

From: Michael E. Arth [mailto:michalearth@earthlink.net]
Sent: Monday, July 19, 2010 8:53 PM
To: FDDC Website Email
Subject: Response to question for candidates

Dear Margaret Hooper,

Thanks for your request for a response to the question, "What do you see as the most important issues facing Floridians with developmental disabilities and their families?"

The term, "developmental disabilities" first appeared in U.S. law with P.L. 91-517, "The Developmental Disabilities Service and Facilities Construction Act of 1970." This law has evolved with a number of amendments that now calls for full community inclusion and self-determination (P.L. 106-402). While well-intentioned, the effect has been mixed, at best. Ironically, prisons have become the new asylums, and, in some cases, former asylums have been turned into prisons.

Since the 1970s, de-institutionalization, which was not followed by sufficient alternatives, has created a number of problems related to those with mental disabilities of various sorts. Nationally, we now have around half a million people with mental disabilities in prison, and another half million living on the streets. (About 1 million live with their families.) Substance abuse issues are also a huge factor, as well as minimum sentencing laws, combined with a penal system that is punitive rather than rehabilitative. As a result, Florida's incarceration rate is 8 times higher than Canada's, and our incarceration rate has gone up over 500% since 1970. This is unacceptable, and the main reason that it continues is because people in the related industries are afraid of losing their jobs if we moved toward more efficient and more compassionate solutions.

I have an informal organization called Villages for the Homeless (www.villagesforthehomeless.org) which is trying to build pedestrian villages to consolidate dozens of homeless agencies in order to provide group homes, specialized care, work opportunities, and community support for those homeless adults with drug problems and/or developmental disabilities. As an urban designer and policy analyst I believe that we need systemic change in the way we help everyone, including those with developmental disabilities. Please go to www.michalearth.org, watch my documentary (New Urban Cowboy) and read my book (Democracy and the Common Wealth: Breaking the Stranglehold of the Special Interests) for in-depth analysis of these issues.

Sincerely,

Michael E. Arth, 2010 gubernatorial candidate