

Programs That Can Directly Address The DSP Workforce Crisis

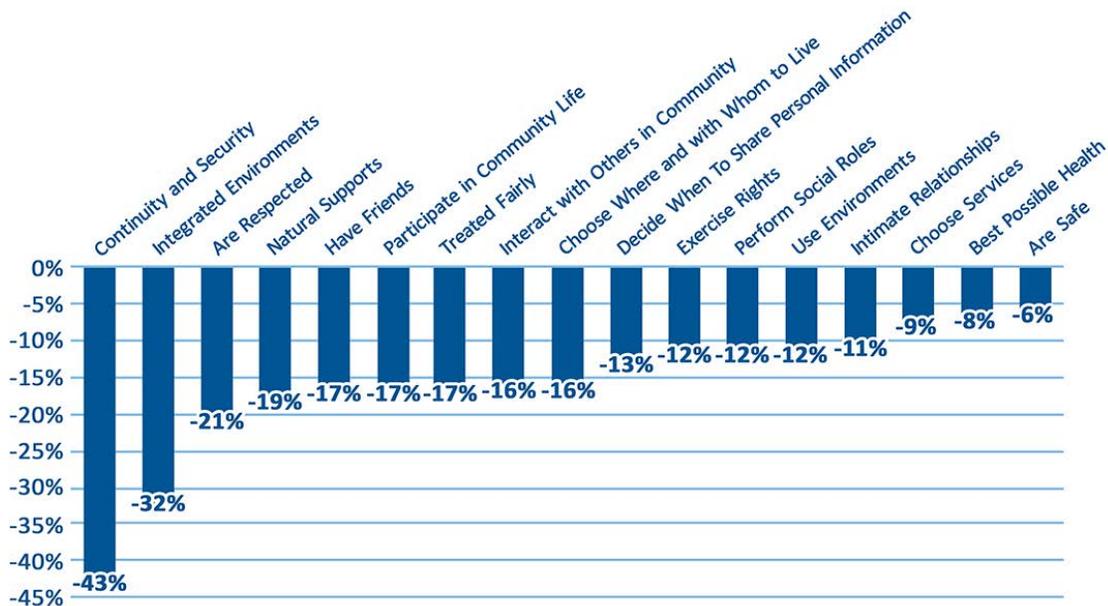
Posted 9/20/2021 via Capstone Newsletter

By Mary Kay Rizzolo | CQL President and CEO

The turnover rate of direct support professionals (DSPs) is staggering, ranging between 30% to 70% (American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), 2014; Hewitt & Larson, 2007). The financial cost of this constant churn is unsustainable, estimated to be \$2.3 billion annually (The President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, 2018). The negative implications for those with disabilities who receive services is nothing short of devastating, with people being significantly less likely to have almost every quality-of-life indicator present when there is DSP turnover.



Impact of DSP turnover (within two years) on personal outcomes



While the issues affecting DSPs are well documented and widely known – dismal wages, lacking benefits, low retention, obstacles in recruitment, insufficient career opportunities, and more – the solutions to the seemingly insurmountable crisis aren’t nearly as clear. But one thing is readily apparent to everyone involved in the human services field. The work of DSPs is absolutely essential. The need to address these workforce issues is urgent.

Programs That Confront The DSP Workforce Crisis

The critical situation described above isn't intended to paint an entirely dire picture. There are examples of excellence in reversing these challenges. There are organizations that have pursued bold undertakings. There is evidence of success in how their solutions have produced positive results.

During 2021 Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week, which took place from September 12, 2021, through September 18, 2021, we partnered with the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) to shine a light on those efforts. We created a campaign to feature agency initiatives that make a long-lasting impact on DSPs.

After launching the campaign in July 2021, we received nearly two dozen different submissions from provider organizations spanning the United States – from New York to North Carolina, Oregon to Iowa, and New Jersey to Tennessee. The impressive programs included a creative recruitment effort of High School interns, a career path to promote professional development, and a new way to connect DSPs and build community with art projects.

