

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the DDS 5 yr. plan.

My name is Chris McNaboe I am the Founder and CEO of Horizons in South Windham .

Since 1992 when this concept was initiated- our agency has been at the forefront of many of the person center initiatives in the various plans. We grew and built our agency founded on the ideas that every person has the ability to prosper and grow with the right **supports, staff** and **environment**.

The key ingredient here is the STAFF.

We developed a comprehensive hiring process to attract the best candidates, train and support them as they learn to implement the successful teaching techniques to help individuals with Developmental Disabilities have a great life.

We fundraise to pay for things our rates do not cover so we can offer a quality, professional working environment which has been proven to create longevity in staff. And staff longevity creates continuity and a group of professionals who can continually train the new hires and carry the torch on and on.

Many good ideas are in the 5 Yr. Plan. The focus on Charting the LifeCourse is one of them. Daily life& Employment, Community Living, Healthy Living, Safety & Security, Social & Spirituality and Advocacy& Engagement all need one

component that is currently at critical – no catastrophically low levels. STAFF

I know you know there is a staff crisis because we have had to pause or reduce service for over 88 people we support because we don't have staff.

We have over 26% of our staff positions unfilled.

I know you are thinking , well the 5 yr. Plan is not the vehicle to address these staffing issues. But I know that nothing in the 5yr plan can happened without staff. Without staff this is 32 pages of wishes. Technology has been publicized as a way to reduce the need for staff for some people. We use a fair amount of technology to augment our supports but technology cannot replace the human connection everyone needs and especially people with Developmental Disabilities.

Covid is a big factor now and has exacerbated the years long struggle we have had because of inadequate funding to pay and retain our professional staff - not just the entry level staff.

Since the American Rescue Plan Act is referenced in the 5 Yr plan, I feel we need to also address the States use of ARPA funds and the Medicaid rates to , once more, bring to light how the nonprofit community of providers who deliver the majority of services to DDS, cannot continue without adequate wages and Cost of Living adjustments to retain our STAFF.

We need your help to advocate for our staff.