



Meet Minnesota's DSPs

The following stories were shared by Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who work in Minnesota's Home & Community-Based Services in every corner of our state. Through these stories, we hope that state legislators will get to know the dedicated people who support individuals with disabilities, and understand the critical need to address the serious workforce shortage in these services by passing a wage increase for DSPs in 2017.

Note: we are gathering stories from every Minnesota district. More stories will be added as they are available.

1A:

1B:

2A: Alison M. Roybal

Alison Roybal is a direct support professional from Blackduck, House District 2A. She has been a DSP for 15 years.

"I have made sacrifices for the people with disabilities I support. I have empathy for their mental/physical conditions.

Direct Support Professionals receive special training just to deliver the services required to sustain a person with disabilities. As a constant care provider, the job is nothing short of being a parent, a friend, a nurse, and role model. I like knowing that I make a difference in people's lives. I feel as though I'm needed and love working with different people within the community."

2B:

3A: Beth

Beth is a direct support professional from Babbitt, House District 3A. She has been a DSP for 17 years.

Despite living paycheck-to-paycheck, and working at her job more than she is with her family to be able to support them, Beth is motivated by being able to help her clients lead healthy, independent lives.

"We are important. What direct support professionals to support people with disabilities is very important."

3B:

4A: Kaylee

Kaylee is a direct support professional from Moorhead, House District 4A. She has been a DSP for one and a half years.

"I love that I get to help people improve their lives by helping with everyday activities! It's so rewarding looking back on the progress your client has made and knowing that you were a part of that! One good day makes up for a pile of bad days when you are a DSP. There are other jobs that I could apply for that pay more, but I love being a DSP. I wish [lawmakers] could see how eager we are and how many people would love to stay in this field, but are unable to due to pay. I also wish that they could see how mentally and physically draining our work can be."

4B: Laura

Laura is a direct support professional from Ada, House District 4B. She has been a DSP for four years.

What motivates Laura is knowing that she is helping people with disabilities live independently. Staff turnover and unfilled shifts, along with difficult behavior from clients makes her work challenging.

"I wish legislators would compensate us fairly for being a crucial part in assisting people to live their lives to the fullest. I wish they would look at how much people with disabilities can, and do, contribute to our community in a positive way."

5A: Marshall Goughnour

Marshall Goughnour is a group home manager from Bemidji, House District 5A. He has been in this line of work for 35 years.

“Over the course of my career, it's been very rewarding to help people with disabilities live outside of institutional settings and to see them participate in community activities that the rest of us enjoy. The most challenging problem we face is being able to hire and retain good, competent DSPs. While we have a solid core of employees, there's constant turnover in a good portion of our workforce. This issue has become even more challenging as a result of our rates rarely increasing, or at times decreasing. This past year has been the worst I've ever experienced with positions remaining open for long periods of time. Client security and care is at risk. I, like other managers in Home & Community-Based Services, often work 50 to 70 hours a week to get through these crises.”

5B: Parley Kent

Parley Kent is a direct support professional from Bovey, House District 5B. He has been a DSP for three months.

“I love the fact that my job is both challenging and rewarding. I would love the lawmakers to help a DSP worker like myself with more job related incentives and better equipment to improve the care for the people with disabilities we serve.”

Daily challenges for Parley include: "Learning the types of mental diagnosis and co-morbidity mental health challenges when I'm working with, and helping those individuals reach their programming directive goals and achieve personal growth."

6A:

6B:

7A: Jolene Ellis

Jolene Ellis is a direct support professional from Duluth, House District 7A. She has been a DSP for 12 years.

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“I love coming to work every day knowing that I am making a difference in someone’s life. I also love talking with the people with disabilities we support and getting the great big thank-you for what I do. I face staffing shortages, challenging behaviors of the people we support, work undesired hours, and receive low pay and compensation. I help out when we are short-staffed and the stress level from my employment has caused tension in my family life. My biggest wish is that lawmakers could see how hard each and every one of us work every day to make sure that individuals are getting the help that they need.”

7B:

8A:

8B:

9A:

9B: Jeanette Bathel

Jeanette Bathel is a direct support professional from Burtrum, House District 9B. She has been a DSP for 33 years.

