

The Diverse and Changing Roles of West Virginia's
Community Development Specialists

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Background

Two years ago when I conducted my first qualitative assessment of the Community Development Specialists (CDS) Network, I went into the field with CSAP (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention)¹ strategies as my guide, which I assumed was a loose job description that defined the work required of the CDS. It soon became clear that, while CDS honored these strategies, their jobs entailed much more than meeting CSAP requirements. The over-arching goal of preventing substance abuse within the strategies defined by CSAP appeared a solid framework, yet inside the framework moved a fluid network of sixteen specialists who traveled through their communities at varying speeds, and in different and diverse directions. The CDS are part of the West Virginia Prevention Resource Center (PRC), and in order to unify and strengthen the Network while maintaining this fluidity, the PRC adopted a team approach, dividing the CDS into four regions around the state, each region consisting of four CDS who formed their own support system. Teams chose a leader to represent them at monthly team council meetings thereby, the theory goes, creating a structure in which to support and unify CDS around the state. Implementation of this system had just begun two years ago during my last evaluation. Measuring its success was a component of this current evaluation, which took place via observations, interviews, and focus groups conducted August through November 2005.

While CDS work “in the field,” most other PRC staff work “in-house” at the Edison Building in Charleston. References in this report to “in-house,” “Edison,” or the “Center,” refers to PRC headquarters in Charleston. The PRC is a learning organization, and its unique management style and flat structure are linked to the way CDS perform their duties and view their jobs. This report is positioned from the CDS’ point of view. When CDS discuss their concerns about the PRC or their perceptions of the Center, for instance, I have not interviewed Center staff to validate or challenge these perceptions. That would entail a broader scope than intended for this report, which, in addition to providing a progress report to DADA, is meant to give voice to the CDS, to gain a better understanding of their roles in their communities (in turn providing a look into communities themselves), to hear about their challenges and successes, and, finally, to learn what works well and what can be improved upon, in order to strengthen the organization.

Additionally, I wanted to hear about the CDS’ feelings regarding the SPF SIG grant,² an ambitious project the PRC is responsible for coordinating and implementing over the next five years, the success of which is largely dependent upon the work of the CDS. Other topics or themes would be raised by the CDS themselves as they voiced their opinions and shared their work experiences.

All quotations within this report come directly from interview transcripts, and “CDS” is used interchangeably as a singular and plural noun. Where possible, I have used the CDS’ words instead of my own paraphrasing, in order to reveal their character and let them speak for themselves. CDS and their counties have not been identified within the text. A draft of this report was approved by the CDS prior to its submission.

¹The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, funds the CDS Network through the federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant, administered through WV DHHR’s Division on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (DADA).

² The SPF SIG, Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant, is a five-year, \$11.75 million grant from CSAP that aims to build prevention capacity and infrastructure across the state and reduce substance abuse-related problems in communities.

Finally, I am grateful to the CDS for candidly sharing with me their thoughts and personal feelings. Their openness and genuineness during our interviews is a reflection, I believe, of what they take into their communities.



Region 4 CDS, Dave Bailey, Brenda Powell, Christy Rose, and Lynn Wallace at a team meeting in Beckley.

The Team Approach

The CDS Network consists of eleven women and five men; the age range is wide, all have college degrees, several have backgrounds in the field of mental health, each has a distinct personality, and all value the uniqueness, integrity, and mission of their jobs. Overall, working within the PRC seems a good fit for the CDS who, paradoxically, require flexibility and structure. The PRC seems to afford them a bit of both. While the PRC's flat organizational structure sometimes creates a challenge for CDS in determining boundaries and balancing these two ends, it also provides a venue for fine-tuning and improvement on an on-going basis. Hence, the formation and implementation of regional teams.

Since the team approach was implemented, five new CDS have been hired. The remaining eleven CDS experienced the transition from working on their own to working in teams. Both groups offered a unique perspective, and everyone agreed being part of a team was a positive step forward. "For those of us who were here before the team concept," said one CDS, "although we had a supervisor who was kind of over the whole state, we pretty much worked independently. It's very helpful to me to belong somewhere, and I like belonging to my team. I like the fact I can call on them. If one of

us needs something, the other one is there to work with you. We've had terrific interaction in terms of being teammates. I think there are some inherent problems in being a team, like relationship problems, and figuring out where you fit, but the problems are not unresolvable."

