

NEWS ::

 Print Article  Email Article  Share / Bookmark  Buzz up!

Agencies that assist people with disabilities prepare for state funding cuts

 Comments

April 27, 2010

By **SANDY ILLIAN BOSCH** sbosch@pioneerlocal.com

Agencies that assist people with developmental disabilities are looking for ways to do so with less money, should the state legislature approve Gov. Patrick Quinn's proposed 2010-11 budget.

Cathy Ficker Terrill, president of Ray Graham Association for People With Disabilities, said the organization stands to lose \$500,000 if Quinn's proposed budget becomes reality. Terrill said the proposed state budget calls for a 2.5 percent cut of Medicaid-funded services to agencies such as Ray Graham, whose services include the Hanson Center in Burr Ridge. That would leave the Ray Graham Association looking for ways to cut expenses without cutting services.

"There's not a lot left to cut," said Terrill. She said Medicaid-funded services are a peculiar choice for cutbacks, considering the state receives a 62 percent federal reimbursement for every dollar spent by the state.

For every dollar the state doesn't give to agencies like Ray Graham, it only saves 38 cents, Terrill said.

Terrill has been meeting personally with state legislators and has urged Ray Graham families to communicate their feelings, as well.

"We have sent the notice to all of our families and to our board," she said.

Helping Hands of Countryside relies on the state for about 60 percent of its funding and stands to lose about \$400,000 if the budget cuts are approved, said India Ehioba, director of marketing and development. Limits and delays in funding already have resulted in the elimination of six positions at the agency, which serves 275 adults and 175 children with developmental disabilities.

Ehioba said the lost jobs were not service positions, but she can't promise what might happen if more money is taken from the Helping Hands budget.

"There will be more cuts," she said.

In the meantime, Ehioba said Helping Hands staff is working to come up with ways to raise money of its own and to lessen its dependency on government support.

Similar efforts are under way at Westchester-based Aspire, which helps more than 1,000 children and adults each year through services offered at 21 locations in the western suburbs.

"The fiscal picture of the state of Illinois is bad," even without the 2.5 percent cut, said CEO Jim Kales.

He said the latest proposal is just the latest chapter in what has been several years of cuts and under-funding by the state.

"It's a challenging time," he said.

Should the governor's budget be approved, Aspire can expect to lose another \$253,000, Kales said.

He said his agency is reaching out to the public and to the business community for support. Business partnerships such as Aspire Coffee Works, a Chicago coffee company run by clients of Aspire, is a big step away from dependence on the state, Kales said.

Aspire just celebrated 50 years of service, and Kales said it's just getting started.

"We plan to be around for 50 more," he said.