers in human services.

The PATHS effort is intended to improve the lives of people who rely on direct support for daily needs by improving the skills, continuity and availability of skilled staff to meet their needs. With turnover rates in direct service averaging about from 50-75% nationally, the quality and continuity of support for people with disabilities is seriously compromised. In Ohio, over 12,000 people with developmental disabilities currently receive services and over 6,500 people are on waiting lists for residential services. This vast number of vulnerable citizens relies on a house of cards – the highly unstable direct support workforce for activities that dramatically affect the quality of their life on a daily basis in the areas of health, recreation, safety, employment, social affiliation, life skills, and housing. The PATHS effort is an attempt to replace the “house of cards” with a more stable foundation that is built upon investments in the professional skill development and career development of the approximately 16,800 direct support practitioners in Ohio

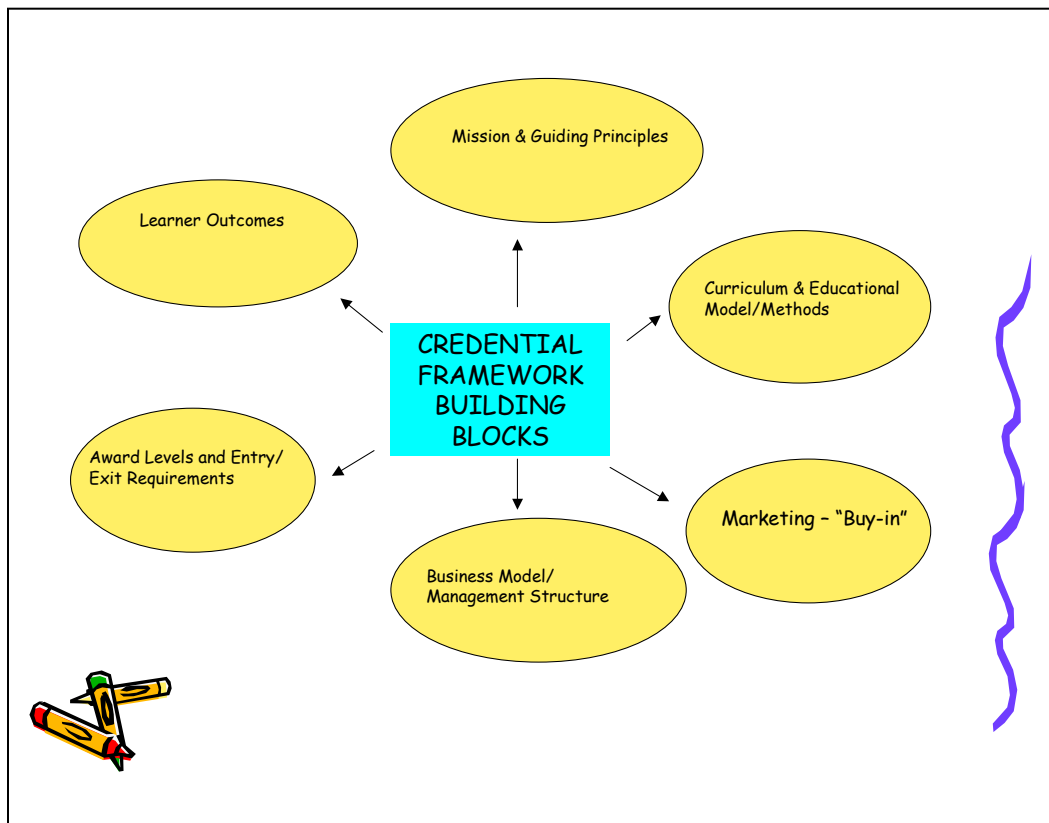
## **Project Partners**

The PATHS goals are addressed within the context of a workforce development partnership that was rooted in the direct support workforce advocacy of the Ohio Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. This group united with developmental disabilities service providers within the Ohio Provider Resource Association with the financial support of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council to undertake this multi-year systems change effort. Additional support has been provided by the US Department of Labor and the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council. The project has also partnered with the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, several county boards, people with disabilities, their families and many other advocates, policy makers and program administrators throughout the state. The primary educational consultant and evaluator for this work is the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) of Cambridge, MA. The PATHS Project sees the expansion and development of this stakeholder body as critical to long term success.

## **Project Description**

The design phase of the PATHS Project was initiated in the Fall of 2001. A stakeholder body consisting of providers, direct support practitioners, educators, advocates, consumers, policy makers and family members was convened to work with educational consultant, Human Services Research Institute, to design a program of education for direct support staff culminating in one or more certificate awards. The stakeholder group met monthly in 2 day workshops for six months shaping the framework in an iterative fashion. The key components of the framework are illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1  
PATHS SKILLS CERTIFICATE PROGRAM COMPONENTS**



Using models provided by the educational consultant, and organized into separate committees working concurrently, the stakeholder group moved swiftly to provide sufficient detail within each component group to provide guidance to pilots. The complete detail of this framework was documented to provide guidance over time (PATHS Framework Report, 2002). A key decision of this group was to focus on competency based performance outcomes for the program, called “Learner Outcomes,” and to permit pilots and other end users to achieve these outcomes in a flexible manner without specifying a particular curriculum to follow. Using this approach, each site preparing candidates for the PATHS certificate is permitted to select or design the curriculum for their region that would facilitate mastery of the required learner outcomes. This is an approach used frequently in the educational reform movement to identify desirable

educational, or in this case, practice standards to which schools are accountable without limiting the creativity of educators in achieving the desired goals.

To assure legally defensible and highly relevant performance criteria, the stakeholder body identified outcomes which were normed for the entry and mid levels of the direct support occupation and nationally validated. These include the Community Support Skill Standards (Taylor, Bradley and Warren, 1996) The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics (NADSP, 2000) and the Minnesota Frontline Supervisor Competencies (Hewitt, 1998).

At the conclusion of the planning phase the project team solicited applications from the stakeholder body to serve as pilot sites and potential applicants were encouraged to apply as consortia of employers and other stakeholders who could effectively organized a demonstration and, ideally, form the basis for a cohesive regional council to guide and sustain the program at the local level to ensure scalability beyond the project borders.

Three applicant consortia were selected as demonstration sites and these are located in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Toledo. The Cincinnati consortia, The Academy, existed as an employer led educational consortia prior to the PATHS activity, the Cleveland and Toledo consortia were formed for the purpose of launching the PATHS pilots in their respective regions.

Once consortia were organized and selected each group worked separately for six months selecting, or developing curricula that would prepare candidates to master the performance outcomes. Their tasks involved organizing instructors, rooms and schedules, recruiting candidates and skills mentors, and preparing materials necessary for the course of instruction. The team leaders of each group would meet periodically to obtain technical assistance, report progress and solve problems.

Each consortium launched a program in January of 2003 with the goal of awarding the PATHS Certificate of Initial Proficiency to successful completers. Graduates of these first cohorts received their CIP in the late fall of 2003, and all sites initiated a second cycle of CIP classes in January of 2004. These evaluation results cover the project activities until the end of 2003 including the completion of the first cycle of CIP training.

Additionally, pilot sites initiated planning and development for the Certificate of Advanced Proficiency in July of 2003. An agreement was made among the pilot leaders to work collaboratively to meet the daunting challenge of preparing or identifying curricula for the CAP level.

