Certification of Disability Workers Pilot Project

Alberta Disability Workers Association

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Contents

Executive Summary

ADWA was created to provide a voice for disability workers and "to build recognition of the professionalism of those who work in this field and help them build careers that are supported by relevant education and an enhanced certification process based on recognized core competency standards" (ADWA, 2010). The Alberta Disability Workers Association (ADWA) has been mandated by our membership from its inception to research and develop a certification process that would be implemented within the province of Alberta. ADWA undertook this task and has been working on this priority extensively since 2014. This document summarizes our recently completed certification pilot project. This report will outline the background research, preparation for the pilot, implementation of the project, discussion of the challenges and finally will make recommendations for moving forward based on what we learned.

Fundamentally, the findings of this pilot demonstrate that a process to certifying competencies for disability workers in Alberta is viable and necessary. ADWA and its community partners will need to work together to ensure the implementation of certification which will demonstrate that disability support workers in Alberta have the necessary education, training, skills and overall competencies to support people with disabilities to be included, active citizens in their communities.

Based on our learnings, we recommend further conversation with all industry/community stakeholders around how to best implement a certification process. Further discussion is critical both for buy in from the sector, as well as to determine the best process to move forward, one that will be both achievable and sustainable. Within this report you will see a plan that will be taken forward as a starting point for community discussion.

Introduction

The purpose of certification, according to the U.S. National Council on Measurement in Education, is "to determine whether individuals are knowledgeable enough in a given occupational area to be labeled as "competent to practice" in that area. It is generally a part of licensing or registration processes for professions (Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators, 2012, p.3). The development of a certification process can also be a first step toward regulation (Government of Canada, 2015.) The need for a credential, such as certification, to practice a profession can also be an important mechanism to manage risk and reduce injury or death of individuals served, the worker or other members of the public (Smith, Macbeth, & Bailey, 2019, Knapp, 2000). In addition to avoiding harm, certification of competent practice indicates that the practitioner should create benefit for individuals served and society as a whole by his or her actions (Smith, Macbeth, & Bailey, 2019).

Unlike most other professions, the disability services sector is made up of workers with a broad range of backgrounds and educational levels supporting individuals with diverse intellectual, physical and emotional disabilities. Disability workers are expected to provide a broad range of supports. These can include but are not limited to the following:

- Find fulfilling work, develop good work habits and learn job skills so individuals fit in and are assets to their workplaces.
- Become connected to other resources, social groups, and activities of interest in their communities.
- Participate in community life by supporting society to welcome individuals and engage with them as fellow citizens.
- Learn to manage their money, busy schedules, and households.
- Understand complicated social, medical and political systems so the individuals they support can advocate effectively for what they need, or to advocate for and with them if necessary.
- Maintain their health by providing safe, respectful and sensitive personal care, medication administration or other medical-related support (such as advocacy for needed health care).
- Manage the frustrations and emotional triggers that are part of life using effective coping strategies.
- Deal with life transitions from childhood to adulthood and/or to retirement or to end-of-life.

This broad scope of practice is different from that of social workers, home care workers, health care aides, PT/OTs, registered or licensed practical nurses, employment counselors, and community developers, even though work requirements may overlap with these professions and others. Determining that a person is a competent disability worker cannot be met by requiring them to be certified or registered under one of the above designations. There is not currently an established process of certifying someone as a competent disability worker in Alberta.

Complicating this situation is the fact that there is no single current standard of educational preparation for this work, as there is for other established professions. There are a variety of related educational programs offering instruction from as short as 12 weeks plus a 90-hour practicum to a 4-year bachelor's degree. The content and learning outcomes of these programs also vary considerably. Many disability workers have no formal education in the field (Boles Consulting, 2014), so must develop the necessary

skills through experience and on-the-job training, which can take longer, increase risks and potentially negatively impact the quality of life of those receiving services in the interim (Tobey, 2012).

The disability services field has changed in significant ways from the 1970s to the present. In the 1970s, the workforce was considered to be well-paid, well-educated (a Bachelor's degree was a common entry requirement), and gender-balanced. At that time, services were more institutional in nature, with people working in teams (e.g., segregated classrooms, group homes, sheltered workshops). Today services are individualized and community-based (e.g., inclusive education, independent living, supported employment) (Sonpal-Valias, 2019). Comparatively, the current disability services workforce is poorly paid, more female-dominant, with less or no post-secondary education and is expected to be effective working alone in the community (Boland, 2015). In addition, the Alberta disability services workforce includes many new resident workers, with a mixture of educational credentials from other countries (Premji et al., 2014) or no post-secondary education. All of these factors may increase risk in disability services and the likelihood that services are delivered by people whose workplace competence has not been externally verified.

Qualifications in Other Jurisdictions

This challenging state of affairs is not limited to Alberta. Jurisdictions across the globe have faced the same challenges. At present, there is no disability worker certification system in other provinces of Canada. Ontario has developed and successfully applied a set of core competency standards to provincial education and training (Toben & Woo, 2016; Forsyth, Atkinson, & Wallace-Gero, 2016; Corbier, 2016; Young, Wallace-Gero & Trahan, 2016), as well as hiring processes in the field (Health, 2016; Ropp & Oneil, 2016; Robb & Johnston, 2016). However, it has yet to develop a certification process (Nugent, Perry, & Benner, 2019). The Ontario professional association has maintained contact with ADWA regarding determining how to proceed on certification of its workforce.

Australia and New Zealand have set core competency standards for disability supports and continue to focus on providing post-secondary training certificates with competency-based demonstration elements in the workplace as part of the program requirements in Australia. Recently in New Zealand efforts have been made to tie training to specific pay equity levels. However, having a certificate in either Australia or New Zealand is not compulsory to obtain employment in disability services and an independent certification process (either mandatory or as a voluntary credentialing process) has not developed in the five years since our original research was conducted. At that time, certification was seen as preventing people from seeking jobs in the field. Having completed a relevant post-secondary education credential is sometimes, but not always, listed as a requirement in disability worker job postings.

In the United Kingdom, certification of disability workers is part of a larger scheme to set National Vocational Qualification levels (NVQ), now called the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), including core competencies of a wide range of occupations. Based on national occupational standards in over 1,000 subjects, NVQs in England and Wales, plus SVQs in Scotland, are statements of performance that describe what competent staff are able to do in a given role. A range of skills are demonstrated with a primary focus on work-based activity, including best practice, health and safety, transferrable skills, problem solving and the ability to adapt to changing requirements and knowledge in

the field. NVQs were first introduced in the mid 1980s and have continually undergone updates and national reorganization, including changes to the naming and regulatory body format, all with a focus on strengthening the workforce and workplace standards. Competence is measured in a variety of formats that has a focus on the individual seeking accreditation being the lead in the process of building a portfolio that demonstrates their skills and abilities. This type of work-based assessment can be used by both experienced employees seeking recognition for their skills and by people new to the field as a development tool guiding their training and experience opportunities.

In the United States, various states have established minimum qualifications for people working in disability services and voluntary credentialing processes (Biersdorff, 2014). Of these, the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has the broadest reach. It starts with a registration process that signals intent, supported by an employer letter verifying completion of all orientations and required training and 6 months of continuous, current employment. In order to advance to level 1 certification, candidates must submit proof of 100 related instruction hours, proof of 1 year of continuous, current work in the field, a letter of support from an individual receiving their support and a portfolio of work samples demonstrating competence and reflective practice in 4 of the 15 NADSP core competencies. Level 2 certification repeats these requirements, but with a portfolio related to an additional 4 competencies. Recently, completion of the requirements has been supported by the development of training E-badges that allow workers to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and values on the job in an alternative way. Employers in the field purchase an E-Badge Academy subscription which allows a specified number of employees to enroll in web "courses" in order to submit assignments that demonstrate specific core competence standards. E-Badges provide an alternative to the traditional portfolio requirement for NADSP certification. The NADSP have provided a [comparison of the traditional and E-Badge methods of completing the certification process](#) at various levels. While a disability worker could complete the traditional process independently, except for support letters, access to the alternative E-Badge process is controlled by service providers who may or may not choose to buy into the E-Badge Academy and who could choose which employees to enroll in it.

In summary, different jurisdictions have chosen different approaches to try to ensure that individual disability workers have the skills, knowledge and abilities required to support individuals with disabilities safely and effectively. Some have focused on developing coursework tied to core competency standards and then moving toward requiring workers to have those levels of education before hiring them or within a period of time after hiring them (i.e., credentialing via certificate or diploma). Others have recognized the value of education and training as means of developing expertise, but focus on demonstration of required knowledge, skills and abilities through a portfolio and/or workplace observation process. Demonstration of reflective practice is a key component of professionalism in all credentialing systems.

In order to establish disability work as a profession in Alberta and mitigate risks associated with its practice, a system of certifying the competence of the workforce is needed. In recognition of this, some employers across the province have attempted to establish a basic level of competency within their own organizations and/or regions. For example, some are supporting this by arranging for employees to take courses from post-secondary institutions or providing value-based training such as Open Futures

Learning. Others are including the core competencies as part of their performance evaluation systems. While certification can never guarantee error-free service delivery (Knapp, 2000), a certified profession does assure government funders that public money spent to pay workers translates into services performed by staff who have demonstrated their skills at some point in time (Alberta Health & Wellness, 2001). Working with stakeholders in the sector, ADWA has developed a system of assessing members of the disability workforce against agreed-on core competency standards and now needs to ensure that the system it has developed is fair and flexible yet rigorous, and meets the needs of the sector, its funders and the individuals with disabilities who receive its support.

Preparation for the Pilot

Much work was completed in preparation for the pilot over the past decade and more. The Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS), as part of its [Workforce 2010 initiative](#) (ACDS, n.d.), developed a workforce classification system with broad involvement of the sector. Included in standardized job descriptions was a set of core competencies and related standards for disability workers within the first year of work that had been developed for Ontario's Developmental Services by the Hays Group. An ADWA-commissioned review of core competency standards revealed that while different jurisdictions had different labels and ways of organizing the key skills and principles of quality disability service, they were consistent in the concepts included. ADWA took the ACDS standards, refined the wording for clarity and made some additions consistent with the ACDS workforce classification system. These revisions were reviewed in 2015, first by ACDS staff and the Provincial Workforce Council, before being made available for review by ADWA members, ACDS member service providers, Inclusion Alberta families and Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) government staff. Feedback led to revisions to the standards. A plain language version was reviewed and endorsed by self-advocates who receive disability services. The most recent ACDS Workforce Classification System Manual has adopted the current ADWA standards for its Community Disability Services Worker classification.

Likewise, proposed methods of assessing whether disability workers met these standards were shared with members of our sector by means of E-Bulletins and presentations at Service Provider Councils disability service agency and Inclusion Alberta staff meetings, meetings with government officials and at the ACDS annual conferences. Disability workers were asked to express their interest in pilot participation in an E-Bulletin to ADWA members and at an ACDS conference, resulting in nearly 50 names.

A Certification Pilot Advisory Committee (CPAC) composed of representatives of service providers, PDD, ACDS, Inclusion Alberta, Government of Alberta staff and an elected MLA and post-secondary educators in the sector was created. In addition to broader advice and communication about the project to their members, specific CPAC members have contributed to the assessment methods, most notably the knowledge exam. Many of the questions from the knowledge exam have been drawn from tests used in the ACDS *Foundations* curriculum and post-secondary courses.

For the purposes of the pilot only, a variety of types of evidence were included, both to give disability workers with different levels and types of education and field experience a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills related to the core competency standards, as well as to test the

consistency of the evidence for each candidate. Inspiration for conducting candidate evaluations during the pilot were drawn from both Alberta further education practices and the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system used extensively in the UK. The design and approaches used for observation and document assessment in the accreditation pilot have been based on the models used in the NVQ system which overlaps with existing Alberta further education standard evaluation practices. Some of the approaches used include:

- Live workplace and community observation
- Accreditation for prior learning
- Written examinations with the use of a proctor in the community
- Online scenarios
- Uploading examples of work
- Extensive supervisor feedback
- Supported individual feedback (support recipient)

We were aware from the beginning that we did not intend to include all of these assessment measures in our final certification process, but for the purposes of the pilot project we wanted to include as many as possible to be able to determine which methods would be part of our final process.

Specifically, from the United Kingdom, we used direct observation sessions by experienced observers. In addition to the evidence gathered by individuals, a trained assessor observed a range of work-based activities and reviewed all of the submitted work to ensure the occupational standards were being met. Observation was a key evaluation tool in the achievement of the qualification. Choosing a method that had a significant emphasis on work-based observation was a key design feature for the ADWA pilot. Evaluators maintain independent rigour in the quality assurance process, maintain occupational standards across all regions, minimize agency and individual bias and build a body of trained staff who are conversant in the language and requirements of work-based assessment.

Answering written scenarios served as a back-up to observation, allowing disability workers to describe what they would do and give a rationale that indicated reflective practice, a process consistent with the NADSP certification system in the US. Both the UK and US systems emphasized that the disability workers should take a lead role in gathering evidence to demonstrate their skills and reflective practice. An evidence upload system was developed as part of the ADWA website to support the upload of education transcripts, training certificates, commendations and letters of support by the certification candidates. The NADSP requirement of a letter of support from a person receiving services was also supported by Alberta self-advocates and included as part of the evidence.

Most certification systems for established Canadian professions with a core curriculum require graduates to complete a professionalism or ethics exam, therefore this was included as one assessment. Members of our sector from self-advocates to agency leaders expressed concern that disability workers should demonstrate proficiency in understanding and communicating in English, so a language assessment was included. We included a checklist that required supervisors to indicate what standards they had observed being met consistently and the actions they had observed reflecting those standards. Supervisor or employer support letters or forms are a common part of certification systems, although

their content varies from a statement of hours of supervised practice to a confirmation of skill sets. The assessment tools were developed, which included multiple scenarios and ethical dilemmas relevant to a wide range of service delivery situations.