CDS reported being in teams allowed them to build on each other's strengths and weakness, to "spin off of one another," share ideas, and brainstorm new approaches. Working in small groups has enabled deeper discussion and promoted a broader interpretation of the job. "The team approach is really effective in getting a job done," said a CDS. Closer connections to other colleagues have opened avenues of communication and collaboration and helped to provide a sense of security. "Before, you wouldn't talk to anybody for a month, and then you felt like you only called them when you needed something. Now, I have others close to me to learn from directly and to go to with questions, and I don't feel like I'm burdening them."

Notoriously easy to become "completely lost" when first starting the job, the team approach serves to anchor newer CDS as they try to define their jobs and roles. "There's a kind of pressure to motivate yourself," explained an "older" CDS. "If you've got a day when there's nothing on the calendar, you have to create something, and I think it takes some experience getting used to figuring out how to do that. Floundering as a new CDS is part of the job, but I think it's easier now, because you get a chance to see what everybody else is doing. When I came on, there's wasn't anybody else to see." One of the newer CDS explained, "[My teammate] was very good about taking me along wherever he went. I learned from watching him, and I've learned more on the job than anything else."

While new CDS rely on their teammates for direction and support, they can also bring a new sense of energy to their teams. "[Our new teammate] has been the biggest addition to my change of thoughts," said an older CDS. "I never thought about all these wonderful ideas she has about working with non-profits and other organizations. I really felt like I was in a box for awhile, and it's been very freeing." For this team, new ideas have translated into new approaches in communities; for instance, exploring a wider definition of who needs to be served and working with different populations and businesses.

All teams agreed a proper mix of personalities and an attention to developing relationships were key ingredients for successful teamwork, and growing pains were part of the process. "We've got a melting pot of personalities and experiences on our team, and we're growing all the time," said a CDS. "We get along pretty well as a team," said another CDS, "and there's been some issues along the way, but they seem to work themselves out. It's a relationship, just like a marriage or anything else." Another CDS from another team remarked, "Our team has come a long way in terms of the personality differences and our expectations of each other, but at this particular point I feel we're open enough to discuss anything." One team who felt "very fortunate that our personalities coordinate, instead of clash," credited the management style of the PRC for empowering each region to hire its own people, thereby making it more likely to find individuals whose skills and personalities complement the team.

Strengthened bonds between the CDS has resulted in a stronger community presence. CDS reported communities are beginning to see the Network "as one entity" instead of individual CDS handling individual counties. One team explained, "We're

gaining credibility, because we conquer in numbers. Although we have the three or four counties assigned to us, we're overlapping with one another, building a more collaborative approach." As community awareness of the CDS Network grows, what they can do, their purpose, becomes clearer to the community. "Communities are starting to know who I am," explained a CDS. "They're seeking me, and instead of questions like, "can you pay my heating bill?" they're more questions like, "we have this issue, what would you suggest?" They're becoming more streamlined and specific to the mission of the PRC."

Community Establishment



Bill O'Dell, with Cabell County Sheriff Kim Wolfe and a police officer, leads Boy Scouts in an oath to never use drugs.

Becoming known in communities, building a reputation, gaining credibility, is an essential and on-going process for all CDS. Getting established in some communities "can take years," and patience is a virtue. Communities are fluid, "opportunities ebb and flow," and taking advantage of them when they arise, especially contacts with key people, is an instrumental strategy for CDS. CDS reported major barriers to getting established were most often due to (1) key people in communities with control, turf, and/or personality issues, and (2) community readiness, which often includes a denial of problems within the community. "It's really an interesting experience to go through and try to seed yourself somewhere where they don't want you," said a CDS. "I don't know if the community's not ready, or the people who hold the power aren't ready. The community may be up and ready to roll, but that doesn't really matter if the people who hold all the cards aren't going to do anything about it." All CDS felt varying degrees of connectedness within their regions. All had counties where they were "still looking for opportunities," and counties and communities where they felt welcome and strong.