Due to short staffing and lack of quality DSPs, Jeanette's has often given up time with her family as she has worked hard to care for those with disabilities. What motivates her about her work is seeing people with disabilities become involved in their community, and spending one-on-one time with them.

"The work that I do benefit others and gives them a quality of life and it is meaningful and challenging. It would be nice to get fairly compensated for what we do. "

10A: Angie Maile

Angie Maile is a direct support professional from Baxter, House District 10A. She has been a DSP for seven and a half years.

"I can teach and learn from the adults with disabilities that I help support. I also help them through the toughest times in their lives. They are my second family. I see them more than my family. They are my life!

There are always challenges finding staff who will stay! I can't tell you how many times I have trained someone in only for them to turn around and quit, or not show up. Then I am stuck at work for 19 hours because there is no one to call because everyone is already over-worked. The full-time people are getting burned out and overworked. Last week I pulled 79 hours from Monday to Friday."

10B:

11A: Lauren Clark

Lauren Clark is a direct support professional from Holyoke, House District 11A. She has been a DSP for six years.

"I love coming in to work and having the people with disabilities I support run up to proudly tell me that they have learned a new skill. I face many challenges, as I am the coordinator of the home I work in. I am constantly on-call. I give up family time if a shift needs to be covered, and am always in the office with some new paperwork that is required. I wish you could see how challenging some of my days can be and how little I am paid. I am not only support for my clients; I am for their families as well. I get calls day-in and day-out from staff, supervisors, families, day programs, and clients. I am the peacemaker and the mediator, the maintenance, the homemaker, the cleanup crew, the nurse, and the chauffer. When you make your budget decisions, please think of all that we do to make the lives of people with disabilities better."

11B:

12A:

12B:

13A:

13B:

14A:

14B: Kiersten Rogness

Kiersten Rogness is a direct support professional from House District 14B. She has been a DSP for three years.

"I work with kids who have disabilities, and seeing them grow up, learn, and become the people they wish to be is why I love my job. We are short staffed more often than not. This means that scheduling gaps need filling and my shifts are longer and my days off are scarcer. The work we do is vital so the individuals we help have the best chance at a successful life. The client base is ever-growing and we have lost really great people because they can't pay their bills on our wages. High turnover rates only hurt the individuals we support more. I have felt frustrated and unappreciated by the state of Minnesota and their decisions to cut funding. I cannot tell you how many times my family, friends, and partner have begged me to quit because I am ragged and angry at the state of affairs. I cannot and it breaks my heart to think of doing so. I will continue on until I have no more time and energy to give."

15A: Amber Lachelt

Amber Lachelt is a direct support professional from Princeton, House District 15A. She has been a DSP for 13 years.

"Helping others is what motivates me. I love and cherish my relationships with people with disabilities who I support and their families. Worrying about the future of my clients is a big challenge. They deserve to have supports in place, and places for them to go to work and interact with others. Our clients are important and we matter. Clients absolutely deserve to have the best quality of life possible whether that is in a group home, in-home supports, or at day programs. Some clients cannot work out in the community or have trouble building relationships outside of their supported programs. They are people who, just like those without disabilities, have the right to good care and options to improve their lives."

15B:

16A: Michelle Herrera

Michelle Herrera is a Direct Support Professional from Marshall, House District 16A. She has been a DSP for 5 years.

"What I like the most about my job is knowing that I make a difference in someone else's life. The smallest things I do can be a major thing for someone else. I love helping the individuals with disabilities I work with to become more independent. I love to see them become confident in themselves. I wish lawmakers knew how hard DSP's and caregivers work. We are committed to our jobs and the individuals we serve."

16B: Mary Sullivan

Mary Sullivan is a Designated Coordinator from House District 16B. She has been in the industry as a Direct Support Professional and Designated Coordinator for 28 years.

