

The Direct Support Workforce: Empowering Ohioans

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Introduction

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are critical to the lives of individuals with disabilities. They support and empower individuals in all aspects of living.¹

The DSP role faces wage challenges and employment shortages.

Results of a neglected direct support workforce could include widespread negative economic and social consequences impacting individuals with disabilities and their families, caregivers, DSPs, provider agencies, and communities.¹

This project aims to provide a deeper understanding of the DSP workforce crisis by analyzing survey responses from DSP professionals. The survey included questions that may shed insight on the type of support that would allow DSPs to stay in the field longer.

Methodology

Our team looked at both closed and open-ended survey responses and discussed themes that emerged. Each response was reviewed by multiple researchers separately before coming to an agreement on a broader theme. The most common themes are presented here.

Top Five Concerns and Opportunities for Growth

Pay	Job Stability	Career Opportunities & Advancement	Benefits	Company Culture & Management
"As a new parent... there are not enough benefits and pay needed to continue employment. ... The main reason for staying is the love I have for my individuals. "	"I love being a DSP but I also love my family... I have been working so much that I can't take care of myself or my family. When I do take time for my family, I feel like I am letting people down at work..."	"There is no security in this position. After working as a DSP for nearly a decade I only recently was promoted to Team Leader and began to make \$16/hr (still not enough..."	"Love being a provider but there are no benefits, insurance, vacation"	"To many changes in policies. And to much turn over. The job I was hired for is not the same as the job I am completing now."
"I like the field I'm in and also like my client. Only thing is pay. It's hard to stick around when you have people in the fast food industry making more than you are."	"I am new to the field, coming in is very overwhelming. There is not enough support within the field. I Fear burnout and emotional exhaustion"	"I work for an agency for over 10 years and have had my hours cut ... when asked if I could get a raise was met with a question as to why would they give me one."	"No benefits or health insurance and every time you ask for a day off or two ... then usually lose hours the next few weeks."	"...there are no unions that investigate or carry out surveys to make sure that we as staffs are well respected or treated and way forward for career advancements or development."

Reasons to Stay

"My daughter needs me, and I don't trust anyone else. I've had an issue in the past with abuse that led to a lawsuit and it was a nightmare"

This is my passion and I enjoy working in this field. I am family to the individuals that don't have a family.

"... rapid turn over hurts our people. They become attached to us as quickly as we do to them. Stability and reliability ... lessen behaviors, keeps them safe..., and helps them build trust in a world that can quickly take advantage of them. This job is... draining, but worth it seeing ... THEIR growth."

Conclusions

Nearly 40% of DSPs in our survey reported that they may leave the profession within the next two years. While it is necessary to focus on all the opportunities above, the most impactful is to create policies that would increase pay for the DSP workforce. Other policies could focus on improving job stability, creating clear opportunities for career advancements and job benefits.

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