CDS are hopeful the SPF SIG grant will provide a means for them to become more visible and help them gain access in hard-to-reach communities.

Prevention is Prevention is Prevention – A New Language



Michelle Markovich and Carol Moscar at a True Colors workshop.

A comprehensive approach to prevention is now being realized as a best practice. The SPF SIG, for instance, in its attempt to prevent substance abuse, takes into account the culture and socio-economic conditions of the population it's aiming to serve. Every thing is connected. CDS report getting communities to think comprehensively, to see the link between drug prevention and other social concerns, has been a challenge. While communities have typically focused on target areas like domestic violence or obesity, the CDS' challenge is to convince communities that the risk factors for obesity and the strategies used to combat it are the same risk factors and strategies used to combat substance abuse. "What we've been doing in our communities for a long time is treating symptoms of a bigger problem," explained a CDS. "We need to quit treating symptoms, because that doesn't have good outcomes, and we need to start looking at things in a more comprehensive, scientific, best-practice fashion. So, we're beginning to use a new language. We're doing a good job of approaching communities at a different level, but I think we're at a critical stage where we could lose that quickly if we don't stay on course, remain persistent, and steer to the direction we're headed."

Evidence this new language is being understood is emerging from communities. The message that building partnerships and working collectively is more effective than working in isolation is starting to be heard. “I am definitely seeing more cooperation between individuals and different agencies and groups,” said a CDS. “There’s more of an awareness for the need of collaboration.” Another CDS reported a community group in his region “asked us to come in and help develop and implement a coalition. We’re calling it a comprehensive coalition, because we’re going to be looking at the whole spectrum. We’re looking at universal prevention all the way through treatment, that whole continuum, so we have providers not only from prevention but from treatment. We’re looking to have an overall prevention and treatment plan for [Counties X and Y]. We’re excited about that. It’s in the beginning stages. But, see, that’s only come about since we’ve been trying to move away from our traditional way of doing things and getting into more best-practice approaches in the community.” Overall, CDS reported a presence of “strong groups who want to try” a comprehensive, collaborative approach in their communities.

Community Priorities



Kristi Adkins shows kids how to get out of “addiction’s handcuffs” at a *Project Towards No Drug Abuse* activity at Marshall University.

In terms of requests for information, presentations, or trainings on specific issues coming from communities across the state, CDS reported “it comes from everywhere,”

but a leading issue is methamphetamine. “It’s taking our rural counties by storm,” said a CDS. “It’s an epidemic.” Another CDS stated, “It’s like a monster. It’s coming up and rearing its head all over the place.” Other top requests were alcohol, underage drinking, and teen pregnancy. CDS in the northeastern region of the state reported a top priority developing from the expanding Latino population, including problems associated with illegal immigrants in the workforce, domestic violence, and an influx of students in schools, where interpreters and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes are quickly becoming an issue. Methadone is “another growing issue” in which one CDS reported “some people aren’t willing to acknowledge, because it’s legal. [But overall], meth right now is probably the most talked about, just because of how dangerous it is.”

CDS agreed that, typically, the issues getting the most press coverage are the issues people seek help with the most. “There’s still a lot of “just-in-time” training on issues,” explained a CDS. “If something pops up, then it’s an issue. If meth is an issue, then we need information on meth. If somebody dies because of prescription drugs, we’ve got a prescription drug problem. They [community people] don’t want to necessarily look at things that aren’t hot topics.” Another CDS surmised the media is “part of the reason people go out for these information dissemination campaigns, and billboards, and flyers, as being a way to treat [the problem]. Because it’s media, they perceive it as needed. It’s not going to make a change. There’s a lot more problems before a kid starts with meth; there’s a lot more problems in that life. You don’t just start using meth, heroin, or coke because your life is perfect.”

Additionally, CDS felt the priorities coming from their communities were often subject to the organizations seeking help. In college towns “there’s always an issue, something you can touch on and get a good success, and it makes the mayor look good. So there’s many facets that really support that happening there,” explained a CDS. “Then you’ve got organizations [in the same town] that never know about [issues on campus], because it wasn’t happening to them, but they have issues with team-building skills, and we can make them stronger by helping them work together. Then there’s other organizations who just want you to help them research, find funding. So it’s very different. It’s not like you walk out into [CITY K] and they’ve got the same problems.”

