



“ Our mission is huge, our clients have complex, ever-changing needs, and there is always a shortage of funding in our social service world. In spite of these challenges, Clearbrook maintains a solid statewide reputation for consistently delivering high quality care to children and adults with developmental disabilities. I know the primary reason we are able to accomplish our goals – year in and year out – is because of our professional, loyal and well-trained workforce. ”

– Carl La Mell, President

# Clearbrook

Creating Real Opportunities for Clients & Employees

Since its founding in 1955, Clearbrook has been devoted to enhancing the lives of children and adults with developmental disabilities. Today it serves over 3,300 clients annually, making it one of the largest providers to disabled populations in the State of Illinois. With a budget of nearly \$31 million, Clearbrook offers a holistic set of services at more than 40 program and residential facilities throughout the Chicagoland area and in-home services throughout the State of Illinois.

In the human service world where dwindling government resources, increasingly complex client needs, high turnover and lower-paying jobs are the norm, Clearbrook stands out. For the last several years, in spite of these constraints, the agency maintains an impressive statewide reputation for consistently delivering high quality client care through its

## Clearbrook Arlington Heights, IL

- Founded 1955
- Human service agency helping adults and children with disabilities
- 2009 Revenue: \$31 million
- 860 employees; 70% minorities
- Average turnover for full time workforce: 20%
- Average turnover for last 3 years: 6%
- Average tenure: 9 years
- 2006 Best Bosses Winner as awarded by *Winning Workplaces* and *Fortune Small Business Magazine*

[www.Clearbrook.com](http://www.Clearbrook.com)

dedicated and well-prepared workforce. However, this was not always the case.

When a new President took over Clearbrook in 1996, the workforce was demoralized, complacent and resistant to change. The organization had a closed culture where little information was shared and there was a constant fear of reprisal. It took nearly four years for its new leadership to reinvigorate the culture by strengthening its management practices, setting higher performance standards and making a substan-

tial investment in employee development. Today, Clearbrook has grown significantly, diversified its revenue sources and – despite its inability to pay top wages – has cultivated a professional, loyal workforce that is highly-trained and eager to take on new challenges.

## The Hands-On Workforce

Clearbrook is a flat, non-hierarchical organization with limited management, intentionally structured this way to decrease bureaucracy, increase transparency and foster greater employee autonomy. The vast majority, nearly 80%, of staff work directly with clients. Direct service staff are comprised of In-Home Staff and Residential Staff.

In-Home Staff deliver services for families with  
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## Workforce *continued from page 2*

disabled members in the comfort of their home. This staff numbers over 400 and all work part time, generally no more than 15 hours a week, as mandated by the State of Illinois. These individuals are often younger people working their way through college who find the flexible, limited hours accommodating to their schedules.

The 350-person Residential Staff, the focus of this report, work full time, are mostly female and minorities, and belong to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the State of Illinois' government employee union. Their entry-level wages range from \$8.75 - \$10.50 depending on experience and background. Nearly 60% of the Residential Staff make at or below \$40,000 annually.

According to their AFSCME contract, Residential Staff

receive scheduled merit increases of \$.25 - \$.50 per hour each year up to 5 years. While relations between the union and management are positive, this staff receives additional raises, beyond the one previously mentioned, only when the State of Illinois grants pay increases. Given the State's dire financial shape, it has not been able to issue increases for its union workforce for the last three years. Currently, Clearbrook is positioning itself to negotiate a few other options for increasing wages.

Many of the Residential Staff possess long tenures, averaging around nine years, and turnover among this staff hovers around 20% annually, a rate far better than the national average. In the field of developmental disabilities, the national turnover rate for Direct Support Professionals averages 50%.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statistic from study by Hewitt and Larson, cited in the North Carolina Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Direct Support Professional Work Group Report, November 2007.