Certification preparation manuals were developed for candidates and their supervisors with content based on those of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA), which has had a voluntary certification program for over 30 years. These manuals provided the principles behind certification and professional practice in disability work, plain language details and examples of each core competency standard, details of assessment tools with a sample question and model answer for each, the ADWA code of conduct and ethics, and a checklist to guide candidates through the steps of the certification pilot process. Appendices included the application, consent form for ADWA to interview the person they chose who receives support from them and a copy of the supervisor checklist.

In other professions, candidates would be credited for their education in terms of the number of requirements they needed to complete for certification. At ADWA's request, a course assignment was created where teams of Bow Valley College students evaluated each of their first year (certificate program) courses to identify which core competency standards were covered by which courses. Their analysis indicated good alignment with the core competency standards, suggesting that BVC graduates from recent years should have no difficulty demonstrating that they meet the standards in the pilot and might have an expedited certification process in future. A similar process of analysis could be set up in future for other educational and training programs. The Bow Valley College program has decided to use the ADWA core competency standards in evaluating practicum performance and in student goal setting which should make demonstration of core competency standards even easier for students in the future.

Scope of the Pilot Project

The core purpose of the pilot project was to determine whether the certification system developed (i.e., core competency standards, evidence structure and process) are fair, rigorous and flexible enough to determine the competence of disability workers with a wide range of education and experience working in a variety of settings across Alberta. The various measures in the pilot were intended to help identify any changes required for a viable certification system that meets the needs of the sector, its funders and the individuals with disabilities served. The pilot was intended to help ADWA answer the following questions:

- Are the core competency standards valid?
- Which measures are the most reliable indicators of meeting standards of effective practice?
- Does completion of an educational program tied to the core competency standards (e.g., Bow Valley College's current Disability Studies program) provide an equivalency to the piloted certification process?
- What certification system elements or processes are practical and supportive of an effective certification system for disability workers in Alberta vs. impractical and/or unsupportive?
- What is the cost to ADWA of implementing the proposed certification system or its components (and, therefore, the cost that must be charged to break even)?
- What is the level of investment in time and associated costs by candidates and their employers (including supervisors) in becoming certified?

Method

Participants

Initially participation in the certification pilot was restricted to ADWA members who had been in their current position with their current supervisor for at least six months. Individuals who had expressed interest in the pilot over the previous year were re-contacted and asked to complete the application form on the ADWA website. Of the nearly 50 individuals who had previously expressed interest, only 15 completed the application form. Some of the others had left the field, were on a leave of absence, or had changed employers or positions. As a result, significantly more time was spent on a plethora of recruitment activities to achieve our goal of 50 pilot candidates. We continued to add new candidates up to the start of March 2019. Early on ADWA recognized that it was more important to include participation by anyone interested rather than to adhere to requirements that were becoming barriers to some. Therefore, we opened participation in the pilot to people who were not members of ADWA and to those who are new to their positions. A total of 57 people completed the application form and were sent certification preparation manuals, pilot consent forms to complete and return and links to the pre-pilot survey. Of the 57 applicants, 8 (14%) formally withdrew later, 9 (16%) provided neither consents nor evidence beyond the application, 23 (40%) returned consent forms but submitted no evidence and 17 (30%) completed all or nearly all of the evidence requirements.

Candidates in the pilot reflected the diversity of disability workers in Alberta with respect to geographical distribution, community size, employer size, work focus, educational background, years in the field and hours worked. Candidate numbers reflected the distribution of ADWA members by region, with Edmonton slightly over-represented. The percentage of candidates completing the certification requirements was fairly equally distributed. Candidates came from small communities, medium cities and both major metropolises. Employer size also varied from large agencies employing several hundred individuals to family-managed services. Of the three candidates working in family-managed services, one completed the pilot requirements, which is similar to the proportion for larger employers.

Although the certification standards were those for frontline workers, 33% of those who completed applications for the certification pilot were team leaders and program supervisors who didn't always engage in some direct service. It was sometimes difficult for individuals in the higher ranks of the organizations to complete requirements related to letter of support from individuals receiving services and supervisor checklists that are directed to core competency standards of direct service. While 32% of front-line applicants completed or nearly completed the requirements, only 25% of those in supervisory roles completed the requirements.

Distribution of All Candidates by Region

- South: 16
- Calgary: 10
- Central: 5
- Edmonton: 10
- North Central: 15
- NorthWest: 1

Among the candidates on the front line of service, all categories of service delivery were represented, including employment support, facility-based programming, community access, residential support, community
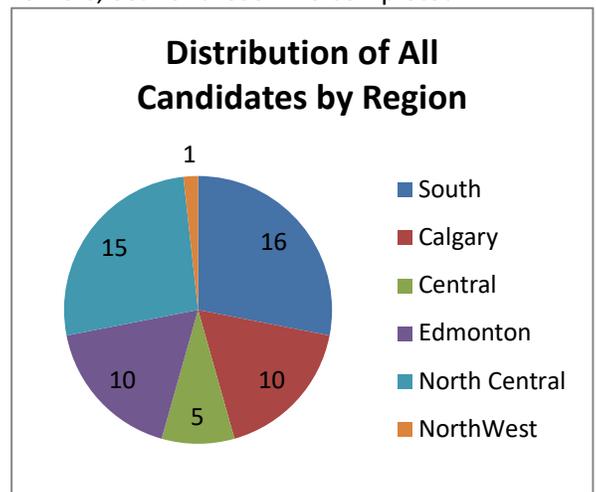
development and self-advocacy support. While most worked with adults who have disabilities, a few worked with children or youth.

The application form asked candidates to indicate any education they had received, the institution, program, attainment and years. Some candidates may have chosen only to include education they deemed as relevant to their work, possibly resulting in an inaccurate picture of the post-secondary experience of the sample. Based only on reported information and/or uploaded documents, 14 of the 57 (25%) individuals who completed applications had no post-secondary education. A total of 19 candidates (33%) had completed a certificate, diploma or degree in a human services field (e.g., home care aid, rehabilitation services, disability studies, special education). A further 9 (16%) had begun but not completed a program in human services. Six candidates (11%) had post-secondary education in an unrelated area (e.g., accounting, bible studies). Finally, 5 candidates (9%) had completed the ACDS *Foundations* course and 4 (7%) had completed *Foundations* in addition to other post-secondary education. *Open Futures Learning* is an online (module) training program that some organizations are using instead of ACDS Foundations training. 7 candidates (12%) reported completion of some of this training. We had hoped to be able to look at how well completion of the Bow Valley program aligned with pilot performance. However, while four candidates had completed the BVC curriculum and three expected to complete the curriculum by 2019, only one non-graduate submitted evidence for certification.[1]

The pilot application form asked for details of current and previous employment. While, in principle, this could give information about how long an individual had been working in the sector, in practice it is hard to interpret. Previous ADWA research indicated that 25% of people work two or more jobs in the sector. The start and end dates of current and past jobs do not necessarily align. Candidates were given space to describe two previous jobs in the sector, which could be insufficient space for some candidates to describe their full work history. Therefore, the information on the application form is not necessarily an accurate picture regarding years of work in the field as would be provided by a complete résumé. The range of years worked in the sector reported by candidates was 9 months to over 39 years.

The number of hours currently worked at the time of application varied from 12.5 hours/week to 85 hours/week. Those completing the pilot requirements averaged 38.8 hours/week, while those who did not complete the requirements averaged 46.2 hours/week. These differences were not statistically significant ($t < 1$, $p = .14$)

Core Competencies and Assessment Tools

Core Competency Standards. The ACDS Workforce Classification System Manual provides a job profile of a Community Disability Services Worker (CDSW) with the primary activities and tasks associated with the position, preferred qualifications and the standards of competency that the CDSW should be able to

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[1] It is interesting to note that of these various educational categories, 56% of those who had started but not completed a program in human services substantially completed pilot requirements. Half of those with unrelated education completed the pilot requirements. Only 20% - 25% of the other education categories substantially completed the pilot requirements.

display within the first 6 months in the position. In 2015, ADWA took the core competency standards described in the ACDS Workforce Classification System Manual and refined the wording for clarity and concreteness so that each core competency standard was measurable, while asking for clarity from ACDS when we were uncertain of a standard's meaning, intent or application. While the ACDS job profile described the CDSW as having roles in supporting community inclusion and risk management (safety), the list of core competency standards did not include these areas. ADWA reviewed core competency standards of those countries referred to earlier to inform us as we developed additional core competency standards to fill this gap.

The revisions were first sent to ACDS staff for review. After making a few recommended changes, the standards were sent for review to the Provincial Workforce Council, a body composed of executive directors, managers, HR and other professionals in the sector from across Alberta who had been responsible for the development of the Workforce Classification System with ACDS. The standards were then distributed to ADWA members who were asked to share them with colleagues to get the broadest feedback possible from our sector. At the same time, the request for review and feedback was sent to ACDS member service providers, Inclusion Alberta (families) and Person with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) government staff, as well as presented for feedback to PDD regional CEO's. Feedback led to some revisions to the standards. The standards and discussions about them were included on the ADWA website to allow members of our community to track the conversations and rationales presented and add their own thoughts. Finally, a plain language version was reviewed and endorsed by self-advocates who receive disability services and their supporters at a meeting of the South Region Self-Advocacy Network. The resulting 12 core competencies and associated standards are found on the ADWA website at https://www.adwa.ca/certification/standards.html.

Assessment tools. The next step was to develop a variety of methods or assessment tools that would allow pilot candidates to be able to demonstrate that they met the core competency standards. We combined elements found in other certification or credentialing systems with the expectation that these tools have been found to provide a rigorous and valid method of assessment.

Education and training. Most certification systems for other professions make heavy use of education as a means of ensuring that practitioners have learned necessary knowledge or skills for professional practice because post-secondary programs include an assessment component in their courses. However, many training seminars, webinars etc. provide only a certificate of attendance, participation or completion without an assessment component, making them less useful as a means of evaluating competence. Candidates were invited to upload educational transcripts and training certificates as part of their evidence package.

Letter of support from individuals receiving services. The NADSP requires its certification candidates to provide a reference from someone the candidate provides or has provided service to as evidence that they make a positive difference in the life of someone they support. This reference can be in the form of a letter or alternative format (e.g., video upload) and can be either from the individual supported or their legal representative (i.e., guardian) if the individual lacks the capacity to evaluate or communicate that type of information.

Rather than soliciting a more traditional reference, we opted to request a letter of support. While a person could say negative things about a candidate, these were not actively solicited, in part to avoid creating a stressful situation for the individual. To prevent candidates from influencing what was included in this letter, candidates or their supervisor (depending on employer policies) were asked to obtain the individual's consent for ADWA to conduct a phone or face-to-face interview with the individual the candidate had chosen for the letter of support. In some instances, guardians provided a letter directly to ADWA in place of a phone interview. The questions answered were

- How is your (the supported individual's) life better because of this person's help?
- What does this person do that makes your (the supported individual's) life better?
- What makes this person stand out?
- Do you have anything else to add?

In addition to the global purpose of the letter of support, any examples given by the person or guardian could add to the list of core competency standards found present for that candidate. The questions and proposed protocol were reviewed by the council members of Albertans Advocating for Change Together, a provincial self-advocacy network, who were highly supportive of the inclusion of this element in the certification process.

Direct observation. The UK system relies heavily on observation in the workplace by trained observers to establish that core competency standards are met in practice. While people may say what they would do in a given service situation, it may not be what they actually do. Observation provides a gold standard of evidence; however, it is costly to incorporate observation into an evaluation process because of the time involved and the necessity to have the observers trained to a consistent standard of observation and interpretation.

Early in the development of our certification process we established a working relationship with an individual in Calgary who had vast experience with the disability sector in the UK and its certification system. This individual was part of creating and designing our process for the observational assessment. Having a trained, experienced NVQ evaluator involved who helped develop, test and refine our process was critical to being able to observe and document the core competency standards. These were incorporated into the Evaluator's Manual. The direct observation was to occur after all other information had been submitted by the candidate. The rationale for this was to allow the time with the candidate to be used to fill in any gaps that had not be met by other pieces of evidence.

Supervisor information. In addition to relying on trained evaluators who might only observe the candidate at work for a few hours under limited circumstances, the certification pilot drew on the observations of the candidate's supervisor. While supervisors, or team leaders, do not necessarily spend much time in the field observing their staff supporting individuals, they would be expected to have observed their actions in team meetings (e.g., meeting Teamwork-related standards) or in individual supervisory sessions and annual performance evaluations reporting on and planning their own professional development (e.g., meeting Professional Excellence-related standards). The supervisor should be able to comment on the clarity of candidate's written reports (e.g., meeting Communication-

related standards). While some certification systems only ask the supervisor to provide verification of hours worked and training completed or to provide a general letter of support for the readiness of candidates to complete the portfolio-based certification process, we chose to ask supervisors for evidence specific to the core competency standards for CDSWs that they had observed. A fillable pdf-form was provided to supervisors which listed every standard and asked them to mark whether the candidate exceeded the standard, met the standard, was inconsistent in meeting the standard or did not meet the standard. In addition, the supervisor could indicate that they had not observed behaviour relevant to that standard. For each section of standards, they were given space to describe what they had seen that led them to indicate that the candidate met or exceeded the standard(s). Specifically, they should briefly describe the situation, the candidate's action and the result or impact on the individual of that action. This anecdote could provide evidence for more than one standard and supervisors could re-use anecdotes for other standards. The final item on the form asked supervisors to describe the candidate's goals for the last performance review period and actions taken to meet those goals. This provided evidence of a continuous learning approach to work, which is part of the Professional Excellence standards.

Submission of a portfolio. Both US and UK certification systems include the requirement for candidates to submit a portfolio of work that demonstrates how they have met each of the core competency standards. This requirement can lead to confidentiality concerns if documents are submitted which include identifiers or proprietary information belonging to employers. While course assignments are another common portfolio element, that would only be an option for candidates with post-secondary education and probably only for those whose education was recent enough to still have copies of the assignments. In the end, a series of assessments were developed that would give candidates a forum in which to demonstrate knowledge related to the core competency standards and the field generally. These assessment tools were a practice-based scenario, an ethical dilemma, a language assessment and a knowledge exam.