## **II. Evaluation Approach**

### **Evaluation Model**

This document reports evaluation findings available at the end of the second year of this multi-year project. The conceptual framework for this evaluation effort uses a mixed approach that draws from the approaches of “logic modeling” (Chen, 1989, Fitz-gibbon et al., 1996) as well as “empowerment evaluation” whose aim is to empower stakeholders through evaluation activities.

“Empowerment” approaches seek to involve stakeholders in defining the terms of evaluation and participating in its methods and findings to assure that the program community grows confident in key evaluation practices. These practices include the identification of goals and the examination of progress toward those goals in a self-determining manner. (Christie, 2003).

Theory based evaluation (logic modeling) is emerging as an evaluation construct that offers advantages to traditional methods when seeking to understand complex social phenomena affecting broader systems. It is used to understand the ecology of the project environment, to establish the hypotheses that provide the rationale for the project’s interventions, to contribute to early and mid-course correction when the proposed or active project activities are inconsistent with foundation assumptions or are unlikely to yield desired outcomes. Finally, it provides a useful tool to guide the development of measures used to investigate the findings with respect to the projected and actual impact of project activities at the interim and final points of a project. The key elements to this approach include:

- ✓ Observing the environmental context of the project to identify the problems or issues the project addresses and mark factors that facilitate or detract from project efforts.
- ✓ Documenting the interventions that the project will undertake to address problems or issues
- ✓ Projecting the outcomes that are predicted as a result of the projects interventions, and,
- ✓ Testing the model by developing, and implementing the measures that provide a window through which one can observe the outcomes and determine if they match are consistent with predicted outcomes.

## **Establishing the Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of the PATHS project was established through discussions with the project stakeholder group. Assumptions and theories articulated within the initial project proposal were reviewed, revised and endorsed in a series of intensive two-day workshops with the stakeholder group. These were captured in the form of a project mission and guiding principles and documented in the PATHS Framework Report. The Framework Report was assembled in an iterative fashion to document the characteristics of the project model as it evolved to assure fidelity to the original design over time in the implementation stages of the project. Project strategies and timelines were mapped onto a “Gameplan” template which was regularly updated and revisited by the stakeholder group. It also appears in the Framework document.

The tables below provide a comprehensive overview of the theories that underpin the PATHS program, the predicted outcomes of the proposed project interventions and the interventions that were proposed and employed. These models will be used to frame and organize the substantial amount of data that has emerged to date from evaluation activities and to use original expectations as one benchmark of project impact. The foundation theory, interventions and outcomes are clustered in three thematically related clusters to facilitate understanding: These include the:

- Professional Development Cluster
- Shared Leadership Cluster
- Quality Cluster

**Table 1  
Professional Development Cluster**

	<b>Professional Development Cluster</b>	
<b>Program Logic Foundation</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Projected outcomes</b>
Clear and visible career PATHS provide role and industry visibility to new workers and strengthen commitment of employees by adding value and meaning	Design and implement a series of integrated profession skills certificates that offer a professional focus and a scaffold for professional development for direct support practitioners	Creation of DSP career PATHS that attract others to the field and improve the commitment of incumbent DSPs to learning and human service careers
Viewing the role as a profession is appropriate given its complexity and will enhance the image of the role and industry within our culture	Define the training occupation in a professional manner and carry this through in all program approaches and interactions	Enhanced image and status for direct support occupation and those doing the work.
Presence of a high quality professional certificate will draw in partners who value a skilled workforce and draw positive attention to the industry	Invite other partners to the table through specific outreach to essential champions and put energy into marketing, image and dissemination	Enhanced profile and image of the occupation and industry within the economic-employment and educational policy stakeholder communities in Ohio
Communities of learning and practice construct a powerful and enlightened vision that improves training	Convene representative stakeholder groups and move forward with participatory planning and consensus building meeting structures	Emergence of training consortia offering improved employee development programs and using resources more effectively
Skill improvement contributes to work value	Provide models to participants regarding incentive, bonus and wage structures building from skill development	Improved income and benefits

**Table 2**  
**Shared Leadership Cluster**

<b>Shared Leadership Cluster</b>		
<b>Program Logic Foundation</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Projected outcomes</b>
Joint planning using facilitation structure designed to share power and build consensus results in a better product	Convene a stakeholder group drawn from different backgrounds with interest in project goals. Use empowering group facilitation structures (Technologies of Participation) and Group Graphics	Development of a robust and comprehensive certification plan
Informed and structured planning cultivates a community with the knowledge and commitment to do difficult things well	Bring expert models, time frames and support tools to the table to build partner knowledge and to inform key decisions	Sufficient commitment, knowledge and energy to launch and sustain solid pilots in several regions of Ohio
Stakeholder participation will improve acceptance and relevance of plans.	Assure presence of key people who have a stake in DSP certification	Creation of a certification structure that is relevant, valid and workable for the industry and for Ohio
Committed, knowledgeable leaders will succeed in activating others to participate in their vision	Recruit and cultivate people who show strong interest and provide support and tools for sharing the consensus vision with others	Expansion of a community of learning, practice, and leadership around professional DSP skills certificate that will sustain itself beyond the initial planning & pilot phase without significant technical assistance
Partners in labor are essential to systems change on workforce issues	Invite participation of federal and state labor officials with specific responsibility for apprenticeship	Presence of non-traditional partners that expand potential of workforce development in the DD service world
Stakeholders must include and elevate the voice of less empowered partners directly affected by the activities	Invite and support DSPs, family members and self advocates in the planning process	Empowered DSPs in council positions

**Table 3  
Quality Cluster**

<b>Quality Cluster</b>		
<b>Program Logic</b>	<b>Interventions</b>	<b>Projected Outcomes</b>
People trained in well designed, competency based educational conditions drawing from valid and contemporary practice guidelines will provide improved support	Require that the educational methods follow best practices in adult education, are competency based and content is drawn from expert level practice guidelines	Acquisition and transfer of desired skills/knowledge to work environment & therefore improving quality)
Education programs should strive for satisfaction to improve motivation and outcomes	Assure appropriate levels of challenge, comfort and support of learners throughout the process	Satisfactory learning experience for candidates
Program and curriculum frameworks will facilitate comparability across regions	Build an outcomes based framework to assure similar outcomes	Comparable levels of quality and program results across the state
Use of nationally validated content will provide an important benchmark	Use valid national criteria for training content and performance standards	Comparability of quality and results at a national level
An outcome based framework will drive higher quality employee development programs	Incorporate program guidelines that are rooted in quality educational practice in the framework	Improved capacity of participating organizations to provide high quality training
Use of validated content meets legal standards	Rely on practice guidelines that meet legal standards for occupational relevance (validity)	A program that is legally defensible in the area of employment law.
Direct Support is a complex role and people should be held accountable through assessments that can observe that complexity	Use performance based assessment approaches such as portfolio, criterion referenced self assessment etc.	Performance evaluation processes that honor the complexity of direct support practice and build knowledge of learners and evaluators

## **Evaluation Methods**

Once the project's theoretical foundation, goals, predicted outcomes, and strategies were in place and prior to the launch of pilots, the stakeholder group reached consensus on the kinds of information and data that would be relevant to determining project progress and impact. Using this information, the educational consultant developed an evaluation plan and instruments. The plan involves the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Qualitative data inquiry consisted of: day long observations of program classes occurring at the mid point of each region's PATHS CIP program cycle, interviews with candidates during the class observation day, interviews with local pilot leaders following the day of observation, and a review of curriculum plans.

