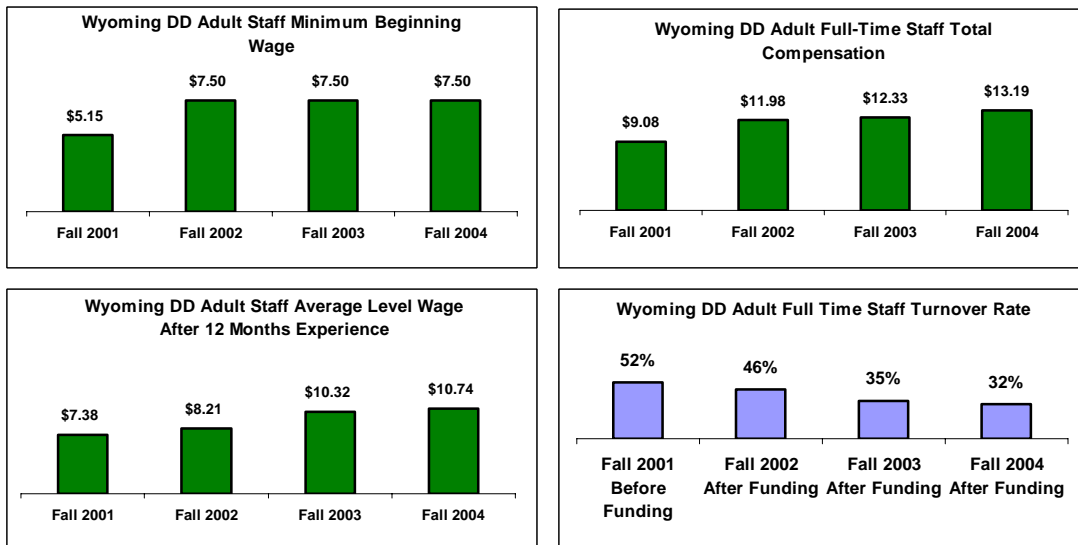


## Wyoming Developmental Disabilities Direct Service Professionals Wages and Retention

In 1992 Wyoming salaries direct service professional wages were identified by Braddock and Mitchell as being ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for starting wages adjusted for cost of living, adjusted wage, and on nominal wage Community staff wages and benefits constitute 60 to 70 percent of MR/DD Community Program budgets (Braddock, 2004).

The Wyoming legislature after commissioning a study with the University of Wyoming, WIND project headed by Dr. Keith Miller appropriated a 28% increase to the adult DD waiver to improve staff reimbursement and retention. In the summer of 2002 and in two cost of living increases since then these dollars have changed Direct Service Professional wages and retention.

### Footnote 9 Surveys for Wyoming Adult DD Direct Service Staff Reimbursement and Retention



National average hourly wage rates for Community MR/DD Direct Support staff averages \$8.68 (Rizzolo, Hemp, Braddock, & Pomeranz-Essley, 2004). Wyoming average wage rates for a similar full and part-time staff members average \$9.96.

### References

Braddock, D., & Mitchell, D. (1992). Residential services and developmental disabilities in the United States: A national survey of staff compensation, turnover and related issues. Washington, DC: AAMR.

Rizzolo, M. C., Hemp, R., Braddock, D. & Pomeranz-Essley, A. (2004). *The state of the states in developmental disabilities*. Washington, DC: American Association for Mental Retardation.

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### **GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES PROGRAM TO BOLSTER WORKFORCE ASSISTING DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED**

CHEYENNE, Wyo. - Gov. Dave Freudenthal announced last night the success of an initiative that has offered apprenticeship training and career services for the 2,000 people in Wyoming currently working to aid state residents with developmental disabilities.

The governor said the training programs - sponsored jointly by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Wyoming Department of Health - has proven to be a welcome addition to state legislative support raising the starting wage and benefits package for Direct Support Specialists (DSS).

The governor made the announcement at an awards banquet in Cheyenne last night honoring eight recipients of the Direct Support Professional of the Year award. These individuals were selected from nearly 100 nominees from around the state who represent the best in the direct support profession.

The awards were presented as part of the "Do You Want Your Job to Make a Difference?" campaign, sponsored by the Wyoming Department of Health Developmental Disabilities Division, Wyoming providers of developmental disabilities services and the Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Direct support specialists in Wyoming provide guidance and support to over 2,000 clients who need help to be self-sufficient. DSS provide this support to a wide range of individuals including people with physical, psychiatric, or cognitive disabilities, chronic illness, children and youth at risk, and families who need assistance in supporting family members.

Like many other health care occupations in Wyoming, a challenge exists in keeping workers in the field.

By January 2002, the developmental disability staff turnover rate had reached 52 percent and wages in Wyoming were 50th in the nation according to state health officials. Leadership took steps to improve direct service staff wages with the passage of Footnote 9 legislation and since July 2002, the improved pay and benefits have lowered the rate of attrition. Wyoming now enjoys an average wage for this occupation and vastly reduced turnover.

"This program, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor and the Wyoming Department of Health, effectively creates a career path for people to follow as direct support staff," the governor said. "This is a long-delayed recognition that this has always been a profession.

"It's fair to say that in the field of developmental disabilities, the direct support specialist has the most impact through direct contact with clients. In this occupation, everything is hands on."

DSS are found in hundreds of different settings with various job titles such as residential counselor, employment specialist, family advocate and personal support assistant. Many of these jobs share similar requirements and approaches, including the ability to teach life skills, provide physical assistance, and to support the empowerment, choices and self-direction of the individual receiving support. It is estimated that there are over 2 million Americans working in these roles.

With the new program, Wyoming is one of the first states to have a Direct Support Specialist National Apprenticeship program approved by the Department of Labor. In addition, Wyoming is also the first state to join the Internet-based instructional site called the College of Direct Support that offers instruction for direct support staff. This initiative has resulted in over 100 graduates who have won certificates from the program in the last year.

Department of Health director Dr. Sherard said the new legislation and the program will help avert what was becoming a crisis situation in the field.

"We were experiencing extremely high turnover in the position," he said. "This is a position that requires training. By being able to offer higher wages and advanced training to those in the field, we feel we have a real cornerstone for success."

The Ark Regional Services program in Laramie, directed by Darryl Cooper, was one of the first apprenticeship sites in 2004. The apprenticeship program was developed by Ark based upon their competency-based method of preparing workers for employment through direct work experience and training with other qualified professionals. This direct concept provides for employment and training under actual job conditions, supervised by skilled direct support professionals with wages commensurate with the apprentice's level of competence. Four people have completed their apprenticeship programs and greatly increased their wages and responsibilities.

Wyoming Department of Workforce Services Director Kathy Emmons also applauded the new program.

"The Department of Workforce Services is very excited to see the Department of Health taking advantage of the apprenticeship program," she said. "This is an excellent way to build a targeted workforce to meet the needs of employers and consumers across the state of Wyoming."

The Internet-based College of Direct Support is on the Internet at <http://www.collegeofdirectsupport.com>, and Wyoming's direct staff recruitment and retention web page is located at [www.directsupport.org](http://www.directsupport.org).

Individuals interested in participating in the Laramie program should call (307) 742-6641.

Direct Support Professional of the year award winners:

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