

Introduction to the Special Issue on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), Part II

From the Special Issue Editorial Committee

Introduction

This second special issue dedicated to Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) continues to amplify the voices, experiences, and expertise of a workforce that is foundational to the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Across Canada, DSPs provide essential support that facilitates community participation, inclusion, belonging, and self-determination. Yet their contributions are often underrecognized within policy, education, research, and service systems.

The articles in this issue reflect the depth of knowledge DSPs bring to their work, while highlighting the challenges, innovations, and opportunities across the field today. Together, these contributions demonstrate that DSPs are advocates, relationship-builders, educators, and leaders whose insights are critical to strengthening developmental services.

Several papers in this issue illustrate the diversity and richness of DSP perspectives.

In the foreword, *“We’re the Ones Holding It Together”*: Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence (CCCE) DSP Fellowship Voices on System Change, fellows reflect on their lived experiences within the sector and offer compelling insights into the changes needed to build a more sustainable and responsive system.

Ann Hines, Nicole Bobbette, and Lisa Whittingham make a strong case for strengthening workforce identity through the development of a professional association for Ontario DSPs.

In *Valuing Our DSP Knowledge and Practice in Social Work Education*, Anna Przednowek, Kia Winger, and Teri-Lyn French challenge readers to reconsider how DSP knowledge is represented within professional education and advocate for greater recognition of the expertise developed through direct support practice.

Complementing these perspectives, Nicole Bobbette and colleagues explore the realities of facilitating meaningful participation for adults with developmental disabilities, highlighting the creativity, persistence, and relationship-based approaches DSPs bring to the field every day. Together with the other contributions in this issue, including perspectives from students, researchers, educators, and frontline practitioners sharing photos from the field, these papers invite readers to recognize, value, and invest in the knowledge, leadership, and humanity of the very important DSP workforce.

Offering our thanks

The Editorial Committee thanks all who contributed to this issue and helped elevate and highlight the importance of DSPs through peer review. We are also grateful to the CCCE for advocating for the wellbeing of care providers like DSPs and supporting the DSP Fellows to contribute to these two special issues, and to the CAMH Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre for supporting the organization of this effort together with OADD.

Most importantly, the Editorial Committee extends its deepest gratitude to each and every Direct Support Professional who, every day, supports people with developmental disabilities to live meaningful lives in their communities and pursue their fullest potential.

We'd also thank the educators who continue to teach and mentor future DSPs, as well as the advocates, researchers, policymakers, and system leaders working to strengthen and elevate this essential profession.

It is our hope that, after reading this issue, readers will recognize not only the profound impact of DSPs but also our collective responsibility to better support, value, and invest in the people who make inclusion, belonging, and community participation possible.

Claudiane Coutu Arbour, Nicole Bobbette, Ann Hines, Sue Hutton, Yona Lunsky, Anna Przednowek, Jocelyn Tan, Lisa Whittingham