Discussions with pilot leaders fulfilled a twofold purpose. First, they provided a source of information regarding the impressions and experiences of the regional leaders, and secondly, they provided an opportunity for the evaluator to provide formative feedback to regional councils based on the previous day's field observations and field interviews. Additional qualitative data was gathered through ongoing conversations at statewide Council meetings and through the commentary of a panel of candidates who were videotaped at a conference providing an overview of their experience in the PATHS program.

Statistical information was gathered using several survey instruments developed for gathering information from program candidates and local project leaders. The "PATHS Candidate Surveys" had two forms. The Time One PATHS Candidate Survey was administered early in the PATHS training process and the Time Two PATHS Candidate Survey was completed at the end of the educational period. A skills based self evaluation tool was developed to gather candidate's self perceptions of skill growth over time and was administered at the beginning and again at the completion of the training program. Additionally agencies participating in the consortium were asked to track staff turnover information using a specific formula for that purpose. A "Six Month Follow-Up Candidate Reaction Survey" was used to measure impact 6 months after the last class – these data will be included in the next report. In the second cycle of the CIP evaluation, a scale will be added to the PATHS Candidate Time 2 survey to measure learners' opinions about the structure, design and execution of the program as well as their perceptions of their mastery of program content and the likelihood of using program content on the job. This scale and the 6 month follow up survey are tied to national data bases normed for employer based training enabling PATHS efficacy to be compared to other employer based training programs.

## **III. Pilot Characteristics**

### ***Capacity***

The overarching task of each demonstration site was to be ready to implement the PATHS Certificate of Initial Proficiency preparation program by January of 2003 and conduct a high quality pilot testing the framework components. This challenge involved identifying additional partners to participate at the local level, selecting or developing adequate curriculum, preparing

materials, organizing and training instructors, formulating schedules and locations and recruiting candidates and skills mentors who would provide individualized support and guidance to candidates throughout the experience.

Each site was required to align their pilot effort with the PATHS Framework that specifies the following components:

- Mission and Guiding Principles
- Learner Outcomes
- Assessment instruments and scoring rubrics
- Candidate Resource File Format and Forms
- Entry and Exit Requirements

While there were a number of common denominators across the three locations, each site organized their candidate preparation program in slightly different ways. The table below was organized to provide a window into some of the common factors across sites and a comparative overview of unique characteristics.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison of Pilot Site Characteristics**

Characteristics of Pilot Sites	So. West Ohio	Cleveland	Toledo
Agencies with candidates in pilot consortium	8	12	7
Used multiple instructors?	No	Yes	Yes
Rotated class locations among agencies	Yes	No	Yes
Used some self-directed learning formats?	Yes	No	No
Number of class sessions / hours in session	8 <sup>1</sup> /6	10/ 6	10/6
Interval between each class session	3 –4 wks	2 wks	2 wks
Number candidates starting/ completing	23/17	21/15 <sup>2</sup>	18/16
Attrition rate	23%	28%	11%
Candidates paid for training?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Candidates receive incentive for completion?	Yes	Yes	Yes
College credit offered?	No	No	No
Agencies registering apprentices	0	1	0

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<sup>1</sup> The Southwest group designed their curriculum to include 16 hours of computer based self-directed learning in addition to classroom hours.  
<sup>2</sup> One candidate moved, one dropped out, one on probation status

Characteristics of Pilot Sites	So. West Ohio	Cleveland	Toledo
Family advocates participating	2	0	0
Skills Mentors starting/ completing	16/16 <sup>3</sup>	17/17	10/10
County Boards Participating	2	0	0
Per candidate fees to agency for PATHS	500	200	400

### **Factors Favoring Pilot Implementation**

Planning the framework involved a great commitment of time and was difficult, sometimes tedious work. Despite these conditions the planning group sustained their commitment and vision devoting two days per month on a voluntary basis to complete the framework. After a six-month planning period, several members of the planning group were ready to test the credential framework plan in local regions. The members ready to move to the action phase were employer leaders who were major contributors to the framework discussions and endorsed the product. They believed strongly that quality support is inextricably linked to a strong direct support workforce and that career opportunities are critical to attracting and developing employees. These leaders were able to bring the framework product to their local regions and ignite the interest of other agency leaders who agreed to form educational consortia and apply to become PATHS demonstration sites. Planning efforts then shifted to the regional level where the Pilot leaders established themselves as a Regional PATHS Council and spent another six months of intensive planning and curriculum development to launch programs in 2003. The educational consultant supported this effort by providing curriculum resources, and necessary forms and handbooks to guide candidates and instructors. Each region received training in development and review of “Resource Files” and Portfolios which provided the primary evidence of candidate success.

The presence of the regional employer leaders is the most important of several factors facilitating the expeditious transition to the pilot stage.

In the Southwest region the presence of an existing training consortium, The Academy, facilitated the launch of the PATHS pilot. The PATHS program concept did attract some new

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the original 16 starters dropped out and were replaced by other candidates

members to the existing consortium. Implementation was also facilitated in this region by the availability of a trusted, experienced instructor who had worked with the Academy.

In the Cleveland area, the PATHS Council attributed their readiness to the groundwork previously established by in conducting a study on recruitment and retention. This study raised awareness within the Cleveland group that wage was not the only concern of direct support staff, they also wanted career opportunities. This group was also energized by joining with other agencies in a powerful and important vision. They pointed to the importance of separation of labor into functional committees and enhanced motivation knowing they were part of a statewide and national movement. The ability to work with other pilot sites to figure things out was also a facilitating factor for this region.

A motivating factor cited by the Toledo Council was the recognition that the challenge of developing a capable workforce is bigger than one agency could tackle, it affects everyone and thus require collaborative response. Another facilitating factor cited by the Toledo Council was their common commitment to producing a quality product; this jointly held vision served to eliminate any territorialism in the project.

Pilot readiness was also increased by the involvement of the Human Services Research Institute as a technical expert. HSRI was able to draw from a decade of tools and theories on methods of educating the direct support workforce and customize these for PATHS.

Another facilitating factor was the enthusiastic support and involvement of staff of the primary funder, the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, whose staff were active in the planning process and the support of the provider association, OPRA, which provided significant instrumental support through the project period.

## **Pilot Challenges**

It is important to consider the voluntary context of the individuals who have led the project forward through the planning and piloting phase. As volunteers, these leaders are not receiving any financial support to cover their contributions. Individuals are typically working in demanding executive roles and have taken on the PATHS activities in addition to their regular jobs. This has been a significant additional activity and all of the pilot leaders discussed the stress that juggling time and responsibility presents. This factor does present a threat to sustainability if it is not addressed. A variety of other limiting factors were noted by the pilot groups.

## **Building Curriculum**

Each pilot site was responsible for selecting or developing curricula, instructors, methods and educational environments that would achieve the “Learner Outcomes” designated in the framework. While this provided flexibility to permit consortia to continue using any existing curricula that aligned with the framework, it also presented a formidable challenge to the two new consortia (the Southwest Consortium, the Academy, existed before the pilot). The pilots chose to work individually within their regions on curriculum development. During this phase

the groups had access to technical support and consultation and were provided with a variety of curriculum materials to assist them. Interviews with regional councils revealed that while this was a difficult challenge, it also cultivated and deepened the partnership of the agencies involved who had to call upon the strengths of a cross agency team to achieve their goals. The newer consortia indicated that, at the end of the day, it was more important to have worked together to create the curriculum than to receive a pre-built curriculum. In planning for the next phase of piloting which will include curriculum preparation for the Paths Certificate of Advanced Proficiency, the three pilot regions have decided to work together to produce a common curriculum. This decision is emblematic of the quality and depth of the collaboration across the PATHS regions as well as evidence that each region has build the confidence and capability of creating high level curriculum products useful beyond their region.

