

My fellow People of Connecticut,

My name is Jason Longo and I would to thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Today I stand before you a Man, a Father, a Brother, a Son and a Friend.

Most importantly, today I stand before you a strong advocate and resounding voice for those who are unable to speak for themselves.

Today I stand before you as the voice of every single person in CT with special needs.

Individuals who are receiving services from non profit agencies such as CRI, that depend on state funding to maintain the highest quality of staffing available.

Today, I ask you to open your minds as well as your hearts and look at the budget from another side.

The side that has a first and last name, as well as thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams.

The side that deserves the same opportunities as the rest of the population;

Our fellow CT citizens with special needs.

Every Individual, who is a citizen of the State of CT, deserves the highest quality of services available. Why then, have the nonprofit agencies that provide these high quality services, been suffering due to the lack of appropriate and adequate funding?

The nonprofit and private sector is sure to enter a state of atrophy if something is not done NOW.

The funds that fuel the organism which feeds, nourishes and serves our population are diminishing year to year.

I have personally been in the Human Services field for over twenty years. Within that time, I have seen many decisions made regarding the services and funding for Individuals with special needs.

Some of these decisions have had a positive impact and have made me proud to live in CT and some of your decisions have had a very negative impact and have made many CT citizens question the integrity, personal interest and moral fiber of the powers that be in our great state of CT.

For the last fifteen years, I have had the honor of serving Individuals with special needs through my employment at Community Residences Incorporated. CRI is a "not so small" nonprofit agency located in Southington Connecticut.

Throughout my time with CRI, I have had the distinct benefit of working in several capacities of the agency. Some of the positions I have held in CRI have included; Direct Care Residential Instructor, Physical and Psychological Management Training Instructor, Mentor, Assistant Manager, and currently, my position as Program Manager Mentor.

Over the last twenty plus years, I have seen what works and I have also seen what does not work. By no means do I claim to have all of the answers, but after twenty years of experience in every aspect of this field, I believe that I do have SOME of the answers.

I have been asked on several occasions,

“What does it take to provide the Individuals you serve with the highest quality of life?”

My answer to that question is quite fundamental and organic. In order to provide the highest quality services, we must be able to HIRE and MAINTAIN the highest quality staffing and highest quality employees.

A wise man once said,

“Greatness is easy to achieve, but difficult to maintain”.

I think this absolutely applies when you take an objective look at the very apparent cycle that continues on a year to year basis; regarding the difficulty nonprofits have retaining quality staff.

Look around. Nonprofit agencies are typically the ones that recruit, hire and train the staff necessary to provide services for the individuals that are served in CT, yet ironically, over the last several years, nonprofits have not seen anything in the COLA.

Each year, the cost of living increases but our pay remains the same.

The direct translation is that essentially we are getting paid less each year. How can we expect to retain quality staff, if we can't afford to compensate them fairly for the high quality of services that they provide?

It is almost inevitable that the Staff who are recruited and trained by nonprofits, reach a point where they cannot support their own quality of life or even survive on a basic level, in some cases.

So the cycle continues. Year after year, agencies like ours recruit, hire and train quality staff. Staff that will most likely be saying goodbye in six months to a year, once they receive all of their trainings and realize they deserve more money for the work they are doing and the services they are providing.

In most cases, quality staff will leave our agency to work for the State of CT, or they will leave CT entirely and move to another state, where they will receive twice the pay for the same work. This is not a coincidence. This is a predictable product of the machine that continues year to year. A stick must be stuck in the spokes of this machine.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with the following thought;

The conscientious farmer does not just plant a seed and walk away. The conscientious farmer cares enough to nourish it.

If you are truly concerned about providing the highest quality of services for the people we serve in CT with special needs, you must nourish the roots of the system...and continue to provide nourishment.

With all due respect, let me make this clear;

We are NOT asking to be praised or rewarded for the work we do.

Knowing that we make a positive difference in the lives of the Individuals we serve, IS our "reward".

I have had the pleasure and honor of being thanked directly by the Individuals in the programs that I oversee. They are grateful that our nonprofit has helped them to not only survive, but thrive and find the quality of life that they would not have known if it was not for non profit agencies like Community Residence Incorporated. This in itself is our "reward".

All we are asking for is the funding and support that it takes to continue making this difference.

The question now is;

Will you nourish the seeds you have planted or will you just walk away?

Thank you for your time and attention and your anticipated assistance.

Jason Longo

Program Manager Mentor

Community Residences Incorporated

(203) 704-7345

Paul M. Rosin
Executive Director
Community Residences Inc.
732 West Street, Southington, Ct
(860) 621-7600 ext. 111