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## Prioritizing and Incentivizing Staff Development

Over the last decade, leadership at Clearbrook has worked steadily to create a more professional and engaged work environment by first building the capacity of its mid-level managers. The company then instituted a new performance measurement system, redesigned jobs and set higher standards encouraging staff to take greater initiative. Central to this transformation has been an unwavering commitment to staff development – at all levels. Where the agency is limited in its ability to pay higher wages, they make up for this in the amount of staff learning opportunities. Even in the very lean years of the agency, Clearbrook's leadership has never cut back on employee training and development.

With an annual training budget of nearly \$300,000, a three-person staff develops and oversees a wide array of personal and professional learning opportunities at Clearbrook. Employees are expected to attain up to 40 hours of training each year; 15 hours



are mandated and the rest is voluntary but strongly encouraged. Employees receive credit for each learning activity and those that complete the 40 hours are recognized and receive a 1% salary increase. During the first quarter of 2010, nearly 30% of staff have already completed the 40 hours of training and thus received a salary increase.

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## Staff Development *continued from page 3*

The development opportunities for Residential Staff have been structured to be delivered in a number of formats for flexibility and ease of access:

- **On-site Training** provided by internal staff or an outside trainer. Internal staff are encouraged to deliver training on timely topics and receive extra compensation for doing so. Clearbrook's training department has a budget of \$25,000 to pay staff to deliver training sessions. For some staff this can mean an additional several hundred dollars annually. Management has found that this practice develops leadership and presentation skills among the internal trainers and fosters positive employee interaction.
- **Staff Job Shadowing** provided through

observation of another program site, facility or client population.

- **External Course Work/Credentials:** Clearbrook helps with tuition in a limited manner, reimbursing \$300 - \$750 annually. While the organization cannot afford to pay total tuition fees for advance degrees, they allow employees a great deal of flexibility in their schedules to accommodate school commitments. Employees can receive credit for outside coursework that goes toward the organization's 40-hour annual training requirement. Those that obtain their degree receive an extra \$400 in recognition of their efforts.
- **Videos/DVDs/Webinars** are available on a variety of professional topics involving the care of disabled adults.

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## Success Story



Brad, 26 years old, is currently a Resident Services Director. In 2004 he started working for Clearbrook as an in-home direct service worker assisting a young boy with a rare neurological problem. For a young man, Brad's dedication was impressive: four times a week, he would travel up to an hour and a half to spend time with the boy helping him develop basic life skills.

Brad's commitment and hard work led to many opportunities. After a year of in-home service work, he was promoted to Case Manager and shortly thereafter to a Coordinator position supervising seven other Case Managers. In 2009, the President suggested that he consider an even greater challenge as Director at their 92-bed residential program. Wary at first, he resisted but then eventually stepped into the position, more than doubling his salary. "Managers here have always been very supportive of allowing us to move around," says Brad. "They give us lots of autonomy to get things done and there is very little micromanaging."

Over the years, Clearbrook has invested in Brad's development, from the Direct Service certification to countless clinical and leadership trainings. His long-term goal is to obtain his Administrator's License from the State of Illinois, which will allow him to oversee the facility's operation. But right now, he is focused on his present job and making sure his own staff feel fulfilled in their work. "We can't pay our direct care staff a lot of money. People have to enjoy their jobs to stay here. I want to be able to give our staff room to be creative, to give them independence and a sense of ownership – just as I was given," he says.

**"This is a fast moving, changing environment. If we have an idea and have thought it through, management tells us to go for it. There is not a lot to hold us back."**

**– Brad, Service Director**

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## Staff Development *continued from page 4*

**“Philosophically, management believes that the only way they can provide the best service to the client is if we have the best staff.”**  
– Christine, Program Coordinator

### Certification and Beyond

All staff that work directly with clients, including Residential and In-Home Staff, must receive their Direct Service Provider (DSP) certification involving 40 hours of classroom work and 80 hours of on-the-job training. This credential, paid for by the agency and provided on company time, is very portable. If the individual leaves the agency, this certification is valued and accepted at a host of other private and public health care agencies around the State.

