

# Direct care hiring crisis for people with disabilities

Minnesota's providers of training and employment services for people with disabilities are finding great difficulty in attracting and keeping direct support employees, jeopardizing the wellbeing of people served by their organizations.

Mike Burke, the president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR), said the legislature must act this year to deal with this pressing problem, which has left many jobs unfilled at member organizations. "It is estimated there are 8,700 unfilled direct support positions in Minnesota right now, and that number is growing as pay rates continue to lag behind other industries," he said. A wage increase of at least four percent is needed this year to help deal with the problem. "It is hard to lose able, talented and passionate employees because they can earn more flipping burgers at a local fast-food shop," Burke said.

MOHR providers support for the Best Life Alliance, a Minnesota coalition of advocates asking state legislators to pass a four percent wage increase for all direct support professionals (DSPs). These workers are the critical link in supporting people with

disabilities to get as far as they can in the employment realm, Burke explains.

The MOHR president said the group's member organizations that employ direct support professionals are not only negatively impacted by the DSP staff shortage, but are also under increasing regulations. There are new audits, studies and policies to comply with, which are more typically known as "unfunded mandates." To meet requirements, members often must divert valuable direct support staff members from their work serving people with disabilities to other tasks to complete these mandates. "This takes time away from actually providing service to the people who need it most," Burke said.

Representing more than 100 providers in the state, MOHR members provide skills training, employment services, community involvement, behavioral supports and life enrichment activities to more than 26,000 individuals with disabilities in Minnesota.

