

Identification of Facilitators and Barriers to Accessing Retained Skilled Job Coaches: A Needs Assessment

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Objective:

Despite playing a critical role in supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) face persistent challenges related to burnout, high turnover, and inadequate training preparation. This needs assessment examined self-reported levels of training and education among DSPs relative to established ACRE (Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators) certification competencies, with the goal of identifying gaps that hinder workforce stability and quality of support.

Method:

A cross-sectional, mixed methods needs assessment was conducted using an online survey administered through Qualtrics. The survey was sent through professional networks using convenience/snowball sampling, resulting in 296 responses between February 20 and March 13, 2026. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative responses were examined using thematic analysis.

Results:

Participants reported generally high competence across ACRE domains, with average scores clustering toward the upper end of the scale (approximately 3.9-4.3) on a 5-point scale, suggesting strong perceived skills in core areas. Barriers to retention varied in importance, with pay most frequently ranked as the primary concern, while factors such as workload, burnout, and lack of support were more often endorsed as secondary considerations.

Discussion:

Survey findings suggest participants demonstrate strong competence in person-centered and relational practices, particularly in direct workplace supports, but report lower confidence in systems-level skills such as policy navigation, benefits, and job customization. These patterns highlight the need to strengthen training in translating assessment into practice and navigating complex systems, alongside addressing organizational factors that may impact long-term retention.

Limitations:

Limitations include reliance on self-report data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, the focus on perceived rather than objective competence, and potential variability in how participants across roles and settings interpreted survey items.

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