Kane, Brittany

From: Leslie Dickerson <ldickerson1906@optonline.net>
Sent: Wednesday, February 20, 2013 1:55 PM
To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Restore CIL Fundings
Attachments: DRCFC General Brochure (1).txt; Restore CIL Funding.txt

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Dear Members of Appropriation Committee,

My name is Leslie Dickerson and I am an independent Living Advocate at Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County.

In 2007, I was diagnosed with an untreatable and incurable neurological/brain disorder which did not give me much hope for any future. In 2008, I was given the option to be admitted to an extended care facility for permanent residency or return home with inadequate care. I chose the latter. The next day, my condition worsened and I called my Pastor in Stratford, CT to let her know that I was not going to be o.k. alone. She took me in that day with the help of my daughters. I had not been able to eat or drink for sometime. Upon arrival to live with Pastor Fran so that we could pray our way through this, I began to make progress. Pastor Fran made my girls bring my car to Stratford, stating that I WOULD drive again. My daughters had the daunting responsibility of clearing my apartment and putting in storage. I was going to fight this with my faith, as medicine has failed me. No one knows how to treat what I have, but I can tell you that working and helping others with disabilities has been a major key to my ability to stay independent.

After about a month and a half I was strong enough to drive and think about part time work. I was not ready to give up being a productive member of society. I happened to call the Disability Resource Center and talked with Glenn Claflin, who saw me promptly. My emphasis should be on the word promptly, because I have not had that type of instant service prior to this time. To Glenn's credit, he did not see me as a victim, but rather a colleague. Prior to coming to Stratford, I was a Peer Engagement Specialist with Mental Health Association of Connecticut in Waterbury.

I asked to volunteer one day to answer phones, as their receptionist was out sick. I worked for three hours answering phones and Tony LaCava, our Executive Director, talked with me for sometime after that. His receptionist was leaving, thus I could take that position. I was too sick to do anything but that, but was grateful for the opportunity to work part time.

Gradually, my strength has come (it varies at different times) and I took the position as Independent Living Advocate which is where my desire to be was. While I served the mentally ill at MHAC, this gave me the same opportunity, but also including the physically disabled. I have worked part time since 2008. My diagnosis was changed, but it still is just as bad, but I believe my courage to live comes by serving others who need like services, and faith in my Lord. I have had many consumers that I have been able to help find their own purpose and their own skills to live a productive and independent life.

DRC is an organization who not only serves both the mentally and physically disabled, but we do it with compassion and empathy. We are 90% disabled ourselves and as the old saying goes "it takes one to know one," certainly comes into play as we serve the disabled population. The desire to live independently is in the majority of disabled people, yet resources are gradually being taken from them that will discourage them from doing so. We answer our own phones, return calls in a timely manner, and work outside of our job description because we so believe in what we are doing.

If we were not here in the Fairfield County, I believe many needs of the disabled will go unmet and their lives compounded by inaccessible services or someone to talk to when they are struggling with their own limitations.

I strongly ask that you consider refunding the CILs statewide.

Sincerely,

Leslie Dickerson
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