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July 2022

Dear Friends and Supporters of PAO,

**Collaboration.** It's one of my favorite words in the business world. When done effectively, it can bring many benefits to organizations that seek to succeed in an evolving environment. From an operations perspective, it can speed up processes, result in greater efficiencies, and increase transparency. From an employee standpoint, collaboration gives employees a sense of purpose and enhances teamwork, which boosts overall happiness. It also necessitates cutting through department silos and encourages big picture perspectives. When you're a customer, knowing the organization functions collaboratively means it's truly a connected workplace that can focus its efforts on the satisfaction of services.

For us at PAO, team collaboration has been a part of who we are for many years. We purposefully use our collective knowledge to bring about unfettered innovation and maximum performance. We know each other well, including our skill sets and how we contribute to work in general. Deadlines are set and achievements are equally recognized.

We also invite and participate in community collaboration. It's about fostering a sense of community in shared work within teams. It's centered around learning and sharing knowledge within teams as opposed to carrying out tasks or completing work in team settings. Community collaboration turns teams into knowledge banks instead of siloed subject experts working individually. One of my favorite community collaborations is partnering with Disability Network of Mid-Michigan to celebrate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This celebration is scheduled for this Wednesday, July 27<sup>th</sup> at Auburn City Park from 4:00–7:00pm. There will be several vendors, a food truck, snacks, a scavenger hunt with a prize, and information on the ADA, along with opportunities to go fishing and kayaking. A live band will be playing most of the time. Last year was our first time partnering on this event and as a result, over 400 people attended, the most ever in the history of this celebration.

**State News.** I've been privileged to be a part of the employer-led MICA grant (Michigan Industry Cluster Approach) for about a year now. The key changes we're working on to raise Direct Care Workers' (DCW) economic security, equity, and respect are the following:

- Increase wages and benefits (we've been successful so far with the \$2.35/hour increase and advocate for it to continue, which was just recently approved for the 2022-2023 fiscal year).
- Professionalize the Direct Care Workforce by:

*PAO Mission: Providing support to individuals with differing abilities based on their personal needs and goals.*



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1. Establishing competencies and professional and ethical standards in ways that support professional growth and development.
  2. Establishing training guidelines and make training accessible and affordable.
  3. Establishing credentials.
  4. Establishing career pathways for career advancement.
- Culture Change – increase the value placed on direct care work.

While these may seem like lofty goals, we've already made great process within our collaborative to help legislatures see the value of a DCW's position and the need to increase wages. We also believe that advocacy and actions need to be on behalf of all DCWs, not just those with specific titles (like Certified Nursing Assistants – CNAs) or in specific settings or programs (like nursing or group homes).

In fact, just recently, the Direct Care Worker Competency Guidelines have been accepted by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) leadership. These guidelines were developed by the statewide Direct Care Workforce Advisory Committee through IMPART ALLIANCE, who is also the convener for the MICA grant, and is now the quality of standard for all DCWs. The guidelines are based on national guidelines and include all DCWs who provide essential services through behavioral health, community mental health, and long-term care systems to support individuals with disabilities and older adults in a range of settings including their own home.

Employers of DCWs continue to be challenged by the acute DCW shortage. Although not mandated, adopting competency guidelines is a huge step forward in addressing the problem by recognizing the importance of the DCW workforce. The Committee's primary goal is to use these standards to increase affordable training options for employers and DCWs and make it easier and quicker to hire and retain qualified workers. Having such standards will lead to skills that transfer from job to job across all programs in the state. They will serve as the basis for building DCW credentials and career pathways. In time, we hope this helps others see DCWs as professionals and leads to a DCW workforce that's bigger and more stable. Multiple studies indicate that taking these steps can stabilize this workforce.

