



## **We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional A Realistic Job Preview User's Guide**

### **About Realistic Job Previews**

*We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional* is a Realistic Job Preview developed by the New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies (NYSACRA) with financial, technical, and other assistance from the New York State Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, the University of Minnesota's Research and Training Center on Community Living, the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, and service recipients and staff of NYSACRA member agencies too numerous to mention.

Realistic Job Previews (RJP) are tools designed to assist organizations in the recruitment and retention of employees. One of the risks organizations face in recruiting staff is the mismatch between pre-employment expectations on the part of a prospective employee and the reality of working life inside the organization. This "reality shock" often leads to staff turnover. RJP's are intended to address the mismatch between expectations and reality by presenting applicants with a realistic view of the job, including both its positive and negative aspects, **before** they accept a position with the organization.

RJP's come in many different formats: structured group discussions with current employees, job shadowing, pamphlets and brochures, videos, etc. Regardless of the format, research has shown that RJP's reduce turnover and promote job satisfaction. By providing honest insights into the job before it is offered and accepted, RJP's present the opportunity for certain applicants to "self-select" out of the hiring process without "scaring off" others who will develop into excellent long-term employees. For those who embark on the job, RJP's help cement a bond between the employee and the organization which, from the onset, helped shape realistic expectations.

RJP's are not intended to replace interviews, which are vitally important in assuring a match between a prospective employee's expectations and those of the organization. Rather, they are meant to enhance the process of making the right match.<sup>1</sup>

This guide offers advice on how organizations can use the RJP video, *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional*, in their staff recruitment efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about Realistic Job Previews and calibrating realistic job expectations in the recruitment process one may wish to **type language of footnote & add references.**

### **When to Show *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional***

Prospective employees should be shown *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional* early in the recruitment process. Studies have shown that as the hiring process progresses – paperwork completed, second or third interviews scheduled, etc. – prospective employees become increasingly invested in the prospect of having a job, about which they may have very little factual information; their expectations become unduly optimistic. Conversely, to save time for all involved, the video should be viewed only after some level of pre-screening has indicated that the prospective employee has met the minimum job requirements, e.g., a valid driver’s license, high school diploma or equivalent, etc.

Job applicants can view the *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional* RJP individually or as a group.

### **Creating a Context for Viewing *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional***

The RJP is just one step in the hiring process. Prospective employees should be prepared for this step and the steps that will follow.

Applicants should be told that they will be shown a video depicting various aspects of being a Direct Support Professional. They should also be informed that the video discusses the profession of direct support in general terms and does not present the specific job duties they would be assigned within the organization. They should be informed that they will have a chance to discuss their role and specific duties in a meeting after they have viewed the RJP, if they are still interested in pursuing a position with the organization.

Prospective employees should be encouraged to jot down questions arising from the RJP which can be discussed during the later meeting. They should also be encouraged to think about questions specific to the job for which they are applying, as well as the organization, which can also be discussed during the later meeting. One may want to suggest issue areas for these specific questions, such as training, supervision, support when problems arise, etc.

### **Follow-up Meeting**

If the applicant is still interested in pursuing a position within the organization after viewing *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional*, a follow-up meeting should occur. In addition to exploring issues and questions one may normally probe during an interview, the purpose of the follow-up meeting interview is threefold:

1. Explore reactions to the RJP. As *We Get It Done* provides a general overview of the work of Direct Support Professionals, the prospective employee may have questions or reactions to what was seen. S/he has already been invited to jot down questions and bring them to the

meeting. The interviewer can also probe their reactions and thoughts by asking questions such as:

- So what did you think of *We Get It Done* ?
  - What struck you as the most challenging part of being a Direct Support Professional?
  - What aspects of the work, as it was portrayed, cause you concern? (Behavior management, provision of personal/intimate care, etc.)
  - What supports would you need in doing this work?
  - What aspects of the work do you find the most attractive?
  - What can you bring to the work?
2. Provide Organization/Job Specific Information. Because *We Get It Done* provides a general overview of the profession of direct support and is not organization or job specific, this is the time to get into specifics of the job. The prospective employee has been invited to bring questions about the job and organization to the meeting, but the interviewer should make sure a number of issues are discussed realistically. These include:
- Work hours, including holidays, overtime, weekends, etc.
  - Salaries, benefits, opportunities for advancement.
  - Specific job site, location, environment, individuals supported and their support needs.
  - Job duties at the site, staffing patterns, support and supervision.
  - Staff training and other support issues.
3. Reinforce Realistic Expectations. Literature indicates that RJPs are most helpful in staff retention when accompanied by statements and examples of more generalized job realities which can't be captured in a video or single interview about job specific duties. They help shape the prospective employee's expectations, so s/he won't be surprised, disappointed or distrustful when they are encountered on the job. Examples of such realities might include statements like:
- Sometimes families are not always happy with the supports their loved ones are getting, despite your best efforts.
  - Sometimes an individual you are supporting may not be appreciative, may not make progress or may even regress, despite your best efforts,
  - Sometimes co-workers may not always get along or pull their weight.

Presenting these generalized realities, which transcend what an RJP can honestly portray in just several minutes, helps match employee expectations to the real world and the organization's presentation of the real world...thus building a bond of trust. Presenting these generalized realities also provides the organization the opportunity to inform the prospective employee of the supports in place and the assistance s/he can expect when such situations arise.

### **Other Activities**

In their efforts to recruit and retain committed Direct Support Professionals, organizations may engage in other activities. These may include arranging for a prospective employee to visit and spend time at the site where s/he would be working, or scheduling an interview by Direct Support Professionals

working for the organization or individuals supported by the organization. No one approach fits all organizations.

However, it is our hope that *We Get It Done: Working as a Direct Support Professional* will be a valuable tool for all organizations in their workforce development efforts.