

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

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## Introduction

- A **direct service provider (DSP)** is hired by an organization or a person with a disability so they can support a person with a disability's ability to live independently and access their community. Due to the shortages of DSPs, people with disabilities are suffering from neglect, abuse, and violations of human rights (Disability Law Center, 2021; Laws et al., 2020)
- Challenges contributing to the DSP workforce shortage include inconsistent staffing, undesirable shifts, and insufficient pay (Disability Law Center, 2021; Laws et al., 2020)
- In 2022, 96% of Iowa's community providers had DSP vacancies (Iowa Association of Community Providers, 2023)
- The goal was to gain knowledge on the current DSP shortage and understand current recruitment and retention processes in Iowa

## Methods

### Procedure

- Recruited those who hire DSPs via email using Iowa Compass to send a Qualtrics survey
- Survey had 13 questions that utilized a mixture of open-ended, slider, and select all that apply questions

### Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
- Qualitative analysis of participants' comments

## Findings

- Shortages of DSPs varied across organizations from zero to over 100 depending on organization's size and location
- Seventeen participants rated their recruiting practices at five or higher for effectiveness on a ten-point scale
- Participants reported factors that impact the retention of current DSPs are size of the organization, demand for DSP-specific shifts and hours, geography of the communities served, and burnout
- Quotes from open ended question:
  - 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 for the intense duties that are required
  - By design, it is an invisible job so takes extra educating of the community

## Discussion

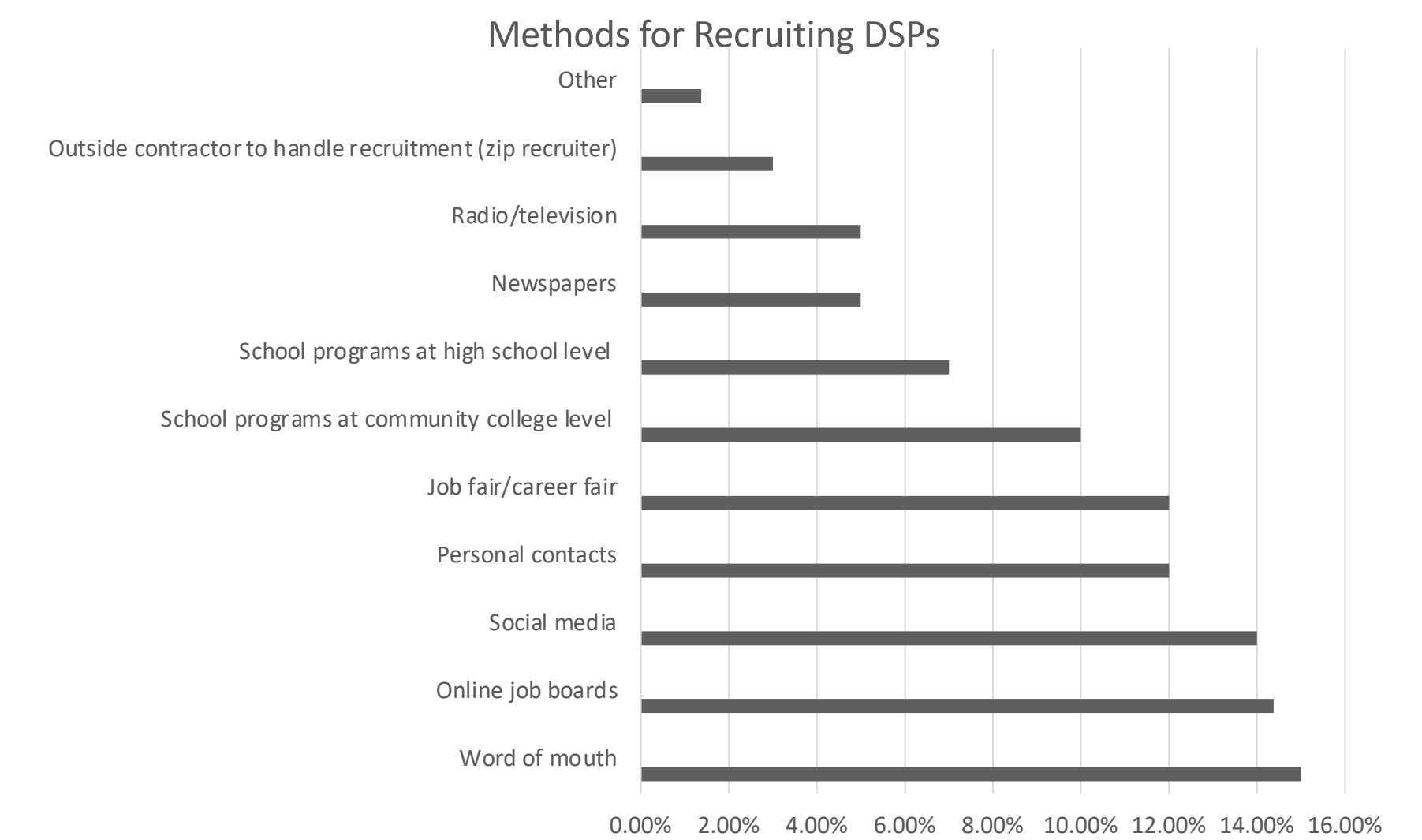
### Areas of need

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

### Next steps

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

## Figures



### Why do DSPs leave the profession?

Answer	%	Count
Pay	21.51%	20
Burn Out	17.20%	16
Child Care	10.75%	10alttex
Odd Hours or Shifts	9.68%	9
Career Advancement	9.68%	9

## References

Disability Law Center. (2021). Direct support professionals: A workforce crisis limiting security, human rights, and opportunity for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. <https://www.dlc-ma.org/2021/11/>

Iowa Association of Community Providers. (2022). Addressing the DSP workforce crisis. <https://theiacp.memberclicks.net/policy-priorities>

Laws, C. B., & Hewitt, A. S. (2020). Introduction to the Special Issue: Understanding the Direct Support Workforce in the United States. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, 58(3), 189–191. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-58.3.189>