

FRIENDS OF THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

January 2010

The next meeting of Friends of
DD is scheduled for:

Friday, February 26, 2010
1-3 p.m.
CSTS
2140 E. Ellsworth Rd.
Ann Arbor

Serious problems facing Michigan's Community Mental Health system

On January 13, 2010, the CMH Boards in the *Community Mental Health Partnership of Southeastern Michigan* met to hear very bad news about Michigan's funding of mental health agencies. Because of the state's deflationary spiral downward and drastically reduced revenues, all local Community Mental Health agencies can expect unprecedented cuts in funds from the state.

The four CMH boards from Washtenaw, Lenawee, Livingston, and Monroe Counties braced themselves for the beginning of the 2011 state budget negotiations which start in February when the Governor delivers her budget proposals to the state legislature.

The meeting began with a sobering presentation of a state budget overview, finance basics, and the impact on the state's General Fund and Medicaid funding.

Here are the major points from that presentation:

- The current recession at 22 months ("peak to trough") is the longest since the Great Depression.
- Leading indicators point to an imminent national recovery, but Michigan has been in a longer and deeper decline than other states.
- Auto sales may be going up again, but the Big Three market share has dropped from around 70% of the market in the early 1990's to 35% of the market now. (Nationally, fewer people today work in manufacturing jobs than did in 1941.)
- Michigan Vehicle employment dropped 78% from 2000 to 2010. Overall, 1 million jobs have been lost since 2000. The forecast for 2010 is a Michigan unemployment rate of 15.3%.
- In good times, Michigan's personal income relative to the U.S. was 122%. We have fallen to 87% of the national average.
- State revenues in the General Fund for 2010 are equal to the General Fund level of 1965, when ad-

Featuring...

Janet Hawkins on housing options for people with developmental disabilities.

See page two of this issue for Janet's article: *Building a community of their own*

St. Louis Center—Chelsea

justed for inflation. All the rumors about how our taxes keep going up are not exactly true: Michigan taxes as a percent of personal income have declined since 2000.

After significant cuts in spending for the 2010 fiscal year, the state has told all agencies that they must submit program reduction proposals for fiscal year 2011 equal to 20% of their General Fund appropriation. According to one speaker, the Department of Community Health also wants agencies to submit proposals for 20% reductions in Medicaid spending. (This is especially troublesome, because Medicaid pays for most of the specialty services for people with developmental disabilities.)

If the threatened cuts were to be fully implemented, Washtenaw County would have to cut \$1.9 million from its General Fund authorization. Even though Medicaid-enrolled consumers are entitled to needed services, Medicaid funds would be cut by \$8.8 million.

The four-county affiliation that includes Washtenaw County is developing a strategy to make sure that the CMH Partnership of Southeastern Michigan takes a leadership role in determining how the state will respond to this crisis. They have been disappointed in the past by the lack of leadership from their state association (the Michigan Association of CMH Boards) and plan to take more direct action.

Jill Barker

Building a community of their own St. Louis Center—Chelsea

By Janet Hawkins

Many of us remember college as the point in our lives we became independent. There was always something fun to do and learn on campus and in the town that bordered it. We quickly adjusted to rooming with someone other than a sibling and we saw our parents occasionally during brief visits at home. In many ways, Chelsea's St. Louis Center is like that first independent experience.

Part efficiency apartments, part cohousing community, the St. Louis Center has provided a safe and comfortable living environment for its developmentally disabled residents since 1960. St. Louis Center is celebrating its Golden Anniversary in 2010 with the theme of "50 years of Service and Education."

Nestled on a sprawling and picturesque 180 acre parcel bordering Grass Lake in western Washtenaw County, St. Louis Center is one of this area's best kept secrets when it comes to affordable housing for our DD sons and daughters.

"The St. Louis Center serves young boys age six and up and adult men and women of all races and religions," says Fr. Enzo Addari, Administrator for St. Louis Center and a member of the Servants of Charity Congregation of Catholic priests, which runs the facility. "We have 53 adults in residence, eight of which are women, and we envision a separate building just for women someday. Most residents have a roommate, but there are some who do not. We've seen a growth in individuals with autism who require single occupancy."

Several bedrooms form a unit, which connects to common areas for light food prep, dining and lounging. One-on-one activities with staff, group games or just sitting back for a little TV are some of the things that might occupy a resident's time indoors. Outdoors they'll find a basketball court, beautiful grounds to walk in and a picnic area and gazebo to make the most of a sunny summer day.

St. Louis Center also has imported an idea from the Dutch called "Snoezelen" (sniff and doze). In this remarkable room just down the hall from some of the units are sensory activities particularly effective for autistic residents. The first of its kind in Michigan, it utilizes color, light and sound to give residents an opportunity to interact with their surroundings. There also is a beautiful chapel connected to the main building that welcomes the community each morning for an 8:15 a.m. service.

