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People With Disabilities Still Need Supports

Bloomington, IN: As a result of Covid-19 daily life has changed for almost everyone. Schools and public gathering places are closed; retail stores have shortened their hours or closed; restaurants and bars are limited to take out or delivery services; many people are working from home or out of work. But for a significant part of our community working from home isn't an option – adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who receive supports from agencies such as LIFEDesigns still need those supports, and those who provide supports still have to go to work at least as often as they did before Covid-19 was known. Most of the recommendations to avoid potential exposure to Covid-19 don't cover the daily work and other activities faced by these caring professionals, and the bills in Congress to shore up the economy similarly fail to address the needs of those with IDD as well as the agencies that serve them.

Every day hundreds of Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) work with adults with IDD providing assistance ranging from learning job-specific skills to cooking, improving communication to personal hygiene, finding connections in their communities to understanding their health needs. Under the best of circumstances DSPs work behind the scenes to support individuals often overlooked during times of crisis. Working from home and practicing social distancing are impossible for DSPs, and close or direct physical contact is commonly required to perform their job. And throughout DSPs, like health care and emergency services workers, perform their jobs 365 (or 366) days a year, 24 hours a day because they are professionals serving those in need.

The need for these services has increased due to all the changes taking place in response to Covid-19. Young adults who would attend school daily are now home all day adding hours of work not normally scheduled. Others who worked, often at entry-level jobs, during the day have found themselves out of work and requiring additional at-home supports as a result, again hours not scheduled. For our staff this means our clients need them more - perhaps during the same hours their own children, now out of school, need them. And for our agency this means additional need for DSPs as well as the possibility of providing services that funding sources are not prepared to pay.

Our communities are made up of a diverse group of caring individuals who help others throughout the year. Disability services providers and clients are faced with a unique situation. During this time of stress our clients need more supports, our staff have added needs at home, and government activities to address the economic

challenges are overlooking both those with IDD and the agencies that support them. But there is a way we can help each other – those who need employment can become Direct Service Professionals and get paid while helping our clients, and each of us can contact our U. S. Representatives and Senators and ask them to remember all our community members – especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the agencies who support them – with legislation such as the *Coronavirus Relief for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act* sponsored by Senator Bob Casey (D-PA).

LIFEDesigns is a not-for-profit provider of community and home-based supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In operation for almost forty years, we serve those in four counties with a mission to ***partner with and promote independence for people with disabilities***. For more information go to our website at www.lifedesignsinc.org or email info@lifedesignsinc.org .

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