

Caring in *Crisis*

How Marijane Wiebenga is fighting for her family's future during a Direct Care Worker shortage

The shortage of Direct Care Workers in today's labor market has put many Michigan families in unmanageable positions.

Meet the Wiebengas. They live in a small town outside of Cadillac and are struggling to find care for their daughter, Tesha.

Now 41, Tesha was born with significant, multiple disabilities and requires 24/7 care to live her daily life. Her family built her a custom home 14 years ago to provide her with independence, believing they could access in-home care support. Even though it's been difficult over the years, they've never experienced anything like what they're enduring in today's labor market.

Securing consistent, reliable caretakers has been impossible, forcing Tesha's mother, Marijane, to provide all her daughter's care by herself.

"The inconsistent hours and low wages Direct Care Workers are being offered in Northern Michigan has made it a nightmare to keep anyone on the job," Marijane says. "As a result, we're down to just me. I am here with Tesha 24/7."

Today, Marijane has no ability to work, pursue hobbies, or do much of anything outside of caring for her daughter.

"I'm constantly exhausted and burnt out," Marijane says. "The support and respite Direct Care Workers offer is important, necessary, and life-saving. Our state's policy leaders need to do far more to support these workers, so they can stay on the job and keep families strong."

Marijane worries about what will happen without a significant increase in Direct Care Worker wages.

"I'm worried about whether Tesha can ever have the life she wants," Marijane says. "I also am so fearful about what will happen as my husband and I age. Who will care for Tesha?"

The chaos of inconsistent care and worker turnover is also extremely difficult for Tesha to cope with.

"Tesha experiences great anxiety and fear when she doesn't know the people coming to care for her," Marijane says. "With a revolving door in the profession, this happens a lot. It's not good for the workers or for our family."

The Wiebenga family's only priority is quality care for their daughter, but they worry about Tesha's future if the system doesn't change.

"We have so much money in Michigan today that policy leaders are having trouble spending it all," Marijane says. "It seems only right to help people like my daughter get the care they deserve."

Michigan needs to make the Direct Care Worker wage increase permanent—and even more competitive—to help families secure the care they desperately need.