“When I first started working in this field, I worked every Sunday, missing my own church services. When my children were growing up, I worked many evening shifts and missed their after school and extracurricular activities. Caring for people with disabilities who truly need assistance and receiving their gratitude is what I like best about my profession. I enjoy working with others who are dedicated to making the lives of people better. Because of the high turnover in our industry, it is difficult for the people with disabilities we serve to adjust to new employees all the time. Their care suffers because each person has unique needs and it takes several weeks for a new staff member to know, understand, and build rapport with each individual.”

17A:

17B:

18A: Brigitte Wallace

Brigitte Wallace is a Direct Support Professional from Litchfield, House District 18A. She has been a DSP for 5 years.

“I love working with people with disabilities and making them happy. DSPs work really hard to make sure our clients are well taken care of. Staff deserve better pay. I love my job, but it is hard to pay bills with not working full time so I have to work a second job.”

18B: Deborah Pearson

Deborah Pearson is a Direct Support Professional from Litchfield, House District 18B. She has been a DSP for more than 20 years.

“What motivates me about my work is the joy I feel from working with the individuals with disabilities I serve. They are the most loving and caring people I know. I love them like my own family. The challenges we face are staff shortages. As the minimum wage has increased, many people are not interested in this

type of work as they can work retail or other jobs and make the same amount and not have the related stress. My family has suffered and struggled to meet our basic needs on my income and it has required me to get a second job to supplement my income. Please make funding for human services and DSPs a top priority in 2017.”

19A:

19B: Kaylee Sohns

Kaylee Sohns has been a Direct Support Professional for two years in district 19B.

“I love being able to make a difference in the lives of the individuals with disabilities I serve. No two days on the job are ever the same. They are some of the most amazing, funny, and inspiring people I know. Meeting the physical and emotional needs of people with disabilities is challenging. When DSPs have to leave their positions because their wage isn't enough to support their families, the people we support suffer the most. They miss appointments and activities, have less one-to-one time with staff, and lose staff they have put trust in and bonded with. – Many people cannot understand why staff leave. Meeting the financial needs of DSPs will increase the quality of life for the individuals who are served. They deserve to have more consistent staff who can meet all of their needs.”

20A:

20B:

21A:

21B:

22A:

22B:

23A:

23B:

24A:

24B:

25A:

25B:

26A: Andrus Jensen

Andrus Jensen is a Direct Support Professional from Rochester, House District 26A. He has been a DSP for 7 months.

"Working as a DSP supporting people with disabilities requires a unique blend of personal and professional skills in order to be successful. It requires practical skills, critical thinking and attention to detail, but even more importantly immense compassion, empathy, patience and the strong desire to make a positive impact in the lives of others by helping them achieve happiness and success. I am happiest when I am being helpful and bringing joy into the lives of others. As a DSP I have the opportunity to experience this every day I go to work and that means everything."

26B:

27A:

27B:

28A:

28B:

29A:

29B:

30A:

30B:

31A:

31B:

32A: Susanne Johnson

Susanne Johnson is a Direct Support Professional from Cambridge, House District 32A. She has been a DSP supporting people with disabilities for 23 years.

When asked what is one thing that you wish lawmakers knew about you or the work you do, Susanne replied: "We don't make much money for the responsibilities we are entrusted to make and do. It seems to me that people who do the most important things for our community - like caring for our parents, our children and vulnerable adults - should be paid higher wages."

32B: Mathew Beconovich

Mathew Beconovich is a Direct Support Professional from Chisago City, House District 32B. He has been a DSP supporting people with disabilities for 8 years.

"I truly believe what I do is meaningful and important, but none of it matters if I cannot support my family doing this line of work. If anything pops up that is an emergency (such as a car repair) the financial burden falls on me.

I have been working 60 hours a week for the past five years, but this is not a sustainable pace for my health, my family or my sanity. I want to remain in this job, but should not have to let my family's home and dreams to be lost.

We dedicate our lives to advocating for others. Please advocate for us. Minnesota DSPs need and deserve a wage increase."

33A:

33B: Brenda Svoboda

Brenda Svoboda is a Direct Support Professional from Mound, House District 33B. She has been a DSP supporting people with disabilities for 15 years.

