

State of Louisiana 2011 Report - by Mary Kay Cowen, Board Member & State Coordinator

As of right now, there will be no major cuts to the three remaining Supports and Services Center's budgets for this next fiscal year. We have been told the state did their major cutting mid-year last year.

While Louisiana had nine centers several years ago, we are now down to three with the fourth one being privatized through a five year Cooperative Endeavor Agreement between Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals/Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities and the private provider (ARC of Acadiana). While we understand four other states have unsuccessfully tried privatizing a public center, we do not believe it has ever been done through this type of agreement. The provider was selected through a Request for Information process and the transition to the new provider is expected to be done by July 1, 2011. The facility's Family Association was involved from the beginning and is supposed to be involved through to its completion.

The SIS/LA Plus has been completed for all residents living at our state-run SSC's. Issues that have arisen in the process of assessing SSC residents for transition into community residential options raised four primary concerns.

- 1) Difficulties in the organizational process resulted in late, or a lack of, notification to residents' families which then produced a lack of representation for many residents by their parents and/or guardians (their primary advocates), violating their civil rights.
- 2) Many residents did not receive appropriate evaluations because the primary assessment tool, the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS), was originally designed to determine funding, not housing placement.
- 3) Many Supports and Services Center residents have mental and emotional disabilities which make them susceptible to "transfer trauma" in which a resident experiences extreme psychological distress from the sudden change in environment and routine.
- 4) As people are being transitioned from the Centers, higher functioning individuals with acute behavioral problems are being admitted. The intermingling of the remaining residents who are mentally and physically vulnerable with the new more aggressive residents created a separate set of problems for the State in terms of safety.

Many families are in shock and do not know what to do. Siblings and other family members unprepared and uneducated about their loved ones are being thrown into the situation by desperate parents who are overwhelmed by what is happening. Keeping our local legislators informed and involved in the process has helped a few families, but the number of families who do not even know where to begin is huge.

During a meeting with members of the Coalition of Families and Friends Associations of Louisiana Supports and Services Centers, OCDD staff said where individuals who have been slated to be transitioned out of the SSC's, where family members have "lost" the appeals process but refuse to move forward with the transitions, the State will eventually take steps to move them out. They stressed the need for family members to work with the Waiver system which will allow homes to be out-fitted with appropriate things like ramps, therapy, etc. There have been problems with miscommunication in the transition process as to when and how modifications are to be made but the State now has the "My Place Grant" to help pay for these modifications before an individual is moved.

Time-lines given to families right now are given only as guidelines because there are issues with private providers being able or unwilling to provide services. At some point, the State will have to force the private providers to make available all services needed by the individuals being transitioned out.

As for the higher functioning/behaviorial problem residents now moving into the SSC's, we are told that "DHH Custody" residents are not necessarily court-ordered individuals. Some just have medical issues and should be evaluated by staff before placed in one of the facility cottages with other residents. Some need stabilization of their medications or

structure to their daily lives. Many can go back into the community once these things are put in place, but that could be anywhere from 3 weeks to a year.

Also, DHH is stepping in when judges want to send someone to a SSC that would be inappropriately placed due to criminal behavior.

On the upside, there are no bills or resolutions pertaining to the SSC's being discussed in this session. The DDC and community advocates seem to be leaving the centers alone as of now.

LOUISIANA By Terry LaFleur

Louisiana's Supports and Services Centers were hit hard by budget 2010 cuts. Because of these cuts, our center, Pinecrest in Pineville, La. lost over 100 positions.

This year we were told we will see any major cuts but some smaller ones can be expected.

Our governor, Bobby Jindal, ordered DHH to cut population in all the state's centers by 20%. This is being done by re evaluating residents to find out if they need all the services the centers provide.

We had never faced anything like this Louisiana, parents always were always given a choice. Confused and scared we asked VOR for help because we had no idea what to do to stop these forced moves. We made alot calls to law firms, asking for help or direction. Most were very nice but too expensive for us.

So far about 60 residents have been evicted from Pinecrest regardless of how long they have lived there or their parents objections.

Parents who did go through the appeal process had little or no success. One family has contacted a "legal services" firm that is working with them right now.

So far, 2 of the evictions have not worked out and both were brought back to Pinecrest, temporarily , until another place can be found. The parents of one of the residents who was brought back are in their late 80's and early 90's. Very hard for both parents and residents.

In April we met with the deputy secretary of DHH and Julia Kenny, Assistant Secretary for OCDD, in Baton Rouge and were told that the balance of the moves were going to happen but were not told how, nor have we seen anyone being taken out.

We were also told that the state does not want to move to quickly to ensure parents choose the right place.

We were told these moves were necessary to save the state money. However at Pinecrest over 60 new residents have been admitted. These are high functioning individuals ,some have had issues with the law and some pose a threat to our existing residents. Our daughter was in a cottage with some of the new residents and my wife and I felt very uneasy and asked she be moved with other ladies less aggressive.

We continue to hold our breath for parents whose loved ones was selected to leave.

One last note: We in Louisiana feel our current governor, Bobby Jindal, has his sights on the White House. REMEMBER THAT NAME-----DO NOT VOTE FOR THIS MAN. He is the reason our centers are changing. He seems to us to be non caring and will cut ANTHING to fulfill his agenda.

Thank you