

A Day in the Life of a Direct Support Professional

For years I have been asked, "What is the role of a Direct Support Professional?" I always find myself trying to summarize this into a succinct, clear, and concise, job description that captures it all. But in reality, what I'm trying to describe is anything but succinct. It's perplexing. How do I describe my day when I'm providing something different to each person? The needs for each person are so unique. How do I capture the love and emotion that is called for each day? So instead, I've decided to tell you a story of an average Tuesday.



I'm up before the sun to make sure home life is taken care of, then it's off to work. Today I work with Heidi. I need to get there early to get her up and out of bed so Dad can go to work. Heidi needs total care. Though basically the same age as I am, she has a developmental age of less than two. She does not talk, though she can certainly communicate. She is still asleep when I go to her room. I put on

Pandora and start the Disney station so I can serenade her with fun songs as I wake her up and give her a bed bath. Dad comes in to say goodbye before leaving for work, and then it is up in the Hoyer Lift and into her wheelchair to put on her day clothes. After this, Heidi starts 'talking', which is mostly random baby talk, but I also start to get the smiles that light up her face. They make my day. Today I even got Heidi hugs! Then it is time to make some breakfast. Mom is away, so I mix up yogurt and fruit with some grapes on the side. She is happy to be fed this morning. When we are done with breakfast, we brush teeth and play 'catch' by rolling squishy balls back and forth across the table. Her face lights up while we play, and she laughs when the ball falls off the table and I have to retrieve it. We read some books, and she plays with her 'bling bag', which has silly sunglasses, hats, jewelry, and other stuff that she takes out of the bag and puts back, sometimes putting them on, and laughing at me when I put them on. I like starting my day with Heidi. She makes me feel needed and I get to be my silly self, which puts me in a good mood for the day.

Next, I'm off to see Ricky. It is quite a drive, so I listen to books on Audible. Today he wants to go to the store, so we head to Aldi. Ricky lives independently and although he can get to some places on his own with his electric wheelchair, for bigger shopping trips, he needs a ride. Some days we pick up food from the food pantry or go to a doctor's appointment. After shopping, we go back to his apartment and make food. Ricky loves my meatloaf recipe, so we make it together, along with some mashed potatoes, and gravy. Ricky is smart and gets out a half dozen Tupperware containers. He divvies up the food we made, plus some frozen vegetables into each of the containers, so he can put them in the fridge for the next few days. This helps him with portion control and eating a balanced meal. He has been losing weight, as the doctor suggested. After meal prepping, he shows me an awesome drawing of a house he drew in pen with the paper I gave him.

He is an amazing artist. He talks about his childhood and his siblings. Ricky is a very nostalgic person. He thanks me

multiple times for helping him make the meatloaf. I am glad I can make him happy – he is a good guy.



Lastly, I visit Cheyanne. She has her mask on and her walking journal in her hands. She comes over and waits for me to wave her into my car. She is an energetic, young woman. She asks me about my day and how I am doing. She knows that being a good friend means a two-way street and tries very hard to do that. As is our routine, we go to the walking path that is next to her house. We park the car and decide which way we want to walk today – upriver or down. We walk for about 55 minutes before turning around to walk back. Cheyanne talks the entire time.



She talks about her day program, the friends she has there, what they did, her boyfriend she met at camp this summer, her parents, her

dog, the stresses she has in life, the joys she has in life. She just keeps talking. Sometimes she asks for advice or if I can help her understand the why's or how's of something, but mostly she just needs to get it all out. She always makes sure to get the polite 'How are you?' out at the beginning because she knows she talks a lot. It is all good. I enjoy the 5-mile walk. I enjoy the 'big sister' role I have. She is calmer at home when we get to do this two times a week. This makes her parents much happier as well. This shift is about as opposite to my first shift as you can get – but I enjoy it as well, just for other reasons.

I am just as helpful in Cheyanne's life, as in Heidi's and Ricky's. Whether it is the occasional smile or laugh from Heidi, the non-stop words from Cheyanne or the smile and sincere thank-you from Ricky, I know I am helping them live the best version of their lives. It is a good thing.

Written by Dianne Sheaffer, Supervisor for the In-Home Supports Program

This is a typical day for just one of the many Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) here at Access Services. DSPs who work in the Intellectual Disability and Autism Programs at Access Services, make up approximately 255 of our employees. They are the heart of our organization. No matter the program they are working in or role that they need to fill that day, DSPs exemplify our core values in their everyday actions. It is impossible to summarize the meaning of their role in just a sentence.

Thank you to our DSPs and Happy DSP Recognition Week! (Sept 13 – 19)

