

Turnover and Vacancy Rate Survey for
Direct Support Staff in Montgomery
County Agencies Serving Families and
persons with Mental Retardation and
Persons with Mental Illness

Fiscal Year 2002-03

Report of Findings

Prepared for the Montgomery County
Association for Excellence in Service
(MAX)

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Executive Summary

A total of 24 agencies participated in a survey intended to collect and summarize data regarding turnover and vacancy rates in Montgomery County. Various indicators were examined related to recruitment and retention of Direct Support Staff (DSS).

Results showed that employees still with their agency as of 6/30/02 had an average tenure of nearly three years. Employees who left their agency during the last fiscal year stayed an average of 1-½ years. More than one-third of all new employees who left in the last fiscal year did so within six months of being hired.

The overall average turnover rate was 29%. 25% of the agencies reported turnover rates of over 40% and 16% reported rates of over 50%. The overall vacancy rate was 10.2%

In comparison with residential services, those agencies reporting day/vocational services showed a higher average tenure of stayers, a lower percentage of people leaving with less than six months tenure, and lower turnover and vacancy rates. Wages for direct support staff tended to be higher in day/vocational services compared to residential services. Conversely, wages for first line supervisors were higher in residential services compared with day/vocational services.

In relation to the previous study for Fiscal Year 2001-02, the current study showed a longer period of tenure for those still employed as of 6/30/03, and lower overall turnover and vacancy rates. The percentage of employees who left in the fiscal year with less than six months tenure showed little change from the previous fiscal year. There was also little variation in wages across fiscal years for both direct support staff and first line supervisors.

Introduction

The staff turnover and vacancy rate survey summarized in this report is a follow-up study commissioned by the Montgomery County Association for Excellence in Service (MAX) as part of their Direct Service Worker Initiative Recruitment and Retention Plan. It's intent is to ascertain turnover and vacancy rate information for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2003 and to compare with baseline data gathered in the previous study for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2002.

As in the previous study, the worksheet used to gather data was developed by the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota. In the current study, the language was modified somewhat for clarity based on feedback received from participating agencies last year. The only change made to the current form was asking for *annual* estimates of advertising expenses, hours of overtime paid and percentage of budget spent on overtime pay instead of for the last 30 days of the fiscal year, as requested on the 2001-02 Fiscal Year worksheet.

In addition, this year, applicable participating agencies were asked to submit data for day/vocational and residential services separately in order to compare data across disciplines. For items where this breakdown of information was requested, data is shown in comparison form. All other data in this report is combined.

Methodology

In September 2003, the Direct Service Staff Turnover and Vacancy Rate sheet (Attachment 1) was sent to 44 agencies that provide services to persons with mental retardation and mental illness in Montgomery County. A list of participating agencies is included as Attachment 2.

An accompanying letter was sent by Eric Goldstein, Administrator, Montgomery County Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Drug and Alcohol Programs. While the letter encouraged all

providers to participate in the survey, it stated that providers who had accepted dollars under the Direct Service Worker Initiative were required to comply and submit data for their agency.

Providers were again informed that all submissions would be kept confidential, that data would be reported in aggregate form, and that, while the list of participating agencies would be included in the final report, specific data would not be attributed to individual agencies. To ensure confidentiality, each agency was assigned an identification number for tracking purposes only.

A total of 24 agencies responded to the request for a response rate of 54.5%. Six agencies reported day/vocational services exclusively; 10 agencies reported residential services exclusively; and eight agencies reported data for both day/vocational and residential services.

The study focused primarily on turnover and vacancy rates for direct support staff (DSS). These are employees whose primary job responsibility is to provide support, training, supervision, and personal assistance to people supported by the agency. At least 50% of the direct support staff's hours must be spent in direct support tasks. Front Line Supervisors (FLS) are those whose primary responsibility is the supervision of direct support staff and who spend less than 50% of their hours in direct support roles.

Turnover and vacancy rates were calculated for five distinct areas, including,

- a. Average tenure of current (as of June 30, 2003) direct support staff (stayers), calculated in months, i.e., the average length of stay for those employees still with the agency.
- b. Average tenure of direct support staff who left during fiscal year 2002-03 (leavers), calculated in months, i.e., the average length of stay for those employees who left during the fiscal year.
- c. Percent of direct support staff who left during fiscal year 2002-03 and had less than six months tenure.

- d. Crude separation or turnover rate, calculated in percentage form, i.e., the total number of direct support staff who left during the fiscal year divided by the total number of positions in the agency as of June 30, 2003.
- e. Vacancy rate, calculated in percentage form, i.e., the total number of vacant direct support staff positions in the agency as of June 30, 2003 divided by the total number of direct support staff positions in the agency as of June 30, 2003.

