

Time to Recognize Those Who Care of the Disabled.

Carol Busbee

Let's talk about the heroes of the work force in disability services that receive little to no recognition and very few rewards, the Direct Support Professional (DSP). These are the people providing the front line support to people with development/intellectual disabilities who need more intensive supports. This group of employees are expected to have high standards, high ethics and professional skills, yet are paid at rates comparable, and often less than retail stores and fast food employees. Direct Support Professionals are responsible for not only teaching daily life skills, but for the health, safety and wellbeing of the people they serve. Each document they write or sign is a legal document and open to state and Medicaid scrutiny. A shift in the life of a DSP can include changing soiled clothing, assisting with bathing, dressing, oral care and eating. It may involve communication, education, leisure skills or shopping. A person with developmental disabilities/intellectual disabilities may express many different moods that need interpreted if unable to be expressed-frustrations, anxiety, excitement, happiness or others. Expressions of moods can occur in many ways, not all safely-sometimes, anxiety and fear can be expressed violently-the DSP must stay calm and keep all people safe in these situations. The job of the DSP is a difficult, emotional, physical, mentally challenging and at times high stress and demanding. The dedicated DSP comes back day after day due to their love of the work they do and the people they serve. It is time they receive the compensation and recognition they so truly deserve!

The National Association of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) has identified 15 areas of competency that a DSP should be skilled in to best support a person with DD/ID. These include: participant empowerment, communication, assessment, community and service networking, facilitation of services, community living skills and supports, education, training and self-development, advocacy, vocational, educational and career support, crisis prevention and intervention, organizational participation, documentation, building and maintaining friendships and relationships, provide person centered supports and supporting health and wellness. In addition to the 15 areas of competency, the DSP also adheres to a code of ethics that further enhances the professionalism and dedication to providing services and quality of care. Yet, this group of people, providing quality care to Wyoming's most vulnerable, is working for nearly poverty level wages, many working two or more jobs just to get by and support their families. There is plenty of information available to us of the effects of low wages on families, and this applies to the majority of front line staff providing support to persons with DD/ID.

In addition to the cost to Wyoming families for the staff who hold the jobs, there is a negative effect to the agencies who hire those employees and to the state of Wyoming. Naturally, with this type of work, there is a high burn out rate, as well as high turnover rate. Why put myself through this for so little compensation? It is understandable-It takes a significant amount of money to train staff in the 15 competencies and ethics mentioned above, in addition to the many other factors of the job and then to assist in developing an understanding and bond with the individuals they serve. Every time a staff person leaves, the entire process, and cost of the training starts over. If turnover was not a significant issue, this money could be put into wages, not the entire solution, but a small step forward.

Other than one time emergency money put into the system last year, 2008 was the last time funds were placed into the Wyoming Developmental Disabilities services. The cost of living has

increased significantly during the last eight years. Providers, including the DSPs cannot continue providing services to persons with DD/ID without an increase in wages and payments. In 2015, The State of Wyoming completed a study to evaluate the cost of services for developmental disabilities and an extensive evaluation of the entire findings clearly shows that the current reimbursement rates do not adequately support the cost of providing services to the participants utilizing services. Add to that, new rules requiring more freedoms and time in the community and greater risks to health and wellbeing, the demands placed on the front line DPS increases significantly, again, for low pay and little to no recognition. It is time that the unrecognized heroes of the DD/ID services were recognized and compensated for the incredibly valuable and necessary work they do.

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Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities

Mission

The MCPD's mission is to serve as a network, catalyst, and referral organization that will enhance equality and self-advocacy for people regardless of their disability.

For more information, view the [Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities Website](http://www.cheyennesmcpd.org) at www.cheyennesmcpd.org