### **Insufficient Financial Resources:**

In the first year of the demonstration (pilot) period there were insufficient financial resources to pay for the following supports determined to be necessary:

- Paid part time administrator each region
- Support for instructor costs
- Support for copying/ purchasing curriculum materials and supplies
- Stipends for skill mentors (responsibilities of mentoring were added to current jobs s were paid for time but not for mentoring)
- Meeting support – food
- Travel to conferences/ meetings
- Technical support – eg., computers, learning tools
- Possible costs of renting classroom/ training space
- Local marketing
- Support for curriculum development

These resources were supplied by the agencies participating in each consortium group stretching the resources and time of participating members. By the end of the first year, the project team was able to secure additional funds from the Ohio Apprenticeship Council that builds upon the start-up funds provided by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. These funds will significantly improve these conditions in the second year of piloting which will focus on building out the second level of the skills certificate framework, the PATHS Certificate of Advanced Proficiency.

## IV. Evaluation Results Across Content Clusters

### Findings in the Professional Development Cluster

#### Creation of Career PATHS

The PATHS skills certificate program design offers several levels of skills certificates to provide a scaffold for career paths. This is intended to enable employers to align job promotion and advancement levels using a skills framework rather than a seniority system of promotion. This approach has yielded some predicted outcomes (see Professional Development Cluster Table for predicted outcomes). In a survey of Regional Council members (pilot leaders) 20% of respondents reported that they have noticed organizational changes in the organization of work functions and work roles as a result of paths, 40% report changes in organizational practice and structure. Examples of these changes include:

- ✓ Candidates promoted to supervisory positions (one promotion noted to be result of increased confidence and new ideas gained through the PATHS experience). In one region about 50% of the graduates received promotions
- ✓ Clarification of staff roles
- ✓ More teamwork
- ✓ Revised duties
- ✓ Greater focus on mentor development
- ✓ Breaking down barriers between management and direct support
- ✓ Improved supervision skills due to increase in confidence and listening skills
- ✓ Interest among staff in pursuing the PATHS program to the next level
- ✓ Increase of supervisory staff
- ✓ Revision of performance evaluation process
- ✓ Integration of training and mentoring

The Administrator Survey probed the views of Regional Council members to determine if the vision of the pilot leaders is aligned with the program mission defined in the framework. 38% of respondents identified career development as a primary goal of the PATHS program, another 33% focused on professional development as a key outcome with the remainder noting the importance of certification and skill enhancement as the program mission. These responses indicate that the Regional Councils are focused on the most important outcomes of the program and aligned with the program mission.

In a survey of program candidates completed in the fourth quarter of their program, 31% report that their job role has changed (70% who had not yet experienced a change predicted a positive change would occur). For those whose jobs did change, 22% report they received a new job title and a pay raise, 56% received a one time financial bonus and 17% report changes in job duties.

Over 95% of those who received the CIP have expressed a desire to continue to the advanced level of the PATHS program (PATHS Certificate of Advanced Proficiency)

## Enhanced image and status for the direct support occupation and for direct support practitioners

A consistent theme throughout candidate interviews and discussions with pilot team leaders is that the PATHS program has been a powerfully transforming experience for participants. Candidates' survey responses indicate a modest (not statistically significant) upward trend in feeling recognized for good work and with employers seeking their input.

The Cleveland Council conducted a structured focus group with candidates following graduation where participants offered the following comments on whether PATHS changed their views of their career or professional identity, comments included:

- This is a professional job
- Greater confidence and knowledge
- Motivator to others in the field – I am encouraging others to get involved
- More outspoken
- More confidence to stick up for clients or report what's really going on
- Being there for the client – not just a paycheck

Interviews with candidates revealed a variety of perspectives that indicate the program is promoting an enhanced occupational image and status – candidates said:

I feel more appreciated, more important – people care besides the ones I support!

You get a sense of legitimacy to your work.

I know that I mean something – I'm part of something important – I add to everything.

It shows our agencies are invested in me as an employee.

I have strengthened commitment.

I'm going back to college and have my eye on my boss's job.

I have more confidence. It gives me a sense that it's more than just a job, it can be networking – greater engagement with community.

We are meeting new people seeing new agencies, we don't usually get to interact each other.

Not just sitting by ourselves... we share our unique experiences.

Videotapes of candidates who attended conferences to discuss the PATHS program provide a range of powerful evidence of positive professional transformation. One middle aged woman who joined the field recently described how before entering the PATHS program she had modeled the “custodial” form of service that had become the norm in the group home where she was assigned to work. The typical practice of direct contact staff was to do everything for service participants vs. teaching people life skills. With the knowledge and support of the PATHS classes, she was able to transform her practice completely to and was able to influence her peers on the job to follow her lead in teaching and supporting choice. The extent of her professional growth was driven home when she described her effort to research the medical history of an individual she supports to assist the planning team in determining whether it was advisable to wean her from seizure medications. The medical history revealed that this was tried in the past and provoked intense seizure activity. The Direct Support Professional was able to bring this information to the support team and lead others to a decision informed by this crucial history. In her presentation, this DSP attributed the confidence and skills necessary to provide this leadership to the PATHS educational experience.

Council leaders reported that the Portfolio assessment process played an important role in facilitating the professional identify of the candidates. They reported that early in the educational program, candidates had difficulty identifying the interventions they used to promote positive outcomes among service participants, instead focusing on what the consumer had “done” to achieve their goals. Working through the Portfolio enabled candidates to reflect on their contributions to consumer success and recognize more specifically how their skills and activities contribute directly to the outcomes consumers achieve.

A prominent theme in conversations with candidates during evaluation field visits was the growth in professional self-image that occurred as a direct result of meeting people in the PATHS classrooms who are doing the same work but in different settings. Candidates described identifying important similarities with other workers as well as learning a great deal due to the differences from agency to agency.

## **Enhanced Profile and Image of the Human Services Industry**

Early on in the planning process, the PATHS planning body recognized the value of reaching beyond the human service borders to forge partnerships with other key constituencies, especially the US Department of Labor and the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council (OSAC). These relationships were formed and achieved the predicted outcome of raising the profile of the

human services industry within the state. A direct result of these connections was the selection of the “direct support occupation” by the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council as one of only two occupations (aerospace technician is the other) that will be a major focus for the agency in coming years. OSAC provided a \$100,000 grant and additional support in developing marketing materials to the PATHS group to support the development of the advanced level of the Paths certificate. Representatives of the OSACS and US DOL have participated in planning activities, conferences and events associated with PATHS.

In the Cleveland area, the PATHS activity has attracted the attention of a regional Vocational-Technical Training institute, The Auburn Career Center. This secondary and post-secondary technical institute has initiated dialogue with the Cleveland area with the focus of replicating and expanding the PATHS program through center resources. A team met in May of 2004 to plan for this. This connection would create a bridge to important sources of potential employees within high schools and 1 Stop Career Centers. Additionally, this technical center is eager to craft articulations with degree programs with Kent State University and will provide greater access to the PATHS experience in Northeast Ohio.

The Toledo Regional Council has received inquiries about replicating PATHS from a community college and from a vocational-technical secondary school. The Council is pursuing these opportunities. The PATHS project has been recognized as a national model with promise for others as evidenced by invitations to present at national telephone conferences and industry conferences.