Development at Clearbrook falls into three major categories: mandated training by OSHA and the State of Illinois; training on the organization’s policies and practices; and other electives of personal and professional interest (Wellness, Managing Time, Stress Management, etc.).

A sample of the mandated courses that make up the DSP certification includes:

- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- First Aid
- Service Planning
- Behavior Management
- Human Rights
- Abuse/Neglect Reporting and Prevention
- Service Plan Theory and Application
- Providing Care with Dignity
- Bloodborn Pathogens
- Fire Safety
- Domestic Skills/Food Preparation
- Driver Safety and Vehicle Training
- Medication Administration

Most human service agencies working with disabled populations train their staff on the basics: how to feed, clothe, bathe and keep clients safe. Clearbrook distinguishes itself by going way beyond these basics. They have their own onsite clinical staff made up of behavioral analysts as well as speech, physical and occupational therapists. These experts teach onsite classes giving staff a deeper understanding of their clients. *“Sometimes our clients can be hostile,”* explains Training Director Shannon Paul. *“Because our staff are better trained we have far fewer accidents and incidents of clients being aggressive toward our employees.”*

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## Success Story



Christine, 33 years old, has worked at Clearbrook for nearly 10 years. She has been promoted three times, currently functioning as a Coordinator for the In-Home Program. In 2001 she was hired as a Job Coach in the agency’s Employment Services Program where she remained for eight years, working her way through college. To position herself for future leadership positions, she was encouraged to gain experience in many aspects of the agency. She moved on to become a Case Manager and was soon promoted to Site Supervisor overseeing several job coaches and 25+ worksites. After three years, she made a lateral move to another program as a Service Facilitator and shortly thereafter was promoted to her present position.

Christine has grown and developed strong

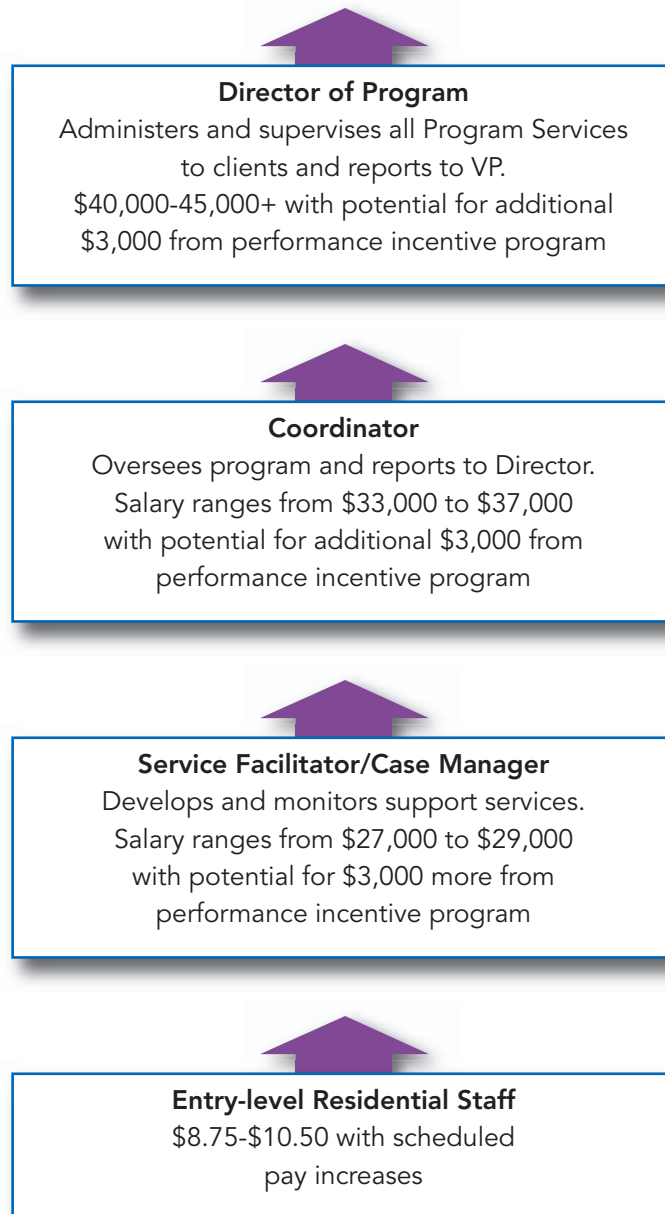
capabilities in a wide variety of areas due to her training and mentoring. A true lifelong learner, she takes advantage of all development opportunities and has more than doubled her salary. She has received numerous certifications while at Clearbrook: Direct Service, First Aid/CPR, Document Management and Employing Disabled Populations. In addition, she has taken several continuing education courses through the University of Illinois resulting in a clinical certification.