Brenda describes the challenges she faces working as a DSP in the following way: “The wage range for a DSP is not a living wage. I personally work as a DSP and then go home to care for my granddaughter who has special needs and requires 24/7 care. If DSP wages were more aligned with the important work DSPs do, it would alleviate many needs at home. I’m not sure if I will be able to continue DSP work outside of the home because the low pay does not allow me to support my family as I need to do.”

34A:

34B: Alyssa

Alyssa is a Direct Support Professional from Maple Grove, House District 34B. She has been a DSP for 2 months.

Alyssa wishes that Minnesota lawmakers knew how she and her co-workers treat the people with disabilities they support like family. The relationships DSPs build with individuals are important to their successes. Those relationships are currently built because DSPs often stay late to cover unfilled shifts and work weekends. For Alyssa this means sacrificing time with her own family.

35A: Troy Obright

Troy Obright is a Direct Support Professional from Ramsey, House District 35A. He has been a DSP for 25 years.

Troy wants Minnesota lawmakers to know that their decisions impact not only the caregivers, but the people with disabilities who depend on services as well. Troy works 80 hours a week in a 2 different jobs

just to make enough money to support his family, but continues to do the work because of the satisfaction he receives knowing that he helped someone in a positive way. Troy says: “I love going home at night knowing I assisted someone in making their life a better place for themselves.”

35B: Nakisha Walker

Nakisha Walker is a Direct Support Professional from Coon Rapids, House District 35B. She has been a DSP for 12 years.

Nakisha shared: “The individuals with disabilities I serve keep me coming back daily, knowing the impact I make in their lives.” Nakisha sacrifices her holiday every year to be with her clients, and when asked what she wishes lawmaker knew about her work she said: “This is a hard, demanding field to work in. You are dealing with people’s lives each and every day.”

36A:

36B: Diane Hill

Diane Hill is a Direct Support Professional from Coon Rapids, House District 36B. She has been a DSP for 22 years.

“The people with disabilities I support would have a lower quality of life if I were not there to assist them. Working short-handed is a big challenge; I often miss family events due to filling in a shift. I have done this work for 22 years because I love the people and how important they feel we are to them. Many people with disabilities who we support have no family – their staff become their family.”

37A: Kayla Flanagan

Kayla Flanagan is a Direct Support Professional from Coon Rapids, House District 37A. She has been a DSP for 5 months.

When asked what motivates her to do this work, Kayla responded: “I love the impact we leave on the people with disabilities we serve. Being 18 and working in this field is tough, but it is definitely worth it – I consider my clients family.” Kayla wants legislators to know that: “It takes a very special person to do this type of work.”

37B: Aleah Bellanger

Aleah Bellanger is a Direct Support Professional from Blaine, House District 37B. She has been a DSP for 4 years.

Aleah stated: "I support people with disabilities who with high needs-t hey can be volatile and try to hurt you. Or you experience the sadness of supporting people who have no family, and adjusting yourself to be that family for them. Because of this job I have made sacrifices being away from my family, and taking away my personal time so that the ladies I support can get the care they need. Most of the time, we are the only support that these individuals have."

38A: Renay Greenwaldt

Renay Greenwaldt is a Direct Support Professional from House District 38A. She has been a DSP for 12 years.

"I love to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities - that is what keeps me doing what I do every single day. But this is sometimes difficult. "There are times that there are emergencies at the home where I work, and I have to leave my family during my time off or holiday events so I can help out the staff and be there for the individuals we serve."

"The people with disabilities who we care for are people just like us all. They deserve to live the best lives they can live. These people deserve to have good caregivers that are attentive to their needs and dedicated to their jobs."

38B:

39A:

39B: Hannah Palbicki

Hannah Palbicki is a Direct Support Professional from Stillwater, House District 39B. She has been a DSP for 15 years.

“The current staff crisis in Minnesota’s disability services has become so bad that I worry every day about the safety of our state’s most vulnerable people. My family goes without many things, as money is tight. I work two other jobs to make sure I am able to pay the bills.”

“I wish legislators understood that this is a very difficult field and when decisions are made that are not in the best interest of our most vulnerable citizens, it will cause many problems.”

