

Deinstitutionalization

Major Issue as Funding Tightens Up

As more studies become available about people with disabilities leaving large congregate settings and developing more person-centered, individualized and community-based lives, the same stories keep emerging. With increases in independence being a continual theme.

Those, at least, are the summarized findings of David Mank in an August 2009 article written for the ArLink. Mank is the Director of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and Professor at Indiana University.

The trend toward deinstitutionalization is spreading nationwide. "Over 20 state institutions for people with developmental disabilities have closed since 1995...at least four other states have fewer than 300 people with mental disabilities in state institutions," Mank reported.

Shelly Simmons, chair of Georgia's Statewide Independent Living Council, concurs. "We are really trying to push for the Community Choice Act which will allow for the money to follow the person," she explained. "That's just a small slice of the CCA. Unfortunately, we still have a waiting list that doesn't allow enough people to come out of nursing homes or institutions.

Seventy-six percent of Medicaid dollars are going toward nursing homes and institutions. If we could get to 50 percent, that would be a plus."

The Community Choice Act is federal legislation that is for the development of a community-based alternative to nursing homes and institutions. This bill would also plan for the money to follow the person (rather than remain in one certain

program and/or in a certain state), and allow people to choose how they receive services.

Robert Stack, president and CEO of Community Options, Inc. has put hard numbers to that equation on a national level. "If they took 50 percent of the people residing in the institutions the average cost savings would be over a billion dollars. And an equal amount would be saved by the states." Community Options, Inc. is a national organization based in Maryland that embraces the philosophy of self-determination and provides housing, support services and advocacy assistance to empower thousands of people with disabilities.

Andre Cooper of Lilburn is a man who knows first-hand that the system needs changing. Cooper is 40 years old, and was paralyzed in an accident in 2005. He has no family nearby that can help, and currently lives in a nursing home. But, as he points out, there's no need for him to be there. "I'm capable of staying in a hotel or a house or an apartment. I'm able to do pretty much everything [for myself]."

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He knows it costs a great deal of money for him to remain in the nursing home, and he's also well aware it would cost less for him to be out on his own. "If Medicaid is willing to help me in a nursing home, why can't they help with an apartment or with some housekeeping?" he asks.

With a dearth of programs in Georgia, it's difficult for Cooper to find help. "It just seems to me that the less you're able to take care of yourself, the more they are willing to help," he says. "If I tell people I can take care of myself, they think I don't need any programs."

Refusing to give up, Cooper - along with many others - echoes Simmons' call to have the money follow the person. The state of Georgia currently

76%
of Medicaid dollars are going toward nursing homes and institutions.



Stimulus Money to go to Public Housing Agencies

By Carly Sharec

Curious as to what the stimulus money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act means to you? You're not the only one.

"It's broken down into Section 8 Housing Choice and Mainstream vouchers, money for capital improvements and then gets into tenant-based rental assistance and HOME funds," Barbara Chandler explained. Chandler is the fair housing manager of Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership in Massachusetts.

- **"New" Section 8** – These aren't technically new. This program has been around for some time, but \$30 million is now available for voucher assistance. This will allow for 4,000 vouchers – 3,000 for 'Housing Choice' and 1,000 for 'Mainstream.' "The Housing Choice vouchers are for anyone," Chandler said. "Mainstream vouchers are specifically for taking people out of institutions."
- **Public Housing Authorities** - \$3 billion in stimulus money is specifically for capital improvements (repair work.) "Some of the housing stock owned by PHAs are 50 to 60 years old," Chandler stated. "This both creates jobs for construction workers, and enables older buildings to be brought up to code and be made more accessible."

- **Tenant-Based Rental Assistance and HOME Funds**

- "These are used for a wide variety of purposes – from affordable single-family homes to creating portable rental properties." Additionally, communities seeking these funds must have a consolidated plan detailing what they will be using funding for.

"This is why disability advocates must be involved, to ensure that funds go to the proper places."

- **Low Income Housing Tax Credits**

- Previously, nonprofits could sell their \$1 million in a tax credit to a for-profit as a win-win situation for all involved – however, that system has tanked in the past three years due to the downturn in the housing market. "It's been proposed that the department of housing and urban development now buy those credits for 85 cents to the dollar," Chandler said. "As the government is now involved, this is a significant win for disability advocates." Chandler explained that, as the government now directly purchases the credits, contractors must now adhere to Uniformed Federal Accessibility Standards.

As of August 2009, the state of Georgia has received approximately \$150 million

dollars in stimulus funding for housing projects. "Around \$130 million is going to help produce affordable rental housing in our state," explained Don Watt, director of the Office of Special Housing Initiatives at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Watt continued to say that the left over approximate \$20 million is for the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, which helps to provide short-term assistance to households facing homelessness.

"What can really help people with disabilities is our Neighborhood Stabilization Program," Watt said. "This program can help people who are homeless or in an institution due to a disability afford long term permanent housing support." This program is expected to be available within one year.

"A lot of this is still floating out there – communities are just now in the beginning stages of getting together their applications for funding," Chandler said. Chandler said that advocates should show up at various meetings, including at state housing offices, public housing authorities, city halls and planning departments.

"Let officials know how they should be using the money based on the demographics of the area, including the number of people stuck in institutions and the composition of the waiting lists," Chandler said. "By going to public meetings, your thoughts go into the public record. This helps hold those in power accountable."

has a grant of over \$54 million in federal funds for the Money Follows the Person Initiative (MFP), which is helping to shift Medicaid Long-Term Care from its emphasis on institutional care to home and community-based services. The program began on September 1, 2008 and will run through 2011.

Through August 31 (for the 2009 fiscal year), 91 people with developmental disabilities have transitioned into the communities according to Alice Hogan of the department of community health. "An additional 63 people who are either senior adults or have a physical disability or brain injury have transitioned as well," Hogan confirmed. She continued to explain that they have benchmarks set for each year.

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As far as a more permanent solution that lasts beyond 2011, disability advocates remain hopeful. "We're trying to get a lot of our senators and representatives on board to hopefully make a change. Georgia was the state where the Olmstead Act was enacted, but Georgia's at the bottom of the list when it comes to actually allowing people to live in a community. We should be leading and in the forefront and we're actually behind. So we have a lot of catching up to do," Simmons emphasized. ●