

Current Shortages, Recruitment, and Retention of Direct Service Providers in Iowa

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Objective:

The purpose of this project was to understand the current shortages, recruitment, and retention practices for Direct Service Providers (DSPs) so they can be improved.

Method:

Researchers obtained publicly listed emails, primarily from Iowa Compass, that belonged to individuals involved in the hiring of DSPs and were therefore reasonably able to respond to the survey questions. Researchers then sent individual recruitment emails via the University of Iowa's email system, inviting the individuals to participate in a Qualtrics survey. Researchers completed a qualitative research study. The findings include a descriptive sample analysis of the survey results.

Results/Conclusion:

This study sought to better understand the current shortages, recruitment strategies, and retention practices of DSPs in Iowa. The data identified that possible factors connected to DSP shortages include the size of the organization, demand for DSPs for specific shifts and hours, the geography of communities served, pay, and burnout.

Why do DSPs leave the profession?		
<u>Answer</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>
Pay	21.51%	20
Burn Out	17.20%	16
Child Care	10.75%	10
Odd Hours or Shifts	9.68%	9
Career Advancement	9.68%	9

The number of open Direct Service Provider (DSP) positions varied broadly across organizations of different sizes. Size of organizations can vary from a family who may be looking for one or two DSPs to help with disabled loved one to large retirement communities serving hundreds of clients. This is reflected in the data that identified respondents who were not looking for any DSPs to respondents looking for 230 DSPs. In Iowa, families can hire DSPs directly or they can go through an agency to receive support services. Whether a family or an agency is doing the hiring could explain the data's large variance.

When considering the number of vacancies, it is important to also consider the number of people served. Organizations serving more clients typically demand more staff than those serving fewer clients. The demand for DSPs is also influenced by the number of hours or shifts a client requires support. Some people with disabilities require 24/7 support while others only need staff for a few hours a day once or twice a week. Some individuals require a 1:1 client-to-staff ratio. Other circumstances may only require a 3:1 client-to-staff ratio.

The following are quotes from open ended questions which identified the factors impacting the retention of current DSPs:

“The job market is too competitive and the ability to recruit and retain in such a market is exceptionally challenging. They can make more money, work better hours, and have less responsibility in a variety of alternative industries.”

“People want to do this kind of work; however, the pay is not good at all for the intense duties that are required.”

“It is an invisible job, by design, so takes extra educating of the community.”

In summary, participants reported that factors impacting the retention of current DSPs include the size of the organization, demand for DSP-specific shifts and hours, the geography of the communities served, and burnout.

Suggested steps for addressing DSP shortages could include:

- Restructuring the pay scale for DSPs to a competitive level that retains workers
- Development of policies which address worker burnout and support work life balance
- Marketing that DSP positions can be a long-term job

Possible next steps could be:

- Larger sample size
- Semi structured interviews with administrators who hire DSPs
- Semi structured interviews with DSP prep programs
- Legislative support to increase wages

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