

# The Key to *Independence*

## How the shortage of Direct Care Workers threatens Jane Hash's personal freedom

Having the support of Direct Care Workers is truly the only reason Jane Hash has been able to live independently. Born with a disability, she is now almost 47 years old and has required assistance for around 16 hours each day throughout her entire life.

"It used to be easy to find and interview staff," Jane says. "I was able to pick between people and find the individuals that fit best within my lifestyle. But now I can hardly get anyone to show up for an interview and the low wages Direct Care Workers earn is a huge part of that."

Originally from Ohio, Jane moved to Michigan four years ago when she began having difficulty securing staff. She had hoped it would be easier in Michigan but, unfortunately, that has not been the case. Jane used to have between four and six Direct Care Workers assisting her at a time, but now workers are difficult to find and impossible to keep.

"Before the caregiver shortage, I would attend weekly community events, present at conferences all over the country, and visit friends and family whenever I wanted," Jane says. "I was forced to scale back my active lifestyle because I didn't have reliable staff to provide the support I needed."

For the last two years, Jane's support has come from a pair of highly dedicated caregivers who have set aside their careers in other professions to assist her. They have become her chosen family, but she is extremely concerned about how much they are sacrificing to care for her. Sometimes she believes they are working themselves into poor physical health and challenging financial situations.

Jane strongly believes that higher, more stable wages for Direct Care Workers would dramatically elevate the profession and provide greater peace of mind to people like her. She says Direct Care wages used to be all right when the cost of living was lower. However, wages haven't gone up in years and that is making it harder and harder for people like her to secure reliable care.

"The future is dark for individuals like me if the state doesn't get this figured out," Jane says. "Our lives literally depend on this."

**Michigan needs to make the Direct Care Worker wage increase permanent—and even more competitive—to help families secure the care they desperately need.**

