

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Category: ASLD#1 Tier 2  
Advancement in Staff & Leadership Development

Project Title: ROPES/Job Shadowing Program

1. **Project/Program Summary:** Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget.

In October 2005, Moore County DSS embarked on a program to enhance both personal and team growth. Twelve staff volunteered to participate in a ROPES course at the local community college. In the spring of 2006, a second group of 12 completed the ROPES program. To encourage workers to take ownership of their role in the agency as part of a team, ROPES participants then began a job shadowing program to building on relationships established on the ROPES course. This project encourages staff to reach for higher goals, work together as a team, develop better communication skills, and provides an opportunity to better understand the day to day responsibilities of their co-workers. This is an on-going project with ROPES classes planned in the fall and spring each year and job shadowing with a "buddy" of choice after ROPES has been completed. After a ROPES participant and their buddy job shadow each other in a given month, they each recruit a new participant for the program. Program budget is \$65 per employee for the ROPES fee.

2. **Innovation:** Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects?

This program is unique because it takes a successful team building event, a ROPES class, and builds on the experience. Many agencies and organizations send staff to team building programs. However, most will fail to transfer the experience to the every day work environment. This two part program takes team building a step further - from the outdoor course and into the agency. In ROPES, workers learn to take risks, trust their co-workers, coach each other, and communicate better. Through job shadowing, staff develop a better understanding of each person's role in the agency, build interdependence, and strengthen the bonds created in the ROPES class. This emphasis on collaboration among workers will ultimately have a positive influence on agency-client relationships.

3. **Project Success and Impact:** What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration.

The objective of the ROPES/Job Shadowing program is to enhance team spirit, foster better relations between units, encourage staff to move outside their comfort zones and reach higher levels of performance, and expand the knowledge base within the agency. We started with 12 volunteers who agreed to take the challenge to participate in a fun event and at the same time develop some DSS team spirit. The first class was so successful that the agency had little trouble filling the next 12 slots. Initial participants came back to the agency energized and invigorated, bragging about their

accomplishments as a team. They all reported with much excitement how they made new friendships and developed bonds that didn't exist before. The first group called themselves the "Social Survivors" and the second team was the "Lifesavers". Their enthusiasm has transferred from the course to their relationships with each other at DSS. Teams were comprised of staff from different units, which has impacted camaraderie between Adult and Children's Services, Income Maintenance, and Administration. Our agency base of knowledge is expanding as the job shadowing program progresses. Job shadow participants complete a questionnaire after their experience and recruit a new participant for the program. This ensures that the agency continues to foster team work and motivation to succeed together. Another important objective of the ROPES program is to identify workers who exhibit leadership skills and who step up to guide their team to accomplish their goals. The natural leaders emerged during the team challenges and helped the agency identify workers who might be promotion ready. In fact, due to their job skills and leadership potential, two ROPES participants were recently promoted to supervisors. Many employees who have not yet participated in this program hear the positive feedback from their peers, see the exciting photos, and look forward to the challenge. While participation is voluntary, it is hoped that all staff will experience this opportunity for self discovery and team growth. Our agency is thrilled with the success of this program and pleased with the significant return on our investment in this project.

4. **Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done?

Training funds for our agency are limited but it is felt that the investment of \$1,560 per year for 24 participants is well worth the gains the agency is reaping from this project. The original obstacle was getting 12 workers to volunteer. Once that was accomplished, the next ROPES class was easy to fill. The program flourished because team members were excited to build on their new relationships and spend some time with each other learning more about their respective day to day roles. Supervisors need to cooperate in planning job shadowing schedules and one person needs to monitor the job shadowing program and collect questionnaires.

5. **Ability to Replicate Project:** Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems?

This program can be easily implemented in other counties. The ROPES course may not be available in all communities but neighboring counties may offer the course or a similar course may be available nearby. Any agency can implement a job shadowing program to enhance communication and team spirit. Counties can plan ahead and budget the expense.