

Mid-Hudson Coalition, Inc.

September 2003

An Association for Quality Direct Care Services



Mid-Hudson Coalition, Inc. *Directors*

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Circle of Courage Learning Community

Carl Valentino
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Mareve E. Van Voorhis, M.P.S.
Program Chair, Human Services
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\$50,000 Grant for Scholarships to Direct Care Workers

The Mid-Hudson Coalition (MHC) received at the end of July a grant of \$50,000 from the Dutchess County Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

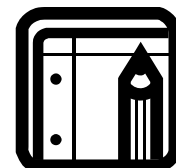
The purpose of this funding opportunity is to assist in the development and strengthening of the health care workforce in the county by providing scholarships to individuals who are MHC members or who are direct support staff at MHC member agencies. Additionally, the grant requires recipients to be Dutchess County residents or work for an agency based in Dutchess County.

This funding must be applied to 50 individuals over the course of the 2003 fall and 2004 spring semesters. Since the contract was formalized late in the college registration process, the MHC board narrowed the initial application of the grant to the Dutchess Community College (DCC) Direct Care Certificate credit-bearing program. The MHC currently has curriculum agreements with three community colleges and SUNY New Paltz.

As with each of the colleges that the MHC has developed educational programs, the curriculum at DCC uniquely addresses the study of and competence in the Community Support Skill Standards, a national measure of direct support proficiency (www.hsri.org). These skill standards as well as the successful completion of the individual courses themselves are the outcomes measures of the grant criteria.

Seven Dutchess County based member agencies responded quickly to the MHC announcement of the scholarship opportunity. As a result, close to 50

members enrolled in the DCC certificate program for September classes.



The process for applying for scholarship funds for the spring semester will be the same as for the fall semester. Candidates must complete a series of forms and attend eligibility determination and orientation sessions offered by Dutchess Works, a county agency that monitors and administers workforce initiatives such as this one.

After completion of Dutchess Works requirements, the candidate must then register for class at the college. At the time of registration, agencies are required to pay the college registration fees and books that amount to approximately \$1,000 for two classes. At the end of the semester, the student is required to produce documentation of a passing grade and attendance. The agency will submit the grades and receipts for college costs and books to the MHC for reimbursement up to \$1,000 per student.

The \$50,000 grant must be spread over 50 eligible individuals, and the scholarships will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

The MHC is dedicated to improving the quality of services for people with special needs through an educated direct support workforce. Education is an excellent way to professionalize services, increase retention and reward staff who are motivated to self-improve.

For more information about this grant or applying for the spring 2004 semester, please contact either Mareve Van Voorhis of Dutchess Community College at 845-431-8354 or Regis Obijiski at 845-473-3000 ext. 304.

Message from the MHC President—Looking Towards the Future

On September 19th the Coalition held its 11th annual membership meeting. Attendees heard about the Coalition’s ongoing work and the new directions that we will be embarking on over the upcoming year. The past year has been one of growth, expansion and recognition and we are proud of the following achievements:

- Recipient of the **Moving Mountains Award** for excellence and innovation in the direct care field. (See related story on page 4).
- The initiation of an **Educational Forum** at our annual conference bringing together experts in Direct Care education to encourage growth in certificate and degree programs.
- Working with **Sullivan, Orange and Westchester Community Colleges** to create **Certificate and Degree programs** for Direct Care Workers.
- “**Are You Aware of Who I Am**” - the annual Coalition conference attended by over 300 direct care workers.
- A **\$50,000 grant** awarded by the Workforce Investment Board to provide educational stipends for Dutchess County Direct Care Workers.
- **Four Direct Care Worker forums** presented throughout the Hudson Valley to direct care workers.
- Completion of the **Coalition Web Site** - midhudsoncoalition.org

As the Coalition looks towards the future, we are committed to continuing the above work while taking on new projects including:

- Creation of a **part-time position** to assist the Coalition in expanding its services to Direct Care Professionals.
- **2004 Coalition Conference** to offer Direct Care Workers an opportunity to come together with experts from the field.
- The establishment of **Certificate and Degree programs** at Sullivan, Orange and Westchester County Community Colleges.
- The establishment of the first annual **Direct Care Worker Legislative Lobbying Day**.
- Expansion of our agency membership base and the

creation of **agency links** on our web site.

- Continuation of our **grant procurement efforts** to increase our ability to provide scholarships to Direct Care Professionals

Over the last 11 years, the Coalition has completed these tasks with a completely volunteer board of directors and dedicated committee volunteers who selflessly give of their time and expertise so that the above achievements could be realized.

We are always looking for individuals to help with our many projects and hope that you can find the time to participate. Your participation is one way of giving of yourself to your profession and I am confident that you will find it a rewarding and motivating experience.