Scenarios. Six 2-part practice scenarios were developed, one of which was given as an example in the certification preparation manual. ADWA's internal Certification Committee identified several common situations that CDSWs face in their organizations related to a range of services. The assessment scenarios involved setting up service for a new individual in a family crisis, supporting a child in the community, supporting a senior with changing needs, intervening in an employment placement in trouble, and providing self-advocacy support. Each scenario gave basic information about the person and the situation and asked the candidates what they would do and why. A second part added follow-up information about what happened next and asked what the candidate would then do and why. In each case, candidates were encouraged to present experiences they had with that type of situation and describe what they actually did and what they learned from doing that. The rationales for actions would indicate reflective practice related to the standards and make it less likely that evaluators were reading in meaning based on their own responses. The candidate's scenario responses were to be evaluated simply in terms of identifying the standards met in the responses, not on pass-fail criteria. In addition, because the initial sample answer was not intended to reflect all possible good responses, answer

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elements not found in the model which met standards were to be added to the answer key by the evaluator.

Ethical dilemma. Disability workers often face situations where the appropriate response is not obvious given the policies or practices of the employer and do not involve applying basic skills such as safe lifting or medication administration. Often the ethical dilemma of a situation is missed as the worker is not initially identifying it as requiring more scrutiny. Even the moral principles of the profession are not always perfectly aligned with a particular solution. While referring an identified situation to a supervisor for a solution can be an option, ultimately disability workers need to be able to apply a sound ethical decision-making process based on the ethical code of their profession or workplace. Ethics exams involving ethical dilemmas are part of virtually every certifying body's requirements from engineering to psychology, physiotherapy to coaching. Eight ethical dilemma scenarios were developed. One of the dilemmas was used in the certification preparation manual presented with the ethical decision-making process and a model answer for the dilemma. The decision was made to design the question in a way that outlined the steps of the ethical decision-making process in the assessment. The topics of the dilemmas were working with a guardian who has an outdated view of the individual's decision-making skills, addressing requests for personal details of an individual seeking employment, observing poor support practices of a colleague in a mall, considering taking on residential support roles for an individual who you support for employment, addressing bullying by a sibling of a minor, managing cultural diversity on a team, and supporting self-determination of a senior who has serious health issues. The ethical decision-making process that was used to design the questions can be reviewed on the ADWA website https://www.adwa.ca/ethics/interpretation.html

Language assessment. Disability workers must be familiar with the way key terms and concepts are used in the workplace (vocabulary), as well as how to find and understand critical information for effective delivery of services or following policy (comprehension). The disability worker also needs to communicate key facts clearly to ensure that co-workers and employers understand and can make good decisions based on relevant and accurate information (writing). Therefore, the decision was made to have each candidate complete the assessment of vocabulary, comprehension and writing.

Several English language assessments commonly used in Alberta colleges were examined to identify suitability and structure (e.g., TOEFL, Canadian Academic English Language Assessment, Academic Pearson Test of English, EIKEN Test in Practical English Proficiency). While useful in ensuring that individuals were prepared to comprehend the types of materials they would read in academic courses, the content was generally irrelevant to the level and type of language found in disability service work. Drawing on the structure of existing language assessments, we borrowed from materials such as the *ACDS Staff Safety Toolkit*, personnel policies, ADWA E-Bulletins, medication administration instructions and similar materials that Alberta disability workers might be expected to encounter. Vocabulary, comprehension and writing assessments were developed.

Knowledge exam. Based on feedback from the sector, and especially from the advisory group, we decided to include a knowledge exam as part of the assessment. A knowledge exam is often a part of a certification process. Additionally, people in the sector felt it was an important part of workers

understanding their roles (i.e., that workers should know the underlying reasons and values for the approach to work we do in our sector).The knowledge exam consisted of a series of multiple choice, true-false, matching and short answer questions drawn from a variety of educational sources including the ACDS *Foundations* curriculum, Bow Valley College courses in Disability Studies and MacEwan University courses in their Disability Studies program which is no longer offered. There was a total of 40 items which covered laws and rights, models underlying services, disability worker roles and responsibilities, disability characteristics, and best practices in general and with respect to presented scenarios. The exam was offered in an online format where candidates were given as long as required to complete it.

Certification Preparation Manuals

Certification preparation manuals were developed for both candidates and for supervisors supporting them. These were modelled on the candidate and supervisor preparation manuals used by the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta in their voluntary certification process. The body of ADWA's candidate certification preparation manual described the

- Certification program development
- ADWA code of ethics
- Conceptual framework for disability work as a profession
- Annotated list of the core competency standards with plain language descriptions and examples related to a variety of service types
- Certification policies and procedures (e.g., eligibility, process, appeals, maintenance and loss of certification and reinstatement)
- Certification process (e.g., role of supervisor, help available from ADWA, steps from application to completion)
- Examples of online assessment questions with guides to what we are looking for in an answer with model answers as illustration
- A description of how submitted evidence would be evaluated
- Checklist with the steps to take to complete the certification pilot process

ADWA's supervisor certification preparation manual described the certification program and eligibility requirements, the certification process (e.g., role of supervisor, help available from ADWA, steps from application to completion), the annotated core competency standards and the code of ethics. It also included a copy of the application form, consent form for an individual receiving services and the supervisor checklist form.

Procedures

The start date for the pilot was communicated either through ADWA presentations and/or other forms of communication. From this we received many inquiries of interest from organizations or individual disability workers which resulted in their participation in the pilot. Disability workers registered their intent to participate in the pilot by completing and submitting an online application. Interested individuals were given a username and password so they could complete the application form online. Not everyone who asked for and was given access completed the application process.

Completion of the required information on the certification application triggered the administrator to send an email to the candidate welcoming them to the pilot with a description of next steps, a link to the online pre-pilot survey and attachments included a:

- Certification preparation manual
- Pilot consent form
- Time tracking sheet.

Candidates were to sign the consent and return it to ADWA, while the time-tracking sheet was used to indicate the amount of time spent on different certification tasks during the pilot to help us determine the time commitment involved in each element of the pilot process.

The pre-pilot survey asked about their reasons for pursuing certification, their expectations about the time involved, their concerns about the process, and what they hoped to receive as the result of certification from ADWA or their employer.

At the same time, a welcome email was sent to the candidate's supervisor (as identified on the application form) welcoming them to the pilot with a description of next steps, a link to the online pre-pilot survey for supervisors and attachments of a

- Supervisor certification preparation manual
- Pilot consent form
- Time tracking sheet
- Supervisor checklist form (fillable PDF)

Supervisors were to sign the consent and return it to ADWA. They were then to complete the pre-pilot survey about their expectations of time required of them, why they felt certification of their staff is important, any concerns about the certification process, and any recognition they would like to see of certification and the supervisor's role by ADWA and their employer.

After completing the consent process and pre-pilot survey, candidates and supervisors were expected to review their preparation manual. It was suggested to candidates to work with their supervisors or supervisors to check in with the candidate they supported to monitor progress, help interpret requirements and make suggestions to help the candidate move forward in the process. The method the supervisor used to complete the checklist form could include the candidate in identifying examples of how they had met standards in particular situations or could be completed independently by the supervisor based solely on past observations with input from other supervisors if needed. Supervisors could also schedule time to observe the candidate supporting individuals.

The candidate's certification preparation manual included a page with a checklist of all of the pilot requirements (see Appendix A) that the candidate could use to help them monitor their progress and guide next steps. In addition, the certification coordinator prepared and emailed an individualized visual summary of completed pilot tasks to each candidate to use to help them see what they had already done and what they still needed to complete. The certification coordinator also routinely sent emails and made phone calls to candidates and supervisors who had not yet completed the requirements

almost monthly to provide encouragement and troubleshoot barriers. Throughout the entire pilot attempts were made to simplify the process, encourage and motivate candidates and supervisors and to maintain interactive communication. Every attempt possible was made to identify the barriers or challenges that were influencing progression and work to mitigate them. For example, visual progression checklists were provided and "how to" videos were created.

In order to ensure authenticity of the assessment process, the candidate was required to arrange for a proctor. Candidates were limited in their choice of proctor to individuals whose profession required them to uphold a professional code of ethics: educational administrators or teachers or post-secondary institutions, religious ministers, librarians or ADWA staff and board members. The proctor also could not be a relative or co-worker of the candidate. Candidates were responsible for any costs for this service; however, efforts were made to keep candidate costs down to zero by providing proctoring by ADWA board or staff members if they were in the same community as the candidate. Proctoring charges we heard about ranged from $0 - $50.

The scenario and ethical dilemma that was given to the candidate was chosen by the administrator and provided directly to the proctor. The proctor was also given a form to return to ADWA afterward identifying any irregularities and the date and time that the assessments were completed. Candidates were allowed as much time as needed to complete each online assessment, although the preparation manual indicated that one hour per assessment should be sufficient for most and that it was prudent to allow for two hours, in case extra time was needed. Accommodations were provided for any candidate that requested them.

When all of the required evidence (i.e., consents, letter of support from an individual receiving services, supervisor checklist, scenario, ethical dilemma, language assessment, knowledge exam and any other supporting documents) had been submitted, the evaluator assigned to the candidate contacted the candidate to arrange a time and place for a field observation. The observation session lasted between one and two hours and could involve direct observation, interviews with the candidate and sometimes a supported individual, or both.

The initial process included a minimum of two ADWA evaluator visits with each candidate and a list of what was considered "must" observe standards (see Appendix B). As time went on it became obvious that ADWA would not receive necessary evidence in time to evaluate it and to determine what would need to be demonstrated in each observation. It also was apparent that ADWA could no longer reasonably complete two visits in the timeframe allotted to complete the pilot. Therefore, the remaining (13) candidates were asked to review the competencies and choose a time/day where they were most likely to have opportunities to demonstrate the skills they would like to showcase. From the observations the evaluator was able to translate what was observed to what standards were met by demonstration at that given moment in time for each candidate.

Results

Pre-Pilot Surveys

Predicted time commitment. A total of 38 of 57 candidates completed the pre-pilot survey. Candidates were given a list of the candidate tasks involved in the certification process and asked to indicate the number of hours they felt was reasonably needed to complete those tasks. Thirty candidates expressed their answer in hours (Median = 60 hours, Range = 8 – 4380 hours), while five gave an estimate in months (Median = 6 months, Range = 2 – 6 months), two in hours per week and one in minutes. Candidates using hours per week expected to spend up to 5 hours per week.

A total of 17 supervisors completed the pre-pilot survey for supervisors. When given a list of the tasks a supervisor might be expected to spend supporting a candidate's certification process, 15 of the 17 gave their estimate in hours (Median = 15, Range = 3 – 168). Another supervisor expected that a few hours a week would be necessary, and the other supervisor said s/he would spend whatever time was required.

Value of certification. Both candidates and supervisors were asked why certification was important to them. The responses were classified by theme and are listed in the table in Appendix C. The two most frequent reasons candidates gave for the value of certification were that it would be recognition by the sector of the quality of supports and their commitment to the work, and that it would help to professionalize the sector and its image. Additional important reasons for candidates included that it would help them to attain knowledge and skills, it would create an accountability mechanism and proof of their competence and it would help with career advancement. The three most frequently identified values of certification by supervisors were that it would professionalize the sector, that it would help to achieve fair pay for skills and that it would provide recognition for quality staff. Also identified as important were staff accountability and the setting of standards for people working in the field to meet.

Concerns about certification process. Candidates and supervisors were asked what concerns or worries they had at present about the certification process. (For details see Appendix D.) The two greatest areas of apprehension candidates had about certification were the amount of time it would take and if they would have enough time to compete it. They were also concerned about whether they had enough knowledge to be certified and if the process would be recognized/accepted by the sector. Supervisors greatest worries were the amount of time it would add to their already heavy workloads and the time it would take for candidates to complete it.

Recognition of certification. We asked candidates and supervisors how they would like successful candidates to be recognized by ADWA and by their employer. In terms of ADWA recognition, candidates felt the two most important types of recognition would be a formal certificate/seal and a listing of those with certification status on the ADWA website. Supervisors also thought that a certificate recognized across the province and some sort of public acknowledgment of those who had achieved certification would be important. In terms of employer recognition, candidates felt the most important recognition would be a pay increase, career advancement and a formal congratulation (such as a letter on the employment file). Supervisors felt that a pay increase would be appropriate (if funding was provided to do so) and a formal congratulations would also be important. (See Appendix E for details.)

We also asked supervisors how they would like to be recognized for their contributions by ADWA and by their employer. Most felt that no recognition was required. (See Appendix F for details.)

Post-pilot surveys

Initially a single post-pilot survey was developed for candidates and another for supervisors. However, given the number of candidates who did not complete the process, we realized that we needed to ask different questions of those who completed and those who did not complete the process in order to provide valuable information about barriers and challenges, factors influencing completion of requirements and the overall experience.

Eleven candidates who had substantially completed the certification pilot requirements and the same number of candidates who had completed very little of the process responded to the post-pilot survey. They were asked why they had signed up for the pilot. For those who substantially completed the process, the most common reasons for signing up were to help the sector, to increase professionalism, to set expected standards for the workforce and to help workers evaluate their skills. The most common responses for those who did not complete the process were that they wanted to be credentialed and that they had been in the field for a long time (presumably wanting recognition as well). (See Appendix G for details.)

The responses of candidates who stuck with the pilot were more likely to talk about the benefit to the field than personal benefits to themselves. Here is what one candidate said:

> *"I signed up because I want to help uplift or change our sector's image. I want to let everyone know that we are not just ordinary workers but workers with standards— equipped with knowledge, skills and attitude."*

By contrast, those who completed few if any certification pilot requirements were more likely to talk about seeking a credential as their motivation.

Candidates were asked about their expectations regarding their participation and whether those expectations had been met. The most common responses were that they thought certification would be more like a course (with study materials, exams and test results). (See Appendix H for details.)