"My son Dean lives in a unit with four or five other young DD men, and has a roommate who shares a bedroom and bathroom with him," says Janet Birk. "There is a large living room and kitchen and dining room, it's always clean and neat. Adjoining his unit is another for seven or eight DD women."

Judy Greenbaum's daughter Susie is one of those residents. Susie lived for many years at Our Lady of Providence in Livonia and moved to St. Louis Center when OLP closed in 2002.



Susie and Dean with parents and staff

"Susie has more independence at St. Louis Center than she would in the community," says Judy. "If she lived in the community she would not be able to go outside without a staff member; at St. Louis she can walk around the place without supervision. And there is always something to do. Susie takes turns going shopping with staff and enjoys eating out when they go. She bowls on Saturdays at Bel-Mark Lanes in Ann Arbor with other St. Louis Center residents and with other DD men and women from around the county. Sometimes groups from Chelsea High School come in and play music and put on performances for the residents.

"All the young men and women know each other, too. They get together for barbecues and other activities in the summer. In the winter they use the gym a lot and have pizza parties with the boys from the other units. It's a nice, social environment, and well supervised."

The St. Louis Center is licensed by the State of Michigan and is CARF accredited, which means it meets strict standards for its day program and residential facili-

ties. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, it receives operating funds from program revenues, which include agency dollars, Social Security and respite service fees. It also relies heavily on fundraising and donations. Patrons such as the Italian American Club of Livonia are staunch supporters. Parents are encouraged to assist with fundraising and some, like Judy and Janet, donate their time.

"This isn't just a job for these people, they have a mission, they care," says Judy. "As a parent I had my concerns and they listened to me, we talked things

through. Listening to parents should always be one of the primary criteria of placement."

"Dean lived with us for 32 years until our health became compromised," says Janet. "I had prayed for a place for Dean to live and when he was accepted here I felt that it was an answer to my prayers."

**To learn more about St. Louis Center visit
www.stlouiscenter.org or talk with Joe Yekulis,
Public Relations Director, at 734-475-8430.**

OPINION

On the MDCH vision for the future of DD services

Lansing is a place I do not pretend to understand. Emanations from the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) about its "vision" for people with developmental disabilities seem especially murky and at times far removed from reality.

On December 16, 2009, Michael Head, a Deputy Director at MDCH, met with the directors of the state's Prepaid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs). PIHPs are regional affiliations of Community Mental Health agencies.

According to the PowerPoint presentation of Mr. Head's talk, Michigan's "vision" for adults with developmental disabilities is that they have the supports and services necessary to be healthy and safe and to successfully:

- contribute to their communities
- earn an income in a non-segregated community setting
- live in their own homes
- have full community inclusion with meaningful participation and membership
- have friendships and relationships
- have fulfilling lives

According to the MDCH, people who do not conform to the state's vision of success (people who live in group homes or are unable to earn an income in non-segregated settings, for example) are now being deprived of a new-found right, "the right to live in the world".

The state's vision dovetails nicely with MDCH proposals to deal with the state's economic crisis to eventually eliminate the bad old "legacy" programs such as day programs, sheltered workshops, group homes, and other programs designed especially for people with the most

severe and complex disabilities. Among the principles underlying the planning process for the future is that consumers need to get used to making do with less than adequate services. The state, however, is more than willing to give them the opportunity to participate in the fight over what to do with the remaining resources.

There are many well-defined rights for people with disabilities, including the right to treatment and services suitable to the person's condition and the right to participate in determining those services through the Person-Centered planning process. State and local mental health agencies have the obligation to assure that rights are protected and services are available to meet the needs of a diverse population. There is nothing wrong or illegal with the existence of programs such as day programs, licensed group homes, and sheltered workshops that provide for the needs of many people with developmental disabilities. And rights do not disappear in a bad economy.

"Living in the world" is not a right, but an often unpleasant reality that we all have to cope with. Everyone, unless one happens to be a hermit, lives in a community. "The" community, however, is an abstract notion that is open to interpretation. Attempting to eliminate an infrastructure of services that many people with developmental disabilities depend on by choice and necessity does nothing to protect rights and very likely will not save money.

There is no getting around the seriousness of Michigan's economic crisis, but placing the burden of the crisis on vulnerable people and their families who have few resources with which to fight back is neither a reasonable nor humane approach to the problem.

Jill Barker

CHS Vocational Services Contract Reinstated

At the December 2009 WCHO Board meeting, the Board voted to rescind an earlier decision to discontinue a contract with CHS, an agency that provides supported employment services to people in Washtenaw County. A misunderstanding regarding

CHS's financial status led to the contract being discontinued. After CHS reported to the Board on their financial stability, the contract was reinstated.

CHS will continue to serve the same client base and provide the same skill building/supported employment services as they have been doing.