

Statement for Public Hearing – October 22, 2001

Dane County Board Chair Keven Kesterson and Members of the Dane County Board:

The Arc- Dane County has a fifty-year history of advocacy for children and adults with developmental disabilities. We are proud of the work that we have accomplished to help establish community services. We are also grateful for the service system that exists in Dane County.

We know that Dane County has had to use local tax dollars to provide increases over the past several years because of the state's neglect of human services. Our members have also advocated at the state level for adequate state support. This advocacy was successful in the 1970's and early 1980's but recent history has not been encouraging.

We believe that the quality of services in Dane County is in danger because the annual cost of living adjustments in funding has not met the rate of inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index. In fact, in many years, the COLA has been less than one-half of the CPI. Health insurance costs have risen even more drastically than the CPI. The Purchase of Service (POS) Agencies are struggling to provide quality services with inadequate resources.

We know that the quality of services has suffered. There is often not staff time available to develop new job sites when consumers lose their employment. Often, the individuals are expected to stay at home when unemployed, putting pressure on families and the residential providers. For example, our daughter Sara, who was employed for six years after she left school, has been unemployed for the past 12 months. She has the skills to work and she did work and received minimum wage. But the supported employment agency working with Sara doesn't have the staff to do job placement. Sara was recently able to "hook up" with an agency specializing in job placement. But why did it take a year? It took a year because we were told that there were not adequate funds available.

We are also concerned that we hear of incidents and practices in the residences that are of questionable safety. These practices are not made by choice, but rather by the necessity of inadequate funding, high staff turnover and subsequent staff vacancies.

We believe that quality services are dependent on adequate wages and benefits for the POS staff members who provide services and supports. Therefore, the Arc Board of Directors voted to support a 3% increase in the COLA for the agencies providing services in Dane County. We appreciate the 2.1% increase in the County Executive's Budget, an improvement over previous years. We would suggest that the allocation of any increase should be based on health benefits as well as the salaries provided by the POS agencies.

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We will welcome the opportunity to participate in the strategic planning process that was recommended by the Human Services Task Force. Any reorganization of services to cope with the funding crisis must be done carefully. Any attempt to save dollars will have the potential for unintended consequences. The POS agencies, as well as advocates, must be involved in this important planning process. Early intervention strategies such as Birth to Three, Family Support, life span respite care and vocational/day services for high school graduates offer long term savings possibilities to help address our waiting list. We believe that programs such as these can prevent or postpone the need for more intensive services.

You should know that The Arc-Dane County has been looking for new programs that foster independence and also generates savings for other services for adults with developmental disabilities and their families.

We commend the Human Services department for proposing the new pilot program, Safe At Home (you may see it as Sound Response). This new pilot fosters independence by setting up an individually determined system that will allow the person with a developmental disability to be free of a night time care giver. The planning has progressed with safety in mind and will include only volunteers. We appreciated the opportunity to make suggestions to staff planning this new pilot program.

Thank you for listening,

Paul A. Yochum
President
The Arc-Dane County