

AUTHOR

Claire Poor-Harmon, MHA
Staffing Director
AME Community Services
Minneapolis, Minnesota
claire@amecommunity.com

Implementing a Staffing Leadership Position to Address PWS Caregiver Shortages

“Meeting the needs of IDD individuals is a highly complex and individualized undertaking... This type of comprehensive knowledge about a person is not acquired overnight; it requires DSPs to spend a significant amount of time working with that person. High staff turnover takes away those natural on-the-job learning opportunities for DSPs, which, in turn, limits their ability to successfully and safely meet the needs of the people they are supporting.”
(ANCOR, 2025)



OBJECTIVE

This project aimed to address high turnover rates among Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) at AME Community Services—a Minnesota-based provider specializing in support for individuals with Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS). The primary objective was to evaluate the impact of a newly established staffing leadership role introduced in 2021 to focus on workforce stability within AME’s Twin Cities metro region. The project also sought to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess DSP staffing trends and use findings to inform organizational practices and advocate for policy changes that allocate HCBS waiver funding toward staffing leadership positions across the sector.

RELATED LITERATURE

- **Friedman, C. (2021).** The impact of direct support professional turnover on the health and safety of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Inclusion*, 9(1), 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-9.1.63>
- **Friedman C. (2018).** Direct Support Professionals and Quality of Life of People With Intellectual and Developmental
- **Hewitt, A. (2001, 08).** Who cares?: The crisis in the direct support professional workforce--finding, keeping, and training DSPs. *The Exceptional Parent*, 31, 12-14+. <https://trmproxy.mnpals.net/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/who-cares-crisis-direct-support-professional/docview/223489141/se-2>
- **Kayadjanian, N., Schwartz, L., Farrar, E., Comtois, K. A., & Strong, T. V. (2018).** High levels of caregiver burden in Prader-Willi syndrome. *PLoS one*, 13(3), e0194655. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0194655>

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The project achieved its goals without incurring additional costs to the organization. However, it generated significant cost-saving benefits by enabling the organization to track and respond to staffing KPIs, particularly those related to reducing DSP turnover and overtime. Nationally, DSP turnover is a costly issue, with estimates ranging from \$3,278 to \$5,000 per vacancy. For AME, calculations shared by Megan Saunders of the Institute on Community Integration estimated the annual cost of DSP turnover at an average of **\$275,412 per year between 2021 and 2024**. Over this period, the 9.2% reduction in annual DSP turnover resulted in an estimated **savings of \$28,907**. These findings highlight the cost-effectiveness and long-term financial value of using KPI tracking to guide workforce development and retention strategies.

