

Kane, Brittany

From: Joe Eckert <jeckert@drcfc.org>
Sent: Wednesday, February 20, 2013 11:38 PM
To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Please Restore Funding to Center for Independent Living!
Attachments: DRCFC General Brochure.pdf; Restore CIL Funding.PDF

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Joe Eckert, I am a resident of Stratford and Assistant to the Director at Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County, one of the State's five Centers for Independent Living. As Assistant to the Director I work with all staff, and therefore have a very clear picture of the effect withdrawing State funding from our Center will have on our consumers.

One of the things that makes our Center unique is our dedication to our consumers and their goals. A perfect example of this is our cross-disability advocacy group called the Greater Bridgeport Disability Advocates. The group welcomes anyone with a disability or an interest in disabilities to meet once per month at Bridgeport City Hall. The meetings have welcomed past guest speakers such as Tricia Coppola-Passariello from the Easter Seals Mobility Center, Cindy Rafael and Carly Duffy from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), and a variety of other relevant speakers. The speaker typically spends approximately half an hour presenting information to the group, followed by fifteen to twenty minutes of answering questions. Afterward the group discusses the topic presented, as well as other business relevant to the cross-disability community. In addition to the monthly meetings, the group has a website, www.gbdact.org, where disability news for the Greater Bridgeport area is posted. The website also has a Message Board where members can discuss any topic or ask questions related to disabilities in a safe, anonymous setting. The Greater Bridgeport Disability Advocates group gives consumers who are often marginalized or overlooked a voice, and teaches them how to become better advocates. Should our State funding be cut, our Center would be unable to afford to continue to host this group. This would be a devastating blow to many people with disabilities who are learning to become active members of their community through their participation in the advocacy group.

Another service our Center provides that is very dear to my heart is the Youth Transition Program. Before becoming Assistant to the Director I was Youth Transition Advocate for our agency, working with kids ages 16 to 21 primarily with intellectual disabilities. The focus of the program is to empower youth with disabilities to work towards becoming independent adults by teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills. The youth develop vocational soft-skills such as leadership, teamwork and responsibility, as well as Independent Living skills such as financial planning, emergency preparedness and other important daily living skills that will help them to live independently within the community. If our Center were to lose State funding, the Youth Transition Program is very likely to be cut as it is currently only funded for twelve hours a week and could not suffer a cut in funding. Without the assistance the Youth Transition Program provides to our consumers, they will be left to develop these skills on their own. While there are other vocational programs available to people with disabilities, many are very regimented and impersonal,

while our Center provides an Independent Living Plan unique to each individual and works to provide individualized services to assist our consumers in meeting their personal goals.

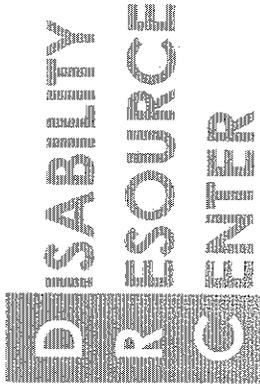
In this financial climate cuts are to be expected, but why do we bear the full brunt of the cuts? Completely cutting State funding to Independent Living Centers will negatively impact any person in the State with a disability in need of services. The State funding to the Centers for Independent Living makes such a huge impact in the Centers it would be devastating to have this funding disappear: Please restore State funding to Independent Living Centers!

Sincerely,
Joe Eckert
Assistant to the Director
Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County
80 Ferry Blvd., Suite 210, Stratford, CT 06615 jeckert@drcfc.org

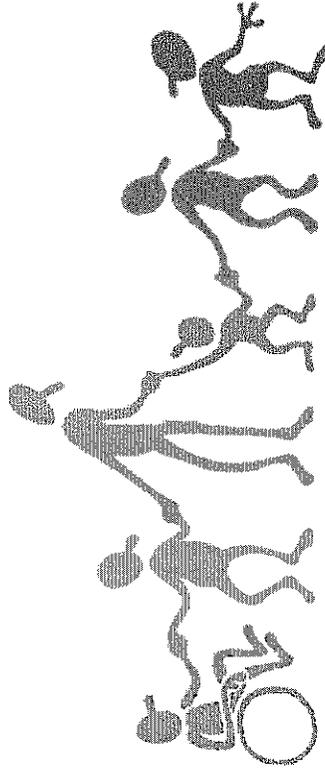
Attachments: 2

Accomplishments

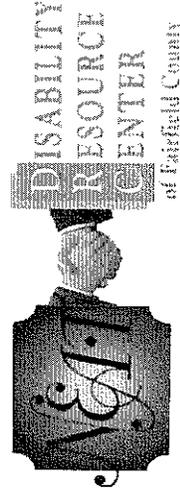
- Provided individual services to 288 consumers over the last reporting year and information and referral services to 1828 people, in addition to 2860 website hits.
- With the Greater Bridgeport Disability Advocates Group, successfully advocated for the reestablishment of the Commission for People with Disabilities to the City of Bridgeport.
- Successfully transitioned 12 people from nursing homes into the community in 2012 through The Money Follows the Person program (MFP).



of Fairfield County, Inc.



