

# CRISIS IN THE DISABILITY FIELD:

## ESSENTIAL WORKERS FACE FOOD AND HOUSING INSECURITY



**A first-of-its-kind workforce study of Direct Support Professionals (DSP) across New York found that low pay is causing nearly half to experience food insecurity and unstable housing conditions while providing critical life support for people with disabilities.**

Low wages disproportionately affect women and people of color, the majority of the DSP workforce, according to the study. Conducted by Miami University and commissioned by New York Disability Advocates, the study surveyed 4,497 New York DSPs on a range of quality-of-life issues such as food and housing security, well-being, burnout, and turnover.

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**There is a “Satisfaction Gap” amongst DSPs — 85% of those surveyed report being satisfied with their work, but only one in four are satisfied with their pay.**

This “Satisfaction Gap” drives turnover amongst current DSPs and deters those looking to enter the field.



**Pay is critical: the nearly universal sentiment from the 4,497 respondents is that the pay is too low for workers to maintain even a minimally decent standard of living.**

Nearly one in three DSPs surveyed reported they often struggle to meet their household’s financial demands.

*“I was attracted to my job because I feel I’m very good with the population and build rapport very fast, which in this field is not only key but will take you far. I have a special connection with all my guys and I’m sure the feeling is mutual. Love what I do – it’s just the field doesn’t love me enough to keep me around...it’s tough making a living on what we’re paid, unfortunately.”*

**QUOTE FROM DSP SURVEY RESPONDENT**

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## **Half of DSPs experience food insecurity. Half experience housing insecurity.**

Half of all DSPs surveyed reported experiencing food insecurity: they lack reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Half of all DSPs surveyed also reported lacking stable housing or experiencing significant problems related to housing. **The study found that women of color are the demographic most affected by food insecurity and men of color are most affected by housing insecurity.**



## **DSPs are trained, essential workers, yet they are compensated at a **minimum wage level**.**

44% of the DSPs surveyed have a college degree, yet 80% make less than \$20 an hour. This reflects a stark imbalance between skills/training and compensation. Apart from postgraduate degrees, survey respondents have higher educational attainment than the population of NYS, aged 25 years and above.<sup>1</sup>

**“ Pay is not enough. Pay is not enough. Pay is not enough. People like their jobs but literally can’t afford to stay at them because the PAY IS NOT ENOUGH. ”**

**QUOTE FROM DSP SURVEY RESPONDENT**



## **Low pay and long hours make **work-life balance** ‘impossible’ and eventually lead to burnout.**

Low pay and understaffing cause DSPs to work long hours or multiple jobs, causing distress and burnout that creates further problems for retention in a field already experiencing a workforce shortage.



## **Low pay **disproportionately affects women and people of color**.**

Efforts to combat the DSP workforce crisis must also recognize this is a workforce of predominately women, particularly women of color. Gender inequities and racial disparities are present in individual earnings and household income.

- Men (85%) are more likely than women (76%) to live in households with a spouse or partner who is earning income
- Almost 3-in-4 women of color and over half of white women live in households with income below \$60,000
- Men are almost twice as likely as women to live in households with income above \$125,000

**“ My children and husband always ate without worry. I never let them know we didn’t have enough for me to eat. ”**

**QUOTE FROM DSP SURVEY RESPONDENT**

\*Preliminary findings are highlighted HERE; the full published report with further analysis is expected in March.

<sup>1</sup> NYS education data from the 2022 American Community Survey. Over 70% of those surveyed completed at least some college coursework. In NYS, 63% completed at least some college; just under half had a degree, including postgraduates.