

For Immediate Release**For information: Lori Grace, (607) 965-8377, ext. 115**

2017 Workforce Summit shares challenges in meeting growing needs for Direct Support Professionals

EDMESTON, NEW YORK, October 24, 2017 ... In the U.S. today, there is a simmering healthcare crisis: There aren't enough current or potential Direct Support Professionals to care for growing populations of seniors and those living with intellectual disabilities.

This was the consensus of a dozen top human services, non-profit and government experts featured this past week at the **2017 Workforce Summit** held at Pathfinder Village. Although this trend started 30 years ago, the presenters said it is more apparent now due to concurrent trends of stagnant wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), increased competition from other sectors for available workers, and in some regions, decreases in the work-aged/work-ready demographic. Direct Support is the fastest growing workforce sector in the U.S. economy; it is forecast that an additional 1.6 million workers will be needed for direct support work by 2021.

The **2017 Workforce Summit**, attended by over 200 representatives of education, health care and business agencies, was organized by Pathfinder Village's Kennedy Willis Center, and co-sponsored by The Arc Otsego, the Otsego County Chamber of Commerce, The Bonadio Group, Gates-Cole Insurance, and NYCM Insurance. Chobani Founder and Chief Executive Officer Hamdi Ulukaya and Acting Deputy Commissioner Helene DeSanto of the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities were among the featured presenters.

And yet, even with dire shortages forecast, the Workforce Summit also offered ways human service and health care agencies can "get rid of the box" that constricts thinking when it comes to hiring issues. During their presentations, Mr. Ulukaya and Ms. DeSanto suggested tapping into non-traditional pools of workers as a partial solution. Mr. Ulukaya, a strong advocate for global refugees, has successfully integrated hundreds of immigrant workers into Chobani's workforce at its Twin Falls, Idaho, and New Berlin and Norwich, New York locations.

During his keynote presentation, a Q&A format hosted by Pathfinder CEO Paul C. Landers, Mr. Ulukaya explained that when he first came to the area in 2005, he was struck by "a spirit that lives in these towns" that is rooted in taking pride in one's work. He sought to tap into and cultivate that pride that workers had for the product and company, and after several years of rapid growth, Chobani had difficulties in hiring sufficient workers. To keep up with demand, the company looked to regional refugee centers to recruit new staff.

"I asked, 'Can we create an environment that can bring in everybody, where judgment is gone, and all can come in as who they are?'" said Mr. Ulukaya. "Being yourself, being real, is one of the biggest things: At Chobani, we can be who we are. Working with the refugee center, it's the exact same base. You come as you are, make yogurt, and build a life around it."

"We now have people of 19 different nationalities: We had a company event the other week with everybody's families, people of all backgrounds, sharing life together. It was magical," he said. "In business, it isn't the rules you write ... you have to practice the culture, and it can be real. Once the culture is created, you can build on it."

Earlier that morning, Acting Deputy Commissioner DeSanto alluded to recruiting workers with non-cognitive disabilities, who are largely under-employed, as a possible pool of DSP candidates. She also spoke on steps being taken through New York state government – the start-up of Regional Centers for Workforce Development, common credentialing processes across agencies, and pay equity issues – as other steps to ease DSP shortages.

Pathfinder's longest serving Board member, State Senator James L. Seward (R-51, Milford), opened the Workforce Summit, noting that the 2017-18 budget included \$55 million as a result of the **Be Fair to Direct Care** grassroots campaign, which sought funding to implement a living wage for DSPs at the state's non-profit human service agencies. A 6.5 percent hike is to be implemented over the next two state budgets.

"The Be Fair to Direct Care was a good start," said Senator Seward, as he concluded his opening remarks. "But we all know there is so much more to be done."

Reassessing and Re-evaluating DSP Work

Dr. Amy Hewitt and Barbara Kleist, of the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis' Institute on Community Integration, set the stage for later presentations, comparing national data and New York's statistics on current and predicted DSP shortages; changing trends in service environments; and factors that make workers decide against becoming DSPs, including low wages and benefits, high accountability for actions, and other stressors. These factors also lead to high turnover and vacancy rates in human services, which results in agencies spending additional funds on more expensive overtime pay, orientation and training.

"Although we believe that everyone with an intellectual or developmental disability is receiving state-funded services," said Dr. Hewitt, "research indicates that only about 25% of those eligible for services are actually receiving them. So our current shortages are really just the tip of the iceberg." Dr. Hewitt also related that the \$55 million increase to New York DSPs through the **Be Fair** campaign would only amount to \$.24 per hour for DSPs. She added that 61% of the state's DSPs must rely on public benefits, despite working full-time, to make ends meet.

Dr. Hewitt recommended that standard labor department job categories be upgraded, as they do not account for the integrative nature of DSP duties: "We need to discuss the 'Scope of Practice' of what DSPs do," she said. "We need to stop thinking of them as 'care givers.' We need to view them as interdisciplinary professionals, who on any given day may be providing skilled nursing care; teaching daily care and other key skills; providing OT, PT and speech therapy supports; and acting as drivers and personal coaches to more-than-one person who has an intellectual disability."

Other speakers at the 2017 Workforce Summit included John Raffaele of the National Association of Direct Support Professionals; Douglas Bauer, Executive Director of The Clark Foundation; Melinda Mack, Executive Director of the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals; Bethany Toledo, Executive Director of the New York Alliance of Direct Support Professionals; Mark Davis, President of the Ohio Provider Resource Association; Ann Hardiman, Executive Director, Carol Napierski, Senior Director of Administration, and Kirsten Sanchirico, Director of Workforce Initiatives, all of the New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies.

About Pathfinder Village: Pathfinder Village is an internationally respected open-access community in upstate New York, and was founded in 1980 to provide people living with Down syndrome and related disabilities an independent, engaging, and fulfilling lifestyle. As it works to provide quality supports for older individuals living with intellectual disabilities, the Village also offers highly successful educational and pre-vocational programs, including its post-secondary program, Otsego Academy, and its community-based day services option for regional residents.

To learn more about Pathfinder Village, please call (607) 965-8377, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., visit the website at pathfindervillage.org, or visit our fan page on the popular social networking site, Facebook.

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