The body of this report is divided into six sections:

- o Agency demographic data
- o Retention, turnover and vacancy data
- o Wages and other financial data
- o Changes in recruitment, retention or training outcomes as reported by agencies
- o Comparison of data across Fiscal Years
- o Summary and implications

Agency Demographic Data

The total number of individuals with disabilities served by participating agencies was 5,121. Agencies reported a total of 249 agency-based sites (community homes and centers), 221 home-based sites (in-home supports) and 206 job sites (community employment, enclaves, etc.).

Agencies reported a total of 1,439 direct support workers, 223 first line supervisors, and 147 administrators/managers. In percentages, 80% of the employees reported by participating agencies are direct support workers, 12% are first line supervisors and 8% are administrators/managers.

Retention, Turnover and Vacancy Data

In this section, the overall average was calculated for all participating agencies by total, by residential service and by day/vocational service. In addition, the ranges were reported, i.e., highest and lowest reported numbers, in each category. For greater comparison, averages were also calculated for agencies across three categories: agencies with one to 25 direct support staff positions (n=20); agencies with 26 to 50 direct support staff positions (n=5); and agencies with 51 or more direct support staff positions (n=7). In the day/vocational category, only one agency reported more than 50 direct support staff. For purposes of confidentiality, this agency's scores were included with agencies reporting 26-50 direct support staff. Results, in table form, are as follows:

Average Tenure of Stayers (in months)

	Average	Range	1-25 DSS	26-50 DSS (Day/Voc: 26+)	51+ DSS
TOTAL	35.6	6.09-124.15	32.5	36.7	43.7
RESIDENTIAL	28.3	6.09-59.8	19.6	31.5	39.7
DAY/VOCATIONAL	45	7.23-124.15	43.1	52.3	----

Average Tenure of Leavers (in months)

	Average	Range	1-25 DSS	26-50 DSS (Day/Voc: 26+)	51+ DSS
TOTAL	16.3	0-76.8	15.1	18.3	18.1
RESIDENTIAL	16.4	0-76.8	15	16	18.7
DAY/VOCATIONAL	16	0-32.8	15.2	19.3	----

Percent of Leavers with Less Than Six Months Tenure

	Average	Range	1-25 DSS	26-50 DSS (Day/Voc: 26+)	51+ DSS
TOTAL	35.1	0-100	30.6	33.5	50
RESIDENTIAL	41.2	0-66.7	37.5	42	47.6
DAY/VOCATIONAL	27.2	0-100	25	34.5	----

Turnover Rate (in percentage)

	Average	Range	1-25 DSS	26-50 DSS (Day/Voc: 26+)	51+ DSS
TOTAL	29	0-70	28.5	30.6	29.2
RESIDENTIAL	32	0-52	32.5	38	28
DAY/VOCATIONAL	25.2	0-70	25.2	25.3	----

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Vacancy Rate (in percentage)

	Average	Range	1-25 DSS	26-50 DSS (Day/Voc: 26+)	51+ DSS
TOTAL	10.2	0-34	7.6	11.2	16.9
RESIDENTIAL	14.7	0-34	12.3	13.7	18.9
DAY/VOCATIONAL	4.4	0-11.5	3.8	6.7	----

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Discussion

Overall, employees who were with their agencies as of June 30, 2003 had an average tenure of nearly three years. The average tenure for employees in day/vocational services was significantly higher than for employees in residential services (3.9 years vs. 2.4 years). In all categories, the average tenure increased with the size of the agency. Overall, agencies with between one and 25 DSS averaged a little over 2.8 years while agencies with 51 DSS and higher had averages of slightly more than 3 ½ years tenure.

Overall, the average length of stay for those DSS who left during the fiscal year was slightly less than 1-½ years. This figure was generally consistent across both residential services and day/vocational services. Of those DSS who left during the last fiscal year, more than one-third (35.1%) left with less than six months tenure. This average was less for employees in day/vocational services (27.2%) and higher for employees in residential services (41.2%). The highest percentage of leavers in this category occurred in agencies with 50 or more DSS where exactly half of the employees who left were with the agency for less than six months.

The overall turnover rate for agencies in this study was 29%. 25% of the agencies reported turnover rates of over 40% and 16% reported turnover rates of over 50%. Again, the average was lower (25.2%) in day/vocational services and higher (32%) in residential services. There was fairly uniform consistency in turnover rate by size of the agency.

Finally, the overall vacancy rate as of June 30, 2003 among participating agencies was 10.2%. There was a large discrepancy by service category, with the vacancy rate in residential services at 14.7% and in day/vocational services, 4.4%. Overall, vacancy rate increased with the size of the agency, with agencies employing 51 or more DSS reporting a vacancy rate of 16.9% (18.9% in residential services.)