Disability workers in Alberta have long-standing experience with training (i.e., learning opportunities) but most do not have experience with certification processes that merely evaluate a worker's current state of knowledge and skill. This created common expectations that there was a "certification course" that one must pass to become certified. Those who substantially completed the pilot requirements were more likely to understand the purpose and structure and work with it.[2]

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[2] Furthermore, a few are now implementing what they learned about the standards in their workplace.

Those who did little to complete requirements were just as likely to grasp the steps in the process but ran into difficulties making them happen. While data on the candidates indicated that their workload was not significantly greater than that of the completers in terms of hours, they often reported lacking stability in supervisors or caseload. As one respondent put it:

"As a big chunk of the process rests on my supervisor, which is not in my control and resulted in so much delay, as I had three supervisors in the span of six months. So, there's no continuity in the process, and I'm always in the mercy of my supervisor's left-over time as they're busy in their main job."

Even when there was consistency of supervisors, current workload requirements of this position make it difficult to reasonably count on significant contribution to the process.

"My supervisors have an excessive amount of responsibilities in their jobs already, and they were overwhelmed by the amount of work they were expected to complete so I could be certified. They openly admitted they wished I never signed up to take this pilot project. I eventually just informed them that this project is not worth the stress, and to discontinue the work. My supervisors were relieved they would not have to complete the excessive workload placed on them by the pilot project."

Feedback from supervisors confirmed that workload played a factor. Five supervisors of candidates who substantially completed the pilot requirements and seven supervisors of candidates who completed little of the process responded to our surveys. While both groups recognized that they would be asked to provide feedback about candidate skills and to support their participation, they reported surprise at the amount of time involved. A supervisor of one of those who did not complete the process indicated that with a caseload of 21 staff to manage, it was challenging to devote so much time to one. Another from this group had expected the candidate to seek his/her support, but it had not happened, even when the supervisor probed on multiple occasions. Two others cited confusion about the process and technical difficulties with completion.

Candidates who substantially completed the certification pilot requirements were asked additional questions about those experiences. The steps most likely to be completed were

- Consents from the candidate, supervisor and individual receiving services
- Uploading of supporting documents related to training or support letters
- Online assessments (scenario, ethical dilemma, language and knowledge).

On-site observation was arranged for all but one of the respondents and all but two had a supervisor checklist submitted on their behalf. The step least likely to be submitted was a professional development plan.

When asked how the amount of time spent on the certification steps compared to their expectations, six (55%) of the respondents indicated that the time taken matched their expectation, four (36%) indicated that it took longer than expected and one (9%) indicated that it took less time than expected. Explanations commonly indicated that work on certification stalled due to work commitments or waiting for instructions about the next step. One candidate indicated that the knowledge exam was too long (Median time = 1 hour 15 minutes) and choosing to do the other assessments in a single sitting was too long.

Among supervisors, 60% responded that their role took more time than expected, with 20% indicating that it took less time than expected. In terms of pilot activities, 60% of respondents completed the supervisor checklist, 40% helped the candidate arrange for assessments (e.g., find proctors), 20% obtained consent from an individual receiving services and helped upload supporting documents, and 20% did none of those tasks.

Eight (73%) of the responding candidates indicated that they had difficulty getting started. When asked what helped them move forward, they typically indicated that they found the size of the certification preparation manual daunting. Once through it, some found it self-explanatory after they broke down the steps. Others appreciated the individualized checklist of tasks left to complete prepared by the certification coordinator. Speaking with the certification coordinator or their supervisor also helped them make a plan. One other respondent indicated a need for specific deadlines for each step to stay on track.

Among supervisors of candidates substantially completing pilot requirements, 60% had difficulty getting started. Three supervisors identified strategies that helped them move forward:

- Breaking the intimidating length of the manual into bite-size steps
- Thinking of the checklist like the CET agency accreditation standards, which have the same structure and number of elements
- Setting deadlines.

We asked candidates who had substantially completed the pilot requirements whether the certification preparation manual was helpful and what changes we should make in future, the majority of respondents (67%) indicated that it was helpful. A quarter (25%) indicated that it was somewhat helpful and 8% found it unhelpful. The manual was typically described as comprehensive and detailed, and helpful in explaining and answering questions. However, its size could make it challenging to search. The single most valuable pieces were the flowchart summarizing the process and the checklist of steps. While several respondents indicated that it was fine as is and needed to be comprehensive, others recommended both condensing it and organizing it more like a course manual with sections describing it in a step-by-step way with recommended deadlines.

Among supervisors, 40% found their manual helpful, 40% found it somewhat helpful and 20% did not find it helpful. While one reported that the manual was fine as it was, others made suggestions to distill it to its essence with the summary sheet and information on the checklist up front. Any detail could be left to appendices.

We asked whether the online assessments were at the right level and length. The following table summarizes respondents' evaluation of each assessment.

	Level of Assessment			Length of Assessment		
	Too Easy	Just Right	Too Hard	Too Short	Just Right	Too Long
Scenario	11%	89%	0%	0%	89%	11%
Ethical Dilemma	6%	88%	6%	0%	88%	12%
Language Proficiency	20%	70%	10%	12.5%	62.5%	25%
Knowledge Exam	12.5%	75%	12.5%	11%	78%	11%

The general assumption in assessment is that if most test takers find the assessment to be at the right level and length, and the remainder are relatively equally distributed between the two extremes, that the assessment is balanced. In this instance, where numbers are out of balance, it is by a single respondent. Specific challenges with the assessments included computer issues with video being slow to load or of poor sound quality and an instance where answers needed to be re-entered because they were lost when submitted the first time. This could be due to glitches in the software, the result of using older hardware or Internet transmission problems. Sometimes questions were considered unclear or terminology was used that was not standard in the candidate's workplace.

Candidates were asked to indicate whether they felt the online assessments' content reflected their knowledge and skills needed for disability work. Respondents were divided into two camps. Most felt that the examples used fairly reflected the types of situations they face in their work. As one respondent put it:

"Yes. Exactly because when I read it, those are the jobs I do every day."

A minority recommended that the examples have more variety to include examples of individuals who were more independent or more vulnerable. Also, written assessments inherently depend on writing skills and may not accurately reflect skills in working with individuals who have disabilities in the field. These respondents favour assessment based on field observation as being more predictive of the candidate's skills.

When asked about whether the on-site observation contributed to demonstrating their competence, 80% agreed fully and 20% said it did somewhat. Respondent explanations indicated that they were happy with the observation process and outcome in the pilot. One respondent said

The limitation pointed out by one respondent is that observations capture a partial slice of time and activity and do not give access to the full range of a candidate's support skills over a long period of time. We appreciate the nature of observation times not reflecting skill and/or not occurring as planned. It was quite difficult to arrange a time where the opportunity to demonstrate specific skills presented itself. We also recognize the ethical challenge of candidate attempts to prescribe what will be observed while an evaluator is present. Given these circumstances, observations were implemented in a way that allowed for a person's natural day to continue and hoped to be the least intrusive as possible.

The supervisor checklist was a time-consuming task. It required supervisors to recall what they had seen of a candidate's workplace behaviour and what core competency standards were reflected in that behaviour. Therefore, we had suggested that candidates and their supervisors could choose to work together to complete the form, with the candidate being able to supply instances of behaviour that the supervisor had witnessed. We asked the candidates who had substantially completed the certification pilot requirements whether they had helped their supervisor complete the checklist. Five of the 11 respondents did not collaborate on completing the tool. One of these did provide reminders about completing the tool. Another did review it with the supervisor before it was submitted. Most of the others reported brainstorming examples together or providing input. One candidate completed the checklist and gave it to the supervisor to review because it was too much work given the supervisor's schedule.

Supervisors reported that they often had difficulty recalling examples. Three of the five reported either having the candidate complete the checklist for their review or to provide examples. One supervisor indicated that they did the checklist together. Another indicated that there was no time to do the checklist together. If the checklist indicated 'not observed' or there were insufficient examples of specific standards an evaluator, when possible on an observation visit, would ask the candidate to supply an example.

We asked candidates who had completed most but not all of the pilot requirements what challenges they had faced in completing the entire process. The most three frequent responses involved

- Workload increases
- Certification having a lower priority with a busy life
- Not understanding what would be involved when they signed up for the pilot.

Other challenges that were mentioned included a change of employers, supervisor inability to complete the checklist due to newness or workload increases, lack of organizational support, being frustrated by not knowing what to do or who to ask and forgetting to work on certification tasks.

Supervisors whose candidates had substantially completed pilot requirements were also asked to identify the challenges they faced. Three of the five reported challenges with

- Workload changes or increases
- Pilot tasks being a lower priority than other work demands
- The length of the checklist being demotivating.

Supervisors singly reported challenges due to no longer supervising the candidate, having to do candidate support tasks on his/her personal time and spending a lot of time coaching an individual who never followed through on certification.

Candidate Recommendations. We asked both candidates who had progressed and those who had not to think ahead to a future when certification was part of the disability sector and to make recommendations about what a successful certification process would look like. Respondents provided both practical suggestions and their vision for a future that includes certification. The most common suggestions from all candidates were to set timelines/limits for the process, reduce the workload for the supervisor and simplify the process/manual. (See Appendix I for details.)

In their vision for the future, one candidate who had substantially completed the process saw ADWA certification of disability workers becoming a criterion for accreditation and another saw it being a PLAR option for advanced placement into the second year of Bow Valley College's Disability Studies Program. Generally, they would like to see certification take place before employment in the field and see it as a way to weed out bad workers before they have a negative impact on individuals' lives.

Candidates in both the complete and incomplete groups look forward to a time when people in supervisory and management positions go through a certification process that is disability-services based, because these individuals are sometimes hired from outside with other professional backgrounds that do not reflect the values and skills of our unique sector. While risk management often focuses on the workers on the front line, two candidates noted that managers from other fields have been known to recommend actions that are not in keeping with field values, such as implementing unapproved restrictive procedures, without realizing it.

Candidates who completed few of the certification pilot requirements suggested that more practical training is needed in the field in areas such as mental health, dual diagnosis and drug addiction, areas relevant to future levels of certification at a practitioner/complex needs level. For certification to be viable, time must be allowed in contracts for staff (both front-line and supervisors) to participate in training and in certification without it affecting support time and completion of paperwork and other job duties. At present, candidates reported that turnover at all levels creates coverage issues that cut into any time that could be spent preparing for certification.

Supervisor recommendations. Supervisors of candidates who completed and of those who did not complete the pilot requirements were also asked to make recommendations for a certification process moving forward. Supervisors of those who substantially completed the requirements suggested the following:

- Streamline the process
- Clarify questions in terms of the desired outcome or correct response
- Have the candidate complete the checklist with the supervisor providing validation of it
- Set up the system on Moodle to include interactive elements
- Ensure that the executive director is supportive of worktime being used for certification tasks.

One supervisor said that s/he liked the variety of evidence modes in the current model. Another wrote,

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"…organizations could withdraw support, particularly if the supervisors are hourly employees. Overtime is very expensive."

Among supervisors of candidates who did not complete requirements, suggestions were to

- Simplify the process and provide clearer instructions
- Set support requirements of no more than 30 minutes a day for supervisors
- Ensure that worktime would be allotted for supervisor support of candidates
- Embed certification into training
- Put the certification standards into the performance review process.

In fact, at least one Alberta service provider has the core competency standards in their performance reviews, but no one from that organization participated in the pilot. In addition, one supervisor suggested that *ACDS Foundations* and certification cover the same areas.

Time Spent on Certification Activities

Candidates. We asked all those involved in the certification process to track the amount of time spent on certification activities. For candidates and supervisors, this information would help us give future candidates an estimate of the time they might expect to commit to the process. For ADWA personnel, it would be important to know the time required to set a cost for certification that covered expenses. In each case, the time estimates were broken down by task, as the final certification process would likely not include everything that was in the pilot process.

We received time estimates from 12 candidates who had substantially completed the certification process and one who had submitted educational transcripts and training certificates but had not completed online assessments or other requirements. Several candidates gave global estimates or focused entirely on the time to complete online assessments and the observation, without giving an indication of how long they spent reviewing the certification manual or setting up proctoring. These individuals, therefore, would underestimate the time involved in the overall process. In order to give the most accurate estimate of the time involved, only the estimates of those providing a number for that activity were factored into the average (mean) time. These are presented in the table below:

Activity	Minutes	Hours
Reviewing ADWA-provided materials (Prep Manual, FAQ, update emails)	195	3.3
Posting/reading posts in the certification participant forum	48	.81
Searching for existing evidence documents	82	1.4
Uploading evidence documents (including scanning/conversion)	60	1
Making arrangements for proctoring/observation/transcripts	82	1.4
Completing online written exams or oral interviews	400	6.7
Obtaining consents from individuals for letters of support or observations	47	.78
Responding to evaluator feedback	152	2.5
Email correspondence to ADWA to follow-up	73	1.2
Follow-up with supervisor to complete checklist	60	1

Global calculations or estimates of overall time for those substantially completing the pilot requirements ranged from just over 7 hours (430 minutes) to just under 34 hours (2025 minutes) with a median of 16.5 hours (990 minutes). While this compares favorably with the median amount of time estimated in the pre-pilot survey (60 hours), the reality of trying to fit an additional 16+ hours into a full workload could be very challenging. While the amount of time spent taking the online assessments that were done in single sessions were probably more accurately tracked, activities that took place over multiple sessions, such as review of the certification preparation manual were probably significantly underestimated.

Supervisors. Supervisors were also asked to complete and return time tracking sheets, but we did not receive any. However, we did receive estimates of time for the supervisor activities either by email or in the post-pilot survey for supervisors of candidates who had substantially completed the pilot requirements. Global estimates among the five supervisor respondents ranged from 4 hours (240 minutes) to 46 hours (2760 minutes) with a median of 7.5 hours (450 minutes) and a mean of 16 hours (954 minutes). (Note that the arithmetic mean is more affected by extreme scores, whereas the median is the score at the midpoint of the group.) The most time-consuming task for all but one, who presumably looked at it but did not do it, was the supervisor checklist, where estimates ranged from 15 minutes to 2400 minutes (40 hours), with a median of 300 minutes (5 hours). The table below provides the estimates of how many minutes were spent on each of the identified tasks.

