



**FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.**

124 Marriott Drive, Suite 203, Tallahassee, Florida 32301-2981

Phone (850) 488-4180 • Toll-Free (800) 580-7801

Fax (850) 922-6702 • TDD (850) 488-0956/(888) 488-8633

## **Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Services Waiver**

During the past few years, major service reductions, service eliminations and caps on services were approved and changes are currently being phased in across the state. The 2008 session ended with \$43 million in provider cuts that denied individuals with developmental disabilities access to needed services. While there were no significant reductions in 2009, due in part to the Economic Stimulus funding from the federal government, the implementation of the service reductions of the past years is having a substantial impact on individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, including forcing some to consider more restrictive levels of care.

This past year, the Council worked with other stakeholders in the developmental disabilities community to begin building a strategic path toward a shared vision of people with developmental disabilities living self-directed lives. The action areas from the Strategic Path have been used as the foundation for the Council's Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Based Services (DD/HCBS) Waiver legislative priority.

### **Avoid Further Service Cuts**

Findings resulting from 24 focus groups across the state involving individuals with disabilities and their families reported increased stress and dwindling capacity to continue providing supports at home. In essence, if Florida is to maintain a system that relies on in-home supports offered through family households, it will need to fund it adequately. Individuals living at home with their families are not capable of withstanding continued cuts in services, and eventually the state will feel the consequences, fiscal and otherwise, of a failing in-home supports system. Therefore, the Florida Legislature and the Governor should not reduce the funding for community services for people with developmental disabilities.

### **Strengthen Community System Infrastructure**

During the 2009 Legislative session, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities was mandated to begin developing a process for utilizing individual budgeting. The use of flexible individual budgeting, combined with a valid and reliable assessment process that predicts costs, can provide soft caps (spending limits that can be changed if the individuals' situation changes) to contain and predict costs. Such a process will also allow individuals with developmental disabilities who fall at the end of a hard cap or Tier more consideration of their unique needs so they will not be propelled into crisis. A good individual budgeting process can and should replace the Tiers.

## **Work to Eliminate the Waitlist**

Over the past 7-8 years, Florida has done much to expand its service capacity for people with developmental disabilities. Due to population growth and other factors, however, the state still maintains a stubborn waiting list that leaves some individuals waiting for extended periods with little or no services. If nothing more is done to respond to the growing unmet needs within the developmental disabilities service system, these numbers will grow larger due to the expected growth in the state population and inescapable demographics of an aging population that will accelerate demand over the next several years.

Florida needs to make a firm long-term commitment to provide funding each year to meet the unmet service need. If Florida expands its capacity at a steady pace by serving 2,287 individuals with developmental disabilities each year between 2010 to 2020, the current waitlist and much of the anticipated growth could be met by 2020. Florida should also explore other services such as assistive technology to help individuals with developmental disabilities remain in their homes or avoid crisis.

The Council wants to see individuals with developmental disabilities who are on the waitlist receive the services they need, but the process should not cause a crisis to individuals currently receiving services. The waitlist will not be addressed by shifting the funding from the individuals currently receiving services to those on the waitlist.

## **Promote Partnerships Among State and Local Public Agencies**

More attention needs to be devoted to tapping into generic resources available within local communities across the state. In addition, there must be a strong commitment to coordinating public services available to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families from various sources. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities should not be solely responsible for supporting all those in need. More must be done to forge collaborative partnerships within the public sector at both the state and local levels. This can be accomplished by allowing case managers for individuals on the waitlist to conduct needs assessments and connect these individuals with local services, which could then lead to relationships that will encourage capacity building at the local level.

