

To all of those in power,

I write to you today, to plead for the approval of POP 132 and HB 2457 in support of our local Direct Support Professionals. I have worked for a St. Helens based non-profit, lifempowered, for just over a year now. I have always known that DSP's were not recognized in the medical field but working here has opened my eyes to it further and it is saddening on many levels. Our current funding doesn't only affect our DSPs; it affects our residents as well.

Like CNA, RN, MA etc. workers, DSP's are in this field because they love helping people. Direct Support staff often work with Intellectually and developmentally disabled peoples. The work and the care that they provide is often equal to or above what a CNA role commonly does. The main difference being the fact that our IDD residents rely on our staff not only for their medical and health priorities but they rely on and trust them to help guide and support them through everyday life. Direct Support care, is not a minimum wage position; it is far from it.

As it goes for most all of us, trusting someone to help you navigate life, requires time. It requires communication and understanding. It requires consistency. The bare minimum of being consistent in any job is that your pay meets your financial needs. Currently, our rates don't even come close.

While working administration at lifempowered, I have watched from afar, as our residents have lost their supports and a portion of the stability that they need and crave. I have watched as the remaining staff struggle consistently to keep up with their bills; or, on the other hand, struggle to keep up with the overtime hours to ensure the residents are cared for. Burn out is real. DSP staffing turnover is real. While handling a large part of our hiring process, I have witnessed the countless numbers of applicants who turn down the position simply due to the low pay we are able to provide given our current funding.

With the approval of these bills and the protection of previous investments we will have a much better standing for our staff and in return for our residents' care and well-being. A huge part of a DSPs position is getting the residents out of the house and doing the things that they love. We are doing our best but when we don't have the staff available to make those trips happen as often as they should be, the residents suffer. With your help, they don't have to anymore. With your help, we will have enough consistent staff to get our residents out and living full lives again.

Approve these bills- increase wages/funding past minimum wage- help us help our residents.