Time-tracking estimates from supervisor post-pilot surveys	Minutes	Hours
Reviewing ADWA-provided materials (preparation manual and update emails)	105	1.75
Searching for supporting evidence to complete the checklist	36	.6
Supporting the candidate to meet the requirements of the pilot	75	1.25
Completing and submitting the supervisor checklist	717	12
Communicating with ADWA about the pilot	21	.35

ADWA personnel. The three identified roles of certification coordinator, administrator and evaluator all tracked their time on specific tasks associated with their role. To determine the per candidate resource allocation, one must identify which tasks were relevant to all applicants (n=57) and which applied to only to candidates who substantially completed the pilot requirements (n=17).

Marketing activities (i.e., presentations to service providers, follow-up correspondence and phone calls) could be considered a separate and necessary process which sometimes resulted in certification applications. The marketing activities carried out by the certification coordinator were tracked, but similar activities carried out by ADWA board members were not. This function could be considered a core area of operations and the need for it is dependent on time, exposure and the ultimate position of certification in the industry.

The following table presents the amount of time in total minutes, per candidate minutes and per candidate hours for tasks of the certification coordinator (C), administrator (A) and evaluator (E). The number in parentheses with the actor code indicates if the task applied to the 57 candidates or the 17 completing candidates.

Activity	Total minutes	Minutes per candidate	Hours per candidate
Application processing & prep manual delivery (A57)	1623	28.47	0.47
Creating and maintaining candidate portfolios and records (A57)	1346	23.61	0.39
Pre-application communications (A57)	351	6.16	0.10
Technical support to candidates, employers & evaluators (A57)	853	14.96	0.25
Updates prep manuals, FAQs & informs pilot participants (A57)	462	8.11	0.14
Communication with Coordinator (A57)	426	7.47	0.12
Communication with members (A57)	10	0.18	0.00
Liaison with candidates & employers re: process (C57)	2670	46.84	0.78
Correspondence with candidates (details/interpretation) (C57)	1505	26.40	0.44
Monthly follow-up & tracking evidence submissions (C/A57)	788	13.82	0.23
Proctor letters and support (A17)	191	11.24	0.19
Download, close & replace completed assessments (A17) [3]	353	20.76	0.35
Proctor candidate assessments (C/A2)	765	382.50	6.38
Reviewing evidence with reference to standards & answer guidelines (E17)	4840	284.71	4.75
Updating answer guidelines (E17)	186	10.94	0.18
Arranging observation visits (E15)	135	9.00	0.15
Travel to/from observation sites (E15)	1691	112.73	1.88
Conducting observations & note-taking (E15)	2280	152.00	2.53
Consulting other evaluators (E17)	1125	66.18	1.10
Communication (internal) (C57)	6760	118.60	1.98
Complete general tasks and/or review/refine certification documents and process (C57)	8100	142.11	2.37
Marketing (Communication, presentations, meetings not specific to a candidate) (C57)	5540	97.19	1.62

The cost to ADWA of the certification process if it continued to involve everything in the pilot, including marketing would be the equivalent of 26.4 hours per candidate. A structure that charged separately for the application process (based on admin and basic support costs for the 57 candidates) and the evidence

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[3] This task would change with implementation of suitable technology

evaluation process (based on costs for candidates who substantially completed the process) would be the equivalent of 3 hours for application (4.5 hours if marketing is included) and 13.1 hours for current evidence creation and review processes (including internal communication), if proctoring services are not included.

Time spent evaluating each of the forms of evidence were either individually tracked or estimated. In some instances, a particular assessment type was evaluated for all or a set of candidates in a single block of time. Where several assessments for a single candidate were completed in a block of time, the average of those assessments tracked individually and/or as a block were used to estimate how much of the candidate's evidence evaluation was spent on that particular assessment tool. The following table indicates the average number of minutes spent evaluating each type of evidence across candidates submitting that type of evidence.

Type of Evidence	Mean Minutes
Letter/interview of support from an individual receiving services	50
Supervisor Checklist (standards met)	65
Documents (transcripts, certificates, commendations, letters)	38
Scenario (standards met)	52
Ethical Dilemma (standards met)	81
Language Assessment (% correct)	45
Knowledge Exam (% correct)	15
Observation (standards met) (NB: does not include actual observation time)	50
Observation time (specific to 14 candidates)	130
Other activities related to certification evaluation	31

Because the individual's letter of support requirement was considered met if it was provided, times for this category include interview time with the individual and/or their guardian, where applicable. Time spent evaluating the individual's response is probably an overestimate, as the mean was skewed by one person's interview that was exceptionally long.

Assessment Results

Results were analysed to determine the consistency of the picture of competence created by the various assessment measures (including observation and supervisor checklists). There were two types of measures, depending on the particular assessment of competence: 1) the number of core competency standards met by evidence provided (i.e., on-site observations, supervisor checklists, scenario response, and ethical dilemma response content) and 2) the percentage of answers correct (i.e., language assessment, knowledge exam, and ethical dilemma decision-making process). Pearson Product-Moment correlations were used to analyse the relationship between each pair of measures. The results are presented in the table below.

	Observation	Supervisor Checklist	Scenario	Ethics (standards met)	Ethics (decision process)	Language Proficiency	Knowledge Exam
Observation	XXXXX	-.21	.61*	.46	.31	.10	.60*
Supervisor Checklist		XXXXX	-.34	-.47	-.62**	-.56*	-.51
Scenario			XXXXX	.42	.55*	.42	.53*
Ethics (standards)				XXXXX	.80***	.69**	.68**
Ethics (process)					XXXXX	.69**	.61**
Language Proficiency						XXXXX	.48
Knowledge Exam							XXXXX
Significance values: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001							

The strongest relationship between measures was between the two different analyses of candidates' response to the ethical dilemma. Those who demonstrated more core competency standards in their response were also more likely to follow a more exemplary ethical decision-making process with 64% of the variance accounted for (as measured by r^2). Ethical dilemma responses were also strongly related to how well candidates did on the language proficiency assessment (47% variance accounted for) and the knowledge exam (37 – 46% of variance accounted for). The number of core competency standards met through the observation measure (either in the observation or interview process) were most strongly related to the number of standards met through the scenario and to how well one did on the knowledge exam with 36% of the variance accounted for by the relationship.

The most interesting result in this table is the inverse relationship between the number of standards supervisors said the candidate met using the checklist and all of the other assessments. There are two things of particular note with how supervisors approached the checklist. First, they tended not to use the "have not observed" option very often and were likely to indicate that candidates had met or exceeded standards where an opinion was offered. The result is that the range of standards met was 73 – 114 (all) with an average of 107 met standards. Second, examples demonstrating how the candidate met the standard were often absent or judged by the evaluator to be unrelated to the standard they supposedly demonstrated or marginal examples. When unsupported or poorly supported standards were eliminated, the average number of met standards was 56 with a range of 0 – 113. Consequently, an analysis of the relationship between the number of exemplar-supported competencies on the supervisor checklist and other measures became neutral or positive (r = .56, p < .05 with the language assessment).

An effort was made to determine if some demographic characteristics were related to the certification performance measures. There were mostly nonsignificant positive relationships between the number of years spent in the current and most recent job (as a measure of tenure in the field) and how well they

did on the various assessment measures. The exception was a significant positive relationship between tenure in the sector and the number of core competency standards met in their response to the ethical dilemma ($r = .55$, $p < .05$). It was difficult to measure the relationship between performance and education simply because of the diversity of education in both number of years of post-secondary education and how related the area of study was to disability work.

Core Competency Standards

The core competency standards have been worded largely in terms of the **behaviour** one would expect to see if the disability worker had the related competency. Some standards are likely to be demonstrable on a daily basis regardless of the support setting, characteristics of the person receiving services and demands of the situation. Others may be important in certain types of situations or while supporting individuals with certain characteristics, needs or desires, but not others. On this basis, one might expect to find some standards easier to demonstrate than others.

For each core competency standard, we looked at how often candidates were credited as having met that standard. Standards could be credited on the basis of

- Observation/interview
- Inclusion in a scenario response
- Inclusion in an ethical dilemma response
- Supervisor checklist example of observed behavior
- Letter of support or interview content from an individual receiving services
- Educational coursework and training.

As such, a candidate could be given credit for a standard up to six times, once for each type of evidence tied to core competency standards. Because of the tendency of supervisors to routinely mark standards as having been met, for the purposes of this analysis, we only considered a standard as met if a relevant supporting example had been provided. We identified a number of core competency standards that were met on average less than once by candidates. Refer to Appendix J for details.

In addition to the standards that were difficult to meet with the pilot methods, there were also standards that were easy to meet. Appendix K shows the standards that candidates met on average by at least three different methods:

Appendix L provides further information comparing the standards we had identified must be met in the observation visit to those that we were actually able to observe.

From this analysis we learned that the number of standards was very daunting not only for the candidates and supervisors but also for the evaluators to assess.

Discussion

Throughout the pilot process we encountered several barriers and challenges. Each of these barriers and possible solutions to them will be discussed below.

Ability to generalize based on limited data. Even though we were able to achieve diversity and provincial representation within our pilot project, we had a somewhat low number of participants who fully completed the process. While we were able to produce some statistically significant results, our ability to broadly generalize must take the small numbers into consideration. That being said, the pilot gave us the opportunity to try out a wide variety of measurement processes with some the candidates. We have used what we have learned to determine which measurement processes we would like to take forward and which ones we would like to eliminate.

Solutions regarding generalizability of data. Our pilot process gave us enough information to help us to hone in on how to develop the process for the future. We will use this information to redevelop our competency-based process and take it to our community for feedback.

Technical challenges. Our website designers were not able to meet our deadline of setting up a process on our website for this pilot. Therefore, we had to manage the process through other technical means. For example, there was no online area for candidates and their supervisors to receive individual communications and feedback, so this had to be done by emails. This made it very difficult to streamline question/answer and check-in type of communication. Communication via email for this kind of process is cumbersome. Additionally, the online assessments could not be integrated into our website, so we had to use different 'survey' tools to administer them. This may have interfered with ease of use and the layout presentation of assessments.

Another concern related to technology is that we have a sector whose employees are varied in technical skill levels and are not as sophisticated with technology as expected. Some had difficulty with even basic activities such as scanning and uploading documents. We would anticipate that a better-functioning website/database would help in this area, but for those with limited access to and lower skill levels in working with even basic technology, certification would present an ongoing challenge

Solutions regarding technical challenges. Going forward we have found a company to contract that will be able to provide us with the necessary technical requirements and support, so we do not anticipate the technical challenges faced in the pilot project to be significant barriers in the future. Additionally, we will need to prepare less technical solutions for those who work in the area who are less technologically proficient. This could include things like reworking the manual into those recommended "bite-sized pieces" or perhaps the preparation of detailed instruction videos to guide people through the process. (In the latter stages of the pilot we prepared instructional videos to guide people which they found helpful.)

Candidate recruitment. It took some time between our initial recruitment activities and the beginning of the pilot project. When the pilot finally rolled out, we no longer had the whole initial group of candidates available to participate; therefore, recruitment of new participants became our focus. ADWA communicated through various methods (e.g., ADWA website, ADWA Facebook page, direct-targeted emails, organizational meetings, sector events, etc.) with all stakeholders saying that we were looking

for interested candidates. Emails were sent to executive directors, as well as presentations/discussions being made at regional service providers council meetings. Even with all the outreach and support, we struggled with low uptake of candidates signing up for the process. This is an issue that would need to be addressed should certification be desired by the sector.

What we have learned from the pilot project is that certification cannot be the responsibility of the individual worker alone. The process relies heavily on commitment from the employer as well. The involvement of the supervisor became a barrier to some completing the process due to heavy demands on supervisors' time and employers not having the resources for this to occur during work time. Some employers were also uncertain as to their role in the process. A few executive directors initiated discussions with ADWA regarding how they could influence their staff to become involved and/or show their support for certification. This resulted with various specific organizational strategies being implemented. ED's struggled with wanting their staff to make the decision to participate versus hand picking staff and asking them to apply.

Solutions regarding candidate recruitment. While this issue would not be present moving forward in terms of involvement in the pilot, it would be a concern if the sector decided to implement certification. Should a decision be made to support a certification process, we will have to work collaboratively with our partners to convince others of the value and importance of certification in general. We will also have to come to agreement on the role of all parties in this process. The issue of candidate uptake will be addressed further in other sections.

Pilot candidates getting started. We encouraged candidates to work through the process at a pace that they could manage. There were no pre-set deadlines other than we wanted the entire process completed, originally by October 30, 2018, and finally by March 30, 2019. We strongly recommended that candidates and their supervisor discuss and make a plan to complete the pilot process. After the first few months we found that the biggest hurdle to overcome was how to get candidates to begin the process. Different methods of contact and encouragement were tried. The certification coordinator sent numerous emails to them and their supervisor, developed different visuals to show where each candidate was in their process, called them and their supervisor, provided examples of how a description or story of what they did aligns with demonstration of competencies and even offered incentives for those who completed the process. Since candidates started at different points in time, some would have received only a few communications while others would have received many. Those who did respond in some way received more specific support in order to finish.

Since we were not sure why candidates were struggling with getting started, we speculated on some possible reasons and implemented strategies. For example, we wondered if candidates were worried about the assessments and more specifically the knowledge exam. To mitigate this we explained that, for the pilot, we are not looking at giving them a pass or fail, but that we are assessing the validity or appropriateness of the assessment. This seemed to ease concerns for some candidates. An outcome of this is that candidates did not receive individual feedback on their results for each of the assessments. In our communication to candidates and supervisors, we tried to anticipate barriers by stating a possible concern and then explaining what they could do. For example, if they were having trouble finding a

proctor, they could email the certification coordinator and she would make arrangements for them. We considered any technical issues that may cause problems and changed some formats, links, etc.

