



The Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA) is a statewide association representing private providers of service to individuals with developmental disabilities. OPRA members represent the full array of services to individuals served within Ohio's developmental disabilities system – early intervention and childhood services, residential, vocational, day habilitation and transportation.

OPRA has 177 member organizations in 79 of Ohio's 88 counties. OPRA membership consists of 8 districts (attachment). Each district is represented on our Board of Trustees. Members include large, multi-state provider organizations, Ohio only agencies and small, county specific organizations. Collectively, these 177 members employ 30,300 individuals; 26,890 of which are full time positions. Provider organizations employ management staff, therapists and administrative personnel. However, the vast majority of the 30,300 positions are direct care. Direct care staff (or Direct Support Professionals/DSP's) provide the daily care and services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Funding constraints have severely limited the pay for DSP's. Our recent salary survey showed that the average weighted pay rate for DSP's was \$10.24 an hour. Sixty seven percent (67%) of DSP's are receiving some type of public assistance. To further illustrate the funding constraints, 19% of supervisory staff also receive some form of public assistance.

Workforce recruitment and retention in the DD system is at a crisis level. We compete for employees with fast food restaurants and big box stores, many of which have raised their starting pay significantly above our \$10.24 average. Member agencies are reporting staff vacancies of 20% and higher. This leads to significant overtime for those available to work, causing burnout and a tendency to leave the agency in search of a more stable schedule and better pay - which further exacerbates the problem. In 2013 the turnover rate for DSP's was 47%. In 2016, turnover is at 51%; a 4% increase. The cost of turnover for one DSP position ranges from \$3,000 to \$5,000, depending on an agency's structure. There are other costs as well, the most significant being the loss in continuity of care for individuals receiving services.

Reducing turnover and increasing DSP retention rates is a focus of OPRA's. For obvious reasons direct care staff are the cornerstone of any human service delivery system. Significant financial resources go into recruitment, overtime and training. Increased retention would free up these resources for pay increases, which are sorely needed. Increased retention would also improve service provision as there would be continuity in care. Oftentimes, just as staff person becomes familiar with an individual's needs and

routine, they leave for another opportunity and a new staff person begins the process all over. Increasing retention would also improve staff productivity as work schedules would be more stable, which will prevent burnout and afford DSP's time for themselves and their families.

The recruitment and retention of low wage earning direct care staff is the primary challenge of service providers today and into the foreseeable future. As a response to this crisis, the OPRA Board developed the following goals under the heading **Workforce Sustainability**:

1. Advocate for average DSP wage of 200% of the federal poverty level, DSP's receiving average benefits package and funding to sustain.
2. Advocate for re-investment of County Boards of DD/DODD budget savings accrued from waiver budgets or efficiencies in County Boards and State systems in DSP wages, benefits, training and supervision and waiting list.
3. Development and implement strategies to attract, train and retain people to the direct support profession.

In addition to these stated goals, OPRA has two standing committees that address workforce issues. The first is our Human Resources Committee, which is made up of DD HR professionals from across the state. The focus of this committee is data collection/analysis (salary survey, member surveys) and training and education of the membership in HR related issues, including recruitment and retention strategies. The second is our Workforce Committee, which was formed last fall to focus specifically on retention strategies. This group is in the process of developing a work plan to address three most frequently cited (non-pay related) reasons that DSP's terminate their employment: lack of child care, poor supervision and a lack of reliable transportation. Understanding that we alone cannot increase reimbursement rates to affect pay, we are focusing on other forms of support for the DSP workforce.

OPRA is the largest statewide provider association in Ohio dedicated to serving individuals with developmental disabilities. OPRA focuses its efforts impacting public policy through its advocacy efforts with system stakeholders including Ohio's legislature and Congress. Although OPRA members count as a fraction of the overall number of agency providers in Ohio's developmental disabilities system, it's policy and advocacy influence affect all providers across Ohio whether they are dues paying members or not. The advantage of OPRA as a partner in this grant is the historic and continual impact of its policy influence on Ohio's DD system as a whole, its ability through its collective strength to change and improve the statewide delivery of service and the strength of its membership and its professional staff. Critical to the initial success of this grant and its replication statewide is the ability to have dedicated, professional OPRA staff who have the time, experience and expertise necessary to carry this effort forward after implementation in Lucas County. OPRA's staff have over 70 years of experience in the developmental disability service system. From direct service to management to public

policy development and legislative advocacy the current OPRA staff individually and collectively have a holistic view of Ohio's system. This experience and expertise will provide the foundation for effective implementation of the pilot program and its expansion. In addition, the OPRA staff have built strong, beneficial relationships with professionals, individuals and families throughout Ohio that will prove both necessary and instrumental if HBC is to be successful. OPRA staff know and understand the local delivery of service in each of Ohio's regions and counties which will prove critical to understanding both the opportunities for and barriers to expansion.

OPRA became involved in the development of the HBCGPP in March of 2016. OPRA staff and members of both the HR and Workforce committees have been involved in discussions with representatives of the Lucas County Family and Children First Council and attended a presentation by the LCFCFC and Phil DeVol of Bridges out of Poverty. We have assisted LCFCFC by providing information on the grant to our Lucas County membership and organizing informational meetings. There is genuine excitement among the members about the potential outcomes of this project and how it can positively impact the lives of their staff and the people they serve.

OPRA will be engaged in all aspects of implementation including working closely with the Lucas County provider organizations, participating in Bridges out of Poverty facilitation and technical assistance trainings, assisting with data collection, identifying best practices concerning program implementation and learning how to develop and implement ERN's.

OPRA is committed to the statewide application of HBCGPP and intends to replicate the process across the state utilizing information garnered from the project. Our HR and Workforce Committee members will be available to assist and advise, not just in Lucas County, but in all areas of the state should expansion of the program occur. Lessons learned will be incorporated as we select future counties and regions in which to implement programs. There is the potential to positively affect hundreds of provider organizations and subsequently the DSP's and the individuals they provide services to.

Given proper, targeted support we are certain that retention will improve and that DSP's will lead more self-sufficient, balanced and productive lives. In turn, the individuals they support will experience less turnover in staffing and increased continuity of care. This will positively impact the health, education and well-being of those receiving services.

**OPRA's Mission:** To support and provide advocacy for community-based service providers to insure the availability of programs, services and funding adequate to support and assist individuals with developmental disabilities as they strive to achieve a life of increasing independence, productivity and integration.