



AADD will be profiling innovative approaches and best practices of our members in our monthly newsletter.

Strong Solutions' DSP Apprenticeship Success

When Jonathan Strong (pictured right with a DSP Apprenticeship graduate) attended an AADD meeting and heard AADD member Nadon Family Homes talk about its creative employment opportunities, it sparked an idea. "We need DSPs—workforce—and at the same time, we're doing employment support," Strong explained. "The options are really limited in Kodiak; we had to think differently."

The result was a year-long DSP Apprenticeship Program designed specifically for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who wanted to explore direct support work as a career path. Strong Solutions recruited participants including someone who had worked for nine years collecting carts at a grocery store and was ready for a new challenge. His current employer couldn't offer different opportunities, so he was intrigued by the idea of learning to become a DSP. The program combined classroom learning with hands-on training. Participants used the Department of Labor's "Skills to Pay the Bills" curriculum focusing on workplace soft skills, alongside Alaska's Core Competencies for direct support professionals. Some apprentices shadowed experienced DSPs working toward their national employment services certification.

Crucially, this was a "Learn and Earn" model—not volunteering, but paid work. Apprentices completed all standard onboarding requirements including CPR, First Aid, and background checks. They learned to use Therap. They gained real experience providing pro bono services to elders in the community. "Worst case scenario, participants learn valuable soft skills they can use anywhere," Strong said. "Best case? We're building our workforce while creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities."

Nadon Family Homes - the inspiration for Strong Solutions' recent success - provides a wide range of employment opportunities through its array of enterprises. They were recently profiled in a national golf magazine (picture below) - link [here](#).

