
MANHATTAN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

Marco Damiani, Chair, c/o AHRC, 83 Maiden Lane, New York, N.Y. 10038, (212) 780-2661;
manhattanddcouncilchair@gmail.com; www.manhattanddcouncil.org

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WORKFORCE ISSUES

Presented by Sheldon Jones
Direct Support Professional, YAI
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Direct support professionals help the people we support with everything from showering and managing behaviors to monitoring for medication side effects. We help them be as independent as possible.

DSPs get a lot of training on things like CPR, first aid, dealing with behaviors, and medication administration. Before I even stepped foot into the residence, I had over 2 weeks of training. I had another 2 or 3 weeks once I started.

Staff turnover is a big issue. It's very hard to keep staff with such low pay. You might be fully staffed for a couple of months and then you are under-staffed for maybe the next 3 or 4 months because it takes a while to find and train new staff. It's very hard to support a family on the pay that we get. For most DSPs, to survive they work a second job in the field. Most of the people I know work 80 hour weeks. It's a very grueling schedule and it can lead to burnout. You can end up in a really bad situation for everybody.

Turnover affects the people we support really badly because sometimes they get very close to the staff, and when those people leave, it upsets them. Sometimes they are really hurting.

I stay because of the love of the guys and the families. Those moments when you see someone accomplish a goal, and be excited about it, that's the kind of thing I always look for. But as much as I love it, there are times I have thought about changing jobs. Some of my friends are delivering packages and they're making more than twice the money I make. Our pay isn't suitable for the kind of work we do. Advocacy over the past few years has helped in getting us a little more money. But in the long run when you compare it to other jobs, it's very tough.

DSPs shouldn't get bargain basement pay. We never want to have a situation where we're so understaffed like in the past that we see again some of the bad things that used to happen to people with developmental disabilities. DSPs should be paid to make this a career, where they can stay. The way to make that happen is to increase the pay.