40A: Lori Noland

Lori Noland is a Direct Support Professional from Brooklyn Park, House District 40A. She has been a DSP for 9 years.

“I wish legislators knew that the people with disabilities we serve did not ask to have the life they have – to have their disabilities. We get the chance to make their lives better – to help them be a part of their community.”

“My husband and I both work for non-profits. He has worked in the field for 24 years. There have been many years where we went without a raise. It’s hard to support a family on the same wage, year after year, when the cost of things continues to go up.”

40B:

41A: Stephen Muler

Stephen Muler is a Direct Support Professional from Fridley, House District 41A. He has been a DSP for 14 years.

“I am motivated to do this work however because of the people with disabilities I support; enabling them to meet their daily needs, providing comfort, affection and compassion is what drives me. The biggest challenge is my low wages, especially when I go beyond my duties and make sacrifices to meet the demands of this job.”

41B: Danielle Murphy

Danielle Murphy is a Direct Support Professional from Columbia Heights, House District 41B. She has been a DSP supporting people with disabilities for 2 years.

“One of the biggest challenges of this work is having enough staff to support the people with disabilities. It’s difficult to find staff to cover for me so that I can take time off to spend with my family. Direct Support Professionals simply do not get paid enough to do what we do.”

42A:

42B: Dawn Marie Oldenburg

Dawn Marie Oldenburg is a Direct Support Professional from Vadnais Heights, House District 42B. She has been a DSP for 39 years.

When asked what the biggest challenge she faces or sacrifice she has made after 39 years in the field Dawn replied: “Having to work two jobs just to try and make ends meet. As one ages, it is physically challenging on one’s body. I also give up my Holidays and weekends.”

“The majority of individuals we support cannot support themselves on any level without some type of assistance. I am committed to making a difference in people’s lives.”

43A: Megan Krech

Megan Krech is a Direct Support Professional from Maplewood, House District 43A. She has been a DSP for 1 year.

Megan wishes lawmakers knew: “How hard we work as DSPs; how physically, mentally, and emotionally draining this field can be.” She also wishes they knew that as staff, they become part of their client’s lives, part of their families.

“I think the most challenging thing about my position is the lack of staffing we have; I believe if we had higher wages, more people would think it’s worth it to work in this field.”

43B: Mandy Newell

Mandy Newell is a Direct Support Professional from North St. Paul, House District 43B. She has been a DSP for 6 years.

When asked what challenges she faces in her position or sacrifices she has made, Mandy replied: “Dealing with the stress on very busy days, feeling like I don’t have enough time or help on some days, struggling to pay my bills as I live by myself, needing to rely on the food shelf at times.”

Mandy went on to say that: “I have been in my position with this house for 18 months, I take on extra duties to help the house run better, have never had a medication error and received a very positive year review, however, I still make the same salary as someone starting with the company.”

44A:

44B:

45A:

45B: Katie Whiteford

Katie Whiteford is a Direct Support Professional from House District 45B. She has been a DSP for 21 years.

“The biggest challenge I face in my position is financial insecurity. I have no savings for a rainy day because my entire paycheck goes to monthly bills. I am always one illness or major car repair away from a financial crisis.”

“I am always torn between continuing the work I love of looking for better pay. I don’t want a big expensive car or yearly vacation, I just want to be able to afford my medical deductibles if I get sick and pay for a place to live.”

46A:

46B:

47A:

47B: Cheryl Ruby

Cheryl Ruby is a Direct Support Professional from Chanhassen, House District 47B. She has been a DSP for 2 years.

I wish legislators would consider the hard work and quality care we provide for the people with disabilities we support, and the sacrifices we make for our own families. My family has been without me on many holidays because of my work.

I also wish they would understand that the costs of living keep going up, but our pay checks are staying the same week from week, from year to year.

48A:

48B: Kyke

Kyke is a Direct Support Professional from Eden Prairie, House District 48B. She has been a DSP for 15 years.

Kyke likes her job as a DSP because of the people with disabilities she works with. Over the years her work has become more challenging due to being short-staffed and she is supporting people who sometimes have violent behaviors. When asked what she wished legislators would know about working as a DSP she said, "We get paid such low wages that sometimes I have to skip meals."