*Gerry Dohrenwend, MHC President
Assistant Executive Director,
Abbott House*



The Beauty of the Mid-Hudson Coalition by April C. Isaacs

On March 29th, the Mid-Hudson Coalition (MHC) hosted a conference for direct care workers at Dutchess Community College. The title of the conference was "Are You Aware of Who I Am?"

Being a relatively new member of the MHC and its public relations/membership committee, I was given the opportunity to volunteer my services at the conference. There were many wonderful things that occurred at the conference. There was a gallery where art work by staff from various agencies was displayed. The main speaker, Frank Pastizzo, gave an inspiring message to all direct care workers. There was a time of recognition for direct care workers who did outstanding work at their agencies. A friend from Anderson School was recognized for his work at our agency.

The seminar I attended was very informative and engaging. It was at this seminar that new information and websites about training and education in the field of autism were introduced to me. This led me to new ways in how I can be an effective direct care worker with children diagnosed with autism.

What are the benefits of being a member of the Mid-Hudson Coalition?

1. You are encouraged and able to attend direct care forums.
2. As a member, the coalition will assist you while



you are in school by helping to pay for books and materials.

3. You meet other direct care workers from other agencies.
4. The MHC is there to help direct care workers get the recognition they deserve.

The MHC is working to help the direct care workers to be seen as professionals. They provide opportunities to receive training and attend conferences. The most important part of our jobs as direct care workers is that our clients are our number one priority. We have to be advocates for our clients and make sure their needs and concerns are met. The MHC is the direct care workers' advocate.

Become a member of the MHC and take advantage of the wonderful opportunities given to us.

Support in Direct Care Settings—A Conference Awakening by Lori Rose and Silka Benz

A conference offers an opportunity for learning at every level. That is what we as MHC members experienced firsthand at this year's MHC conference. We attended the conference as presenters and left the conference with an eye-opening experience.

During our years in the field as Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), we have both attended and presented at numerous statewide conferences. We are also active members of the MHC public relations/membership committee. As we reflect back on this year's conference, we were struck by the vast differences and levels of support available to the many agencies of our region. Across the numerous agencies who attended our presentation, the common denominator voiced was a perceived lack of support and how to advocate for their individuals. We were surprised to

learn that the supports we receive and provide are not out there for everyone.

Many of our conference participants were surprised when we spoke about our team approach at Anderson School. Our educational setting readily provides all the supports needed by our students. As a residential school, our role as Speech-language therapists is especially important. We personally take on the responsibility for reaching out to all aspects of our student's life. Education, residential, clinical, vocational, and home environments are addressed in order to assure carryover and generalization of communication skills.

Our presentation focused on functional visual communication strategies for individuals of any age in any setting. Visual strategies

included picture communication books/boards/cards to aid in choice and decision making, task analysis for completing activities of daily living, emotion boards, behavioral supports, schedules, and calendars. We encouraged attending DSPs to seek the assistance from their agencies as a follow up to their concerns and questions regarding support. We assumed that all speech-language therapists provided services and supports across settings, yet we discovered that in some cases it is compartmentalized. For most of our individuals, learning is a lifelong process that should not stop at the age of 21.

We hope we offered those who attended useful strategies and information to take back with them to keep in their DSP toolbox.

Moving Mountains Award Presented to Mid-Hudson Coalition

The Moving Mountains Awards are presented to organizations and agencies that have demonstrated best practice in direct support workforce development. They are awarded by the Research and Training Center on Community Living (RTC/CL) at the University of Minnesota in partnership with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP). Nominations are solicited through NADSP member organizations and submissions are reviewed by a panel of NADSP members. Selection criteria are based on the mission and five goals of the NADSP:

Mission: To promote the development of a highly competent human services workforce which supports individuals in achieving their life goals.

Goals:

1. Enhance the status of direct support professionals.
2. Provide better access for all direct support professionals to high quality educational experiences (e.g., in-service

training, continuing and higher education) and lifelong learning which enhances competency.

3. Strengthening the working relationships and partnerships between direct support professionals, self-advocates, and other consumer groups and families.
4. Promote systems reform which provides incentives for educational experiences, increased compensation, and access to career pathways for direct support professionals through the promotion of policy initiatives (e.g., legislation, funding, practices). Support the development and implementation of a national volunteer credentialing process for direct support professionals.

According to the award committee, the MHC was specifically selected because



“this organization has proven that through commitment, collaboration and a common mission, direct support professionals can and will become better educated and more committed to the field of community human services work.

“Organizational members within the Mid-Hudson Coalition have remarkably low annual turnover rates of direct support staff when compared to other organizations in the region and state. Their leaders are committed to improving the working conditions and public image of direct support employees. Most have found ways to build career paths within their organizations and to pay competitive wages to their employees.”

Amy Hewitt of the University of Minnesota is shown in the photo above with Board Member Regis Obijiski who accepted the award on behalf of the MHC.

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