Solutions to getting started. While we will no longer need to be concerned about people getting started in the pilot project, if we decide to proceed, we will need to make the actual process smoother for candidates. Many of the issues we have encountered can be taken care of with good technical development (see above solutions for technical challenges). The challenges related to motivation to get started will be addressed below.

Lack of a professional identity. The process of conducting the pilot confirmed our suspicion that many disability support workers in our province do not have a professional identity. There are many disability support workers who do not understand what a professional association is or what the benefits of being part of an association are, what certification is, or even what the purpose of a research pilot is. One of the goals of certification is to help build a professional identity, yet this lack of identity could impede the development of the certification process.

Solutions to a lack of professional identity. A tremendous amount of work will need to be done in this area for certification to be a success. This process has already begun in our attempts to reach out to the community to attract project participants. Many of the materials prepared to educate on both certification and the importance of a professional identity have been created. Anecdotally, we noticed as we were nearing completion of the pilot that more people were starting to understand both certification and the concept of creating a workforce with a professional identity. With the completion of the pilot, our organization is committing to take what we have learned back to our sector for discussion. We will need to decide collaboratively if and how to best move forward with certification of our workforce.

Fear and lack of understanding of the pilot-project process. We found that even up to the closing of applications (March 30, 2019) there were still workers inquiring about the pilot without understanding what was involved. For example, many people thought they were signing up for an instructional course. Lack of understanding may partially be a reflection of employee turnover within the sector as some of the earlier rounds of outreach would have been to people who left the sector prior to the pilot commencing. Also, much of the outreach was done with organizational leaders who may not have filtered the information down to frontline staff. Given that many people signed up but went no further with the process, additional information about the process found in other places such as the manual may not have been accessed. Finally, right from the beginning of discussion of certification within the sector there has been an expression of fear among some workers who worried that certification may result in job loss if they had no formal qualifications. This may have resulted in some actual resistance to participation in the pilot. While the whole competency-based process was developed to recognise the skills of workers who may or may not have formal qualifications, it seems that this information may not have been received or understood by many workers in the sector.

We provided updates on the pilot to our sector through presentations, inquiries, e-bulletins, Facebook and our Certification Pilot Advisory Committee (CPAC). At the CPAC meetings we discussed that workers

in the field have a limited understanding of certification and still fear that it means many will lose their jobs. Some have gone as far to say that certification could be a barrier to people entering the field because they do not want to go through the process. Additionally, workers and employers may have difficulty envisioning a future that is different because they must focus on the day-to-day challenges and therefore are looking for stability and security rather than change. Change can induce fear. Interestingly, this type of thinking may reflect the need for certification as it sets the stage for people to approach their employment in the disability sector as requiring a level of skill that must be obtained and maintained. We have presented certification as a process that involves professional development. If a worker is found to 'lack' certain areas of skills, rather than lose their job, they can develop a plan with their employer on how they can obtain those skills. Employers and workers that we have discussed this with have been open and excited about the possibilities.

Solutions to address fears and misunderstandings. Our organization will focus our efforts on disseminating clear and accurate information on the certification process. We will compile what we have learned from the pilot process and work collaboratively with our community to chart a path forward. Given feedback over the last few months, we believe the sector is more interested and willing to receive and develop this information. Our hope is that we will work collaboratively with our sector to implement a process that we all believe can work, and will help ensure a minimum standard of competency required to provide services which, in turn, could directly address the level of risk that is inherent in the work being performed.

Challenges with including Family Managed Supports (FMS). FMS was a specific type of support that we targeted for inclusion in the pilot. Given services under this funding model can be set up by individual family members, this group can be difficult to contact. We sent out information, met with umbrella organizations and asked specific individuals who were active in the community to solicit participation. The individuals/groups we connected with confirmed their support and expressed the importance of certification. Unfortunately, we were only able to gain one candidate who completed the process. Interestingly, FMS probably have the most to gain from certification as many FMS models do not have the benefit of human resources services and it would provide them with the possibility of hiring employees who had already demonstrated significant competencies to do the work. Once again, a certification process will work toward ensuring a minimum standard of competency required to provide services.

Solutions to address inclusion of FMS in the process. We have begun to make inroads into the FMS supports. We will work hard to ensure they are active participants in the next phase of our development process. We will also explore other avenues of getting the word out through the family resource centres.

Direct observation. In the UK, certification includes quite an extensive observational piece in its process. In our attempt to assess whether this was viable in our sector, a list of 52 standards was identified that we believed could be observed in an evaluator visit (see Appendix B). Given the actual observation was to take place at the latter end of the process, additional standards were to be included based on missing evidence from other assessment tools. Both evaluators who conducted the observations found this a

difficult task for various reasons. First, most candidates did not get to this phase of the process in time to have a range of choice for an appropriate time/day for observations (i.e., we were left with what was available in a short timespan which may not have been the best option for viewing the particular standards in practice). Second, because of the time issue we were unable to fit in two evaluator visits as originally planned, which again limited opportunities to observe practice. Third, many of the visits did not lend themselves to observing the full range of standards or to freeing up additional time with the candidate when they did not have job responsibilities (as we were mostly observing people in one-to-one support models). (Refer to Appendix XII for further details.)

Observations as a method of assessment presented us with other challenges.

- The way the competencies were written may have deterred us from being able to observe them e.g., "6.3.4 *Consistently and effortlessly adjusts behaviours to reflect current, unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns or feelings.*" It is almost impossible to observe what as support worker does 'consistently and effortlessly' in one or two visits.
- Visits ended up being arranged due to availability in schedules and involved other influences that made it impossible to observe what is required.
- If a candidate supported an individual in a one-to-one arrangement, then there was no way to meet privately with the candidate for any reasonable length of time to explore additional questions. To follow up on this problem, evaluators emailed questions to candidates, but they did not necessarily receive responses. It is also important to note that having a face-to-face conversation tends to lend itself to a more thorough understanding than conversing over email, as well as being more likely to ensure some type of response.
- A large geographic footprint and various weather challenges in Alberta also come into play for observations. If an evaluator traveled 5 hours to see a candidate providing support and it didn't turn out as expected, it was not easy to reschedule or 'come back tomorrow.'

Direct observations also presented us with a dilemma that may need to be discussed by our sector. Some organizations and care models provide services in ways that do not appear to be consistent with the competencies we have agreed upon as a community. Therefore, we observed candidate supports that were not compatible with our standards but appeared to be what the employer expected from the employee. Organizations and individuals' expectations of their staff, and the possible lack of consistency in expectations across different supports, are things we need to explore more with our service partners.

On the positive side, the direct observations revealed valuable information. Spending time with the candidates stressed the importance of the observing process. In many instances it allowed for a discussion to occur that helped the candidate understand certification at a different level. Candidates asked more questions and provided more detailed information than we were able to glean through other means. Additionally, seeing what the candidate does and where their 'job' takes place provides a clearer picture to the evaluator than what is provided through other communication and written assessments. Finally, observations allowed time to clarify and/or add examples of demonstrated competencies, as well as providing a way to see how the candidate interacts with others in their work environment. The quality of the information we received through direct observation has made us committed to figuring out how we can continue with this process.

Solutions to address direct-observation concerns. Human experience tells us there is frequently a difference between what people say and what they do. That being said, direct observations are costlier and take more time than other types of assessment. We will continue to work with our direct-observation subgroup to explore ways to ensure this component is part of our certification process. This could include things like recruiting and training observers from across the province who can work more closely in their communities, or even within their organization, in processes similar to those used in the UK or by accreditation through ACDS, supporting organizations to build direct observation into their own supervision process, etc.

Streamlining the process. The purpose of the pilot was to determine which part of the process we developed were viable and what needed to be changed to make it so. Given that we had more assessment procedures than we ever intended to include in the final process, we also needed to be able to eliminate those parts which were either unnecessary, redundant or unreliable. Additionally, we wanted to be able to revise those parts we intend to keep based on what we had learned.

Solutions to streamlining the process. Based on our learnings we are proposing the following.

- Re-developing the preparation manuals primarily for online use to guide candidates through the process. Feedback from participants will guide this process. Make "workbook" version of manual available to those who prefer paper once the online process is developed.
- Put written assessment materials online.
- Revise the competencies based on what we have learned and feedback from stakeholders.
- Eliminate some assessments and reduce others, again based on the specific things we have learned through the pilot process.
- Develop or adopt an ethics/values course/curriculum. We believe it is important for people to understand our agreed-upon ethics and code of conduct, and to be able to implement ethical decision-making processes. At this time, we do not think it is safe to assume that the understanding of these are prevalent in the sector and that we are ready to just test for these related competencies. Additionally, other worker certification processes have included separate instruction and testing of ethics in their development phase (such as the Alberta College of Social Workers), so this would not be inconsistent with other professions. The information could be delivered through existing education options (Such as Foundations or Bow Valley) or be developed as a stand-alone training opportunity.
- Redesign the direct-observation process based on the learnings from the pilot process and feedback from industry partners.
- The level of supervisor responsibility in the process. The response to the pilot was clear—supervisor involvement in the certification process needs to be reduced. The supervisor checklist, if properly completed, proved to be a daunting task. Supervisors of direct-support workers were clear that they did not have the necessary time available to complete the requirements of their involvement in the process. Additionally, the supervisor checklist was also not a reliable indicator of competencies. Some also expressed concern around the abilities of supervisors to advise on whether workers possessed competencies, especially if the supervisors had been hired from other sectors. Finally, if certification were to become an expectation in our sector, supervisors could also be placed in a conflict-of-interest situation if pressured to certify workers for employment.

Solutions to level of supervisor responsibility in the process. Unless additional resources were made available to allow time for supervisors to be actively involved in the process, it is unlikely supervisors would have the time or resources available to support a workforce being certified. The supervisor checklist in its current form needs to be eliminated. Perhaps a more traditional role in certification processes, such as a supervisor reference or letter of support, could be considered. Other approaches to getting the information could also be pursued (such as the candidate providing the examples and then discussing these with the supervisor). Alternatively, if supervisors could be helped to use the competencies in their evaluation processes (as some organizations have already done), their involvement in certification could be a win-win scenario as it would support them to complete their evaluation process. This is something that needs to be decided upon by the whole sector.

Making a decision to support certification. Certification processes either exist or are being developed in many parts of the world. They are a way to assess the knowledge and skills workers have, as well as a way to flag areas for improvement. Our sector often has to focus on the day-to-day challenges of providing supports. It can be difficult to find the time and the resources to invest in bigger-picture improvements. If we decide to implement certification of individual workers as a sector, all stakeholders need to be involved in deciding how we do this. As workers and employers have come to learn more about certification, we have received more support and encouragement from them to continue to develop the process. Our vision is to work in partnership with all segments of our sector to create a viable process for certification of disability support workers that would help ensure a standard of competency necessary to provide services which would greatly benefit all community members.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, we believe the complete pilot process has allowed us to take a critical look at the certification process of disability support workers in other jurisdictions, the need for and interest in certification of disability support workers in Alberta and how we can move forward with the creation of a made-in-Alberta certification process if one should be desired by our sector. Without a certification process there is little to prevent the further erosion of skills in this sector. Additionally, without standards of professional practice applicable to the entire sector, there is a greater chance of individuals experiencing disabilities having less than optimal outcomes, as well as decreased ability to mitigate risk to supported individuals for organizations and the GOA. Going forward, certification will be critical in recognizing, developing and monitoring a competent and professional workforce within our industry.

Based on our learnings, we are making the following recommendations that should be carried out at the same time.

- Encourage further conversation with all industry/community stakeholders around how to best implement a certification process. Further discussion is critical both for buy-in from the sector, as well as to determine the best process to move forward; one that will be both achievable and sustainable. The following is the plan we will take forward as a starting point for community discussion.
  a. Begin with registration. This would start with a simple application of the intent to register (could be included with membership), at which point ADWA would set up a database for the

candidate to upload information and to eventually guide the candidate through the certification process. It would include a letter of reference from an employer or educational program which verified/provided the following;

- . A minimum of 1000 hours of DSW work and/or completion of an education program,
- . Completion of the minimum education/training required for the current position,
- . A recommendation that the individual would make a good candidate for certification as a DSW (a letter of reference) from employer or educational program.
- . Completion of a letter of support from an individual receiving services and/a guardian (if appropriate).

b. Certification Level 1 (CL1). The candidate would follow a step-by-step process guided by our database which would walk people through the evidence process (or a paper process for those without access to computers). This would include an upload of all evidence related to CL1.

- . Current verification of relevant training uploaded.
- . Examples provided of each of the relevant standards for CL1 (those standards identified in the pilot phase as easier to document and observe). Any standards for which examples have not been provided will need to be observed either in role play or in practice.
- . Completion of the code of ethics training and examination.
- . Successful completion of a knowledge proficiency/exam.

c. Certification Level 2 (CL2). Examples provided of each of the relevant standards for CL2 (those standards identified in the pilot phase as more difficult to document and observe).

- . Verification through discussion and role-play exercise.
- . ½-1 day training/observation to demonstrate competencies.

d. Certification Level 3 Specialization (CL3S). Specialization and assessments be developed for identified areas of specialized supports. Those already identified include Employment and Complex needs supports.

e. Re-certification at any level that a worker stays at for longer than 4 years without advancing would require submitting positive letters of support as well as evidence of ongoing professional development. As with all the above levels this requires further community discussion.

