

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee, December 9, 2009
Re: Governor's proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan & Impact of Rescissions

My name is Lorna Grivois and I reside in Colchester. I am a past member of the DCF State Advisory Committee, past member of the Children's Behavioral Health Advisory Council, past co-chair of the Local System of Care (SEMHSOC), was the Statewide Coordinator for one family organization and now the contracted Support Group Coordinator for NAMI-CT. I am a Community Board Member of SMHA, legislatively appointed member of the Behavioral Health Oversight Council, newly appointed member of the Mental Health Adult Advisory Council and a member of the Quality Improvement Collaborative. But I am here to tell you the story of my son and family. Do you know that when AA Milne wrote the story "Winnie-the-Pooh" he included a character with mental illness in the Hundred Acre Wood? Eeyore the Donkey is described as "dismally gloomy for almost eternity". Well, that is how I would describe my 23 year old son, Stephen, too.

Do you know that in the Hundred Acre Wood, that there were characters there to help such as Pooh and Piglet? Those two helped build and then rebuild Eeyore's home for him. And Christopher Robbins was in charge of putting Eeyore's tail back on, making him whole over and over again.

My family has had teams like that in our lives in the last 12 years: First DCF Voluntary Service and then DMHAS's YAS. DCF Voluntary Services helped keep my son with our family and in his community for as long as we all could. They kept him and us safe. They got him help so he could understand his chronic illnesses (fetal alcohol effects, cerebral palsy, ADD, ODD, dysthymia and for awhile there even homicidal/suicidal tendencies) and helped him become the successful young man that he is.

DMHAS Young Adult Services has provided age appropriate psychiatric and clinical services. Staff members have given both my son and our family the support that is needed when it is needed. They have helped us through difficult times and celebrated with us with every success Stephen has.

These services have helped build and then rebuild our son, our family. They have been and are our life line when things have been dangerously impossible. They have helped make our family whole over and over again. Just like the support teams in the community of Hundred Acre Wood.

What will happen to families like mine if the Governor's proposed suspensions of Voluntary Services intakes, reducing DMHAS Young Adult Services and delays to YAS placements goes into effect? Where will parents turn for help for their significantly mentally ill child? What happens if there is a suicide or homicide due to no supports? Will more families end up in Protective Services? Will children or young adults with mental illness end up in jail due to their behaviors? Will parents have to relinquish custody of their child so the child can receive treatment? How many children will end up in residential treatment and away from their families, their communities? How many of our young adults will become victims of abuse and homelessness? Where will they go? Where will they live? How will they get the care and support they need? How will they become the success they have the right to be?

And a question that I have pondered: If DCF is mandated to protect all children in the state of Connecticut, then would they be going against their own mandate if they are forced to suspend intakes to Voluntary Services?

Please know that these two programs are vital to the success and well-being of 1 in 5 children/young adults in our state since 1 in 5 have a mental health diagnosis.

Thank you for taking the time to listen. I would be happy to answer any questions.