



Disability Services Northeast Alberta

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Human Resource Crisis – Impact in the Northeast Region-

The impact of the human resource crisis in the disability services field in the northeast region is profound, having negative implications for the citizens we serve, agency staff and the agency overall. Our Service Provider Council proposes immediate action and long term strategies to ensure our essential services are in place for the citizens we serve.

WHO ARE WE? We represent a group of service providers in the northeast region who deliver services to individuals with disabilities. A significant part of our service delivery is through a contract and/or an Individual funding relationship with the Northeast PDD Community Board. Our agencies deliver services in the communities and surrounding areas of Athabasca, Barrhead, Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Lac-La-Biche, St. Paul, Vegreville, Whitecourt and Westlock. In many of our communities we are one of the major employers. Our staff are actively involved as citizens of their communities. Collectively we represent over 30 years of experience in serving citizens with disabilities. Our members agree that never before in our history of service provision, have we experienced such a serious human resource crisis.

OUR MISSION

To lead, support and influence disability supports in Northeast Alberta through collaboration, innovation and best practices.

OUR VISION

We are recognized as the leading voice for disability supports in Northeast Alberta.

HUMAN RESOURCE CRISIS – IMPACTS

Our commitment to attain and maintain the “Creating Excellence Together Standards” (Premier’s Award of Excellence ’99, p.29) is in serious jeopardy as we are unable to keep and retain skilled and trained staff. **This has had**

significant effect on service quality throughout the region, which has had a direct impact on the lives of the vulnerable citizens that we support. Our regional turnover rate is at an all time high of 40+%. Staff turnover has created a decline in the quality of care, put additional stress on families, and left individuals in service at an increased risk level. All of these impacts are the result of the lack of staff, less qualified staff, or new staff that are not yet well trained. Imagine the impact of having a staff person you have never met (who has limited experience and skills) taking care of your most basic needs such as personal care and feeding.

Staffing turnover is at an all time high among Service Providers in the region. Picture a school or hospital having this type of turnover, with **no new graduates to recruit from**; this is the situation we are in. Many of the new employees we are able to recruit complete the orientation process and then decline to stay employed with the agencies due to the lack of job skill sets required, unrealistic demands, and poor salaries. Very few if any new applicants from post-secondary programs are interested in applying in our field and many of our current staff with post secondary training are now leaving the field. The hours involved in recruitment has made it difficult for agencies to focus on the other key parts of the work which include record keeping, staff appraisals, etc. The increased costs for additional overtime (to cover these staff shortages) have sky rocketed and this further compromises the health and wellness of our employees. **This has serious implications to both the individuals and the agencies in terms of risk management.** We are no longer able to best manage our risk with the resources provided.

Services to individuals are being reduced and some services may have to close. This may result in relocation of some individuals from their home communities. Service delivery may have to change to more of a group shared model, as there may not be sufficient human resources to provide the necessary support. New individuals coming into services may be placed on long wait lists if there is no staff available to support their needs.

The low wages has created serious effects on the people we support, some examples of this are:

- People with significant medical/behavioral needs being forced to spend days in the emergency room awaiting service, which has impacts on our already overtaxed medical system.
- Individuals self-esteem being effected and articulating this by saying “Is something wrong with me that my staff keep leaving?”
- Increase in behavioral incidents as well as medication errors and increased staff illness and WCB claims.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING ?

We believe that the primary cause of the Human Resource Crisis is that the funding for wages is too low. Wages for community services staff are on the average \$4.00 per hour less than what government services staff are being paid to do the same job (see ACDS – “A Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field”. Aug. 2006, pg.4). Comparison of wages between government staff shows their average wage at \$17.64 per hour versus the average community wage of \$13.76 per hour. We are not funded for incentives like shift differential and training/orientation cover off. Our staff often works split shifts, receive

fewer benefits, and are paid significantly lower overnight wages than their government employed counterparts. Today many high school graduates in Alberta can start entry level jobs at \$ 18.00 per hour with fully paid benefits. The expectations of post secondary graduates are that their investment in education will afford them an acceptable “living wage”, which does not equate to a wage of \$13.76 per hour.

The booklet entitled “A Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field”, published August 2006 provides additional answers to the cause of our inability to recruit and retain skilled staff.

A CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION & LONG-TERM STRATEGIES!

WE URGE ALL SERVICE PROVIDER AGENCIES AND THEIR BOARDS TO:

ACT IMMEDIATELY!

- Follow through with the ideas in the document entitled An Agency Response to the Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field published by the Alberta Council of Disability Services.
- Meet with your mayor and other influential community members, provide them with your agency’s impact statement and urge them to support our efforts for equity of wages between government services sector and community services sector.
- Do a presentation at your Chamber of Commerce and ask for a letter of support for this initiative.
- Set up a meeting with your MLA. At the meeting brief your MLA and ask him to address the Northeast Community Board directly on this issue. Additionally ask him to broker a face to face meeting with the Deputy Minister Tim Wiles, or with the Assistant Deputy Minister Dave Arsenault.
- Develop a media plan for your community. Get the news out to all your stakeholders by holding focus meetings.
- Find out who is running in the Leadership Campaign and contact the candidates to find out what their response is to the “Human Resources in Crisis Document” published by ACDS. You can find this information at: www.ken-chapman.blogspot.com. Links to candidates in the leadership race are on the right hand side of the web page.

SUPPORT OUR LONG TERM STRATEGIES

- Work in collaboration with our funders to establish a system that reflects innovation and best practice in creating a work force that will sustain our essential services.
- Continue to work with our provincial affiliate ACDS, through the Workforce 2010 project on the long term strategies to build a stronger Alberta that ensures essential services for the citizens we serve.