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APPENDIX A   Candidate Checklist to guide completion of steps

	Complete pre-pilot survey online at http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/3NUG7/.
	Complete and send pilot consent form to ADWA one of two ways: • by fax to 403-920-0585 • scan/photograph the consent and email it to disabilityworkers@gmail.com
	Remember to complete the time tracking survey every time you are doing any of the tasks.
	Meet with your supervisor to review the core competency standards and plan. • Are there any standards you feel you don't meet now? If so, what do you need to do? • Do you have documents that may provide evidence that you meet standards (e.g., references, commendations, thank you letters, college transcripts, term papers, project reports, presentations you have made)? • Decide which individual you have supported (or their legal representative) to ask for a reference and work out together who will ask for their consent for the reference.
	Gather any identified evidence documents from the supervisor meeting. Convert, as needed, to electronic format by scanning or taking a photo and upload it on the Certification Evidence Form page at the ADWA website.
	Download the Consent form for individual receiving services (http://www.adwa.ca/files/Service User Consent.pdf) and, based on the previous discussion with your supervisor, ask the individual you have supported if ADWA can contact them for a reference. Send the completed form to ADWA one of three ways: • by fax to 403-920-0585 • scan/photograph the consent and email it to disabilityworkers@gmail.com • scan/photograph the consent and upload it on the Certification Evidence Form page at the ADWA website.
	When you are ready, contact a proctor and arrange a date/time/place to take the online assessments. You may do more than one assessment in a single session, but you do not have to. While we think each assessment will take less than an hour, you may have up to two hours to do each assessment. *Online assessments: Scenario, Ethical dilemma, Language assessment, Knowledge assessment*
	Email ADWA at disabilityworkers@gmail.com with the proctor's name and contact information (e-mail/phone) and the date/time you have arranged to do the online assessments. ADWA will contact the proctor prior to that date with access codes and proctor information. ADWA staff will upload the online assessment responses to your record using the Certification Evidence Form.
	At any time, meet with your supervisor to discuss progress or problems. Your supervisor is completing the Supervisor Reference Checklist and may need your help recalling your actions that they observed that you believe meet core competency standards. It may also be beneficial to arrange times for your supervisor to observe you at work. *The Supervisor Reference Checklist must be submitted to move to the next step.*
	You may check your progress by contacting the ADWA Certification Coordinator at ADWAcert@gmail.com. You can phone the ADWA office (587-288-0909) if you have questions or would like to discuss any part of the pilot.
	When you are ready to arrange the observation visits, contact the ADWA Certification Coordinator at ADWAcert@gmail.com. An ADWA Evaluator will contact you to start the planning process for your on-site observations. Think about • the settings that will provide the opportunity for you to demonstrate your skills • who will need to provide their consent to be part of this observation • any workplace hazards that the evaluator needs to be aware of in that setting to maintain her safety

	After the planning meeting (by phone, Skype or face-to-face) with the ADWA Evaluator, discuss with your supervisor how to obtain consents from those involved and related workplace safety assessments.
	Using the consent forms that ADWA will provide, obtain the consents according to the plan developed with your supervisor.
	Complete the observation(s) with the ADWA Evaluator. Observations will also include a conversation.
	Follow up with the Evaluator if you have questions regarding the feedback you have been provided.
	When you have completed the entire certification process, complete the online post-pilot survey at http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/QAOVT/.

APPENDIX B   CDSW Core Competency Standards (*that MUST be observed by ADWA to be considered MET.*)

#1. Focus on Individuals

1.1.1. Seeks input and feedback from individuals to develop a clear understanding of their needs and outcomes.

1.1.2. Responds to requests efficiently and effectively within the limits of the rules.

1.1.3. Meets individuals' needs in a respectful, helpful and responsive manner.

1.1.6. Uses appropriate methods to determine whether the individual is satisfied with the type and level of support the worker provides.

1.1.7. Adjusts service based on feedback from the individual within the limits of the rules.

#2. Building Relationships

2.1.1. Identifies groups and/or social, volunteer or work activities in the community that match the individual's interests and schedule.

2.2.3. Works with the individual and others in the planning team or support network to identify and implement strategies to overcome personal or practical barriers to development and maintenance of social relationships.

#3. Fostering Independence in Others

3.1.2. Provides instruction, guidance and support in a helpful and supportive manner.

3.1.4. Shows belief in and respect for others' (e.g., individuals, families) capabilities by speaking of them in positive terms.

3.2.2. Provides individuals with information, tools and resources appropriate to their level of understanding and capability so that they have what they need to make good decisions for themselves.

3.2.3. Considers health and safety issues in decision-making.

3.2.4. Recognizes and supports the choices of individuals within the limitations of the rules.

3.3.1. Assesses what an individual can already do before attempting to provide training or support on a task.

3.3.2. Can describe the way the individual prefers to learn and the evidence on which that judgement is based.

3.3.3. Demonstrates how to complete tasks to acceptable levels of success.

3.3.4. Provides individuals with information, tools and resources appropriate to their level of understanding and capability to complete tasks.

#5. Flexibility

5.2.1. Maintains the intent of policies, and exercises good judgement when deciding that circumstances require flexibility in applying a practice or procedure to fit a specific situation, to get a task done and/or meet goals.

#6. Interpersonal Relations and Respect

6.1.1. Treats people with respect, dignity and courtesy in all situations by paying attention to the volume and tone of one's own voice, and interacting with them directly rather than through others.

6.1.2. Uses person-first language when communicating about individuals with disabilities.

6.2.1. Takes the time to get to know and understand the interests, concerns and objectives of others.

6.2.4. Pays close attention and accurately interprets others' behaviours (e.g., body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, nuances, questions) to determine their feelings and intent.

6.3.1. Can describe how another person views a situation and how it is different from their own viewpoint.

6.3.2. Demonstrates sincere caring for what people are experiencing with words, tone of voice, facial expressions and body language.

6.3.3. Carefully observes others to accurately anticipate how individuals and groups will react, and tailors approach accordingly.

6.3.4. Consistently and effortlessly adjusts behaviours to reflect current, unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns or feelings.

#7. Communication

7.1.1. Puts aside distractions and focuses full attention on those trying to communicate with you to encourage them to communicate.

7.1.2. Listens quietly and patiently to others' words and their emotional tone, and watches facial expressions and body language in order to communicate interest and build a better understanding of the other person.

7.1.3. Checks own understanding of others' communication by rewording, asking follow-up questions, etc., without interrupting what they are saying.

7.3.1. Following employer timelines and policies, documents what readers need to know in order to understand and take action in a timely way.

7.3.2. Uses respectful and easy-to-understand language to present facts and examples, and does not include personal judgments.

7.3.3. Writes in grammatically-accurate language with correct spelling, punctuation and word choices in order to reduce misinterpretations.

#9. Teamwork

9.1.1. Understands the team's goals, each team member's role and how they interconnect.

9.1.2. Shares relevant experiences, knowledge, ideas and best practices with team members.

9.1.6. Meets commitments made to others.

#10. Values and Ethics

10.1.1. Demonstrates good work ethic by being on time, being prepared and informing those affected in a timely fashion if unable to meet commitments.

10.1.2. Follows instructions, guidelines, procedures, policy, laws and regulations, asking questions if unsure of how to interpret and apply them.

10.1.4. Contributes to an open and safe workplace atmosphere in which individuals and co-workers feel they may safely raise, discuss and address ethical issues.

10.1.5. Demonstrates awareness of personal/professional boundaries and acts in accordance with workplace values and policies.

10.1.6. Demonstrates an understanding of the principles and limits of confidentiality in situations where personal information about others is involved.

10.2.1. Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the relevance of fundamental values and ethics of the profession to everyday work, and consistently attempts to apply them.

10.2.2. Identifies instances where professional values and ethics suggest different solutions to ethical dilemmas.

#11. Professional Excellence

11.1.1. Makes an effort to do the job well or right, following employer policies and government regulations.

11.1.2. Expresses a desire to improve and may express frustration with waste or inefficiency.

11.2.1. When creating professional goals for oneself, understands the needs of others involved and gets buy-in from those affected for key elements (e.g., supervisor, co-workers).

11.2.2. Identifies new or more precise ways of meeting organizational goals.

11.2.3. Keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence.

11.3.1. Knows job requirements and actively works to maintain and upgrade relevant skills.

11.3.2. Follows through from program or individual planning information to achieve desired outcomes.

#12. Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Workplace

12.1.1. Follows safety procedures and protocols set out in policy.

12.1.2. Practises universal precautions consistently.

12.1.3. Recognizes risks in the work environment and takes actions to manage risks.

12.2.2. Supports individuals to learn about safe and healthy lifestyles and pursue goals the individual may have related to wellness. (This may be in conjunction with other professionals.)

Value of Certification to Candidates	#	Value of Certification to Supervisors	#
It would be recognized by people with disabilities, families, employers and others as an indicator of quality work and commitment	17	To professionalize the sector	5
To professionalize the sector & our image	12	To achieve fair pay for skills	4
Help me get the knowledge & skills I need	8	Provides recognition for quality staff	4
Provides an accountability mechanism/ proof of competence	7	Provides accountability to standards for staff that employers can use and rely on	3
Helps career advancement	6	Sets standards for the field to meet	3
Guides professional improvement & learning	5	Guides professional improvement & learning	2
Sets standards for the field to meet	5	My staff want certification, so I support them	2
Gives alternative recognition for those with no post-secondary education	5	Achieves recognition within the health care field (for future regulation)	2
ADWA is an independent evaluator of quality	5	Attracts more qualified workers	1
Recognized by the government for ensuring fair pay	4	Promotes the field to students	1
Improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities via demonstrated skills	4	Guides development of needed learning opportunities	1
To achieve wage equity	3	Proves to PDD that we are professionals	1
Gives me more confidence in my own abilities	3	Provides individuals with qualified, skilled staff	1
Creates a core knowledge base for the field	2	Ensures safety through training	1
Improves work satisfaction & engagement	2	Gives staff mobility	1
Serves as PLAR for college programs	1	Provides more knowledge	1
Hopes it will be treated as equivalent to a 2-year diploma in disability studies	1	Wants to see if the pilot benefits our agency	1
For work	1		

APPENDIX D   Pre-pilot survey responses indicating what concerns people had about certification

Candidate Concerns about Certification	#	Supervisor Concerns about Certification	#
Time-consuming or time requirements unknown	17	Supervisor time required is limited by heavy workload	13
Time available for action & reflection is limited	11	Candidate time is limited relative to requirements	6
Do I know enough to be certified?	7	Need pay incentive for certification effort to be worthwhile	2
Is the process credible enough to be accepted? Will certification be recognized?	6	Difficulty getting started & making a plan	2
Supervisor time & support is limited or may be too little	3	Reading/writing skills of otherwise skilled staff not up to certification requirements	2
Preparation manual length is intimidating	2	Daunting amount of paperwork for candidates	1
What will it cost to maintain certification?	2	Process needs streamlining	1
No concerns	2	Path was unclear with bad module links	1
I don't understand the requirements	2	Supervisor checklist is very long	1
Is the process flexible enough?	1	No concerns	1
I have performance anxiety	1		
Will agencies buy in to standards?	1		
Processes need streamlining	1		
It seems to be unorganized with no clear direction	1		
Certification overlaps with other coursework	1		
I have not done an online course before	1		
I have limited computer access	1		
What do I do next? What's the path?	1		
How do I get a higher certification level?	1		
Unsure if I can track down documents to submit	1		
Do I lose my job if I fail?	1		
If certification is required, there won't be enough staff in the field to meet needs	1		
Will I get asked about standards I didn't meet?	1		
I need a reminder to submit what I need for recertification	1		
Is there a plan to monitor credential use?	1		
Who will audit ADWA's certification?	1		

APPENDIX E – Pre-pilot survey responses to *What type of recognition would they like to see employees receive?*

ADWA Recognition of Candidate Certification			
Candidate Responses	**#**	**Supervisor Responses**	**#**
Formal certificate with gold seal	16	Certificate recognized across Alberta	14
List certification status on ADWA website	6	Name certified CDWs in ADWA E-Bulletins, website or social media (with permission)	3
Certified CDW designation	2	ADWA designation	1
Notify employer of certification status	2	ADWA membership	1
Report card with commendation	2	Recognized as part of the pilot	1
Recognize certification as equivalent to other credentials (e.g., post-secondary certificate)	2	Alignment of certification with defunct post-secondary disability studies programs	1
Advanced ADWA Member status	1	Pin and card	1
Letter to employer when recertification done	1	Have ADWA certification listed on ALIS	1
Notify candidate of their status	1	Recognition at ACDS conference	1
Add certification into ACDS's CET standards	1	Certificate that lists core competencies met	1
Build more training opportunities	1	Discounts on training	1
Professional recognition with allied sectors	1	Can access certification record for employers	1
News release to trade press with names	1		
Yearly photo with new CCDWs	1		
PLAR credit with colleges/universities	1		
Recognition of CCDWs across Canada	1		
Benefit to agency and individual receiving services	1		
Employer Recognition of Candidate Certification			
Candidate Responses	**#**	**Supervisor Responses**	**#**
Pay increase	14	Pay increase (if funding supports it)	7
Career advancement	5	Letter of congratulations/certificate on file	4
Letter of congratulations/ certificate for professional excellence	5	Sign indicating number of certified staff	2
Pay grade increase that treats certification as education	3	Announcement of organizational participation and outcomes	2
Appreciation and support	3	Pay for 1 year of ADWA membership for certified staff	2
Support career development	2	No recognition	2
Reward positive results of skills	2	# of certified staff reflected in contract wages	1
Recognition of ADWA's value	2	Recognize certified staff at AGM	1
Promote high standards in the organization	1	Preference in promotion and hiring	1
Recognition of certification on performance review	1	Pay grade increase that treats certification as education	1
Lobby PDD to recognize certified workers	1		
Commit to support certification process	1		
Paid to support new certification candidates	1		

APPENDIX F Pre-pilot survey responses to what type of recognition should supervisors receive?