Assisting people with disabilities reach their goals of community inclusion through the empowerment based services of information and referral, peer support, advocacy, employment services, and more.



Disability
Resource
Center
of Fairfield County, Inc.
80 Ferry Blvd., Suite 210
Stratford, CT 06615
<http://www.drctc.org>
info@drctc.org

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The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County, or DRCFC, is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving individuals with disabilities in the Fairfield County communities of Stratford, Bridgeport, Darien, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Trumbull, Weston, Westport and Wilton.

DRCFC is one of the state's five Centers for Independent Living, or CILs, and has operated since 1986 when the Center separated from Goodwill Industries of Western Connecticut. In 1995, the Center moved to its present location at 80 Ferry Boulevard, Stratford, where it has served the disabled community ever since.

Individual Services

Information & Referral: DRCFC can assist individuals in identifying and accessing services and supports, benefits, assistive technology, housing, personal assistance services, and other resources.

Independent Living Skills Training: DRCFC provides training in activities of daily living and the skills necessary for integration and full participation in the community for people with disabilities.

Peer Support: DRCFC's peer counselors provide support to people with disabilities by drawing on their own life experience with disability.

Advocacy: DRCFC assists consumers in making their voice heard, and advocates for supports and services needed for consumers to maximize their own independence.

Youth Transition Program: The Youth Transition Program serves Stratford consumers ages 16 to 21 with any disability they feel significantly impairs them from full inclusion within the community.

New England Assistive Technology (NEAT): The New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) satellite office at DRCFC accepts donations of used durable medical equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes and more. Donations are refurbished, then are sold to consumers at a discounted price.

Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC): The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) helps people of all ages, incomes and disabilities to get information on the full range of long-term support options.

Ticket to Work Program: The Ticket to Work Program is a federal program through the Social Security Administration which assists consumers receiving cash benefits through SSI/SSDI in returning to work and gaining the skills they need to be successful.

Money Follows the Person (MFP): The Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program provides consumers in nursing homes with assistance finding the services and supports they need to live independently within the community.

Community Services

Disability Awareness: DRCFC provides specialized disability awareness and sensitivity programs to the public, schools, etc.

Systems Advocacy: DRCFC and its members work to effect change in society through advocacy for laws and change that removes barriers to people with disabilities.

Technical Assistance, Training & Resourcing: DRCFC assists government and the private sector with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), accessibility, and technical assistance.

**The Governor's Budget eliminates all state funding (\$528,680)
for CT's Independent Living Centers**

PLEASE Restore the Centers' funding

Independent Living Centers...

- provide services to 1100 people with ALL types of physical, cognitive & mental health disabilities, of ALL ages & to ALL areas of the state, annually
- provide a single point of entry into disability services, transition from nursing homes, skill development in employment, housing, education & transportation, in addition to our core services of peer counseling, independent living skills, advocacy and information & referral
- are staffed by people with disabilities
- educate & empower people with disabilities to achieve their goals of self-sufficiency & autonomy, which results in state SAVINGS through reduced reliance on state or federal entitlement programs

If Independent Living Centers are eliminated from the state budget...

- hundreds of people with disabilities will be unable to access services from the centers
- centers will lose the necessary funding that subsidizes cost-saving programs - most notably Money Follows the Person, which saved approximately \$4.4M last year
- many people with disabilities will lose their jobs at the centers
- one or more centers may be forced out of business leaving areas of the state without cost-effective independent living services

 **Save Independent Living Centers**

 **Save State Funds**

CONNECTICUT'S INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

Greater New Haven:

Center for Disability Rights (CDR)
764 A Campbell Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
203-934-7077 (V); fax 203-934-7078; 203-934-7079 (TDD)
info@cdr-ct.org
Marc Anthony Gallucci, Executive Director (marcanthony@cdr-ct.org)

Eastern CT:

Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC)
19 Ohio Avenue
Norwich, CT 06360
860-823-1898 (V); fax 860-886-2316
hdunn@dnec.org
Cathy Ferry, Executive Director (ferrycathy@yahoo.com)

Southwestern CT/Fairfield County:

Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County (DRCFC)
80 Ferry Boulevard, Suite 210
Stratford, CT 06615
203-378-6977 (V); fax 203-375-2748; 203-378-3248 (TDD)
info@drcfc.org
Anthony LaCava, Jr., Executive Director (tlacava@drcfc.org)

Northwestern CT:

Independence Northwest (IN)
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Naugatuck, CT 06770
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info@independencenorthwest.org
Eileen Healy, Executive Director (eileen.healy@independencenorthwest.org)

Greater Hartford/North Central CT:

Independence Unlimited (IU)
151 New Park Avenue, Suite D
Hartford, CT 06106
860-523-5021 (V); TDD & fax 860-523-5603
contactus@independenceunlimited.org
Candace Low, Executive Director (clow@independenceunlimited.org)