

Testimony of Samira Gray, DSP – SpArc Services  
House Human Services Committee  
Chair Gene DiGirolamo  
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A day in the life of a Direct Support Professional (DSP) has many challenges. To effectively do my job it requires patience, determination and perseverance. The objective is to create a therapeutic learning environment and influence the participants/clients independence. Each participant attempts to convey their independence in different ways. Difficulties arise when a DSP has to discover those indicators. Direct Support Professionals are not psychologists. Patience is the one essential characteristic that aids the DSP and the participant on a personal level.

I have a passion for this line of work because I believe it's essential to convey to the world that people with any form of disability are human too. While I'm at work I am happier than when I am home alone, because while at work I feel no different than I do with my family and friends. Working with people with disabilities opens my mind to a world that most people overlook because they're afraid of the unknown. I do not fear the unknown, for me knowledge is power. The people I work with have vibrant and witty personalities that make working with them like a home away from home.

Individuals with disabilities are not easily accepted in the community. Often times while working as a DSP I've felt prejudged and alienated. People look at people with disabilities and act like they are abnormal, this is very upsetting, and why I chose this profession. It is my role to help integrate people with disabilities into the community so that all people are more comfortable.

DSPs are front line people who work to instill independence within the participants daily by redirecting when things are done improperly; by teaching morals and values and by explaining things one does not understand. With the aid of a DSP participants can become more independent and are able to accomplish goals that are important to them.

I have a client by the name of Joe who is nonverbal and deaf which makes it much harder to convey things to him. Prior to me working with Joe, others had to

help him transition from one task to the next very often. Now he's more aware of the transitions and can do them with little or no assistance. To many that may seem minute, but it's a huge step towards Joe's goal and means that I am doing my job well and helping him gain his independence.

Each DSP has a different ratio of participants whom they are expected to know all about. They have to know what the needs and goals are of each person that they serve; knowing their risk ,healthy history, health needs, behavioral health needs, how to deescalate situations, and what to do in case of an emergency. This is a lot of information and work.

Also it is required that the DSPs complete daily progress notes for each participant. Daily notes accounts for their attendance, units of service, and what progress they have made toward their goals.

Although the daily struggles of a DSP are abundant still I would not choose any other profession. However, when I return home, I'm faced with life's most difficult challenges. I have rent, utilities, cell phone bill, toiletries, food and clothing expenses that all need to be paid on a DSPs salary. The hourly wage isn't enough for me to the sustain life's daily necessities. My rent alone is \$650 and I don't even make that in one paycheck. I'm in school furthering my education, in this field, because of my commitment to my clients. However that is another expense since I do not own a car and I must use money for public transportation to and from school.

On a DSPs salary, I have to sometimes decide what will or will not get paid monthly. I may have to do my homework in the dark one month just to be able to maintain a roof over my head. I am thankful for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) because I am able to receive food stamps. In order to qualify for SNAP benefits one must prove that they are not able to feed themselves. I have to provide proof (bill statements, lease etc) that I'm unable to meet the basic needs to get through a month without being borderline homeless.

We also pay for our own healthcare. If we aren't healthy who is going to take care of the participants? I believe in this line of work it should not be so hard to stay in a job that you love and you should not have to choose to stop serving people who need you so that you can have a roof over your head.

This struggle is not mine alone. Almost every one of my coworkers are in the same situation. Having to decide which bills get paid and which do not. This is not a good way to live, especially since you work hard, doing the right thing every day for people with disabilities.