ADWA recognition of Supervisor Support	#	Employer Recognition of Supervisor Support	#
None required	8	None required	9
Recognition for the organization's support	2	Modify caseload to accommodate process	2
Certificate for mentorship	1	Thankyou card	2
Letter to employer thanking the supervisor for their contribution	1	Awareness of how time-consuming certification support is	1
Discussion panel at ACDS conference	1	Certificate acknowledging contribution	1
Share results of the process	1	Recognition in performance review	1
Awareness of process	1	Mention to Board	1
Notify of how staff were recognized	1	Few hours extra pay for the time involved (if in budget)	1
Free ADWA membership for a year	1	Gift card	1

APPENDIX G   Post-pilot survey responses to *Why did you apply to participate.*

Substantially completed process	#	Very limited completion of process	#
Field needs certification/help the sector	5	Wanted to be credentialed	6
Show the professionalism of the field	4	I've been in the field a long time	3
Set standards to weed out bad workers	3	Field needs certification/help the sector	2
Self-evaluation of skill level	3	Approached by co-worker/employer	2
Have a say in the certification process	2	Learn more about the field	1
To support ADWA	1	Heard about pilot in initial stages	1
Prepare to help certify others	1		
Tool for my career advancement	1		
Wanted to be credentialed	1		

APPENDIX H Comparison of pre and post pilot survey for candidate expectations of certification

Expectations for participation			
Substantially completed process	**#**	**Very limited completion of process**	**#**
More study materials and exams like other courses	3	Simpler, straightforward process	4
Few if any expectations (open)	2	Info sharing, observation & testing/interviews	4
Testing, observations & feedback	2	Manageable within my workload	1
5 hrs filling forms, 1/2-day interviews/3 hrs gathering credentials	1	Online course with classes, assignments and discussion participation	1
Face-to-face course not online at own pace	1	Less work for my supervisor	1
Confirm current knowledge + ways to improve	1	Not digging up old documents I no longer have access to	1
Clear process with timelines for each step	1	Go to a few meetings and have a say	1
Take a few months to complete	1	Send in certificates	1
Different levels of certification (e.g., CDSW, team leader, coordinator)	1		
I would end up with a certificate	1		
Having done certifications, I had a good idea of what was involved	1		
Reality relative to expectations			
Substantially completed process	**#**	**Very limited completion of process**	**#**
Yes – I am now implementing standards in our organization	2	No – Supervisor involvement was too heavy for workload	5
Yes – the manual was a necessary and accurate guide	1	No – time/effort required seemed overwhelming	5
Yes – nice to finally have pilot happen	1	No – too many processes involved	2
Yes – it matches other certifications from my experience	1	No – lost support due to supervisor & staff turnover	1
Yes – it was a thorough process	1	Unforeseen family responsibilities interfered	1
Yes – above my expectations in giving me knowledge of how I should do my work	1	Yes – but bad timing with workload increase	1
No – was longer than expected	1	Unrealistic # of competencies to meet	1
Expected more mentorship & collaboration	1	Proctor requirement was off-putting	1
Some testing & observation, no feedback	1	Unclear value to my career	1
Once I knew I would not be certified at end, then met expectations	1	I couldn't access old supporting documents to submit	1
A flowchart of the process would be nice	1		
Pilot seemed to be just data collection; process needs more work	1		

APPENDIX I   Post-pilot survey responses asking for candidate recommendations *(return to document)*

Substantially completed process	#	Very limited completion of process	#
Set timelines for completing each step of process	3	Simplify the process (cut documentation requirement by 25%)	2
Less work for the supervisor to complete	2	Less work for the supervisor to complete	2
Simplify the process & manual	2	Limit time to complete the steps to 3 months with flexibility (seamless re-entry)	2
Create a certification course with course material	1	Set (shorter) deadline for supervisors to complete tasks	1
Reduce # of competencies to be met	1	Reduce # of competencies to be met	1
Set up contract of responsibilities for ADWA & candidate to sign (including communication expectations)	1	Take education into account as contributing to meeting competencies	1
Less work to be completed electronically	1	Proctoring by supervisor or ADWA	1
Lots more ADWA observation with feedback	1	Lots more ADWA observation with feedback	1
More personal contact with on-site observer	1	Ongoing input and evaluation from immediate supervisor and ADWA rep	1
More video examples of how to answer questions	1	Do not require certificates as documentation that may be old and hard to get	1
More support and clarity overall	1	Use tests or quizzes to demonstrate skills/knowledge	1
Take education into account as contributing to meeting competencies	1	Allow references from co-workers who know and see your work	1
		Take time in sector into account in meeting certification requirements	1

Creative Problem Solving and Decision Making

- 4.1.4 Identifies discrepancies, trends and interrelationships in the information used to make decisions. Mean = 0.6

Interpersonal Relations and Respect

- 6.3.4 Consistently and effortlessly adjusts behaviours to reflect current, unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns or feelings. Mean = 0.8

Communication

- 7.2.3 Checks to see that others understand by asking them to put what was said in other words, give examples, demonstrate it, answer open-ended questions or add their own ideas. Mean = 0.8
- 7.2.4 Addresses misunderstandings with examples that are relevant to the person's specific situation or life experience. Mean = 0.5
- 7.3.3 Writes in grammatically-accurate language with correct spelling, punctuation and word choices in order to reduce misinterpretations. Mean = 0.5

Self-Control

- 8.1.2 Maintains composed body language in situations when one's opinions, recommendations or ideas are being challenged. Mean = 0.9
- 8.1.3 Pauses to reflect before acting so that own emotional impulses do not stop others from communicating honestly and fully. Mean = 0.9
- 8.2.2 Expresses differing opinions and disagreements with tact and sensitivity to others' positions and interests. Mean = 0.7

Teamwork

- 9.1.4 Manages workplace conflicts and differences in beliefs and values. Mean = 0.8

Values and Ethics

- 10.1.2 Follows instructions, guidelines, procedures, policy, laws and regulations, asking questions if unsure of how to interpret and apply them. Mean = 0.9
- 10.1.3 Takes responsibility for own actions, openly acknowledging their own errors of judgment without being prompted by others. Mean = 0.9
- 10.2.4 Seeks guidance on details and norms of the profession when in doubt, and then demonstrates an understanding of the rationales behind them. Mean = 0.9
- 10.2.5 Shows an equal concern for means and ends. Mean = 0.9

Professional Excellence

- 11.2.1 When creating professional goals for oneself, understands the needs of others involved and gets buy-in from those affected for key elements (e.g., supervisor, co-workers). Mean = 0.8
- 11.2.2 Identifies new or more precise ways of meeting organizational goals. Mean = 0.6
- 11.2.3 Keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence. Mean = 0.3
- 11.3.3 Actively suggests ideas for improving processes in the system or in own work methods. Mean = 0.9
- 11.3.5 Enthusiastically volunteers to take on additional tasks. Mean = 0.5
- 11.3.7 Is persistent in finding better ways to do things, such as making suggestions that will improve a number of services or doing something better, faster, at lower cost, more efficiently. Mean = 0.8
- 11.3.8 Attends, actively participates in and successfully completes required training and professional development aimed at improving knowledge or skills. Mean = 0.8
- 11.3.9 Asks mentors and supervisors to share best practices to help improve outcomes. Mean = 0.6

Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Workplace

- 12.2.3 Supports co-workers to recognize signs of stress or illness and take care of their own physical and mental health. Mean = 0.9

APPENDIX K - standards that candidates met on average by at least three different methods:

Focus on Individuals

- 1.1.1 Seeks input and feedback from individuals to develop a clear understanding of their needs and outcomes. Mean = 3.6
- 1.1.3 Meets individuals' needs in a respectful, helpful and responsive manner. Mean = 3.4

Fostering Independence

- 3.1.2 Provides instruction, guidance and support in a helpful and supportive manner. Mean = 3.2
- 3.1.3 Expresses positive expectations that individuals will take an active role in achieving their goals. Mean = 3.2
- 3.1.4 Shows belief in and respect for others' (e.g., individuals, families) capabilities by speaking of them in positive terms. Mean = 3.2
- 3.2.4 Recognizes and supports the choices of individuals within the limitations of the rules. Mean = 3.3

Creative Problem Solving and Decision Making

- 4.1.1 Uses one's knowledge, common sense and/or past experience to recognize, understand and solve problems/issues. Mean =3.1
- 4.2.4 Works with others to find solutions that meet each involved person's most important needs as defined by them in order to maximize buy-in from all parties affected and achieve the goal or decision. Mean =3.1

Flexibility

- 5.3.2 Evaluates the situation and decides what actions or approach to take in achieving the person's goal based on the demands of the situation or the needs/wishes of the person. Mean =3.2

Professional Excellence

- 11.1.1 Makes an effort to do the job well or right, following employer policies and government regulations. Mean = 3.1

Appendix L - further details on what standards were and were not met in observation time.

Out of the 52 standards, **7** were met by direct observation by 10 or more candidates (out of a possible 16). Those 7 were:

- 1.1.1. Seeks input and feedback from individuals to develop a clear understanding of their needs and outcomes.
- 1.1.3. Meets individuals' needs in a respectful, helpful and responsive manner.
- 3.1.2. Provides instruction, guidance and support in a helpful and supportive manner.
- 3.1.4. Shows belief in and respect for others' (e.g., individuals, families) capabilities by speaking of them in positive terms.
- 6.1.1. Treats people with respect, dignity and courtesy in all situations by paying attention to the volume and tone of one's own voice and interacting with them directly rather than through others.
- 7.1.1. Puts aside distractions and focuses full attention on those trying to communicate with you to encourage them to communicate.
- 7.1.2. Listens quietly and patiently to others' words and their emotional tone and watches facial expressions and body language in order to communicate interest and build a better understanding of the other person.

The following standards were not identified as requiring observed demonstration but in fact were observed for 10 or more of the candidates:

- 3.1.3. Expresses positive expectations that individuals will take an active role in achieving their goals.
- 3.1.5. Openly credits individuals who have performed well, making them feel stronger, more capable, and able to function to the best of their abilities.

Out of the 52, **37** standards were either not observed at all or observed in 6 or less of the candidates:

- 1.1.6. Uses appropriate methods to determine whether the individual is satisfied with the type and level of support the worker provides.
- 1.1.7. Adjusts service based on feedback from the individual within the limits of the rules.
- 2.1.1. Identifies groups and/or social, volunteer or work activities in the community that match the individual's interests and schedule.
- 2.2.3. Works with the individual and others in the planning team or support network to identify and implement strategies to overcome personal or practical barriers to development and maintenance of social relationships.
- 3.2.2. Provides individuals with information, tools and resources appropriate to their level of understanding and capability so that they have what they need to make good decisions for themselves.
- 3.3.1. Assesses what an individual can already do before attempting to provide training or support on a task.
- 3.3.3. Demonstrates how to complete tasks to acceptable levels of success.

- 5.2.1. Maintains the intent of policies and exercises good judgement when deciding that circumstances require flexibility in applying a practice or procedure to fit a specific situation, to get a task done and/or meet goals.
- 6.1.2. Uses person-first language when communicating about individuals with disabilities.
- 6.2.1. Takes the time to get to know and understand the interests, concerns and objectives of others.
- 6.3.1. Can describe how another person views a situation and how it is different from their own viewpoint.
- 6.3.3. Carefully observes others to accurately anticipate how individuals and groups will react, and tailors approach accordingly.
- 6.3.4. Consistently and effortlessly adjusts behaviours to reflect current, unexpressed or poorly expressed thoughts, concerns or feelings.
- 7.3.1. Following employer timelines and policies, documents what readers need to know in order to understand and take action in a timely way.

  7.3.2. Uses respectful and easy-to-understand language to present facts and examples and does not include personal judgments.

- 7.3.3. Writes in grammatically-accurate language with correct spelling, punctuation and word choices in order to reduce misinterpretations
- 9.1.1. Understands the team's goals, each team member's role and how they interconnect.
- 9.1.2. Shares relevant experiences, knowledge, ideas and best practices with team members.
- 9.1.6. Meets commitments made to others.
- 10.1.1. Demonstrates good work ethic by being on time, being prepared and informing those affected in a timely fashion if unable to meet commitments.
- 10.1.2. Follows instructions, guidelines, procedures, policy, laws and regulations, asking questions if unsure of how to interpret and apply them.
- 10.1.4. Contributes to an open and safe workplace atmosphere in which individuals and co-workers feel they may safely raise, discuss and address ethical issues.
- 10.1.5. Demonstrates awareness of personal/professional boundaries and acts in accordance with workplace values and policies.
- 10.1.6. Demonstrates an understanding of the principles and limits of confidentiality in situations where personal information about others is involved.
- 10.2.1. Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the relevance of fundamental values and ethics of the profession to everyday work, and consistently attempts to apply them.
- 10.2.2. Identifies instances where professional values and ethics suggest different solutions to ethical dilemmas.
- 11.1.1. Makes an effort to do the job well or right, following employer policies and government regulations.
- 11.1.2. Expresses a desire to improve and may express frustration with waste or inefficiency.
- 11.2.1. When creating professional goals for oneself, understands the needs of others involved and gets buy-in from those affected for key elements (e.g., supervisor, co-workers).
- 11.2.2. Identifies new or more precise ways of meeting organizational goals.
- 11.2.3. Keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence.
- 11.3.1. Knows job requirements and actively works to maintain and upgrade relevant skills.
- 11.3.2. Follows through from program or individual planning information to achieve desired outcomes.

- 12.1.1. Follows safety procedures and protocols set out in policy.
- 12.1.2. Practices universal precautions consistently.
- 12.1.3. Recognizes risks in the work environment and takes actions to manage risks.
- 12.2.2. Supports individuals to learn about safe and healthy lifestyles and pursue goals the individual may have related to wellness. (This may be in conjunction with other professionals.)

11.1.2 *Expresses a desire to improve and may express frustration with waste or inefficiency.* Is the only competency to be only met through observation for 7 candidates.

The following competencies were only met through observations for at least 4 candidates:

- 2.1.2   *Talks to people in the community to find people and settings that are welcoming and a good fit for the individual*.
- 3.3.3 *Demonstrates how to complete tasks to acceptable levels of success.*
- 6.3.2   *Demonstrates sincere caring for what people are experiencing with words, tone of voice, facial expressions and body language.*
- 11.3.3   *Actively suggests ideas for improving processes in the system or in own work methods.*
- 11.3.4   *Works to achieve consistency in service development and delivery*.
- 11.3.7   *Is persistent in finding better ways to do things, such as making suggestions that will improve a number of services or doing something better, faster, at lower cost or more efficiently.*