While much more work remains to be done, these examples provide substantial indications that PATHS is raising the profile of the human services industry throughout the state.

## **Emergence of Training Consortia**

Throughout the country, the human services business community has been limited in its efforts to collaborate around employee training resulting in weak training programs focused on minimal, regulatory requirements without benefit of updated educational methods. The Professional Development cluster logic model therefore suggests that another desirable outcome of PATHS is the establishment of communities of learning and practice within the field that provide an environment for learning about and implementing advancements in education and training. Mounting a successful professional skills certificate program engages planners and implementers in exploring and using innovations in curriculum development, adult learning, evaluation, mentoring and assessment. It was predicted that the establishment of the pilot activity would stimulate the development of regional groups who would, through their collaborative experience, learn more about implementing and sustaining high quality professional certification programs as well as achieving economies of scale, and efficiency of resources facilitating a program that would be beyond the scope of an individual agency to provide on their own

This outcome was achieved as the several members of the original cluster of stakeholders who convened to plan the framework differentiated into three regional groups who applied to become demonstration sites. A pre-requisite for approval of their application was the applicant group’s agreement to recruit and collaborate with other stakeholders within their region to mount a demonstration effort. These resulted in the emergence of grass roots effort in three regions to take the project to its next step. One downside to this phase was the inevitable refocusing of

project energy to the demonstration sites. Given the limited resources of the project, it was difficult to keep all the members of the state-wide planning group involved. State-wide meetings were continued but primarily focused on problem solving and planning activities to move the demonstrations forward.

The presence of groups in three regions of the state who have successfully executed the first phase of the pilot with high levels of learner and administrator satisfaction indicates that predicted outcome, the establishment of training consortia, with greater capacity to provide quality employee development programs is achieved. A total of 25 regional council leaders responded to the administrator survey (16 in Cleveland, 4 in Cincinnati and 5 in Toledo. 40% described PATHS as “very successful” with another 48% who see it as “somewhat successful” with many of these indicating that it’s still too early to properly judge the program’s potential. When discussing the strong points of the program a strong themes from the point of view of the regional leaders, were the quality of the curriculum, the collaboration among planners and candidates and the impact on the learners.

The regional pilot leaders have established themselves as Regional Councils as recommended in the program framework document. The Councils have adopted the role of building and managing the PATHS program over time and have done an extraordinary job considering the limitations on resources and time noted earlier. Another major challenge in this phase has been engaging local partners in active participation with the local council. All sites have struggled with this and affirm that they would work harder in future cycles to get all agencies sending candidates to take an active role in council activities because they have observed that the interest and involvement of employers improves candidate success.

The challenge articulated by these groups is the importance of sustaining the commitment of current members and expanding the membership of the consortia. The trend across all the regions is that a few original members of the consortia have dropped out but that others have joined.

In the coming year it is likely that an additional consortium will be developed in the Urbana region where plans are currently underway and in Lake County through the involvement of the Auburn Center. Several Columbus area stakeholders are interested in piloting PATHS and may choose to build the capacity for implementing a pilot by participating initially with the Urbana group.

Observations of state council discussions and discussions with regional councils shows a strong trend toward greater confidence and creativity of regional council members in developing and delivering high quality learning experiences to candidate. Every site also noted that the success of the regional collaborations have been a strong incentive to continue the PATHS activity. In two of the three areas, the collaboration provided the first joint, comprehensive training activity undertaken. Another indication of the growing strength and confidence of the regional councils was their agreement to work as a statewide group to develop curricula for the CAP level and their adoption of universal frameworks to assist this work. This level of collaboration and expertise did not exist at the beginning of the pilot phase.

## **Enhancement of Wages & Benefits**

All successfully completing candidates will receive a bonus that is supported through the fund raising of the statewide council. Additionally, many individual organizations within each consortia are offering wage incentives or bonuses to candidates. These results were reported at the beginning of this section.

## **Findings in the Shared Leadership Cluster**

### **A Robust Plan**

At the onset of the project a stakeholder group was assembled who agreed to engage in a participatory planning project to create a program and curriculum framework that would provide sufficient detail to launch the pilots. Agreements with the funders outlined an accelerated planning schedule over a 6 month period to produce the framework. Using structured consensus building strategies, nationally validated direct support occupational criteria and certification and educational models drawn from other industries, the planning group succeeded in meeting the goal through intensive work in monthly two day workshops led by the educational consultant, Human Services Research Institute.

The working plan was assembled and used in subsequent months to facilitate regional council development and to guide ongoing activities of the planning group which emerged as the Statewide Paths Council called for in the program framework.

The ability to translate the theoretical framework into successful pilot demonstrations provides evidence that the framework offered sufficient guidance and validity for effective program operations. Administrator survey comments reflected the general view that the pilot leaders feel that the framework covered the most important learner goals, and that information was organized and sufficient to translate into a positive learning experience. Other elements of the plan that were translated successfully into the programs included the methods of assessment, especially the portfolio process, the structure of regional and state councils, the guidelines around effective adult education methods which, based on class observations, with a few minor exceptions the pilots had effectively used in their classrooms.

### **Commitment to Pilot the Program Framework**

The intensive and fruitful planning process of the stakeholder group forged a deep commitment to the project mission among several stakeholders who applied to become demonstration sites. Fortunately the field of applicants provided a good distribution across the state focused on three urban centers, Toledo, Cincinnati and Cleveland. It is likely that the density of providers in these urban sites was a characteristic that facilitated the multi-agency collaborations which were a pre-requisite to qualifying as a pilot site and that ultimately contributed to the successful collaborations sponsoring pilot activities.

The progress and outcomes of the planning phase were sufficient to demonstrate to the primary funder, the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, that the project should be continued to the pilot phase.

## **Relevance of the PATHS Program Framework in Ohio**

The planning group framed the structure of the certificate to strike a balance between nationally validated content and what is necessary to be effective as direct contact staff in Ohio. Based on pilot performance their decisions have translated well to the needs of workers and employers in widely distributed regions in the state. The use of programmatic guidelines that were developed through a consensus process by the planners was a facilitating factor in creating a workable model for Ohio. The process of discussing and generating these guidelines provided the planners with a method for building a shared and accurate vision of key desirable characteristics of the program. Senge (1990) suggests that such accurate “mental models” of goals or products are one essential ingredient to deep change in systems.

The framework was designed to offer autonomy to local regions while also assuring allegiance to agreed upon outcomes. This freedom has enabled local councils to be creative and consistent with their needs and building upon relevant local curriculum and training capacity while remaining within the PATHS structure. The use of nationally validated skill, knowledge and ethical practice sets has provided the project with high quality benchmarks for employee performance that has resulted in a program with high levels of student satisfaction and high levels of knowledge transfer and application within the workplace. 59% of candidates and skills mentors rated instruction as “very good” and 30% described it as superior (the top two ratings on a 4 point scale.) Candidate survey results and interviews offer substantial evidence that candidates are using what they learn on the job (these results will be discussed in detail in the following cluster). The high levels of candidate satisfaction and transfer of learning into work performance across all three sites provide ample evidence that the program has relevance across multiple agencies, regions and differing direct support work conditions across the state.

## **Building a Self-Sustaining Community of Learning and Practice**

At the outset of the project, it was not clear whether the planning process would take hold and evolve into a more permanent infrastructure for a skills certificate program in Ohio. It is clear at the end of the first demonstration cycle that the project has developed both statewide and regional communities of knowledge and practice around professional skills certification in human services that are stable and growing in knowledge, depth and creativity. The stakeholders have been successful in adding substantially to initial funding to carry the project further.