49A:.

49B:

50A:

50B: MaryAnn Padua

MaryAnn is from Bloomington, House District 50B. She worked as a caregiver for 10 years.

MaryAnn is now on the receiving end of services due to a permanent disability after working as a caregiver for 10 years.

She shared the following, "I am now the client and can see just how important this job is. I especially loved being a caregiver because I was helping people to live their lives with great dignity and respect. I feel that legislators' support for Best Life Alliance's wage increase in 2017 is one way to make sure caregivers are appreciated for their sacrifices. Better pay will also allow caregivers to continue working with the people they support, without worrying about having to look for another job elsewhere!"

51A: Erin Ortiz-Murphy

Erin is from Eagan, House District 51A. She has worked as a caregiver for 22 years.

“There are never enough people available to do all of the things that we would like to do because of the staff shortage in Minnesota’s disability services. Often times, it seems as if we are just barely keeping people with disabilities safe and healthy, which is critical, but the quality of life experiences get sacrificed. Individuals are surviving, not thriving. Often times, the staff have at least 2 jobs to make ends meet. They are exhausted and so the individuals with disabilities are not getting the support from people who are at their best when they are at work. The pay is simply insufficient to meet the needs of a person working as a DSP.”

51B:

52A:

52B: Myriam Husmann

Myriam is from Inver Grove Heights, House District 52A. She has been a Direct Support Professional since May of 2016.

“I have worked during holidays when I wish I could be home with my own family but I do it willingly because everyone in this field shares the burden of their time all year long. Becoming a caregiver is physically exhausting, frustrating due to the lack of resources, and frightening when you realize the huge responsibility of caring for others, but there is nothing more gratifying.”

53A: Beth Ryan

Beth is from Woodbury, House District 53A. She has been a Direct Support Professional for 28 years.

Beth has stayed motivated to continue working in Home & Community-Based Services because she knows her efforts make a positive difference in the lives of others. She shared some personal and professional challenges she has faced as a DSP, “Currently, the greatest challenge in this position is not having enough staff to round out our team. My family has made financial sacrifices because of my choice to continue in this field supporting people with disabilities. My kids didn't get any financial assistance for college from me. I have ended up sharing a home with my sister, who also works in the field. This is an effort to lower expenses and allow each of us to belatedly put away something for our retirement.”

53B:

54A:

54B:

55A:

55B: Katie Lamb

Katie Lamb is from Prior Lake, House District 55B. She has worked as a Direct Support Professional for one year.

Katie loves making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. She works countless hours and spends holidays with other people's loved ones, instead of her own. She would like lawmakers to know that

DSPs working in Home & Community-Based Services do more difficult work than people think. DSPs really make it possible for people with disabilities reach their full potential.

56A:

56B:

57A: Karen Acevedo

Karen is from the Apple Valley area, House District 57A. She has been a caregiver for her son's entire life-34 years!

Due to her son's disability, Karen became a full-time caregiver. "It is very difficult to hold a job outside of caring for our son. I need to be available at a moment's notice should he have a seizure, become ill, etc. My family must consider anything we want to do based on our son's needs and his limitations."

57B:

58A:

58B: Amanda Valade

Amanda is from Cannon Falls, House District 58B. She has been a Direct Support Professional for four years.

“What motivates me the most about what I do are the people with disabilities I serve. They are so thankful for us and the time we devote to them. The feeling of making a difference is truly empowering. We help them to not be ashamed of who they are and to always live life to the fullest - no excuses. We do so much more than the average job requires and make many sacrifices in our personal lives just to ensure others are being taken care of properly and are given their basic rights. We are their voices and they have a right to be heard.”

59B:

60A: Andrea Pearson

Andrea is from Minneapolis in House District 60A. She has been a Direct Support Professional for 15 years.

Andrea works as a DSP to help people with disabilities attain and maintain employment in the community. She has made personal sacrifices to continue working as a DSP for the past 15 years, including working multiple jobs to support her own family.

She shares, "We work hard to support people with disabilities who need guidance and encouragement to live and work independently. I have a passion for my profession and want to work in this field for a long time."