Believe it or not, Personal Assistance Options already provides training that encompasses all the competency guidelines and more, that have been accepted by MDHHS, such as:

- Understanding the Role of a Direct Care Worker
- Professionalism and Ethics
- Person-Centered Thinking and Practices
- Communication
- Safety
- Participant Empowerment and Advocacy
- Cultural Competency

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We have always believed in the importance of training and helping our employees be as successful as possible for those we serve. There are lots of advocacy efforts happening on our employees' behalf and PAO works hard to be a part of those efforts, especially at the state level.

**PAO News:** I thought I'd share some basic facts about Direct Care Workers and costs related to their services:

- Roughly 165,000 DCWs serve several 100,000 Michigan residents.
- 203,900 projected DCW job openings by 2026.
- 36,000 more DCWs needed right now.
- Median hourly wage range is \$11.85/hr. - \$15.18/hr.
- Median annual earning range \$24,640 - \$31,570.
- Turnover rate is 43%-89% depending on the DCW's occupation. Estimated 75.5% on average statewide across all DCW categories. This includes but is not limited to: certified nursing assistants (CNAs), home health aides, hospice aides, personal care aides, direct support professionals, job coaches, and self-directed home care workers.
- Turnover cost per turnover occurrence is \$6,160 - \$7,893 depending on the type of DCW and setting (total direct and indirect costs).
- Annual turnover costs to businesses state-wide - \$684 million.
- 89% of DCWs are women.

The good news is that our agency has a baseline starting wage of more than most agencies across the region. Our turnover rate is currently 11%, one of the lowest in the region. This allows us to continue our philosophy of supporting our employees on a continuous basis throughout the year; whether it's financially by offering bonuses a couple of times a year, giving out gas cards, using our car repair loan, offering a \$25 VISA gift card for referring a friend or family member and that new employee stays with us for three months, or helping our employees flex their schedule or find coverage when they're not feeling well, have child care issues, school or medical appointments. Most of all, we respect and value the life-changing work they do that has a positive impact on those we serve.

*Annual Fundraiser "The Celebrity Art Gala"*. Our Board of Directors made the tough decision to hold off on having our annual fundraiser this year, due to the unknowns of any subvariants of COVID-19. Our plan is to reintroduce the Art Gala in May of 2023. We're looking forward to having it at the Holiday Inn again, as this was a very accommodating venue for us and those we serve. I hope you'll consider joining us for a very entertaining and enjoyable evening.



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*COVID Update.* We've been especially fortunate this year that very few of our employees and people we serve have ended up with the latest sub-variant, Omicron BA.4 or BA.5. The Omicron BA.5 is the most contagious and is the dominant coronavirus strain in the US, according to the CDC. Its common symptoms are similar to other Omicron subvariants; runny nose, fatigue, cough, headaches, fever, and sore throat. What's a little different than the original strain or the Delta variant is there isn't a loss of taste or smell this time. We've been very blessed that none of the people we serve and none of our employees have needed hospitalization due to the subvariant. The few individuals/employees who have tested positive have had mild symptoms and are able to return to their normal routine within a few days. Experts are saying this variant seems to have the ability to elude some of the antibodies produced after vaccinations & infections. PAO continues to follow the CDC recommendations, and if anyone served or an employee are exposed to someone who tested positive, or test positive themselves, they must quarantine for five days and stay away from others. The next five days, the employee needs to wear a mask if returning to work.

### **Final Thoughts.**

Collaboration has been a constant theme of my work this year; whether it's being a part of a group of local leaders who are working on a master plan for equity for those with special needs in our community, or being involved with IMPART Alliance & the MICA grant, working with people across the state to bring value to the position of Direct Care Workers within Michigan and being a role model for the nation. I genuinely believe that change happens because groups of people get together and decide to make things better. It might not happen as quickly as you want or need, but if you have enough smart, thoughtful, and passionate people pushing for it, progress will eventually come.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and those of us in the office, I wish you continued good health and an enjoyable summer and fall.

Best Regards,



Kathleen S. Allen  
Executive Director  
Personal Assistance Options