At the end of the first cycle, 1 or two agencies in each Regional Council chose to not continue with the Council into the second cycle. In each region, new members were recruited to replace the leavers. Some reasons that pilot leaders identified for leavers.

## **Presence of Non-Traditional Partners**

Difficulties with recruiting and retaining direct support staff in the human services are partially rooted in the current economic and educational structures of our country. This suggests that potentially effective responses and solutions must reach beyond the borders of the industry. Thinking outside of the “industry box” demands the engagement of stakeholders who bring alternative perspectives and engaging circles of influence within labor and education that can

promote changes in those systems. For these reasons the PATHS planning group identified the presence of non-traditional partners as a desirable outcome.

The PATHS project has successfully involved stakeholders with potential of influencing systems of education and workforce development. The US Department of Labor and the Ohio State Apprenticeship Council have been active participants as well as financial supporters.

The pilot activities have also attracted a number of educators and workforce development entities to explore the possibility of offering the program through alternative facilities and to alternative populations. These discussions are currently at the exploratory stage in Toledo and Cleveland.

## **Empowered DSPs on State and Regional Council**

One direct support professional participated regularly in the planning phase of the project. The regional councils have not yet recruited direct support practitioners as regular members of the Council. All groups express the intent of involving direct support professionals but this has not yet occurred. Now that each region has a group of DSPs and skills mentors who have completed the program, it will be easier to identify direct support leaders to participate in Council activities. The Cleveland area has provided skills mentors with the opportunity to convene in regular meetings to share ideas and to coordinate and dialogue with instructors in advance of scheduled classes regarding expectations of learners and how mentors can support learners in meeting expectations and participating in classroom activities.

## **Findings in the Quality Cluster**

Across the three pilot locations 32 community support agencies participated in the project supporting a total of 48 PATHS candidates who earned their Certificate of Initial Proficiency in Direct Support Practice and 36 PATHS skills mentors who earned the Certificate of Advanced Proficiency in Direct Support. Inclusive of candidates and skills mentors (80), the program intervention yielded a total of 4800 hours of PATHS training hours and 105,600 hours of guided work based learning. Evaluation approaches must, however, look past the outputs of a project to understand the deeper impact of the project interventions. In this section, the “Quality Cluster” takes a closer look at whether these hours of training and instruction were translated into the day to day practice of the candidates.

## **Who Were the Candidates?**

Both skills mentors and candidates were included as survey respondents as both groups were exposed to the CIP program for the first time. Of the 80 potential respondents, 83% (N = 66) completed the Time 1 surveys given at the beginning of the course and 54% (N = 43) completed the Time 2 survey at the end of the 6 to 8 month PATHS program..

Characteristics of candidates who were included in the respondent group at the end of the training experience (Time 2 Candidate Survey) include the following:

- 93% women
- Average age 40.5
- 53% married
- 26% African American 73% white
- 5% with a disability
- 73% HS/GED 25% BA or higher
- Avg. yrs of experience in Human Services 10.6
- Avg. wage \$11.80 (avg. starting wage 7.90)
- Full time (74%) – 95% get some benefits
- 43% DSPs
- 43% Supervisors



*Candidates learning teamwork skills by completing a “low ropes” course in Toledo pilot.*

## **Comparability to National Standards for High Quality Employer Based Training: Context for Interpreting Data on “Transfer of Learning”**

The literature on employee based training outcomes<sup>4</sup> indicates that a learner’s initial evaluation of how much he or she learned in a given course is the best predictor of both the learner’s & supervisor’s follow-up assessment of the impact of training. In other words what learners say at the end of a learning experience regarding the usefulness of the course content and how much they have learned, is significantly, positively associated with the impact of the course on job performance. Research also shows that learners and supervisors strongly agree on the effects of the training on performance. At about 6 months after training, the learner’s opinion of how their work performance has changed as a function of what they learned in training is highly consistent with supervisor’s observation of that learner’s performance (agreement at about .72 on a scale of 0 to 1). These findings validate the use of subjective assessments of training impact both at the end of training and in follow-up survey as accurate predictors and measures of performance improvement.

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<sup>4</sup> American Society on Training and Development Learning Outcomes Report 2002

To assist in this process the American Society of Training and Development has established a data base of training course evaluation results to establish national norms for benchmarking the effectiveness of employer based training. This literature suggests that training participants' average scores at the end of a course when rating the course's utility to job performance and rating their perceptions of skill change resulting from the course should reach 4.2 or 4.3 on a 5 point scale to be in the range of an effective learning experience. In follow up evaluations supervisors report improvement on course objectives on average to be 32% and estimate job performance improvement at 28%.

## **Transfer of Learning to the Work Environment: PATHS Effectiveness Meets National Norms for Skill Change and Utility**

Candidates' opinions were surveyed at the end of their PATHS experience to determine their views of the program (the six month follow-up assessments were not complete at the time of this report). These statistical data were supplemented by qualitative data gathered in interviews with candidates. Both the qualitative data and statistical data provide evidence of substantial transfer of learning to job performance. In equating the four point scale we used in the PATHS Candidate survey with the five point scale used to establish national norms, the equivalent score on the four point scale indicating effectiveness meeting national norms is 3.3.

Table 5 provides a summary of candidates' views from the PATHS Candidate Survey at the end of the training regarding which skill sets were most improved as a result of PATHS training. The data shows that the PATHS program achieved national standards for effectiveness in six of twelve areas listed in the survey. As the table below indicates, candidate's reports of skill enhancement achieved national norms in the areas of Interpersonal skills, Professional Development, Communication, Advocacy, Organizational Participation, and Documentation.

Three of the 6 remaining skill clusters were rated highly for skill change (3.2) but were 1 tenth of a point below the national benchmark. These findings are predictable in that two areas scoring at 3.2, "Participant empowerment" and "Vocational, Educational and Career Support," were not emphasized at the CIP level curriculum, the major emphasis of these skills as planned in the PATHS program framework occurs at the CAP level. The remaining area scoring at 3.2 "Ethical practice" was emphasized and came within 1 tenth of a point of the benchmark. The overall trends in this area will be tracked through surveys of the next CIP cohort to observe the direction of the reported impact and make curriculum adjustments if necessary. Of the three skill areas candidates rated as much less improved by PATHS training, only one was an emphasis of the CIP curriculum, "Community Living Skills and Supports." Some potential explanations for the lower ratings in the skill set include that candidates may have come into the course with self-perceived strengths in these skills because it is one that is emphasized in day to day on the job learning. Data gathered on a separate instrument called the Candidate Skills Self Assessment which used a three level scale, showed statistically significant improvement in Community Living Skills and Supports in one pilot site area, Cleveland.

These findings will be examined over time as more data is gathered in the six month follow up and as the data set grows with the evaluation of subsequent cycles to determine how additional learners view the impact of PATHS training on this skill area. Continued low scores in this area by CIP candidates will provide a basis for reviewing pilot methods and curricula in this competency area. Additional evaluation will occur when the CAP level is piloted to determine the effects of training on performance in Assessment and Community Networking and other competency areas that are addressed at that level. Given the greater emphasis on these skills at the CAP lever, scores are predicted to be higher in these areas among candidates completing the CAP level.