Some CDS reported what people requested most were Continuing Education Units (CEUs). One CDS explained, “I think most people in southern West Virginia have to come to Charleston or Huntington to get those services, so when we offered CEUs at the Risk and Protective Factors workshop, [the response] was unreal; they were like, “oh my gosh, we can get CEUs!””

Many requests for services are based on existing links. “It filters out based on the contacts I’ve made,” said a CDS. “The Adolescent Health Initiative coordinators, we do a lot of stuff together. The FRN (Family Resource Network) and I try to get on one or two subcommittees so I can meet other people. Typically, I’m the type of person who doesn’t wait for something to become an issue before I get involved with it.”

“Selling yourself” to the community, reaching out instead of waiting for community people to call for services, is another on-going process for CDS. “A lot of times it’s going to meetings and selling what you have to offer, whether it’s helping them with their planning process or assisting them with a grant. You do have those who always call wanting the one-shot deals, “will you come do a drug presentation?” or something like that, but most often I feel myself going out and saying, here’s what I can do for you.”

Many CDS reported a majority of their time was spent working with the school system, from providing *Natural Helpers* training, to helping with after-school programs, to meeting and working with various coalition members affiliated with the school system. CDS agreed that mostly, “The school system will open their doors as long as they can fit you in,” but block scheduling often hampers services and programs CDS can provide. “So you do what you can do.” CDS reported working with law enforcement, though some CDS would like to form closer relationships with this sector, and CDS often work with FRNs, sometimes serving on FRN boards or collaborating with FRNs on various community projects.

CDS felt strongly that because different communities have different issues, CSAP strategies they are required to fill do not always serve community needs. “Sometimes we have to do things because we have to do them. We haven’t done an assessment to find out where our community is, so we rush in and we do this thing that absolutely drops off dead. But we completed something. [There’s no impact because] it doesn’t have the community behind it, because the community doesn’t need it. But I did it.” Another CDS from another region said, “Their [the community’s] issues may require something totally different, and it’s not fair for us to have to push that [required strategies] upon them.”

Determining the real needs of a community, then prompting discussion on the best ways to meet those needs, appears to be part of the new direction and new comprehensive language CDS must learn to communicate to their communities if they are to “stay the course.” One seasoned CDS put forward, “Community-needs assessment is a training need for CDS. I’m not sure what CDS do on a daily basis is really based on what the community needs. We’ve got sort of a gut feeling, assumptions, but how do we test our assumptions? How do we identify community needs in a structure using evaluative methods? We have some data to look at, like Pride Surveys and so forth that can help us determine needs in some respects, but what else is available? Does a community actually need to do a Teen Expo just because it’s a “feel-good” activity, knowing it won’t have real outcomes? Yet, if it’s a need of theirs to feel good, can you link that activity back to protective factors? CDS need to prompt these discussions, regardless of whether they do Teen Expo or not.”

The complexity of these issues and the diversity of needs within communities and organizations help to illuminate why CDS perform different jobs, move in different directions, and need latitude and flexibility in order to serve the myriad needs they encounter. These complexities also reveal why the role of a CDS, when functioning optimally, is never static. If communities are fluid it stands to reason that CDS are required, either innately or through training, to go with the flow. “It’s not like we’re out here building Ford trucks,” said one CDS. “We’re in communities working with very dynamic, diverse, fluid systems, so we have to have that latitude to work more independently, separate from a bureaucratic structure. The team concept helps us do that, and so does the flat structure in our organization.”

The SPF SIG

The SPF SIG grant is an ambitious undertaking for the PRC. Fifty-three out of 55 counties in West Virginia will be part of a year-long planning process, after which an undetermined number of counties (at this point) will be chosen to implement the grant for

the next four years, or until 2010. As of the writing of this report, the planning year kick-off begins in one month. The planning year encompasses statewide regional learning opportunities (RLOs) designed to teach grantees how to assess the needs as well as the capacity of their coalitions and communities, how to gather and interpret data, and, ultimately, how to write county-wide, comprehensive prevention plans based on the data they've learned to assess and interpret. The CDS are vital to the success of this process and project, as they work in their regions doing everything from arranging the time and place for the RLOs to helping grantees envision and then implement new, comprehensive approaches.

