

October 6, 2021

To individuals supported by Putnam County Board of Developmental Disabilities and their families:

You may be aware that Ohio's Developmental Disability system has been struggling with a Direct Support Professional (DSP) staffing crisis for several years. As you can imagine, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the workforce to an even greater extent, sometimes leaving individuals with no supports and very little notice.

Our system does not operate in the manner individuals serviced and their families need, expect, and deserve, without adequate staffing levels of available DSPs. The attached letter co-authored by many of the statewide trade organizations representing the developmental disability system in Ohio acknowledges the critical situations many counties are already facing and highlights actions taken in response to this crisis.

Locally, we work hard to maintain a close relationship with our providers in order to understand their needs and identify ways the Putnam County Board of Developmental Disabilities may be able to help. We have found that most Putnam County providers are not necessarily at a critical level of staff, but they are finding it difficult to recruit and retain new staff.

Providers have employed multiple strategies to temporarily overcome challenges, including the use of overtime, having program managers and other staff supporting people in their homes, offering DSP sign-on bonuses, non-traditional work schedules, etc.

The Putnam County Board of Developmental Disabilities is also actively promoting DSP career campaigns through our website, brochures to local high schools, and funding/supporting training and business relations to providers through our Provider Support Program.

At this point, you may be wondering what you can do to help combat the workforce shortage and assist our local providers. As family and natural supports engage in the planning process, they might think about having individuals spend more time at home on the weekends and providing transportation to appointments, so support staff can remain in the residential setting for others served who may not have those options. Increased natural supports along with an individual's willingness to accept the use of technology-based solutions, remote supports, and virtual services may also help bridge the gaps caused by the current situation. Talk to your Service and Support Administrator (SSA) to identify how you can help directly with the needs identified on the Individual Service Plan (ISP).

The health and safety of the people we support is our number one priority. We will continue to seek and implement solutions to address the DSP Workforce shortage that is affecting all of us.

We invite you to reach out to your SSA with questions, concerns or possible solutions.

Yours in service and support,



Michael Boaz
Superintendent



September 10, 2021

We write to you today to start an important conversation about the ability of Ohio's developmental disability service delivery system to continue meeting your needs in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

Our system has been struggling with a workforce crisis for a long time. Unfortunately, with the end of the pandemic now predicted to be much later than we expected due to the Delta variant and other factors, and with direct support professionals (DSPs) leaving our field for jobs in other industries that have significantly increased their wages to attract new employees (like restaurants, retail stores, warehouses, and others), our system is entering a new, much more difficult phase of its workforce shortage.

Examples of actions that some DD service providers have recently had to take because they don't have enough employees to support them include:

- No longer accepting new people for services (also called "closing the front door");
- Ending services to some people they already serve because their level of need can't be met with the agency's current staff;
- Creating waiting lists for some services (such as residential/Intermediate Care Facility (ICF), Homemaker Personal Care, vocational and adult day hab, transportation, and others);
- Completely shutting doors and/or closing homes.

Our system's leaders, including the Ohio General Assembly, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, Ohio's 88 County Boards of DD, and thousands of DD service providers, have taken several action steps in response to these staffing shortages:

- Many providers have slashed all non-staffing expenses to significantly raise DSP and nursing wages.
- The Ohio General Assembly has allocated state funds to allow for a 4% rate increase for DD services when it passed its most recent two-year State Operating Budget earlier this year.
- County boards of DD across the state have provided millions of dollars in grants, resources, and— at times—even loaned their professional staff to provide direct care for people in need.

Unfortunately, these efforts are not yet enough to fix this problem. We will need your help to ensure our system can continue to meet everyone's needs.

The following are some ways you can help:

- **We are asking for your patience.** It has taken our system years to reach this point. It is going to take time and planning to work our way out of this crisis.
- **We are asking for your support.** Talk with your county board SSA about how this crisis might impact your ability to accomplish the goals in your plan. If you feel comfortable, check in with your provider and ask how they are coping with the current workforce crisis. Ask if there are ways you can help.
- **We are asking for your partnership.** Partner with your county boards and providers during the planning process to come up with creative solutions that can meet your needs with fewer staff by reading this guide (www.oacbdd.org/workingtogether).

This letter is only the beginning of our long journey with you. We will continue to keep you informed as to how you can be involved in this discussion as we move forward.

We look forward to working closely with you to ensure a bright future for all people with developmental disabilities and their families in Ohio.