Clearbrook has been Christine’s home and she intends to stay for a long time. *“I knew this place was different – employees really matter here. I was so impressed that our President takes the time to meet and get to know each employee,”* she says.

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## Career Progression for Residential Staff: One Scenario

Clearbrook strives to promote staff from within the agency;  
a typical career path for entry-level Residential Staff follows:



**“Just as we work hard to create opportunities for our clients  
we must create opportunities for our staff.”**

**– Clearbrook President, Carl La Mell**

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## Benefits At A Glance

Clearbrook's leadership consistently works at the State level advocating for increasing employee benefits. Whether it involves insurance or paid time off, the agency's budget places a priority upon their human resources.

- **Medical Insurance:** 85% employee premium paid by employer
- **Dental Insurance**
- **Employee Assistance Program**
- **Life Insurance**
- **Short & Long Term Disability**
- **403B Retirement Plan**
- **Pre-tax spending benefits**
- **Paid Time Off:** 12 sick days, 2-4 weeks of vacation depending on position and 3 personal days
- **Tuition reimbursement:** \$300 - \$750
- **Prepaid legal assistance**
- **Access to two Credit Unions**
- **Various warehouse club memberships**



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## Mobility Upwards and Laterally

Clearbrook is a flat organization with limited management roles. While its leadership emphasizes promotion from within, they struggle to achieve this in great numbers due to the limited number of positions to which they can promote employees. Despite this challenge, many have advanced: over 40% of all Case Managers were promoted from direct service positions. Over the past year alone, 11 direct service staff have been promoted to these positions.

Besides onsite development, Clearbrook's primary method of grooming employees for advancement is to intentionally move them around the agency, exposing them to a variety of settings, programs and client populations.

Employees gain exposure working with young babies, adolescents, adults or the elderly; they become well-versed in dealing with clients with a variety of diagnoses; and experience settings ranging from day treatment, to residential facilities, to facilitating employment at a Home Depot center.

Staff benefit from these lateral moves by tackling new challenges, building new capabilities and working with new department teams. To accommodate, managers must be very flexible and adept at recognizing when a particular staff member may need a change and encouragement to move out of his or her comfort zone.

*"Over the year and half that I have been here, I can see that there is not a lot of ego at this agency," says Shannon Paul, Training Director. "There is a real desire to move people and groom them into new roles. We are always working to train our successors. It keeps us engaged in our work."*

Employees are also encouraged to take on external roles to collaborate with other agencies across the State in coalitions that engage in policy and advocacy work for disabled populations.

This emphasis on mobility either up through the traditional chain of command or laterally results in frequent job openings around the company, all of which are first publicized internally.



## Conclusion

In the human service world, with its lean budgets, complex client needs and demand for greater accountability, Clearbrook has made a difference. This 55-year-old agency continues to reinvent itself in order to respond to its various stakeholders of clients and their families, funders and regulatory agencies. Over the last decade their budget has more than tripled and the number of group homes they manage in the State of Illinois has skyrocketed from five to 28. Their success is due, in large part, to their enlightened and supportive leadership, their prepared and dedicated direct service staff and a work culture that values both accountability and autonomy.



**[www.WinningWorkplaces.org](http://www.WinningWorkplaces.org)**

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