

Direct-care professionals undervalued in workforce

From Fran Mancl
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The March 15 article, “What’s in your paycheck?” was an eye-opener. I learned that a government report puts Dubuque’s medium annual per-worker wages 10.5 percent below the state average and 24.9 percent below the U.S. average.

As a direct-care professional in Dubuque for 25 years, I am not one of Dubuque’s “medium” wage-earners. I’m one of Dubuque’s “lower” wage earners.

Direct-care professionals include CNA’s like me, home health aides, supported community living professionals and many others. We are counted as part of the largest workforce in Iowa and the frontline of personal support and care for many vulnerable Iowans.

The research indicates 20,000 additional direct-care workers will be needed in the state by 2020. Where will they come from and what will invite them to join the direct-care workforce?

Perhaps part of the reason the gap exists is that direct care lacks recognition and support. Perhaps direct-care workers need and deserve greater training and education credentials. Perhaps direct-care workers need to have greater public support and trust to ensure their job matters and is really important.

Perhaps direct-care needs to become an occupation worthy of compensation that will encourage others to enter, able to make a living, and stay in what needs to be a highly-valued profession.

Just compensation is certainly part of filling the gap in the area’s direct-care workforce. Enhanced wages can help improve the local economy. Perhaps our legislators need to make direct-care issues a priority.

Telegraph Herald in Dubuque