

**TO:** I/DD Waiting List Interim Legislative Committee

**FROM:** Michelle Crumpton  
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**DATE:** October 18, 2021

**RE:** Workforce Challenges

My name is Michelle Crumpton and I am a front line supervisor for direct support professionals (DSPs) who provide services for the clients at Big Lakes. I was hired by Big Lakes as a DSP 26 years ago and LOVE the support I give to our clients and relationships that I have formed with them and our staff over these many years. In 1995, I was originally hired to provide support in residential services. Since 2001, I have worked in employment services providing work opportunities for our clients and supporting them in jobs in the community and in our work center. I have been a front line supervisor for the past 10 years. Working in direct service is not easy but for the right individual with the right attitude, right reasons and right circumstances, it can be a career that is worth living for.

Big Lakes does everything possible to make employees feel valued and wanted but there are only so many things that are under our control. In the 26 years I have been at Big Lakes, I have never seen the staffing situation as bad as it has been the last two years. COVID-19 has only made a bad situation worse for us.

Here are a few of the reasons I have heard from my staff when they leave:

- 1) **Stress** – Lack of adequate numbers of staff causes those who are here to pick up the workload. This is too much for them to handle, especially when they are new. Some will move on and take less pay if that means less hours and less responsibility. As a result, we can never catch up.
- 2) **Burnout** – Even the most dedicated employees will get burned out when working 50-60 or more hours per week. They know coverage is absolutely necessary to ensure the health and safety of the clients they love and will volunteer to work day and residential shifts. As a result, they have no work/life balance and eventually will have to choose their personal needs first.
- 3) **Pay** – The \$1 per hour raise I got July 1<sup>st</sup> is greatly appreciated. Our \$12 per hour starting wage is not competitive in Manhattan except for fast food or other low entry jobs that do not have anywhere near the responsibilities a DSP has. Some of our clients that are placed in community employment jobs are starting at \$12-\$15 per hour. Imagine job coaching a client for a job that makes more money than you do?!?

Client services suffer with high turnover and positions unfilled:

- 1) **Safety** – I am greatly concerned about client safety. Staff are exhausted and the chances of medication errors, accidents and even falling asleep on the job are greatly increased.
- 2) **Behavioral Issues** – Clients with mental health and or behavioral issues have more behavior incidents due to daily staff changes. They find it difficult to adapt to staff that are unfamiliar with their specific needs.

- 3) **Goals** – Each client has personal goals they want to achieve and our outlined in their person-centered plan. Goals are difficult to work on when each client has a “merry-go-round” of staff working with them that are not familiar with their goals and what it takes to achieve them.
- 4) **Coverage** – Staff coverage changes daily in order to meet client needs and contract obligations for the businesses we work with. There is no consistency in service delivery. Clients and employees rarely know for certain who will work with them or where they will work from one day to the next.

We are very fortunate to have a core group of DSPs that have been at Big Lakes from 10-40 years. Staff do come together and work hard as a team to keep services going. We have great staff...just not enough of them!!!

I know this committee is tasked with working on the elimination of the I/DD waiting list. I support these efforts if the workforce shortage can be resolved. Please do what you can to provide relief for our hard working DSPs!