In general, the CDS believe the work the SIG will require them to do "goes right along with our job. It's just going to continue the process." One CDS believes the SIG will "help us to define our job, or maybe re-define our job. I think in the end we'll provide a better service to the community." Many CDS are hoping the SIG will help them reach new audiences, to "make contact with those types of groups we [don't always work with]. It seems like what we're doing, or at least what I'm doing, is working with the traditional, professional groups, and I think we need to work more closely with the non-traditional, non-professional groups."

In addition to the "real opportunity to make some change," the CDS are looking forward to the exposure it will give them in their communities. "Is it going to really change the way I do business? I don't think in a major way. It's just going to give me a pot of money to pull people in, to get people to look at comprehensive plans, strategic planning. It'll put us out in front more."

Some CDS say they are looking forward to the structure the SPF SIG promises, since the loose structure they generally operate within can, at times, be challenging. "After doing this job for awhile," explained one CDS, "there are days when you think, please give me some structure, please give me a time to be somewhere, and I think this is going to provide a little bit of that but still give us the flexibility we need."

Approval from CSAP of this ambitious plan required two attempts by the PRC. The first plan was rejected after statewide informational sessions were held and the CDS had promoted it to their communities. Feeling as though they had to more or less recant what they had advertised to disappointed community members, issues arose regarding communication between PRC at headquarters and CDS in the field. As the rejected plan was being rewritten in-house, CDS reported feeling "pressured to answer questions" from the community they didn't have answers to, which in turn threatened to impact their credibility. As a consequence, many CDS re-examined their relationship with headquarters. "Sometimes the CDS are somewhat outcasts," said one CDS, echoing the sentiment of others. "They don't seem like part of the whole organization. I think they're really more of an asset than given credit for in terms of the organization itself. With the SIG grant, for instance, it didn't matter what you were doing, [we were expected to] put everything else aside. Just because we're out here in the field and you don't see what we're doing doesn't mean we're not doing anything. So don't always think that we can just stop, drop, and roll when you need us to."

While most CDS believed more information should have trickled down to them, and while issues regarding credibility in the community and relationships within the organization were tested during this period, the overall consensus, now that time has passed and the second plan has been approved and put into motion, was that the

organization as a whole went through “a learning process,” and the process will ultimately serve to strengthen the PRC. Indeed, to address some of these issues, the entire organization recently attended a training workshop on *Appreciative Inquiry*, aimed at strengthening the organization’s capacity by recognizing, appreciating, and valuing its people. “It’s the best meeting we’ve ever had,” said a long-time CDS, adding that the PRC had made “strides forward” in seeking to resolve issues and honor relationships.

With the bulk of the SPF SIG grant still ahead, stresses and pressures on the organization, which have already been felt, will certainly continue, given the scope of work required by PRC staff, both in-house and in the field. One CDS surmised, “It’s a tremendous opportunity that could end up either helping us as an organization, or it could be major problems.” But the wheels are in motion; the train has left the station and is barreling down the tracks. On board are valuable lessons already experienced by the PRC - to keep communication flowing, to discourage others from feeling like outcasts by adopting inclusive measures and honoring efforts, seen or unseen, and to value and maintain relationships. As the PRC works through the SPF SIG to help build strong community organizations it, in the process, continues to build itself.

On Success

When asked of their successes, CDS had varying responses and ideas as to the meaning of success. Some considered building and maintaining relationships, both on their team and in the field, a measure of success. Others said, “I don’t really look at it in terms of ‘what is a success.’ I think success comes in increments and layers.” For instance, a new coalition or an after-school program may have opened for business yesterday, but laying the groundwork for it may have started years ago. Others say watching students grow over the years, from shy freshmen to seniors in leadership positions is a success. Working in the substance abuse field has taught CDS that “prevention is not going to reach everybody, and that’s just something I had to come to terms with a long time ago. It’s not going to be 100 percent successful.” While some teenagers CDS work with blossom into leadership roles, others “end up pregnant at 15.” When this situation occurs, said a CDS, “then you work with her to make her a better mom. It’s all about the bumps and bruises. You just continue to grow.”