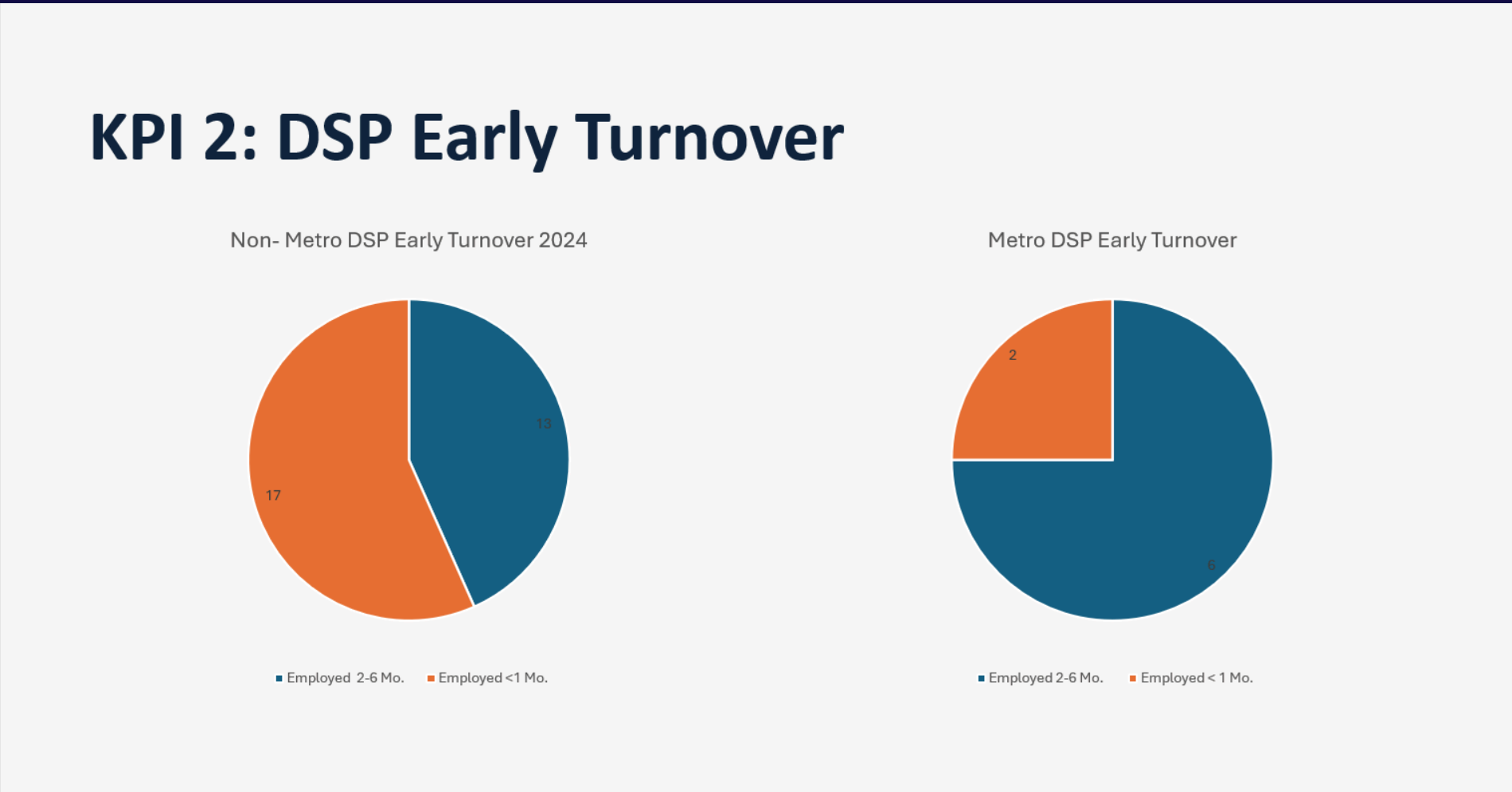
METHODOLOGY

This project used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate workforce stability following the implementation of a staffing leadership role at AME Community Services in March 2021. The primary goal was to establish three key performance indicators (KPIs):

- **DSP Annual Turnover**
- **DSP Early Turnover**
- **Bi-Weekly Overtime Hours Worked**

Quantitative data from 2021 to 2024 was collected and analyzed using standardized formulas provided by the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Community Integration. Data was gathered in collaboration with AME’s HR and executive leadership and tracked using Excel and QuickBooks. These KPIs were used to assess workforce trends and benchmark progress toward reducing DSP turnover. A secondary goal focused on using the findings to engage key external stakeholders in advocating for policy changes that allocate waiver funding to support staffing leadership roles across HCBS organizations. Engagement efforts included targeted presentations at national and state-level conferences.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