Wages and Other Financial Data

In this section, total averages and ranges were calculated for average starting wage, average wage and average highest current wage for both direct support staff and first line supervisors. Data is shown by total and for residential and day/vocational services separately. In addition, expenses related to advertising and overtime were analyzed. Results are as follows:

Wages (per hour) for Direct Support Staff

	Average Starting Wage	Average Wage	Average Highest Current Wage
TOTAL Range	\$9.17 \$6.50-\$14.28	\$10.12 \$7.93-\$14.87	\$12.40 \$8.90-\$22.34
RESIDENTIAL Range	\$8.94 \$6.50-\$10.05	\$9.83 \$7.93-\$12.38	\$11.94 \$9.78-\$22.34
DAY/VOCATIONAL Range	\$9.46 \$8.00-\$14.28	\$10.47 \$8.75-\$14.87	\$12.97 \$8.90-\$16.60

Wages (per hour) for First Line Supervisors

	Average Starting Wage	Average Wage	Average Highest Current Wage
TOTAL Range	\$12.98 \$9.50-\$16.61	\$14.58 \$10.27-\$22.20	\$16.82 \$10.27-\$31.75
RESIDENTIAL Range	\$13.32 \$10.50-\$16.61	\$15.13 \$12.00-\$22.20	\$17.27 \$12.00-\$31.75
DAY/VOCATIONAL Range	\$12.50 \$9.50-\$15.38	\$13.89 \$10.27-\$17.01	\$16.25 \$10.27-\$21.50

Advertising Expenses

Agencies were asked to estimate total expenses for advertising related to recruitment for fiscal year 2002-03. 20 agencies responded to this question. The total estimated expense was \$275,272. Estimates ranged from a low of \$375.00 to a high of over \$51,000. The average annual estimated expense was \$13,764.

Hours and Percentage of Overtime Paid

Agencies were asked to estimate overtime paid in fiscal year 2002-03.

13 agencies, reporting in dollar figures, totaled \$3,809,712. Four agencies reported total overtime hours of 17,642. Using the average DSS wage calculated above, it is estimated that, conservatively, these agencies paid a total of \$178,537 in overtime. Thus, the total amount of dollars paid in overtime in fiscal year 2002-03 for participating agencies is estimated at \$3,988,249. The average percentage of budget spent on overtime pay in fiscal year 2002-03 was 9.3%. This ranged from a low of .49% to a high of 36%.

Curtailment of Services

Of those agencies that responded to the question, *As a result of workforce shortages, has your agency been forced to curtail services to prospective consumers?*, 37% answered “yes” and 63% answered “no”.

Changes in Recruitment, Retention or Training Outcomes

Agencies described several factors that may have negatively influenced recruitment and retention, including significant cost increases to health insurance coupled with zero budget increase from Montgomery County resulting in a decrease in health insurance benefits to new or prospective employees; increased use of part-time employees to minimize expenses; and elimination of management and full-time direct support positions. One agency indicated a lack of success in recruiting applicants through CareerLink and MAX Association recruitment efforts. Another agency cited the disadvantages to individuals served in the program, including reduced access to preferred services and decreased choice of community activities.

Factors or strategies that were identified as positively influencing recruitment and retention included:

- Hiring of new training director.
- Monthly on-site open house interviews coordinated by the company's recruiters and the site managers.
- On-site college courses for all staff in collaboration with Community College of Philadelphia but targeted especially to direct support workers.
- Less traditional (and less expensive) methods of recruitment, including CareerLink, HR efforts within the corporation, Internet postings and referrals.
- Leadership training for supervisory staff.
- Increased name recognition through various types of media.
- Redesigning of entire orientation process.
- Increased rate of tuition reimbursement.
- Additional sick and personal days.
- Involvement of staff in the decision-making process.
- On-going training and staff development.

Comparison of Findings Across Fiscal Years

	<u>FY 2001-02</u>	<u>FY 2002-03</u>
Average Tenure of Stayers (in months)	29.8	35.6
Average Tenure of Leavers (in months)	18.7	16.3
% of Leavers with Less Than 6 Months Tenure	36.7	35.1
Turnover Rate (in percentage)	34.3	29.0
Vacancy Rate (in percentage)	12.8	10.2
Average Starting Wage (DSS)	\$9.27	\$9.17
Average Wage (DSS)	\$10.26	\$10.12
Average Highest Current Wage (DSS)	\$13.40	\$12.40
Average Starting Wage (FLS)	\$12.80	\$12.98
Average Wage (FLS)	\$14.50	\$14.58
Average Highest Current Wage (DSS)	\$16.30	\$16.82

Discussion

With reference to turnover and vacancy data, the current study showed a longer period of tenure for those still employed as of 6/30/03 and lower overall turnover and vacancy rates when compared with figures from the previous fiscal year. This suggests that recruitment and retention strategies proposed in last year's study might have had a positive impact on the stability of staff in participating agencies.