Other successes reported by the CDS include:

- Organizing two rural groups who aren’t “agency people. They’re not the typical crowd,” therefore, they demonstrate a desire by local people to “do some good for their community.”
- Zero to low sales to minors during Synar inspections, indicating “the message is getting out.”
- Helping to establish a mentoring program for teens in one high school that credits the program for an almost 50 percent decrease in the dropout rate.
- Training two teenagers in prevention programs, who started a prevention network and, this year, reported a membership of 22 high school juniors and seniors.
- Successfully collaborating with difficult people in leadership positions.
- Staying involved with groups while continuing to connect with new people and become involved with new things.

- Developing a program on ethical standards for public employees then training correctional officers in those ethics.



Julia Haines during an *Energy Express* program at Romney Elementary School.

- Developing a strategic planning retreat for the board of a child advocacy program. Board members are now “stepping up to the plate more. I’d like to believe that was a result of me sitting at FRN meetings, listening to what they were saying, selling myself, making myself available.”
- Helping to expand an after-school program for teens that includes everything from sign language to fly fishing. “Giving kids something positive to do in their life is an act of prevention. Most drug use in children comes out of either boredom or masking something bad that’s happened. Outweigh the negative with positive, and the idea is they’ll get used to joy or happiness coming from something they’ve done rather than something they use.”

- Developing and implementing a truancy forum. With a reported 1,000 truancy cases currently pending in one county alone, CDS in the region helped a group develop a truancy forum, and the success of that forum has led other communities to request training for specific issues in the forum process. “Now our challenge would be to have them look at their issues on truancy in the broader sense. While we’re trying to reduce truancy rates in [County A], let’s look at how we can use those same approaches to reduce substance abuse.”
- Training a methadone clinic’s staff in conflict resolution. “Giving them tools they can use with their clients as well as tools they can use within their own group.”
- Connecting to youth, “really listening to them, giving guidance and feedback without [being judgmental].”
- Becoming more aware of what a CDS’ job is. “Learning where I fit in, learning my own work ethic, growing professionally on the job, working as a team, and learning team-building skills.”

In terms of the community, CDS overall believed the best indicator of success, in a field where measuring success isn’t easy, occurs when they work themselves out of a job. When groups, coalitions, organizations whom CDS have helped need their services less and less, it’s an indicator the groups are learning to sustain themselves. “Success for me is indicated when my community is moving forward, and I’m not in a leadership capacity. Being able to be part of groups and not be in charge of groups or holding key positions in groups means I am empowering my community.”

What Needs Improving?

On Training

The number one needed improvement voiced by CDS was “more training,” both during the orientation process for new CDS and as on-going, continuing education for the Network as a whole.

Newer CDS reported that, while trained in programs over the course of the first year, “it would’ve been beneficial to have that foundation up front.” One newer CDS who felt the orientation process was “helpful, very detailed and went smoothly” said, “Overall, I don’t feel like I got trained in prevention programs fast enough; it was just hit or miss. In particular, program *Project Toward No Drug Abuse*, my training didn’t come directly from the PRC, it was offered first in the community. It was awkward. I felt, this is something I’m training the communities in, yet I’m going to the community to get this training. So I hesitated, but I took advantage of the opportunity. Later the PRC offered that training, but as far as the timeline, it was offered in the community first.”

One of the older CDS who has served as mentor to newer CDS in his region said, “I know the new employees feel like they’re not getting the program education the rest of us used to get. I think that’s blatantly obvious. I pulled out the certificates I got the first 2 or 3 years I worked here, versus what the last two has been, and a lot of them I went out on my own to get, like I just recently did a Risk and Protective factors [workshop] with CSAP that came through the HIV Prevention Network in [County K]. It used to be [we would incorporate trainings] into quarterly meetings. We’d do workshops

two or three times a year, and you could pick one and go to it. Now you have to wait for Share the Vision, if it's offered." A newer CDS said, "There's a lot of work you can do on your own as far as self-learning, but that only goes so far. When you're talking about model programs and that kind of thing, you need more direct training, [especially] when you first start the job."



Mark Berry explains how to help a friend in need during a *Natural Helpers* training at Poca Middle School.