Additionally, using a separate instrument, the Candidate Self Assessment, when we compared candidates self-assessments of their skills before and after the training, skill improvements as reported by candidates reached statistical significance for positive impact in “Communication” and “Documentation” across all three pilot sites and as described earlier in “Community Living Skills and Supports” for one pilot site. A total of 25 people from agencies employing candidates who are planning and leading activities at the Regional Council level responded to our PATHS Administrator Survey. These data show that 60% of this group view the PATHS program as very successful in teaching the knowledge and skills DSPs need for effective direct support work. When asked to provide examples of skill improvement this group said that candidates:

- Are much stronger in their ability to assess problems and recognized potential problems
- Have improved ability to teach skills and think of effective ways to do this
- Became more aware of the bigger picture - the issues outside of one group home that relate to the whole agency or on a county/state level
- Respect the code of ethics – “I have personally seen the improvement in my two candidates.”

**Table 5**  
**Candidates’ view of PATHS Effect on Skills Improvement at the end of the Course**

<b>Skill Clusters</b>	<b>Rating</b>
■ <b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>3.5</b>
■ <b>Professional Development</b>	<b>3.4</b>
■ <b>Communication</b>	<b>3.3</b>
■ <b>Advocacy</b>	<b>3.3</b>
■ <b>Organizational Participation</b>	<b>3.3</b>
■ <b>Documentation</b>	<b>3.3</b>
■ <b>Participant Empowerment</b>	<b>3.2</b>
■ <b>Voc-career support</b>	<b>3.2</b>
■ <b>Following ethical guidelines</b>	<b>3.2</b>
■ <b>Community Networking</b>	<b>3.1</b>
■ <b>Comm. Living Supports</b>	<b>3.1</b>
■ <b>Assessment</b>	<b>2.9</b>

3.3 and above is the national benchmark for Effectiveness of Training as reported by learners (Van Buren & Erskine, 2002),

- Can put the puzzle pieces together –“My mentee now understands the way Individualized plans work and the basics of how we are funded”

In their surveys and interviews candidates commented in this way on how their role and performance had changed due to the PATHS program:

- I've become more observant of my actions per standard as a professional. I was inspired to do a better job. I saw others in the field and learned new techniques and approaches.
- Bonus and recognition
- I'm more confident in what I do.
- I've changed, better prepared  
I decided to take on a senior direct support professional position
- I think knowing information has made me more valuable  
More responsibilities and respect
- More understanding of my role
- Promotion  
Pay after the Portfolio is graded
- Designing programs
- Documentation much better – much more detailed (3)
- Helped me with training new staff, being more specific, taking more time with training – giving more info on why its important.
- Different ways of communicating with people who don't speak
- Better able to understand people with impaired speech
- More conscious of my own documentation because I have to teach others
- Have passed things on to my staff and use it as a training tool
- Changed documentation methods.
- Learned that the agency method of completing MUI's and UI's was not correct, shared that information with skills mentor.
- Applied knowledge in working with non-verbal individual
- How to be neutral and help people make their own choices. Catch themselves on skills doing incorrectly and modify.
- I understand rights/ethics more clearly now. I didn't realize the history of no rights – helps me to understand the people.
- Being in the field so long you kind of forget things or don't take it seriously. Going to class now it's like opening a book but differently because I have the experience.
- I changed a lot of what I do (man with 23 years experience) I realized I was unintentionally shortchanging people –now I give the eye contact, take the extra time to nurture – gives me a greater appreciation for folks.
- In reviewing the rights with my staff they suggested every week we put up a poster on a single concept of rights

- In terms of communication we got info on 25 ways of communicating more effectively - we have posted these materials
- The ride home is an hour we talk all the way home. Recognition is that we lack social/ recreational opportunities for people we support. Now we are more involved in community activities. Recently we went to a community picnic in Dayton and we would not have done that before.
- I've done this for 23 yrs but you get stuck in ruts – stressed out, burned out. Gives me a refreshed outlook.
- Have used communication skills
- Relate to supervisor better
- Reminds you to do things you're supposed to do but you forget – like making choices. Have ISPs and on there are certain things to get done. But you might forget to do this or ask them.
- So busy trying to “cya” that your too busy to do what's right
- Learning to listen again.
- Lots of documentation required just to keep yourself out of trouble
- Biggest thing is listening and communicate to their level – every level is different.

An important outcome of the PATHS program is that some graduates are influencing the job performance of others in their work unit who did not have access to the PATHS program. This evidence is seen most clearly in the story told by a candidate at a recent conference. Her story recounted how upon taking a direct support job about two years before completing her CIP, her only way of knowing what to do was to observe others in her work area with more experience and to model their behavior. The PATHS training revealed that she had modeled custodial support practices that did not foster growth but rather fostered dependence of service participants and deference to the control and decisions of staff. The PATHS training helped her to understand the importance of supporting people in making big and smaller life choices and in learning skills leading to greater independence including, cleaning, cooking and making choices about every day life. Through her influence, the other staff in the group home where she worked also came to recognize the difference between custodial direct care work and quality direct support and have transformed the life experience of the people living in the home. The results were perceived by these direct support practitioners as so astonishing and powerful that the entire work team remains energized by the outcomes and continually seeks ways of transforming their service to achieve better outcomes.

60% of the agencies involved with the pilot activity feel that people are getting better support from the PATHS graduates and 58% report that the transfer of knowledge to performance is very high or somewhat high (21%).

## **Quality of the Learning Experience**

Most skills mentors and candidates interviewed across the pilot sites indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the PATHS program. The statistical data supports this finding. Table 7 synthesizes the level of satisfaction of candidates with specific aspects of the PATHS Program

on a four point scale where 1 = Poor, 2 = Good, 3 = Very Good and 4 = Superior. Data are arranged in descending order of satisfaction:

**Table 7**  
**Satisfaction of Candidates with PATHS**

Program Characteristic	Mean rank
Level of Interactivity	3.3
Quality of Instruction	3.2
Relevance of Instruction	3.2
Connecting with DSPs from other agencies	3.1
Quality of Materials	3.1
Fairness of Assessment	3.0
Quality of Classroom Environment	2.8
Connecting with DSPs from own agency	2.8
Level of Challenge	2.7
Clarity of Requirements	2.7
Convenience of Location	2.6

These data provide a powerful testimony regarding the overall quality of the program. In interviews, most of the candidates said that the program was targeted to the right level of challenge. The lower ranking of “Level of Challenge” is likely based on the fact that “challenge” does not always produce feelings of satisfaction. Observations of classrooms by the evaluator were consistent with candidate’s opinions that the classroom environments were not the strongest feature of the program. Classrooms were not large enough and were not state of the art. Some did not have windows. It is also no surprise that “clarity of requirements” ranked lower. As the first cycle of the pilot program, many issues were not clear and it was the first time that any of the instructors had implemented the framework in their area.

It is a great testimony to the hard work of the pilots that the quality of instruction and the relevance of instruction, among the most critical aspects of the program, were rated so highly. The satisfaction that candidates took from meeting peers doing the same work from their own agency and other agencies was a strong theme of the qualitative data as well as in these statistics. Interviews revealed that this was a very important aspect of building a sense of occupational identity and professionalism. The strength of this response may also be a function of the sense of isolation that workers in this field may experience due to the highly decentralized nature of the work locations. In some cases practitioners may be on their own with only phone access to a supervisor for large parts of their shift. Past research has shown that the isolated work conditions are a factor in premature termination and to the degree that PATHS can mediate the impact of

social isolation in the workplace, it will be an important contributor to improving work conditions.

