

Challenges for Developmental Disability Services in New Hampshire

New Hampshire is nationally recognized for providing innovative, cost-effective, person-centered services for persons with Developmental Disabilities (DD) through a public/private partnership network of non-profit area agencies, including Gateways Community Services, which delivers state and federally funded DD services in greater Nashua.

The number of people served by the area agency system has grown to more than 10,000. These citizens and their families are your constituents and neighbors. Additional citizens need DD services every year. This increase is caused by general population growth, greater survival of infants with severe disabilities, increased incidence of certain disabilities such as autism, and the dramatic increase in life expectancy for persons with DD. Meanwhile, funding has not even kept up with inflation.

Beginning in the 1990s, there was not enough money in the budget of the Bureau of Health and Human Services to provide services for qualified adults. Unlike the Early Invention and the educational systems, which were mandated to deliver services, the adult system funds had to be supported by the state legislature. Those who qualified were forced to wait until funds could be appropriated for services. Each legislative session made an attempt to come up with funds, but the Wait List kept growing.

On September 30, 2006, there were 213 people on the Wait List with an anticipated wait time of 190 days. Over the next two years, the list was expected to double as young adults with severe developmental disabilities or acquired brain disorders transitioned from the public schools. Middle aged and older adults, with complex medical needs and behaviors, were also waiting for services.

The legislature gave the DD system significant resources this past budget period to address the Wait List. However, that three-year work plan, although well underway, is not finished. There are still people waiting, with more coming on each year. Far too many individuals with certified needs must wait for funded services when they come out of school or when elderly parents can no longer care for their disabled adult children – parents who have voluntarily provided care for years without state funding. Forced to wait, vulnerable individuals are at risk of injury, neglect, or costly regression in life skills developed at taxpayer expense through years of special education. These are citizens we should be supporting to become contributing members of our society. We need all legislators to continue to fully fund the Wait List for June 2010.

As of September 30, 2008, statewide, the number of people of the DD Wait List was 158 and the average wait time was 127 days. If those on the ABD Waitlist were added, the total number on the Wait List would be 173.

BDS estimates that the total number of individuals needing services this biennium will be 648; 69 of these individuals reside in greater Nashua.

We must meet the needs of those currently being served, as well as those who are waiting for services. We must continue to help those with disabilities get the services they need.

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