

January 2009

Dear Senator (or Representative),

The Direct Support Professional Association of Minnesota (DSPAM) is a professional association representing the interests of people employed to provide direct care and other support services to individuals whom have disabilities. Its members primarily work in residential programs, day training and employment programs and personal care assistance agencies. DSPAM seeks to improve the quality of human services provided to persons with disabilities by strengthening the direct support professional workforce.

Recently DSPAM commissioned an environmental scan (E scan) to survey the needs, interests, and the overall landscape for Direct Support Professionals in Minnesota. We are writing to summarize some results of the survey results and urge you to do whatever you can during the 2009 session to protect the interests of thousands of direct support workers in Minnesota.

The survey consisted of nine demographic questions and eighteen survey questions. Three key findings are listed below.

- Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are not making livable wages. The majority of DSP's are dissatisfied with the wages that they make and list it as the most important issue facing DSP's today and five years from now. (Fact: only 14% of DSPs make more than 14\$ per hour. A full 87% make below 14\$)
- DSPs report that although most are offered insurance by their employer, many cannot afford the insurance. Low wages influence a DSP's ability to purchase health insurance coverage. (Fact: 65% of DSP are uninsured)
- DSPs report they feel respected by their clients and coworkers. However, many report they do not feel respect from their communities or employers. There is an overall lack of respect for the field of direct support as a profession.(Fact: DSPs enable people with disabilities to live and work in community settings rather than more expensive institutional environments!!)

We are happy to share the full report upon request. All of the key findings create a picture of how difficult working as a DSP can be. For many this is a career with significant limitations: low wages; expensive insurance; lack of respect; difficulty connecting with others in the field; and a lack of incentives for improved educational opportunities. These challenges create an uninviting picture for the profession during a time in which their services are urgently needed.

During the 2009 session we urge you to:

- Support a Cost of Living Allocation for providers of support services to people whom have disabilities. The only time most DSP's get raises is when the legislature authorized a rate increase for its employers. The current economic crisis impacts DSP's tremendously. For those with little or no discretionary income the only places we can cut are food, child care, housing, and transportation. We have no cushion!
- Oppose any proposals to cut rates for programs serving people with disabilities. Many of these agencies do not have the ability to absorb cuts. Imposing cuts will likely result in layoffs of Direct Support Professionals and a diminished quality of life for people whom have disabilities. Some agencies may not survive budget cuts thus affecting the community based infrastructure that is so important to people with disabilities.
- Oppose efforts to limit access to community based services to people whom have disabilities. People with disabilities already wait for years for many types of support services. They need hope that one day they will have services that will enable families whom have children with disabilities to stay together and adults with disabilities to live, work and play in their local communities.
- Support efforts to make health insurance affordable and accessible to Direct Support Professionals. Lack of health insurance causes dedicated people to leave the field.

Please contact the Direct Support Professional Association of Minnesota regarding Direct Support Professionals offering testimony at the Capitol this year and if you have any questions.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Bridget Siljander
Chairperson

Lindsay Short
Vice-Chairperson

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