60B:

61A:

61B:

62A:

62B: Susanne Beasley

Susanne lives in Minneapolis, House District 62B and has been a Direct Support Professional for 37 years!

“Working as a DSP is a 24/7 job. When I hear people say they just work from home when the roads are bad or that they don't have to work on the holidays, that doesn't pertain to DSP workers. If they aren't on the job, who is going to care for the individuals with disabilities? My family knows that I may have to miss a special event, because I may have to care for the needs of someone who cannot care for themselves.

I have known many of the people supported by my organization for over 30 years, and I feel like they are part of my family. Their families trust me to provide the care for these individuals that they are not able to provide.”

63A:

63B: Kathryn Nelson

Kathryn is from Minneapolis, House District 63B. She has been a Direct Support Professional for four years.

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Kathryn retired from her previous career and now at the age of 66 works part-time as DSP. She shared some of the challenges she and other DSPs face, “It costs me approximately 1 hour of wages to commute for an 8-hour shift. This work is exhilarating, exhausting and essential. The current focus on allowing people with disabilities to make their own choices is important, but the shortage of staff to do this will continue to get worse without livable wages.”

64A: Roberta Malles

Roberta is from St. Paul, House District 64A. She has been a Direct Support Professional for five years.

Roberta enjoys her work as a DSP and shared the following. “Our work is about caring for people with disabilities who are vulnerable, but who also have gifts and strengths. We help them enjoy life and contribute to it. The work we do as DSPs is so important. People with disabilities are in every family. Lawmakers would want their loved ones cared for by well compensated professionals. This should be a livable wage job.”

64B:

65A: Breshonna Staples

Breshonna is from St. Paul in House District 65A. She has been a Direct Support Professional for 10 years.

When Breshonna was asked what motivates her to work she said, “The cycle of life itself motivates me to keep working as a DSP supporting people with disabilities. Work needs to be done and many of us will one day totally rely on someone else when we get older. I am here for the people who need me now.

This is not just an occupation. I’ve had to make many sacrifices as a DSP, and feel like I have to work twice as hard for it never to be enough. I am a single mother of two beautiful and smart children. Better pay is important to me to help pay childcare.”

65B:

66A: Bouselam Nijimio

Bouselam lives in Roseville in House District 66A. He has been a Direct Support Professional for over six years.

“Helping people with disabilities who can’t help themselves is an honor to me. My family makes sacrifices to make this a successful career. Sometimes I work 16 hours straight because of the current staff shortage in Home & Community-Based Services. Good people leave because we don’t get paid enough.”

66B: Krystal Bauer

Krystal lives in St. Paul, House District 66B. She has been a Direct Support Professional for four months.

Krystal is dedicated to her new job as a DSP supporting people with disabilities. She takes four buses just to get to work, and says she is motivated to do her best and make a good impression for her own children. "It is a great feeling knowing that I'm making a difference in someone's life."

67A: Tiffany Crisp

Tiffany lives in St. Paul in House District 67A. She has been a Direct Support Professional for 2 ½ years.

Tiffany is a single parent and struggles to find affordable childcare as a DSP supporting people with disabilities. She likes her job because she knows she is making a difference in people's lives every day and shares, "the ladies I support think I am an angel for helping them."

67B: Elizabeth Haskell

Elizabeth lives in St. Paul House District 67B. She started her 11 year career as a Direct Support Professional in New York before making Minnesota her home in 2012.

She shared a very candid and personal reflection about the challenges to dedicating a career to supporting people with disabilities: "I have had to have second jobs to go beyond living pay check to pay check. I dream of having a family and living in a house, but it seems too far away to be attainable. I have dedicated my life to helping others, and therefore made many sacrifices to continue to do so. My work life constantly interferes with my personal life. Often I give up my personal time to cover open shifts because of staff vacancies, to transport clients to the places they want to be, and to make sure their medical needs are met. Another difficult challenge that all DSPS see is the loss of a life of those we care for. The people with disabilities we care for are like everyone else. In time, we pass. It's the most difficult part of this job to care for someone every day, and watch them deteriorate from an illness or dementia.