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CALL TO ACTION

**A Model for Improving
Quality of Support and Outcomes for
Adults with Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities**

October 2025



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I. Introduction

The True Professional (“TTP”) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to elevating the quality of support for adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (“IDD”). TTP does so by providing professional development and consulting services to the staff and leadership at service providers.¹ High quality support for adults with IDD leads to better physical and mental health, higher levels of independence, and increased quality of life, something every person deserves. Set forth below is a summary of our cross industry research to determine how best to achieve these outcomes and an analysis of TTP’s data-driven implementation model.

II. Urgent Need to Improve Quality of Support and Outcomes for Adults with IDD

Individuals with IDD deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and lead lives that are rich in experience, with as much independence as possible.² As these individuals reach adulthood, their families often rely on residential agencies to provide critical services that shape each individual’s daily life. Indeed, it has been well documented that:

- Mentally stimulating activities improve cognitive functioning;³
- Physical activity boosts brain and overall health;⁴
- Socialization increases the quality of life;⁵ and
- Recreation leads to increased happiness.⁶

¹ See Biographies of the TTP team included as Appendix 1, [linked here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHhrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link).
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHhrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link

² See, e.g., Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, 42 U.S.C. § 15001 et seq. (2000).

³ Krell-Roesch, J., Vemuri, P., Pink, A., Roberts, R. O., Stokin, G. B., Mielke, M. M., Christianson, T. J., Knopman, D. S., Petersen, R. C., Kremers, W. K., & Geda, Y. E. (2017). Association between mentally stimulating activities in late life and the outcome of incident mild cognitive impairment, with an analysis of the APOE ε4 genotype. *JAMA Neurology*, 74(3), 332–338. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaneurol.2016.3822>

⁴ Hall, J. M., & Thomas, M. J. (2008). Promoting physical activity and exercise in older adults with developmental disabilities. *Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation*, 24(1), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.TGR.0000311407.09178.55>

⁵ Green, C. W., Gardner, S. M., & Reid, D. H. (1997). Increasing indices of happiness among people with profound multiple disabilities: A program replication and component analysis. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 30(2), 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1997.30-217>.

⁶ McClannahan, L. E., & Risley, T. R. (1975). Design of living environments for nursing-home residents: Increasing participation in recreation activities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 8(3), 261–268. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1975.8-261>



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The need is clear: providing high quality services will increase mental and physical health as well as quality of life of individuals with IDD.

Providing high quality services, however, is demanding. Service providers face numerous systemic and operational challenges, such as ineffective and inefficient compliance requirements, an underdeveloped workforce, lack of service outcome tracking, and misaligned staff support models, all of which can undermine even the best efforts to provide quality services. The result is that many adults with IDD do not receive the level of services they need to thrive and may, in fact, regress or suffer abuse. Indeed, research has revealed that ineffective supervision, management intimidation, and a lack of senior leadership involvement are directly associated with *increased abuse* in group residential settings.⁷

III. TTP's Hypothesis and History

Founded on the concepts of excellence and quality client service delivery, TTP delivers solutions to stakeholders at every level of residential services. To achieve this, TTP developed:

- A. A **data-driven model** built around its proprietary framework, the **Five Pillars of Excellence in Service Delivery**, known as **The 5Cs™**, which encompass: *Client-Centered Approach, Continuous Engagement, Communication, Collaboration, and Comportment*. These five pillars of excellence in service delivery provide a structured approach to supporting clients, while also supporting teams in building confidence and professionalism in their work;
- B. **Quantitative and qualitative metrics** to assess the quality of services being provided, and a defined process to assess the program participants both before and after participation in the program; and
- C. The data TTP collected from these assessments have been crucial **to understanding where the greatest need** for improvement lies and **how to increase the quality** of service delivery.⁸

We have learned that achieving a high level of excellence is not quixotic. The research from within and outside the IDD service industry is consistent as to the philosophy, structure, and discipline needed to provide quality service. To enable providers to furnish high quality support that the IDD community deserves, TTP created a model that incorporates these learnings. Since our September 2024 report, TTP continued to serve provider agencies by:⁹

⁷ Friedman, C. (2018). Direct support professionals and quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 56(4), 234–250. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-56.5.234>

⁸ See the 2024 Impact Statement, which sets forth the impact of TTP's pilot, included as Appendix 2, [linked here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHhrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHhrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link

⁹ See the September 2024 Report Executive Summary, [linked here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jSp65RS3JlovNHPMtT4d8JmXWRvi-PT/view?usp=drive_link). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jSp65RS3JlovNHPMtT4d8JmXWRvi-PT/view?usp=drive_link



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- A. offering **monthly Foundational Development Courses** and consulting services to approximately 200 professionals;
- B. continuing our **data analysis** by conducting initial and post workshop assessments and developing our findings;
- C. establishing an **Excellence in Support and Outcomes (“ESO”) framework**; and
- D. launching a **Workforce Development and Partnerships program**, by creating strategic partnerships to recruit and develop university undergraduate and graduate students to work in residential services.

