**OPRA and OADSP Proposal on Workforce Crisis**

OPRA has 177 member organizations in 79 of Ohio’s 88 counties. Collectively, these 177 members employ 30,300 individuals; 26,890 of which are full time positions. Provider organizations employ management staff, therapists and administrative personnel. However, the vast majority of the 30,300 positions are direct care. Direct care staff (or Direct Support Professionals/DSP’s) provide the daily care and services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Funding constraints have severely limited the pay for DSP’s. Our recent salary survey showed that the average weighted pay rate for DSP’s was $10.24 an hour. Sixty seven percent (67%) of DSP’s are receiving some type of public assistance. To further illustrate the funding constraints, 19% of supervisory staff also receive some form of public assistance.

Workforce recruitment and retention in the DD system is at a crisis level. We compete for employees with fast food restaurants and big box stores, many of which have raised their starting pay significantly above our $10.24 average. Member agencies are reporting staff vacancies of 20% and higher. This leads to significant overtime for those available to work, causing burnout and a tendency to leave the agency in search of a more stable schedule and better pay - which further exacerbates the problem. In 2013 the turnover rate for DSP’s was 47%. In 2016, turnover is at 51%; a 4% increase. The cost of turnover for one DSP position ranges from $3,000 to $5,000, depending on an agency’s structure. There are other costs as well, the most significant being the loss in continuity of care for individuals receiving services.

Reducing turnover and increasing DSP retention rates is a focus of OPRA’s. For obvious reasons direct care staff are the cornerstone of any human service delivery system. The recruitment and retention of low wage earning direct care staff is the primary challenge of service providers today and into the foreseeable future.

Significant financial resources go into recruitment, overtime and training. Increased retention would free up these resources for pay increases, which are sorely needed. Increased retention would also improve service provision as there would be continuity in care. Increasing retention would also improve staff productivity as work schedules would be more stable, which will prevent burnout and afford DSP’s time for themselves and their families.

In addition to these stated goals, OPRA has two standing committees that address workforce issues. The first is our Human Resources Committee, which is made up of DD HR professionals from across the state. The focus of this committee is data collection/ analysis (salary survey, member surveys) and training and education of the membership in HR related issues, including recruitment and retention strategies. The second is our Workforce Committee, which was formed last fall to focus specifically on retention strategies. OADSP has representatives on this committee and has been instrumental in the formation of the committee’s goals. This group is in the process of developing a work plan to address

three most frequently cited (non-pay related) reasons that DSPs terminate their employment: lack of child care, poor supervision, and a lack of reliable transportation. Understanding that we alone cannot increase reimbursement rates to affect pay, we are focusing on other forms of support for the DSP workforce.

OPRA and OADSP became involved in the development of the HBCGPP (Healthier Buckeye Grant Pilot Program) in March of 2016. This grant, submitted by The Lucas County Children and Family First Council, will establish a pilot program in Lucas County to establish an ERN (Employee Resource Network) for employees of DD provider agencies. The ERN will focus on the health and resource needs of employees, with the goal of stabilizing their living situations, making them more likely to stay employed. We plan to address the child care and transportation needs through the Lucas ERN. OADSP will provide Basic Certificate and CIP training as part of this grant. OPRA is committed to the statewide application of HBCGPP and intends to replicate the process across the state utilizing information garnered from the project.

We request that DODD provide assistance and support in the following areas:

**Non-monetary:**

GED Requirement: We ask that DODD provide waivers of the GED/High School diploma requirement for a one year period, when submitted on an individual basis. This will allow provider agencies to assist staff in obtaining these credentials. The Workforce Committee has disseminated information on GED centers across the state, provided a listing of on- line courses/on line testing and shared the list of states which have GED reciprocity with Ohio. We believe these resources will enable agencies to better assist their staff in obtaining the required GED.

Rule Change Allowing CIP to be Earned in Lieu of Diploma/GED Requirement: OADSP is working closely with OPRA and the Ohio Department of Education to have the CIP (Certificate of Initial Proficiency) recognized as an “industry credential”. Once approved by ODE, high school students will be able to earn the CIP in lieu of current high school graduation testing requirements. OADSP’s credentialing program is competency based, and candidates are required to demonstrate their competency in a variety of skill standards related to being an effective Direct Support Professionals. Candidates must be able to articulate their ability to meet these standards through the development of a portfolio. It is OADSP’s position that we must maintain a high standard for Direct Support Professionals, with the understanding that there are multiple ways of demonstrating competency, including earning an industry credential directly related to the field.

**Monetary:**

Funding for OADSP to Transition Credentialing Courses into Online Trainings: OADSP has gathered data for years that clearly indicates the value and benefits of offering competency based training to DSPs and Supervisors. These benefits include increased job satisfaction, retention, organizational participation, and better outcomes for people receiving services. Access to competency based training can be a challenge with organizations struggling to cover shifts. Currently, agencies have the option to send staff to OADSP sponsored courses, or to purchase a license and teach courses ‘in house’. OADSP’s board is committed to increasing access to courses through online and hybrid models. OADSP has established a business relationship with an organization that has built an on-demand video training library called InterAct. InterAct is operated by Interhab, the leading provider association in Kansas. Interhab contracts with OADSP to provide the DSPATHS credentialing program to Interhab member providers. As a part of this partnership, OADSP and Interhab are currently negotiating the shared use of the InterAct platform to make OADSP’s credentialing program available on it. This partnership will benefit both Ohio and Kansas providers, and will eventually be marketed nationally. OADSP is currently seeking funds to support the transition of the DSPATHS and Supervisor Credentialing programs into online trainings.

Funding to Create a Marketing and Public Awareness Campaign: The field of Developmental Disabilities is often referred to as a “hidden industry”, and never has that been more apparent than now. OPRA and OADSP are addressing the recruitment of tomorrow’s DSPs through a unique program called the Community Connections Career Partnership – Ohio. This program exposes high school students to the field through a combined classroom (DSPATHS curriculum) and internship program. This program has garnered statewide attention, and creates a direct path from high school to the field. This is a well thought out and steady approach that has great potential, however the “payoff” is not immediate.

OADSP and OPRA have looked at the recruiting methods of similar industries, such as the home health. You would be hard pressed to turn on the television and not see a commercial for “Visiting Angels”, or a similar company educating the public on homecare, support for independence, and the importance of community involvement for seniors. OADSP and OPRA are seeking financial support to create a unified statewide initiative to educate the public about the very same points in our field, and the opportunity for people to become a part of it. We believe that a public education campaign of this nature will benefit our field in many ways. Not only will it gain exposure for employment and career opportunities, but it will also educate the public about members of their community, and the importance of recognizing the contributions of all members of society.