

Rebecca Buck

From: Theresa Utton
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2018 2:52 PM
To: Rebecca Buck
Subject: FW: Budget hearing
Attachments: Legislative speech 2-12-18.docx; ATT00001.htm

From: Peter Fagan
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2018 11:22 AM
To: Theresa Utton
Subject: Fwd: Budget hearing

Thanks Dawn,

It was good to meet you.
Dick Courcelle also sent along testimony.

Peter

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Dawn Danner <DDanner@UCSVT.org>
Date: February 13, 2018 at 9:07:41 AM EST
To: "pfagan@leg.state.vt.us" <pfagan@leg.state.vt.us>
Subject: Budget hearing

Thank you so much for allowing me to speak at last night's budget hearings. Attached, please find my testimony.

Thank you again for your time and your help with keeping the Developmental Services Budget intact.

Dawn Danner

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Good morning. Here at UCS, a total of about 85 DS staff assist approximately 280 individuals in a variety of manners including: Home and Community Based Waiver Services, Targeted Case Management, Bridge Case Management, Flexible Family Funding, Family Managed Respite, Children's Personal Care, and Choices for Care. The people we serve have meaningful long-term supports that greatly enhance their quality of life. My staff are compassionate, dedicated people who go above and beyond to allow people with disabilities to be valued and integral parts of society.

We do important work every day and it shows. In our most recent client satisfaction survey, 92% of people we serve said their quality of life is improved with our services. The number of people working in paid competitive employment is rising each year and 14 people have been at the same job for over 5 years, while 12 people have been at the same job for over 10 years. We currently have 5 people attending college through the College Steps Program. All of these milestones could not have been achieved if it were not for the dedicated staff who are empowered to give people the highest quality of life possible. Our involvement in the community also continues to increase each year. Those that come to our Community Support program are able to choose from a variety of activities including tennis, yoga, Zumba, theater, adaptive sports, bowling and working with personal trainers, to name a few. Over 20% of individuals served are volunteering in their communities and this number continues to grow. Our Group Homes continue to offer loving homes where people are treated with respect and dignity while they pursue personal dreams. No matter the living situation, every DS client is given the opportunity to work on person-centered goals. Whether it's helping someone to research their family history, or teaching someone to save for their dream vacation, DS staff are allowing those with disabilities to have the same opportunities that non-disabled people have.

Yes, positive things are happening all around the state in Developmental Services. But, I have recently found out that the individuals we serve may be at risk of losing valuable interventions due to a proposed 2% statewide budget cut to existing DS services.

The *real* people we work with each day are the ones who will lose out if services get cut. I wish that you all could see what I see every day. I see people like "Susan". Susan is 29 years old and has had a large amount of trauma in her life. In addition to her moderate intellectual disability, Susan has been diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and Schizophrenia. In recent years, Susan began presenting in the ER 20-30 times per year because of suicidal ideation and auditory hallucinations. In 2015 and 2016, Susan was hospitalized numerous times at the Brattleboro Retreat. Susan could not find peace and did not feel safe in any environment. However, with the support of dedicated staff who did not give up on her, Susan now has a much higher quality of life. In December of 2017, Susan went out to lunch with some of her DS team. It was a day of celebration for Susan. She was celebrating 1 full year without visiting the ER.

A cut to existing DS services will mean people like Susan would most likely end up in a psychiatric hospital rather than in a supportive home where skills are being taught and people are given the confidence to succeed.

I also see people like “Kevin”. Kevin is now 51 years old and was born in Vietnam in 1966. When Kevin was 5 years old, he was found to have scarring and brain damage that resulted from his head being continuously hit with a blunt object, most likely the butt of a rifle. Kevin has reported that he was forced to witness the death of his family along with the majority of his village from behind the bars of a tiger’s cage. After being arrested for setting multiple fires between 1988 and 1992, Kevin was referred to UCS. He tried outpatient counseling but this did not seem like the right fit for him. Around this time, Kevin was charged with multiple acts of vandalism and placed on ACT 248 under the supervision of Developmental Services. As time went on, and with much staff support, Kevin was able to come off ACT 248 and is now living independently in the community. Today, Kevin no longer needs my staff to help keep him and others safe. It was a very good day when Kevin told us that the only thing he now needs from us is help with his weekly medication set-up.

A cut to DS budgets will mean people like Kevin will be incarcerated rather than given the supports they need to live a successful independent life in their communities. .

Without staffs’ continued supports, “Evan” would be dead. Evan has diabetes and relies heavily on staff to help him with proper nutrition and medication administration. Evan lacks the skills he needs to independently manage his diabetes and live safely so staff help him with grocery shopping, cooking nutritional meals, and ensuring that he is taking his medications and checking his blood sugar. There is no other way for Evan to receive this high level of support while still being able to live in his own apartment.

I could go on and on about the success stories I see. There’s the person who had a stroke years ago and still has mobility issues but was able to ride a bike again thanks to staff support and an adaptive sports program. I see the person who graduated from high school with too much unstructured time and who committed a burglary and assault, but three months later has a paid job working 25 hours a week with staff support. And, I see the young man and woman who do not have appropriate relationship skills and who have made some very unsafe choices. The two are now attending our Relationships and Sexuality classes and learning appropriate dating skills while staff accompany them on supervised dates. For the first time, this couple finally feels that they might be able to have a successful, healthy relationship.

A cut to existing DS budgets will mean these people will get less hours with staff, less time to socialize with friends and peers, less time to be active participants in and of the community, and more time to be isolated and lonely.

As we all know, people with Intellectual Disabilities and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder are living longer, more productive lives. But their care-givers are aging and looking to us more and more for assistance. The majority of people diagnosed with disabilities also suffer from co-occurring mental health disorders which are not easily treated by mental health staff who do not have experience working with those with disabilities. If we cut DS services, not only will the quality of life of those we serve go down, but the eventual cost of caring for

those with disabilities will go up in the form of increased hospitalizations, increased ER visits, increased jail time, and increased admittances to nursing homes.

Individuals with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable populations in Vermont. Without adequate supports, those with disabilities can be financially exploited, physically and emotionally abused, and lack adequate housing options.

Our purpose is to give our clients meaningful, empowered lives where they are afforded the same opportunities as you and I have. Those with disabilities in the state of Vermont deserve a high quality of life just as much as people without disabilities do. I sincerely hope that these opportunities are not taken away from them.