Throughout the week, we highlighted those efforts on our social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter. In this Capstone, we're summarizing the programs and linking to these agency initiatives so that our readers can learn more about what's working. The ultimate goal of this campaign is that other organizations could replicate these efforts and access a roadmap to confront the workforce crisis.

How Core Services Cut Their DSP Turnover Rate In Half

Over the past three years, Core Services of Northeast Tennessee has been on a mission to improve direct support professional (DSP) retention. Read about the significant changes at Core Services that cut their turnover rate in half, reducing their vacancy rate to an average of around 4%.

Success In Recruiting DSPs: The 'Human Services Internship' Program

In 2019, The Arc Lexington created its 'Human Services Internship' program to help introduce high school students to the work of supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Find out how it empowers high school students to become effective DSPs.

Children's Aid and Family Services' Training Program Supports DSP Development

The Cope Institute for Professional Success, developed by Children's Aid and Family Services (CAFS), teaches, coaches, and educates DSPs and other staff members on areas of improvement while teaching fitness for performance in an academic enrichment environment.

Implementing A DSP Career Path At Wildwood Programs

Wildwood Programs rolled out the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Career Path in January 2020, after over a year of holding focus groups with DSPs and residential and day program leadership. Discover how the initiative is improving skills and knowledge, while providing financial incentives.

SEEC's Program Aims to Improve DSP Training In Maryland

The DSP-II Training Program was created by SEEC with support from a consortium of agencies and provides CMS competency-based DSP-II training to DSPs across Maryland. Find out how it is building skills among DSPs and improving retention rates at the agency.

Boosting DSP Morale Through The Employee Retention Committee (ERC)

In an effort to improve the retention of staff – specifically targeted at DSPs – The Arc Southern Maryland’s human resources department formed an Employee Retention Committee (ERC). It was aimed at improving retention by showing appreciation for DSPs.

Recognizing DSPs Through The Kudos Program

The Kudos Program is Imagine the Possibilities Inc.’s initiative which provides employees with opportunities to acknowledge others and be recognized for their everyday work. Learn how it is helping the human service agency in creating a positive organizational culture.

Connecting DSPs Through The ‘Mandatory Fun Series’ Program

The Institutes of Applied Human Dynamics (IAHD) put together weekly art workshops through the ‘Mandatory Fun Series’ program. This provided everyone with an opportunity to reconnect and build community after a year of social restriction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Program To ‘Empower’ The Quality Of Life For DSPs

Empower decided to launch a new Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that concentrated on the areas that people struggle with on a day-to-day basis. While organizations may already have an EAP, it’s important to consider if they have the right EAP.

Looking Beyond National DSP Recognition Week

We love National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week. It’s a wonderful time to devote our attention to the important work of DSPs and recognize all of their contributions to supporting people in living fulfilling lives and achieving goals and dreams. The next step though, is to extend this celebration beyond just one week. We need to ensure that our acknowledgement of DSPs carries on throughout the entire year. We need to take actions that make a more meaningful impact on the issues affecting DSPs. We need to address the challenges that this workforce faces and take concrete steps to solve them.

It is our hope that the agency efforts highlighted through this campaign offer human service providers some specific examples for confronting topics like wages, recruitment, retention, recognition, and ongoing professional development. We appreciate all of the organizations that contributed to this important campaign to spread best practices across the field. And most of all - thank you to all of the DSPs out there for your tireless commitment to providing exemplary, person-centered supports to people with disabilities!

References

- American Network of Community Options and Resources. (2014). *Ensuring a sustainable work force for people with disabilities: Minimum wage increases can not leave direct support professionals behind*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Hewitt, A. & Larson, S. (2007). *The direct support workforce in community supports to individuals with developmental disabilities: Issues, implications, and promising practices*. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 13, 178-187. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mrdd.20151>
- The President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. (2018). Report to the President 2017 – *America’s direct support workforce crisis: Effects on People with Intellectual Disabilities, Families, Communities and the U.S. economy*. <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2018-02/2017%20PCPID%20Short%20Report.pdf>