

# Improving Retention Through Success Coaching



By Ellen G. Frank-Miller, PhD; Molly Wendland; and Madi Ryan of the Workforce & Organizational Research Center (WORC)

## Meet Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board

The Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board (Summit DD) is an Ohio-based government organization on a mission to “help people of all abilities reach their full potential.” Summit DD partners with over 300 agencies that provide direct care and services to adults and children with developmental disabilities. These agencies collectively employ approximately 3,000 Direct Service Providers (DSPs) who provide everyday care.

## What is a DSP?

DSPs are care providers that help individuals with developmental disabilities live independently. DSPs assist with a wide range of everyday tasks that include helping individuals in their homes, providing reliable transportation services, offering coaching and training to help them find and keep jobs, helping them navigate appointments, and providing other supports that vary by agency and individual needs. They utilize federal, state, and local resources offered through Summit DD to help deliver these essential services. The

support of DSPs help those with developmental disabilities live, work, and participate actively in their local communities.

## Success Coach Model to Combat Staffing Shortages

In 2019 representatives from the Summit County service provider community made it clear that the staffing shortage was the number one priority that needed to be addressed in order to ensure continuity of



services. Drew Williams, Assistant Superintendent of Summit DD and Joe DiFranco, the Assistant Director of Summit DD's Community Support and Development, partnered with this group to identify and launch the "Success Coach" model. Success Coaches provide training and enhanced support for new hires to help identify and ameliorate issues affecting their work performance. Issues addressed between the success coach and DSPs are wide-ranging and may include ameliorating barriers to work, mitigating workplace conflict, or identifying professional development opportunities.

### What Does a Success Coach Do?

- Make new hires feel welcome and connected to the organization.
- Schedule (at least) weekly check-ins with newly hired DSPs during the first 60 days of employment.
- Connect with new hires during onboarding to surface and address any issues or concerns.
- At the end of the first 60 days, connect at least biweekly and continue regular contact until the 90-day mark.

Prior to program launch, Summit DD sought input from their stakeholders to understand their perspectives on success coaching and the things they would like to have incorporated. These conversations with employees illuminated a desire for coaches to be trained in-house. Although

they originally intended to outsource the new role, Summit DD's provider partners shared that it would be more beneficial to train their staff to serve as success coaches. For this reason, as well as to ensure the best quality coaching program, Summit DD decided to develop their success coaching model in-house.

With support of its board and leadership, Summit DD was able to implement this model by reallocating some of its annual budget. This allowed select agencies to dedicate approximately seven hours per week or the identified staff to spend on serving as success coaches. This began in 2020.

Although they soon saw anecdotal evidence that the model was improving retention, Summit DD lacked adequate data to support this assertion. Enter ConxusNEO (Connecting People to Opportunity in NE Ohio), a workforce development intermediary affiliated with their local Chamber of Commerce.

### A Local Workforce Development Agency Offers Expanded Data Collection Resources

When they learned about Summit DD's Success Coach model, ConxusNEO had recently begun a new partnership with Kent State University, and was looking for opportunities to study job design improvements with an employer. Summit DD realized this was exactly what they needed to improve their data collection efforts and program tracking to uncover successes and improvement opportunities for future cohorts.

***"We wanted data to give us some indication if our efforts were impactful and ultimately where we could better focus our efforts. It was very helpful to get involved in this research program from that standpoint."***

#### Joe DiFranco

Assistant director of community support and development department, Summit DD

## Data Collection Reveals a Big Win and Learning Opportunities

With additional resources locked in for seven of their network agencies, Summit DD's data tracking efforts of their success coach model were underway. Analysis of the updated success coach model revealed a huge win for the agency — DSP retention rates improved by more than 10% within the first 30 days of employment, a statistically significant amount. Newly hired DSPs also reported high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by success coaches.



The study also revealed that DSP retention at the 90-day mark remained relatively flat. So, Summit DD has decided to investigate ways to extend their success. After digging a bit further, Summit DD noticed some inconsistencies in program implementation that they are currently seeking to address. These include:

- **Balancing workloads.** Some success coaches have found it difficult to juggle their work and coaching responsibilities, which caused some to fall behind in executing the coaching model. Summit DD is looking for ways to help them effectively manage both sets of responsibilities.

- **Coaching supports.** Through discussions with coaches, Summit DD discovered that some were facing their own barriers to success, including occasional issues with childcare or transportation. Summit DD is also looking at options to help provide more supports for the coaches themselves.
- **Stipend administration.** Success coaches receive a stipend to support their mentorship work, which is provided through Summit DD's budget. But these stipends are administered by the agencies Summit DD partners with, which led to some inconsistencies in how they are delivered. Summit DD is now determining how to standardize that process so that the incentives are aligned for all success coaches.

## Advice for Other Employers

Summit DD plans to use insights gleaned from their data-tracking efforts in future grant cycles to include frontline supervisors in the success coach model as a professional development opportunity, partner with United Way to provide additional support for coaches, and focus on consistent program implementation with the existing agencies before expanding the model to new agencies in the network.

***“We’re really focusing on giving people an opportunity to make the program consistent and to see if the data can support this 90-day intense intervention. And in theory, if it can support it 90 days, you can take that timeframe out as far as you want.”***

### Joe DiFranco

Assistant director of community support and development department, Summit DD

Summit DD shared this advice for employers interested in implementing the success coach model at their organizations:

- 1. Engage your local workforce agency** to identify additional support that may help your program flourish and/or provide additional resources once the program is off the ground.
- 2. Widespread organizational buy-in** is vital to make the coaching model work. For the program to really take off, it is crucial that all levels of the organization adopt a culture of looking at staff and problems in a holistic way that addresses root causes and solves problems collectively instead of taking shortcuts.
- 3. Active listening** from various stakeholders both prior to launch and throughout the program is essential to understand how the program will be most effective and better support employees and program outcomes.
- 4. Establish relationships** with community organizations that provide supports to individuals who are at risk due to economic factors and establish clear pathways and supports to connect members of the workforce who may benefit from these supports.

***“You just have to avoid the urge to take shortcuts. And it's super helpful to make sure that what you're putting together is what's really going to help people and what people really need and what they really want.”***

**Joe DiFranco**

Assistant director of community support and development department, Summit DD

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