The more training a CDS has, the more he or she can offer the community. While some CDS believed trainings in certain programs should be "mandated in some way," others wanted the ability and flexibility to choose programs they were interested in, or programs that could directly benefit the needs of their communities. CDS said they would like to have a travel or reimbursement system in place that would allow them the opportunity to attend trainings and conferences out of state "to get different ideas percolating." One CDS suggested, "Even if I could take it out of my office budget, I would do that [in order to] interact with different people." An older CDS said, "Newer CDS are hungry for these opportunities." Many CDS perceived that in-house staff had more opportunities to attend out-of-state events or to receive educational reimbursements than were afforded the CDS. "If the PRC could [offer these opportunities] to sort of make it fair across the board, that would be nice."

On the other hand, one seasoned CDS who has been in the business for years said, "I think teams in the field need to become more responsible for their own training. I don't think [we] need to wait on the PRC to offer it. So one of the things we're going to do as a team is create our own training. Since [hiring trainers] is not in our budget, I don't know how we'll work that out; maybe we'll find someone who'll provide their specialty to us at no charge, or we might look at certain PRC staff to consult with, on evaluation training, for instance. But let's experiment and try new things. With our flat structure we need to do that. We can't wait on directives. Who do we wait on directives from? We have to take responsibility ourselves and test it. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but if it does, then we've created our own opportunity and perhaps created a model someone else can use, which then makes a better organization."

In order for CDS to teach communities how to fish, so to speak, everyone agreed proper trainings were essential tools that strengthen not only communities but the organization as a whole. But amongst some of the CDS themselves, there appeared to be a differing point of view as to what, precisely, they were expected to know. One CDS believed, "I think we need more training, because I feel like we're expected to be experts, but in all reality we're not. I think everyone who goes out and does prevention work ought to have the same understanding of addiction. I don't think they do. Our base is supposed to be in substance abuse prevention, but I think there are a lot of people who have serious misconceptions about drug use, drug abuse, addiction, and things like that. I think that's something that probably ought to be addressed. We should at least be on the same page." In contrast, another CDS said, "I may feel addiction is a disease and another CDS may not. Does that belief make me better at doing my job as a prevention specialist? I don't think so. You can have the same outcomes in terms of preventing substance abuse. Should we have the same skills and knowledge in prevention? Yes. I think we're in different places, depending on how long you've been in the field. Experience teaches you that, and so does training. If you look at the [PRC's] core competency documents, not everybody is at advanced levels [of expertise]. If one of our primary responsibilities is substance abuse prevention, you need to know about substance abuse. On the other hand, if it's about prevention in general, then substance abuse knowledge is not that necessary, because your approach toward any type of prevention is the same. Best-practices are the same, whether preventing substance abuse or heart disease. I don't think I have to be an expert in the field of addiction to provide substance abuse prevention services."

In terms of implementing new trainings, timing challenges sometimes arise for CDS. "A lot of times we're trained in something that we don't use for six months, so we either have to be re-trained, or we've already had that training so we're supposed to know it, and we don't do as well as we need to. Just-in-time training works for me. The new MAR (Monthly Activity Report) is a good example. We've got a whole system, we did it for a month, we double did it, haven't touched it for 4 or 5 months. We're going to have to relearn that whole process. So we sometimes get the cart before the horse and that hurts us." Another CDS said, "You can take this training stuff overboard, get saturated and never utilize it. Organizationally, if you value training you're going to train staff. Individually, I would think if you value training you're going to transfer that training you received to the communities, [otherwise], in a sense you're just giving it lip service. And that's what teams struggle with. Teams say 'we want to be trained,' but what are you going to do with the training once you receive it? We should be training communities in best practices related to prevention. If a CDS says we need more training, I would tend to agree with that, but you need a broad array of training, not just evidence-based

programs, which are a piece of it certainly, but a very small piece. If all a CDS is doing is implementing evidence-based programs like *Babes* or *Natural Helpers*, is that effective? How far does that go in terms of reducing substance abuse? The task of training is more complicated than just evidence-based training. That's easy. How do you train for organizational development? You need a comprehensive approach."

