

**Be a Voice for Positive Change**  
by Fran Mancl, Certified Nursing Assistant

State lawmakers, Senator Pam Jochum, and Representatives, Nancy Dunkel, and Chuck Isenhardt, and Representative-elect, Abby Finkenauer talked with seniors and staff at Stonehill Franciscan Services in Dubuque and engaged in a discussion on issues surrounding the senior-care health industry.

As a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at Stonehill, I immediately made plans to participate and take part in the discussion. In many respects, before the legislative forum began, I felt insecure and intimidated, even gripped with uncertainty and hesitation about speaking up. But in my heart, as an Ambassador for the Direct Care Workforce Initiative, and being a direct care professional personally committed to supporting all direct care professionals and those they serve, I took several deep breaths and delivered my message and asked my questions.

My message was simple. I gave my credentials in terms of knowledge and experience in direct care. I then told the legislators and those present that I just wanted them to hear again how the direct care worker shortage and the high turnover rate deeply impact on me, my co-workers, and direct care professionals throughout much of Iowa. I shared how the impact creates stress because I don't have a supportive work environment to meet the needs and demands for quality care and service without a stable, consistent staff of direct care co-workers to share the workload and meet all the needed services of care.

Further, I indicated the need and value of having educational opportunities and standards for the direct care workforce, and to receive a just compensation for what that workforce does. Both of these would make for a more stable workforce that is competent/skilled and of good character and trustworthy. The direct care workforce needs to receive compensation that applauds direct care as a valued professional career and one in which a direct care professional can make a living.

More importantly, I reminded them that both intensive and extensive work has been done over the years and multiple recommendations have been made. More meetings, committees, commissions, and further pilot projects on direct care issues aren't needed as much as some immediate action steps.

If I learned anything from the experience, it's that we need to go beyond studying the direct care issues and being informed. We need to take a stand, speak out, communicate and talk with others; especially those in a position to take action that will bring about change. We need to take action based on our experience in direct care and what we know. Be a voice that is professional, positive, and potent with genuine concern for change where needed. Basically, be not afraid to tell our personal stories. I learned it can make a difference.

I thank the legislators and others who were present for genuinely listening and responding in a supportive manner to the issues surrounding direct care. It is my hope that because I shared my story and delivered my message, they will make direct care issues a priority during the 2015 state legislative session.

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