



Building Resources for Individuals with Disabilities to Gain Equality

SCOTT DELONG'S SPEECH

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Thank you for joining our day of education and support. I applaud all of you that took the time today to show support for Direct Support Professionals and the individuals they serve. Without your support and advocacy we wouldn't be here today and we would definitely not have the opportunity to promote change.

Today, like many of you I stand here curious as to the future of the DD system. We are in uncharted waters, with record numbers of individuals needing services, the highest staff vacancy rates (open positions), and the most competition for employees I have seen in my 19 years in the field. Staff are working long hard hours both to ensure the well-being and safety of those we serve as well as ensuring they have the funds to provide for their own families.

Being a numbers guy, I am truly worried about the future of our system and those in it. When looking at data we see that turnover is increasing, the number of individuals graduating and entering the workforce is declining at a time when those exiting the workforce is increasing. One of the largest populations to ever work is about to leave the workforce causing the need for an even higher number of caregivers as those elderly enter into long-term or assisted living arrangements. We are seeing options/choices taken away from those we serve and this is creating limited community access, loneliness, and at times the feeling of "am I the problem".

As we see fatigue, stress, and just worn out staff I have to ponder how long before we have major quality issues? Do we sit back and wait? Do we continue to try and barely make it, having staff work 80 hour weeks to ensure needs are met? Do we place individuals at risk, our staff at risk of a major catastrophe because our staff are tired and we want to see individuals served? Many of our staff are currently working two and even some situations three jobs to make ends meet. Shouldn't we have the ability to pay competitive wages that says to our staff your job carries higher value than a fast food workers? I say yes, as we expect high quality and professional services the pay should reflect those expectations.

As a non-profit provider of services, we have sought to continue to lower our administrative costs in order to direct all free and available funds to direct care wages. While implementing sign-on bonuses, referral bonuses, improved training, and working to create a servant leadership model. All of these are beneficial and needed, but to date we see no improvement in filling vacant positions. CRSI today has a 20% vacancy rate that equates to 160 open DSP positions across the state. With those positions filling approximately 35 hours per week, we are short-staffed nearly 300,000 hours over the course of the year. This causes individuals to lose out on community activities, or even worse CRSI to provide notice

causing the individual to receive no services. Our staff are tired, scared, and honestly at a point that they see no HOPE in the system.

Today is the first step of what I believe will be significant change in our industry. Today is not the final answer. It is just the beginning. What we do from here will decide the future of this field. Today we have a unified voice, if we continue the momentum and hold together that unified voice, We CAN bridge this gap.