The percentage of employees who left in the fiscal year with less than six months tenure, however, showed little change from the previous fiscal year. There was also little variation in wages across fiscal years for both direct support staff and first line supervisors.

Summary and Implications

The purpose of this report was to summarize the data gathered by agencies in Montgomery County related to recruitment and retention indicators and to compare findings with that of the previous fiscal year. A total of 24 agencies participated in the survey. Six agencies reported day/vocational services exclusively; 10 agencies reported residential services exclusively; and eight agencies reported data for both day/vocational and residential services.

Among the most significant findings were:

- ❑ Overall, the average length of stay for direct support staff (DSS) still with the agency as of June 30, 2003 was 35.6 months. Agencies with larger numbers of DSS showed higher average lengths of stay. The average tenure for employees in day/vocational services was significantly higher than for employees in residential services.
- ❑ Overall, the average length of stay for DSS who left during the last fiscal year was 16.3 months. There appeared no significant difference in length of stay by size of the agency or by type of service for this indicator.
- ❑ Overall, the percent of DSS who left during the last fiscal year with less than six months tenure was 35.1%. Agencies with larger numbers of DSS showed higher percentages of leavers with less than six months tenure. Agencies reporting day/vocational services showed significantly fewer people leaving with less than six months tenure when compared with agencies reporting residential services.
- ❑ The overall turnover rate for all participating agencies was 29%. 25% of the agencies reported turnover rates of over 40% and 16% of the agencies reported turnover rates of over 50%. The average turnover rate in residential services was higher than in day/vocational services.
- ❑ The overall vacancy rate was 10.2%. There was a large discrepancy by service category, with the vacancy rate in residential services much higher than in day/vocational services. Overall, vacancy rate increased with the size of the agency, with agencies employing 51 or more DSS reporting a vacancy rate of 16.9% (18.9% in residential services.)

- ❑ The average starting wage for DSS was \$9.17/hour, the average wage was \$10.12/hour and the average highest current wage was \$12.40/hour. There was a wide range of wages reported across the participating agencies. Overall, wages for staff in day/vocational services were higher than for those in residential services.
- ❑ The average starting wage for First Line Supervisors (FLS) was \$12.98/hour, the average wage was \$14.58/hour and the average highest current wage was \$16.82/hour. There was also a wide range of wages reported across the participating agencies. Overall, wages for staff in residential services were higher than for those in day/vocational services.
- ❑ The total estimated expense for advertising was \$275,272. The average annual estimated expense was \$13,764.
- ❑ The total amount of dollars paid in overtime in fiscal year 2002-03 for participating agencies is estimated at \$3,988,249. The average percentage of budget spent on overtime pay in fiscal year 2002-03 was 9.3%. This ranged from a low of .49% to a high of 36%.
- ❑ Compared with the previous study, the current study showed a longer period of tenure for those still employed as of 6/30/03 and lower overall turnover and vacancy rates. The percentage of employees who left in the fiscal year with less than six months tenure showed little change from the previous fiscal year. There was also little variation in wages across fiscal years for both direct support staff and first line supervisors.

The data in this report suggests once again that if a Direct Support Worker stays longer than six months in an organization, there is a good chance that he/she will stay considerably longer. The average tenure of stayers increased compared to the previous study suggesting that stability in the workforce is possible. The initial six-month period continues to be critical, however, since the data consistently shows that more than one third of new employees leave within this time frame. The overall turnover rate declined somewhat compared to the previous study, but still shows a significant number of agencies with alarmingly high turnover rates. The vacancy rate, however, declined on average when compared with the previous year's statistics, although agencies with greater numbers of employees continued to show significantly higher percentages of vacant positions.

The issue of advertising and overtime costs continues to be significant. Based on the data in this survey, total annual overtime costs approached four million dollars, a figure that is consistent with that estimated from the data in last year's study.

The comparison of residential and day/vocational services clearly shows that the former is more vulnerable to turnover and vacancy trends. In day/vocational services, the average tenure of stayers was higher; the percentage of people leaving with less than six months tenure was lower; and the overall turnover and vacancy rates were lower, when compared with residential services.

The study suggests a continued need for innovative practices in recruitment and retention, particularly with reference to new employees. Comparison of the data across fiscal years shows some positive signs. However, the general instability of the direct support staff workforce continues to be a major concern and one that requires the on-going attention of all agencies involved.