

Direct Support Professional Week Celebrations

Are a Success

With the recognition of the U.S. Senate proclaiming the week of September 8, 2008 as National Direct Support Professionals Week, many providers took the opportunity to recognize their staff and the important work that they do. Ohio providers were no exception. OPRA would like to thank the following agencies and others of which we are not aware for acknowledging the critical role Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play in meeting the needs of the individuals we serve: Champaign Residential Services, Columbus Center for Human Services, Guernsey Residential, Havar, Heinzerling Foundation, Independence, REM Ohio, and Sunshine.



Pictured above (left to right): Christie Snyder, Winnie Kemboi (DSP prize winner), and Dona England-Afek of Supported Community Living/Columbus Center for Human Services

Listed below are some of the highlights of celebrations held across the state:

- Pizza parties were held for each shift where door prizes were offered. A poster was created for each DSP to highlight the care and special skills that each brings to their work.
- Candy and treats distributed to DSPs by senior supervisors and residents as a personal thank you.
- Individual letters of recognition sent to each DSP's home from the agency's Board of Trustees
- Appreciation reception with door prizes and gifts
- Week long celebration of give-aways, including massages, car washes, freebies, lunches, and a pancake breakfast at different sites
- Posters of thanks handmade by clients and ice cream give-aways
- Miniature golf outing
- Recognition and thanks in local newspapers in various outlets

Special recognition goes to Miss Lee Howe of Sunshine who celebrated 50 years of work directly caring for individuals with MR/DD during DSP week. She is a role model to many on staff at Sunshine and the outdoor stage behind the children's home was renamed in her honor. (Pictured at right, Lee Howe (left) with Betty Holland, Executive Director of Sunshine)



Pictured above: DSP advocates from Sunshine with staff from U.S. Senator George Voinovich's office—Jan Fowler and Chris Holt

In addition to these special events across Ohio, DSPs from Columbus Center for Human Services and Sunshine joined OPRA staff in Washington, DC for a rally and to lobby for support of HR 1279, sponsored by Lois Capps (D-CA) and Lee Terry (R-NE). The legislation amends the Medicaid program (Title XIX of the Social Security Act) to provide federal funds that will enable states to increase wages to targeted direct support professionals providing supports to people with disabilities. In all, the DSPs, OPRA members and staff visited with seven different Congressional offices to raise awareness of the workforce issues in the disability community and inadequacy of DSP wages. A special thanks goes out to co-sponsors from Ohio: Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo), Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-Cleveland), and Congressman Zach Space (D-Dover). Senator Sherrod Brown also deserves recognition for co-sponsoring Senate Res. 613, which established DSP week.



OPRA President Mark Davis and Director of Government Relations Missy Craddock get ready to go to the Capitol Hill for Congressional visits with DSP advocates

About Direct Support Professionals

Direct Support Professionals, often referred to as caregivers, personal assistants or home care aides, are the lynchpin to the ultimate success or failure of community-based long-term supports. DSP workers build close, trusted relationships with the millions of people with disabilities they assist each day. They work in community settings assisting individuals with medications, preparing and eating meals, dressing, mobility, and handling daily affairs. They are true unsung heroes who make a tremendous difference in the quality of care a person receives.

Staggering National Statistics

The U.S. Department of Labor statistics show that the average U.S. worker makes about \$16.75 an hour, while the average DSP makes about \$9.26 an hour for the close, nurturing and intimate critical support they provide. Many DSPs work two jobs to make ends meet for their own families. The daily challenges these front-line workers face are both physically and emotionally demanding. Inadequate wages have led to high turnover (as high as 86% in some residential settings) and ongoing vacancies in the direct support workforce.



Staff from Supported Community Living/Columbus Center for Human Services at the DSP rally in Washington, DC: Gretchen VanMatta and Chari McDonald



From CRSI (standing left to right): DSP Kristi Manns with David, Bob and DSPs Alex Dysert and Michelle Burgoon; (seated left to right): Joe, David, Ron, and Chrissy from Auglaize Group Home

- 19% of all DSPs live in poverty and a staggering 49% of all DSPs are in low-income families (below 200% of the federal poverty level;
- 25% of all DSPs have no health insurance and another 22% receive their health insurance via a government program;
- DSP wages increased only \$1.20 from 1995 to 2004 versus \$2.79 and \$1.75 for public direct support positions (state employees) and fast food workers respectively; and
- DSP wages even rose slower than the minimum wage from 1995 to 2004, 16.88% vs. 21.18%.

Nationwide, there are approximately 1.4 million individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who require professional support in order to live and work in their own communities rather than an institution. Unfortunately, there are only about 875,000 direct support workers serving this one segment of the disabled population. DSP positions will continue to be among the fastest growing jobs in America as 70 million Americans will be age 65 or older by 2030, twice as many 65 and older Americans as there were in 2000. By 2020, the number of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is anticipated to grow to 1.4 million and the number of DSPs for that population alone will need to increase to 1.2 million. Currently all direct support positions represent 2% of the entire American workforce.



DSPs from Guernsey Residential celebrate DSP week