IV. What Research Across Industries Reveals

TTP researched how to provide quality services in the IDD residential services industry by using, among other sources, the Harvard Business Review’s *Service-Profit Chain* business theory, which establishes the link between investment in frontline employees and customer satisfaction. TTP evaluated IDD and cross-industry related research in the retail, hospitality, healthcare, and food service industries. In these industries, the workforce was generally client facing, non-degreed, and not highly compensated. Additionally, TTP analyzed the Harvard Graduate School of Education *Instructional Rounds In Education* approach to developing teachers by applying the hospital format of “making rounds.”¹⁰ In that approach, “rounds” are defined as an improvement strategy grounded in “... identifying a problem of practice, observing, debriefing, and focusing on the next level of work.”¹¹

Our research revealed that delivering high quality services, requires the following:

A. Invest in Continuous Professional Development

Investment in continuous professional development for frontline staff, known in adult services as Direct Support Professionals (“DSPs”) and their managers, is critical to delivering high quality services. Professional development is foundational in nature; without understanding what the role is (and is not) as a DSP, and what appropriate boundaries are, DSPs don’t have a chance to do it well;

B. Provide Ongoing Hands-On Development Opportunities

People without a college degree, as many frontline staff and managers are, develop and retain skills more effectively with continuous hands-on opportunities to apply learnings experientially;

¹⁰ City, E.A., Elmore, R.F., Fiarman, S.E., &Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Harvard Education Press. The IDD industry also is affected by boundary issues, such as work performed in bedrooms and bathrooms, and serving medically frail individuals and individuals with communication challenges. The challenges of intimate care settings highlight what City and Elmore call the *instructional core*—the interaction of content, skill, and engagement. In IDD services, the “content” is the support routine itself; the “teacher” is the Direct Support Professional; the “student” is the person receiving support. Boundary issues are part of the core work and must be observed and improved in that context.

¹¹ Ibid.



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C. Equip Teams with Effective and Accessible Tools

Effective and accessible tools support job satisfaction, retention, and consistent quality of support;

D. Leaders to Prioritize Quality

Leadership that overtly demonstrates that quality is a core value creates high quality service outcomes; and

E. Middle Management to Enforce Accountability

Effective and engaged middle management is critical to retaining high performing frontline staff and achieving outcomes.

TTP's robust cross-industry research establishes the direct link between internal practices and quality of service delivery, and how to best develop professionals.¹² Together, these approaches underscore a critical truth: **frontline staff, supported by ongoing hands-on training and strong, engaged management, with core values prioritized by leadership, are the cornerstones of high-quality service delivery.** When staff are valued, equipped, and led effectively, outcomes improve across the board — from excellence and consistency of services provided to employee satisfaction and retention. These findings confirm TTP's evidence-based framework.

V. TTP's Three-Pronged Approach

TTP's first program offering was a series of Professional Development Workshops targeted towards DSPs and managers. After providing its Professional Development Workshops and rigorously evaluating the data outcomes, TTP expanded its service offerings to sustain the enhanced quality of service. To do so, TTP evolved its offerings using a three-pronged approach:

A. Foundational Development Courses and Consulting

Based on TTP's proprietary **5 Cs™**, TP's first program offering was a series of Professional Development Workshops targeted towards DSPs and managers. TTP has evolved its program to professionally develop stakeholders at **every level** of a residential provider organization. TTP's program is delivered through a dynamic blend of intensive in-person workshops, and customized learning content offered via **1Huddle, an innovative mobile learning app**. These courses can be combined with consulting services to optimize benefits and address individual client needs.

B. Excellence in Support and Outcomes (“ESO”) Consulting

To sustain the learnings from the Foundational workshops, TTP has developed a structured framework for an **Excellence in Support and Outcomes (“ESO”) Function** that enables providers to embed quality improvement into their organizational infrastructure. This

¹² See References, which catalogs our cross-industry research, included as Appendix 3, [linked here](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link).
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fWP9XPHHrxFvNzkPSD4z5pgNr17sFfE/view?usp=drive_link



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function allows the provider to uphold the rigor of the quality on its own. The framework establishes the systems and tools needed to drive ongoing excellence, incorporates mechanisms for regularly assessing and sustaining service quality, and supports the professional development of both frontline staff and management. TTP tailors the ESO function to each provider's unique context and delivers hands-on implementation support to ensure it is effectively integrated into daily operations. This function is distinct from a typical compliance or quality assurance function, which is focused on complying with regulatory and operational requirements, not necessarily on increasing the quality of service and achieving outcomes.

C. Workforce Transformation and Partnerships

TTP has partnered with NEXT for AUTISM, residential providers, and universities to recruit and develop undergraduate and graduate students to work as DSPs as part of the NEXT for AUTISM FELLOWS work-based scholarship program. This initiative connects DSP opportunities with undergraduate and graduate students in psychology, social work, education, and related fields, creating an ongoing source of individuals with an interest in supporting people with IDD.

VI. Conclusion

To sustainably provide high quality service and achieve outcomes that the IDD community deserves, the research is clear: providers need to 1) invest in **continuous professional development**; 2) provide **ongoing hands-on development opportunities** through an established ESO function, 3) use the ESO function to **equip teams with effective and accessible tools**, 4) **prioritize quality through every means available**, including both financial and non-financial methods, and 5) require **middle management to buy in** and enforce these precepts. The alternative is to risk unnecessary cognitive and physical health deterioration, reduction of quality of life, and potential abuse to those who need the services the most.

TTP calls on **every member of this community**, including government, providers and their employees, families, residents and all other stakeholders, to insist upon excellence in supports and outcomes by requiring foundational development, ongoing support to the staff through an ESO function, and the constant search for the highest quality staff and management possible. This will take greater resources, but the outcome is what people with IDD are entitled to and deserve.