

# First Responders for *Vulnerable Families*

## Staffing crisis stretches Direct Care Workers to their limits

Michigan's labor shortage has hit Direct Care Workers hard, leaving these first responders for vulnerable families stretched to the limit. Direct Care Workers are doing all they can to support people with developmental disabilities and other mental and physical challenges, but it's an unwinnable battle.

"I've been forced to prioritize this work over my relationships with my friends, family and my own physical and mental health," says Lisa Smith\*, a Kalamazoo-area DCW and supervisor. "My goal is to bring joy into the lives of individuals by helping them meet their goals. With the current staffing shortage, I am living day to day and am not able to focus on improving the lives of others. The inability to relieve the uncertainty in Direct Care or help my team is giving me great anxiety."



With staff leaving the industry in droves for higher wages and easier work in retail and fast-food environments, those still doing Direct Care Work are stretched to the absolute limit. The staffing shortage has created tremendous uncertainty, long hours and a job that gets harder and harder every day.

"We do our best to keep the individuals we serve healthy and safe, while trying to support one another at the same time. But that's becoming more and more difficult, especially with the wage uncertainty over the last year," Lisa says. "Normal business hours no longer exist. I am constantly on the phone supporting my team from as early as 6 a.m. until sometimes as late as 2 a.m. And on weekends. This isn't sustainable."

It's become common that Direct Care supervisors are taking on countless shifts themselves to cover the shortage, creating a backlog of administrative work. The extra hours supervisors are facing to deal with call-offs and shifting schedules goes far beyond business hours, virtually eliminating any work/life balance.

Being stretched to the limit isn't good for the morale of those working in Direct Care and it doesn't benefit their clients either. The staffing shortage leads workers to work far more hours than they want and often getting stuck on night or weekend shifts they don't want, typically without breaks for meals.

"While we keep trying to have faith that this situation will get better someday, that doesn't relieve any of the stress or worry," Lisa says. "We truly hope the wage increase is made permanent so that we can bring in more team members to help us meet the needs of our clients."

Direct Care Workers should only have to focus on meeting the needs of Michigan's most vulnerable. Being stretched thin is wearing out the Direct Care Workers Michigan still has left. The Direct Care wage increase must be made permanent—or even increased—before this essential field completely collapses.

**It's time to provide Michigan's Direct Care Workers with the same essential support they provide to the people they serve. As first responders for vulnerable families, they deserve nothing less.**

---

\*Name has been changed