

MARC SAVE DD Testimony  
June 16, 2004 by MARC RES – Supported Employment

MARC staff are very concerned about the decline in services due to the 2004 budget cuts, and fear even greater declines if there are cuts for 2005. At Responsive Employment Services, RES, the supported employment division of MARC, 92.5 weekly direct staff hours were cut in 2004. There is no way to cut in more staff in 2005 without major changes in service delivery. Staff have provided some typical examples below to illustrate the combined impact of the budget cuts in vocational and residential services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Neither service can now support the other as we were once able to. Our hope is that it will put a face on the crisis for you. These are real people being affected by the budget cuts. Please budget adequately for safe quality services. All names are not real.

***MARC serves a young man who has Cerebral Palsy, Rob. Rob's muscles contract continuously without control in CP. He uses a wheelchair and must be fed with a stomach tube, requiring the utmost staff attention to follow proper procedures. The inability to swallow at will necessitates frequent oral hygiene.***

***Staff must check 22 pressure points on Rob's body multiple times a day to prevent sores from the wheelchair. Rob's clothing and Depends must be changed due to body fluids. It takes two staff to lift Rob in and out of his wheelchair 5 times a day. Staff hours have been cut due to the budget cuts. Therefore the MARC staff want to know:***

***Which Depends change do we skip for Rob? Which teeth brushing does Rob not need? How can we protect Rob's skin from the wheelchair without staff time?***

Many individuals served by MARC are aging and showing signs of Alzheimer's Disease, which requires increasing staff attention as the condition progresses.

***We serve Joan, an older woman with Alzheimer's who is monitored in her shared residence each night with the "Sound Response" electronic monitoring program. When MARC staff brought Joan home from an evening banquet, there was no one home. Joan's roommate was gone. Joan couldn't remember how to notify staff in the building. This inability to learn new tasks is typical of Alzheimer's. After a half-hour of searching, MARC staff located residential staff and were told to leave her in the apartment. MARC staff was worried that she was left alone due to the budget cuts, and fears for the safety of people with declining skills. Are the budget cuts creating unsafe situations? How will we protect individuals like Joan in the future?***

Frequently, when individuals with disabilities get sick at work they cannot return home until their home staff are scheduled to start the evening shift. They really need to go home and rest. All too often people are sent to work sick, because there is no coverage in the home during the day. MARC staff fear this will increase with budget cuts, further endangering others with exposure to contagious diseases.

Many individuals served by MARC require assistance in communication, especially for medical care. *People with very challenging needs require staff assistance to attend urgent care. Diagnosis is delayed if staff are not available to accompany someone to the doctor. More budget cuts will only further reduce the number of staff, diminishing the amount of individual attention people can receive, even during medical care.*

Staff shortages often result in delays of scheduling medical appointments. *Susan, an individual with a disability who is legally blind and deaf, complained of pain to her residential staff for three days. Each day they said they would call the doctor. No one called to make an appointment, as they indicated they could not find staff to take her to the doctor. On the fourth day her elderly mother took her to the doctor where they diagnosed genital ulcers. Who knows how far this serious condition could have progressed had Susan's mother not taken action?*

MARC staff are also concerned about what they see happening to all staff in the DD field:

- *Qualified staff are hard to hire due to the embarrassing low wages in Dane County. When qualified staff are hired, it's hard to keep them.*
- *Financial stress and work overload is negatively affecting the morale and wellbeing of staff.*
- *Children of staff are being shortchanged due to their parent's absence by working two or three jobs.*
- *Staff wages are so low that many staff qualify for food stamps and medical assistance for their children.*
- *When will staff and clients be treated with respect by Dane County?*

MARC staff drafted the following editorial to express their dismay at what they see happening to DD services:

*Dane County government was created to serve and protect the citizens of Dane County. We are disgusted when Dane County grants a lucrative multiyear contract for its employees that includes raises in future years that will directly result in cuts for necessary human services.*

*We used to be proud of Dane County's work with people with disabilities, and support its national reputation. Now, however, it is embarrassing to see what is happening to services for people with DD. We are concerned that Dane County uses limited tax dollars to pay themselves before restoring money they took from people with disabilities. Actions speak louder than words: the County's actions say that County employees are more important than the people they were elected to serve.*

If you have any questions please feel free to contact  
Suzanne Hanson, MARC-RES Center Director 223-9110 ext. 26