

# IDEAS & VOICES



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- To present balanced views
- To seek solutions to improve

### LOCAL VOICES

## Low wages affecting lives of Ohio's disabled

by Dennis Grant

Imagine relying on someone else for your most basic needs: eating, getting dressed, bathing, using the restroom, and leaving the house. Imagine the trust you have in that person in your most vulnerable moments.

Now, imagine a new person shows up every month, every week or even every day to help you with those tasks. What if they don't show up at all?

This is reality for many thousands with developmental or acquired disabilities who rely on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Because of limited funding, DSPs across the workforce are often unfairly underpaid, with some living near the poverty level and dependent on government subsidies. A recent Dayton Daily News article on April 20, 2019 revealed the

average wage for a worker in Dayton has dropped from \$940 per week to \$740 per week between 2007 and 2018.

As disturbing as this might sound, consider that DSP's statewide average wage is \$450 per week. Every day, these caring professionals who have built relationships with those they serve and who believe in a mission are forced to quit and take jobs in fast-food or retail where they can make more money – leaving the clients they care about behind. It's a heart-breaking situation.

United Rehabilitation Services, as a five-star-rated childcare provider, knows the importance of "continuity of care" for children to develop and progress. This is no different for the adults and seniors with developmental or acquired disabilities we serve. Con-

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sistency, routine and familiar faces are vital to feeling safe, gaining new skills and achieving small moments of independence.

In anticipation of Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed 2019-2021 biennium state budget, I have had several very positive conversations with state representatives Niraj Antani and Phil Plummer, as well as state Sen. Peggy Lehner as the Ohio legislature works on addressing this problem through a proposed new funding model for DSP workers – raising their wages. As a nonprofit

provider of adult and senior day services, we are hopeful Ohio will respond to this critical issue. Since 2005, when the current system and fee structure was established, inflation has risen 29 percent – while the rate we are reimbursed for most direct personal care services has only gone up 7.04 percent. How can we survive the competition in the general workforce competition for good employees at this rate?

United Rehabilitation Services is dedicated to being good stewards of the funds we receive as demonstrated

by keeping our combined overhead of fundraising and administration under 10 percent the past six years. We are not like other businesses that can increase the fee for a service or product when our costs rise, but have our rates dictated to us by the state. It is time for Ohio to step up and support the important work we and our employees do each day supporting individuals with disabilities and changing lives.

I encourage the legislature to support wage increases for Direct Support Professionals so we can continue to offer consistency of care, comfort, safety, and a feeling of belonging for those who need it most.

Dennis Grant is Executive Director of United Rehabilitation Services of Greater Dayton.