



Coalition for a DSP Living Wage

*Valuing Workers Who Support
People with Developmental Disabilities*

Who Are We?

The Coalition is comprised of families, community provider agencies, Direct Support Professionals and, most importantly, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). These members share a common belief that individuals with I/DD deserve to live rich and meaningful lives as fully integrated members of our communities. Toward that end, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who play a critical role in meeting this objective, must be paid a living wage.

What is a Direct Support Professional?

DSPs support individuals with complex needs that include physical, intellectual, or behavioral challenges and health conditions. They need to make important decisions about all aspects of the lives of the individuals they support. Individuals with I/DD require assistance from DSPs in navigating everyday life; within group homes, private homes, day programs, workplaces, and anywhere else a person with I/DD may want or need to go. They are the necessary support system for people with I/DD to live successfully in communities, develop relationships, pursue careers and personal goals, and manage their lives. This work requires a high level of skill and responsibility. In addition, DSPs must comply with training requirements and regulations that are essential for protecting the health and safety of those for whom care is provided.

What is the problem?

Despite the critical and complex work that they do, the average starting salary of a DSP is only \$10.50 per hour. Due to the low salaries, DSPs often must receive public assistance and/or work multiple jobs, neither of which is in the best interest in those being served or the DSP. In addition, low wages make the hiring and retention of qualified DSPs very difficult, with service provider agencies reporting a remarkably high turnover rate of approximately 44%. Families and individuals with I/DD who seek to hire DSPs themselves also struggle. With limited funding sources, they often must search for weeks or months to identify and hire qualified staff, only to have them move on after a short while. The cost associated with such turnover is in the thousands for provider agencies, but continual changes in staffing also have a human impact. People with I/DD have more success when they receive consistent care, which is more challenging to achieve when staff changes so often.

How Can We Fix This Problem?

To ensure that a fully-staffed delivery system in New Jersey is created and maintained, DSPs must be paid a living wage. Toward that end, funding must be allotted to raise DSP salaries by \$1.25 per hour every year for five years, bringing the *starting* hourly wage to \$16.75 by the year 2022. This increase will address the need for a higher starting wage and will also properly compensate existing employees. Building and retaining a strong, qualified, and sustainable workforce requires a commitment to people with I/DD and correspondingly, valuing the workers who support them. Without an increase to address the wage, integrating people with complex challenges into communities throughout the State will not be possible.

The Coalition for a DSP Living Wage

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