

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL ALLIANCE OF NEW YORK STATE

Promoting valued lives for the people we serve by advancing the profession of direct support.



Testimony of the Direct Support Professional Alliance of New York State Before the Administration on Developmental Disabilities' "Envisioning the Future" Summit October 18, 2010 Philadelphia, PA

I would like to thank Commissioner Lewis and the Administration on Developmental disabilities for hearing our testimony and our view of "Envisioning the Future". My name is Michael Tuggey and I am President for the Board of Directors of the Direct Support Professionals Alliance of New York State. DSPANYS is a state chapter of the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals. Our state chapter is a non-profit organization that anyone who is in the field of Direct Support can join. DSPANYS represents about 75,000 workers that are on the front lines working with people with developmental disabilities.

In my opinion, Direct Support Professionals are a critical point when it comes "Envisioning the Future" in terms of supporting people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. As stated above, there are about 75,000 Direct Support Professionals in New York that provide services to about 125,000 people with disabilities. We are entering a time when there will be a lot more expected from Direct Support Professionals, and if there will be fewer of us doing the work that many once did – we'd better be good at it. Over the next four years, we will need an additional work force of at least 17,000 due to turnover rates and other factors that affect Direct Support Professionals. Often many workers have two to three jobs just to make a living wage. Most workers take pride and enjoy the significant and critical work they do, but are sometimes left with no other choice than to find work that provides benefits, living wages, and opportunity for career growth. This fact makes recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce difficult.

The future looks dim for our field as we enter a time when the population is shifting. For example, the baby boomer generation is aging and health related issues would surface which will require the services of Direct Support Professionals. While this age group comes to the near future, our supply of qualified workers is slowly shrinking. There will be a dramatic shift in demand and want of qualified personnel to do this type work. With the disintegration of state institutions our job description has drastically and positively changed. The movement is towards person centered supports and independence for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. DSPANYS sees this as the "way of the future" and will continue to push towards this goal, but we need help.

As we "Envision the Future", this is what needs to be done:

- 1. Truly recognize Direct Support as a Profession as a way for workers to grow in their career. We seek credentialing.**
- 2. Provide Direct Support Professionals a living wage/compensation and benefits that are on par with the importance and critical need of their roles.**

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3. **Developing career ladders and a dedicated path for workers so that they are not forced to find other jobs to provide for themselves and their own families. Link those career ladders to related salary increases when completion of training.**

4. **Our profession requires unique and complex skill sets. On-going competency based training and training of workers should be grounded in the principles of self-determination and person-centered planning.**

5. **Our career requires independent thinking, often on the go without immediate supervision. This requires keen judgment and a need for fostering an adherence to a direct support professional code of ethics.**

In closing, as we put people with intellectual and developmental disabilities first, we realize that they will only really enjoy life and have their dreams come true if there is a competent and qualified workforce. As we empower the people we support in the areas of vocational and recreational opportunities, educational opportunities, and having happy and healthy lifestyles, Direct Support workers need to be empowered as well. Thank you.

Michael Tuggey

Direct Support Professional; The Adirondack Arc
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