In short, expanding the number and types of programs available to CDS, and implementing a more comprehensive approach to their training and education needs could serve to parallel the comprehensive, best-practice approach being tried on communities at large.

While CDS had suggestions for other improvements, they invariably couched their responses with comments like "I love my job," or "The management style of this organization is unique and gives you the opportunity to learn and the freedom and motivation to move in your own direction," or "I'm always proud to be a Community Development Specialist." CDS valued the uniqueness of their jobs, even when it proved a challenge to define it. Some called themselves consultants, others called themselves salespeople. "We keep trying to put our job in a box and define it, and it's almost like a butterfly – just about the time you think you've caught it, it's gone again. And I think that's important to understand about this job, because we do so many different things." While their jobs and job descriptions were often abstract, suggestions for improvements proved more concrete. They include:

- **Communicate, communicate, communicate**, "both within teams and with the PRC." One CDS recommended utilizing the PRC's on-line Stuff Page, "read other teams' minutes, understand more about what other teams are doing. We always expect people to tell us what's going on, and I think so often we don't take initiative to find out ourselves."
- **Develop strategies to increase monies available.** In terms of salary, CDS understood that funding limitations and salary guidelines from fiscal agents restrict the amount of money available for salaries, and all agreed "nobody goes into this field for the money." But, as one CDS said, "That attitude can foster low pay." While CDS were appreciative of their benefits, from flex time to healthcare, developing organizational strategies to increase pay, as well as travel expenses, was a recommendation. In terms of travel expenses, some, but not all, CDS reported, "We could network a whole lot more in communities" if more travel monies were available. One CDS explained, "We talk about trying to work closer with non-traditional approaches in the community, but with restrictions on travel it's difficult to develop those types of relationships, so the tendency is to go to the more traditional groups and work with them." In contrast, another CDS reported that, while having to be cautious with travel funds, she's "never been stopped from going anywhere that she needed to go," but admitted more travel funds would increase her opportunity to do more in the community.
- **Share contacts and information** with people in the community and with each other. "We're all in the same network. Call or email me if you run into somebody you think I should know. I'll do the same for you."
- **Include CDS more in the decision-making process.** "I do think Edison needs to provide more face-to-face opportunity for CDS to be involved in the decision-making process [instead of via email]. When a meeting is convened

at Edison to discuss RLOs, have a CDS there to become part of the process, maybe a CDS from each team, rather than Edison sending out a spread sheet on the RLO schedule and asking for feedback from CDS. I look at it and say, well there it is. What do I think about it when I haven't had the opportunity to interact with others? That's expensive because it requires travel, but I don't know how you can provide more opportunity for CDS to become more directly involved, assist in design, help make decisions, without spending more money.

- **Develop a better reporting system.** "We need better ways of reporting what we do, which I think we're trying to work on that. The MAR leaves a lot to be desired. I just feel like sometimes in my reporting I certainly don't capture everything I do, and then that leads to misperceptions."
- **Develop an organizational code of ethics and an organizational approach to conflict resolution.** "Conflict is healthy, but we need to make every effort to resolve it, organizationally as a whole, not just at Edison, because we're not immune from conflict in the field either."

Conclusion

The field of prevention in West Virginia seems poised on the verge of transformation. Traditional methods are slowly giving way to new, comprehensive approaches, and CDS are the agents who will help usher in the change. As CDS continue to build capacity and promote prevention awareness in their communities, integrating these new, comprehensive approaches will surely demand that CDS themselves continue to develop their own capacity as teachers, counselors, salespeople, consultants, trainers, mentors, professionals. Their desire to receive more training indicates they are eager to do just that.

During these interviews, big heartedness emerged as a fundamental trait in CDS, whose motivation and rewards most often came from touching people's lives, from empowering single individuals, to coalitions, to communities at large. When asked what an ideal, best day looked like, a CDS replied, "I'd say that's 95 percent of my days, because I enjoy what I do." Another CDS, voicing the opinion of many, said "[Best days occur] when the light comes on, and people [in the community] see I'm not coming in because they need something, but they're a part of it." These attitudes, traits, and values, encouraged and given room to grow inside an ambitious learning organization like the PRC, seems fertile ground for the transformation of prevention in West Virginia.