



Expanding Eligibility for Life Skills Coaches

Issue:

Current regulations require that individuals serving as *Life Skills Coaches* possess one of the following:

- A Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree in:
 - Psychology
 - Sociology
 - Social Work
 - Education
 - Child Development
 - Gerontology
 - Nursing
 - Other closely Related Field
- A certified Life Skills Coach
- An intern currently enrolled and supervised by an accredited higher education institution

These required qualifications limit opportunities for qualified and experienced direct care professionals who would like to become Life Skills coaches. This restriction also contributes to the ongoing workforce shortage within community-based programs that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Proposal:

Amend the qualification requirements for Life Skills Coaches to allow individuals with **at least two years of direct care experience** to be eligible for employment in this role, **provided they are supervised by a professional who currently meets the educational requirement and/or has at least five years of experience working with individuals with disabilities.**

Rationale:

1. Addresses Workforce Shortages:

The human services and disability support sectors are facing unprecedented staffing challenges. Expanding eligibility to experienced direct care workers will help fill critical gaps and ensure continuity of services for individuals with IDD.

2. Recognizes Proven Skills and Competency:

Direct care professionals with two or more years of experience have developed essential skills in communication, behavioral support, personal care, and community inclusion—competencies that align closely with the responsibilities of a Life Skills Coach. Practical experience in these areas is often more relevant than formal coursework alone.

3. Supports Workforce Advancement and Retention:

Providing a clear career pathway for direct support professionals encourages retention and professional growth within the field. Allowing experienced workers to advance under supervision acknowledges their expertise and dedication while maintaining appropriate oversight and program integrity.

4. **Maintains Oversight and Quality Standards:**

The proposed amendment preserves quality assurance by requiring that individuals with two years of direct care experience work **under the supervision of someone who meets current educational requirements and/or has at least five years of experience** supporting individuals with disabilities. This ensures that program standards, safety, and person-centered practices are upheld.

Conclusion:

Expanding eligibility for Life Skills Coaches to include individuals with two years of direct care experience—under qualified supervision—strengthens the disability services workforce, promotes equity and career advancement, and ensures continued high-quality supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This change reflects a practical, responsible, and inclusive approach to addressing workforce shortages in Washington State’s community-based support system.