Another way to view satisfaction is to determine which aspects of the program that candidates considered most helpful. In their surveys, candidates and skills mentors were able to rate the different dimensions of the program that they felt contributed most to their work performance. The following table shows these results in descending order of helpfulness on a scale where 1 is least helpful and 4 is most helpful with no rating lower than 2.7:

**Table 8**  
**Candidate rating of program characteristics that enhance performance**

Item	Mean Rank
Payment for time in class	3.5
Classroom discussion	3.4
Lecture	3.3
Self Image as Professional	3.3
Instructors	3.2
Skill Mentor	3.1
Group work in class	3.1
Peer support in class	3.1
Peer support at work	3.1
Convenience of class	3.1
Community Skill Standards	3.0
Self – Assessment of skills	3.0
Support of Supervisor	3.0
Portfolio Assessment	2.9
Multiple Choice	2.7

Aspects of the program that were less satisfactory to candidates were the clarity of expectations, the physical classroom environments and the convenience of location. For some candidates the quality of mentoring was poor because mentors did not spend enough time with the candidate or were distracted during the mentoring meeting.

Most candidates felt that the program was geared to the right level of challenge for them and noted that the completion of the portfolio was the most difficult requirement. At the same time, candidates described the completion of the portfolio as an important learning experience that helped them to understand the depth and importance of their role to people with disabilities. An important finding of this demonstration is that the portfolio process enabled candidates take a more analytic perspective on their work with the work on the portfolio leading them to construct a deeper self knowledge of their work and its importance to the people they support.

Candidates frequently mentioned how much they enjoyed learning about the different characteristics of the diagnostic conditions common to developmental disabilities and many other useful things they learned including how to listen more carefully and to offer choices to people. There were several examples of candidates sharing their class materials and ideas with others at work and at home.

## **Statewide Comparability**

Qualitative evidence based on candidate and council interviews indicate that the PATHS program was well regarded at all pilot sites by both candidates and stakeholders involved with the program at the regional levels. Candidate attrition rates across sites were similar ranging from approximately 10 to 14%. The number of survey respondents from each site does not permit statistical comparisons across sites but as more learning cycles occur and the data base grows this will be possible when learning cohorts are aggregated yielding broad trends for each region. These data will not be able to discern differences from cycle to cycle within a region but should show differences among the three sites.

Observations and reviews of material show that each pilot site translated the PATHS Framework into curriculum in different ways, yet it was clear that each site paid close attention to assuring that the curriculum they designed would adequately prepare candidates to meet the performance outcomes identified in the framework. The quality and comparability of work seen in candidates' major assessment requirement, the PATHS Portfolio provides important evidence that each site is striking the most important chords in the complex PATHS Framework and facilitating comparable outcomes among candidates. Interviews with Council Leaders who were engaged in evaluating portfolios revealed that they were successful in applying the Competency Profiles (the holistic scoring scale applied across sites to the Portfolios) and the scoring process that was designed for the pilot demonstration. They agreed that the scoring scale enabled them to make accurate and reliable distinctions regarding the levels of mastery demonstrated in the Portfolios. All agreed the Paths Portfolio process would have been easier if better models of Portfolios were available. At the beginning of the pilot process models were drawn from a research project and were limited in nature). Now that the pilots have access to much better portfolio models, both candidates and evaluators will have an easier time of completing and evaluating portfolios.

While it is not necessary to use the same curriculum to attain comparable outcomes, the State-wide PATHS Council has decided to develop a common curriculum for the CAP level. Comparability will also benefit by the current Council Plans to build a central library of materials and curriculum that will be shared among all PATHS partners.

## **Improved capacity of participating organizations to provide high quality training**

Interviews with PATHS Regional Council members at each pilot location reveal that through PATHS their agencies and region have achieved a much higher level of quality in the professional preparation of direct support staff. While the agencies involved with PATHS had been leaders in training in the past offering educational experiences that went beyond minimal requirements, all affirmed that the PATHS project offered a depth and quality that they had not

previously achieved. PATHS achieved this new level in their view because it was the first time that training had been carefully planned and integrated to culminate in a skills certificate. It was also the first time that two of the three pilot sites had collaborated across agency borders to plan and deliver training. They viewed this as a challenge that was difficult at first but one that had built strong bonds across the agencies resulting in a level of collaboration and commitment that was successful and energizing. The collaboration enabled the planners to draw upon talented instructors and curriculum designers from a wider circle and to offer people an opportunity to share their knowledge in a teaching role. This resulted in a stronger, higher quality program than any one agency could have developed on their own.

Observations of State-wide Council activity reveal that this body has grown in confidence and expertise in implementing the PATHS program. This is clearly seen in the approach to curriculum development. In this first cycle, each region “did its own thing” in developing necessary curriculum. As members grew in confidence in their own instructional design skills and comfort level with the PATHS framework and approaches, they are now approaching the CAP curriculum development in a more integrated fashion. They have taken it on as a joint task that has been successfully organized with tasks divided among the regions. Through this process, the group has defined a unified template for organizing modules and is effectively reviewing each other’s work. Previews of the curriculum under development reveal that it is a quality product with much thought and creativity.

The different Councils are continually monitoring their own performance and are making adjustments to curriculum and methods as they gain experience to make the program stronger. The State-wide Council serves an important function serving as the connective tissue across each site. Council meetings provide members with opportunities to discuss what works or doesn’t work and to swap materials and methods.

Across all sites, Council members do worry about their ability to sustain the enthusiasm, commitment and resources to keep PATHS a quality experience. An enormous number of volunteer hours were devoted to the creating the PATHS program and developing the pilots and the program does require ongoing administration. They recognize that one important response to this problem is to continually expand the interest of other groups in the PATHS program and to strengthen the involvement of less engaged partners in the Council activity.

## **Changes in Organizational Practices**

Another concern of the Quality Cluster is whether PATHS has had a positive impact on the involved organizations. In addition to the growth in collaboration discussed in previous sections of this report. A total of 40 % of the Administrator’s Survey respondents noted that there had been changes in organizational practice and structure as a result of the PATHS program. Survey respondents provided the following examples of how PATHS had affected their organizations:

I see a lot more coming together and teamwork. It doesn’t seem to be that “It’s us against them” thing going on. We are slowly but surely breaking that down.

It's improved my supervisory skills by listening to DSPs better. I'm more confident.

Many direct care staff have come to me asking about the PATHS program and how they can get involved.

Perhaps there is a stronger interest for developing a skill mentoring program within the agency.

We post a different "right" every other week. It increases interest in importance at staff and team meetings.

We realized an additional frontline supervisor would be beneficial

Training and mentoring within the company comes together with PATHS training and Skills Mentoring.

We are revising our evaluations to reflect the Community Support Skill Standards

It has been difficult to obtain baseline information on annual turnover from the involved agencies. The evaluation team will consider to pursue this to determine if PATHS provides some greater stability to the workforce over time.

## **V. Final Words**

The PATHS project has been remarkable in crystallizing and sustaining the commitment and leadership of small but growing number of people across the state and in mobilizing fiscal and other resources. It is the dedicated and remarkable work of these Council members that has brought the PATHS project to its current high level of success. The evidence generated by evaluation activities depicts a powerful project which is positively transforming the work and professional identify of the direct support practitioners who have had the opportunity to participate in the PATHS training. These changes mean that people are receiving support from a more professional workforce that is more compassionate, more in tune with ethical expectations, and more skilled in promoting choice and self direction.

The challenge will be to expand the program to scale, keep existing efforts fresh and dynamic and to welcome others into leadership roles

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