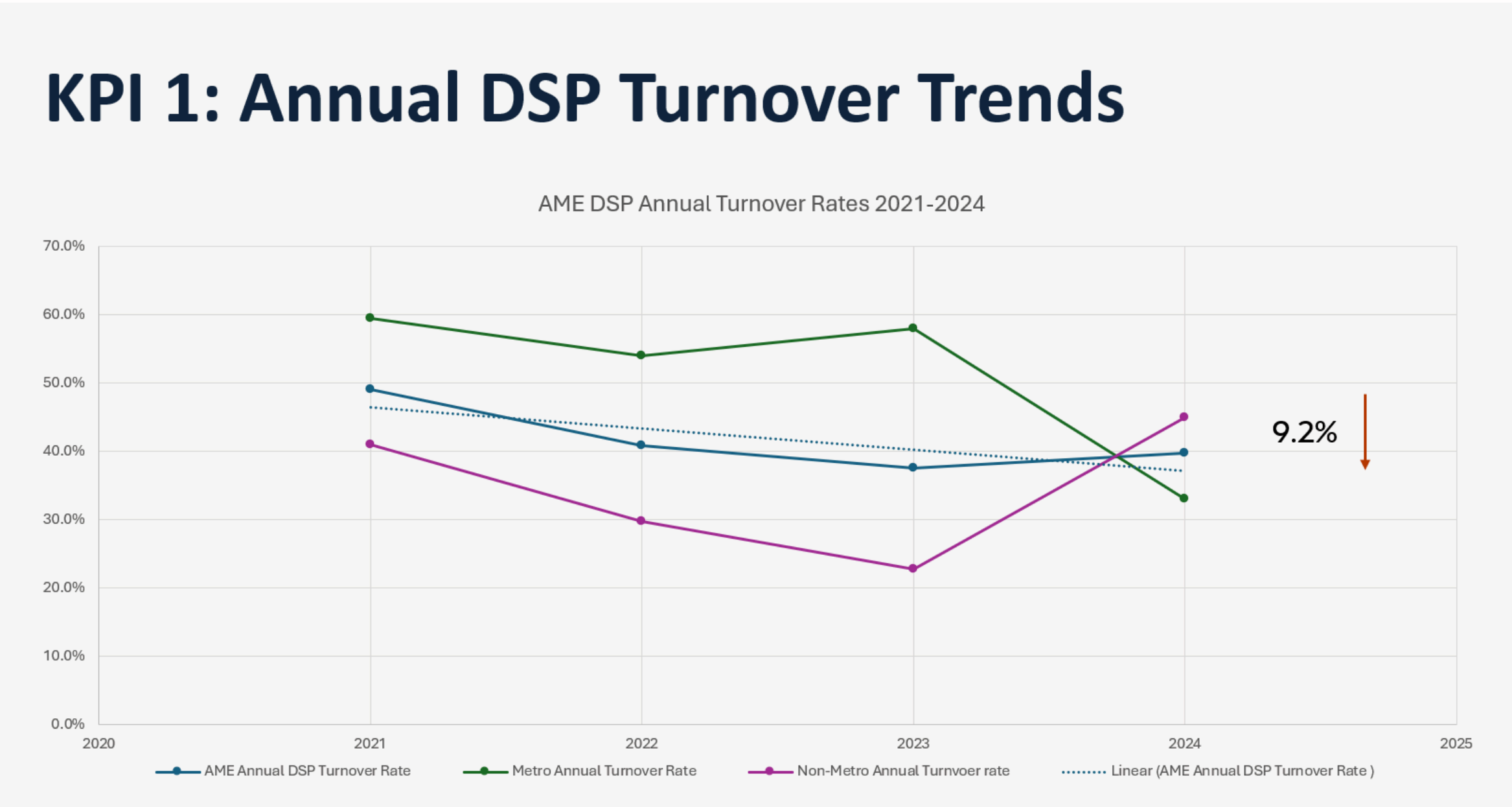


DSP Early Turnover Analysis

Analysis of AME’s 2024 DSP early turnover data revealed that 56.7% of the 30 DSPs who left the non-metro region did so within their first month, compared to only 25% of early separations in the metro region. This significant disparity may be attributed to the implementation of realistic job previews (RJPs), in the metro region beginning in summer 2021. The RJP process includes an observational interview where applicants spend time in the home they are applying to, engaging with the individuals served, current DSPs, and supervisors. This approach allows mutual assessment of fit and has contributed to lower early turnover rates in the metro region by improving alignment between applicants and home environments prior to hire.

ANALYSIS

The project successfully established a KPI dashboard to track DSP workforce stability at AME, including annual turnover, early turnover, and bi-weekly overtime. Annual DSP turnover decreased 9.2% from 49% in 2021 to 39.8% in 2024, with metro region turnover dropping by 26.5%, while the non-metro region saw a slight 3.8% increase—partially attributed to client case closures. A baseline DSP early turnover rate was established in 2024 at 37.4%, with the non-metro region showing significantly higher rates than metro (51.7% vs. 24.2%). Average bi-weekly overtime hours from June to December 2024 were 141.9 and showed an upward trend. The project also led to a standardized overtime reporting system and deeper analysis of overtime causes. Stakeholder engagement efforts resulted in one completed policy presentation to Senator Ann Rest and two scheduled for later in 2025, with identification of SF 402/HF 382 as a viable funding source for staffing leadership roles in HCBS settings. Financial analysis estimated that the **9.2% turnover reduction saved AME approximately \$28,907 annually**, contributing to more informed and cost-effective workforce strategies.



	Annual Turnover % (AME)	Annual Turnover % (Non-Metro)	Annual Turnover % (Metro)	Early Turnover %	Average Bi-weekly Overtime Hours
2021	49.0%	41.1%	59.5%	-	-
2022	40.8%	29.8%	54%	-	-
2023	37.6%	22.8%	58%	-	-
2024	39.8%	44.9%	33%	41.7%	148.9

CONCLUSION

This project demonstrates that organizational-level staffing interventions—specifically the implementation of a dedicated staffing leadership role—can help mitigate the DSP workforce crisis at the provider level. Additionally, providers must explore the challenges of a shortage of caregivers specializing in PWS within the context of the broader DSP workforce crisis. The observed reduction in turnover rates suggests that structured recruitment and onboarding efforts can positively impact workforce stability in HCBS settings. These findings support advocacy efforts for policy changes that allocate waiver funding to support similar roles across HCBS organizations. Continued use of KPIs will aid in data-driven decision-making and promote sustainable workforce practices, ultimately improving the quality of care for individuals with complex disabilities such as PWS.