



BHDSSC

Family Support Newsletter

Special Edition

Issue 33

March 2003

BHDSSC's Budget - Our Concerns

by **Brian Collins Executive Director**



As part of the Governor's budget, the developmental service system faces a statewide cut of \$3.6 million effective July 1, 2003, with an additional \$600,000 cut effective July 1, 2004. These cuts will actually equal twice that amount when matched with federal Medicaid money.

The legislative process, thus far, is nearing its midway point and it is difficult to predict how the Governor's proposed budget will be treated by the legislature. Clearly, the legislators understand that these cuts will require a decrease in services to individuals in our system. It is also clear that they understand that the \$3 million increase to the wait list that the Governor cited in his budget proposal is not really an increase to our system at all.

Over the past eight years, we have tried to manage the multiple needs of our clients without asking for help at the legislative level. We are no longer able to afford that strategy. Our wait list in Strafford County is now at its highest level. As we project over the next two years and consider those students who are turning 21 years old and will need some degree of support, we are sure that we cannot provide any services based on current resources. Even at level funding, inflationary costs, such as health insurance, gasoline prices, heating fuel, etc., would result in the reduction or elimination of services altogether. You, as a family member, no longer have the luxury of believing that these things will not affect your son, daughter, sister, or brother.

This newsletter is dedicated to assisting you to learn more about what is happening with current legislation and to help you *GET INVOLVED*, *whether* you are caring for one or one hundred people, none of us can look the other way. Your help is needed.

The Legislature, The Governor, The Budget

by **Chuck Raymond**

(chuck.raymond@attbi.com)

This could be a memorable year, one in which a new governor is attempting to run the Government like a business venture, and he will be severely challenged by many, including Republican Party members in the Legislature. This undertow could work to our advantage, as there are several key Republican members who will fight for what we in the Developmental Disabilities group require to keep our supports going, to reduce the wait list, and to maintain operations within the Family Support Unit. One of our Senators is Dick Green from Rochester and he is the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee. We would like to thank Senator Green for his independent thinking as he called the governor's budget "a disaster to Human Services". We within Strafford County must write the Senator and thank him for his support. He is laying himself open to chastisement from other members of the Republican Party. If we give him our support and thanks, perhaps he will continue his help.

We have been fighters for our children, now we must carry this fight to Concord with the same approach and energy. We must write

(Continued on page 4)

My Perspective

by Pete Eldredge (phixr@concentric.net)

I am the parent of a 30-year-old daughter. Some of you may know Samantha. She has been receiving services for awhile now through BHDSSC.

As some of you may not be aware of, the new state budget has had hundreds of millions of dollars cut from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DHHS is the funding source for BHDSSC and all the other regions around the state that provide services to our family members with developmental disabilities.

Before the Laconia State School closed in the late 80's if your child with a developmental disability received services they were in Laconia. The only "community" services were where a few parents got together and started their own "school". This situation was the best we had but was not what our children needed. Laconia was a warehouse that was understaffed, overcrowded, dirty, smelly and NOT a school.... No one ever learned anything there of any value. Families got together and filed a class action lawsuit to close it down and provide services in the community. This is what we now have. The people who had resided in Laconia received funding for services as they were released into their community. Folks who were not at Laconia went on a waiting list for services. The waiting list still exists today.

If the budget passes through the NH House and Senate as it was presented by the governor many services will be cut.

Our children are somewhat "protected" while they are in school because effective special education (SE) laws are in place. When they leave school it's a whole new "ball game". Your family member with a developmental disability is now on a wait list and under the present system they most likely will wait for services for years unless something happens (both parents die, they are so violent that they are a danger to others living in the home, etc.) that precludes them from staying at home.

Before Samantha got her services I had to leave the work force for several years because I had to be with her. I fought for years to get her services. I wrote letters to the (then) governor, commissioner of DHHS, my local legislators, congressmen and senators. Finally she got off the wait list and I was able to go back to work.

The reason I am writing this letter is to tell you that I want my daughter's services to continue. I want your family member's services to continue and I want all the people on the wait list to start getting services. If it comes to one or the other I am going to fight for Samantha's services. If you want to join with me I will be glad for the help.... Two heads are better than one. But, we need more than two heads; we need everyone's.

If the budget passes through the NH house and senate as it was presented by the governor many services will be cut.

Within this newsletter you will find a letter from Brian Collins, Executive Director of BHDSSC. He has outlined what has happened and what we need to do to turn things around. We need people who will call their legislators, invite them to meet your family member with a developmental disability . Tell them your story and what will happen if services are cut.

We need everyone's help; this is not a "one man show"! Please read everything in this package and do your part. This is not something that we can afford to put off. If my daughter loses her residential services for example, what will become of her? I'm in my mid-sixties and can't take care of her any more. What will become of your child if (s)he loses all or part of their services? If services are cut this year will they be cut further next year? Do you want to take the chance?

Think about what you are now receiving from DSSC. Respite, residential, vocational/day services, recreation, family support, case management, the annual family support conference and camperships just to name a few. This is serious business and we need to take serious action. To give you an idea as to how serious this threat is to our children I would advise everyone to start making a list of the services your family member receives and decide which ones you would be willing to do away with. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me, your case manager or the family support staff. This is no time to sit back and "let George do it". George is busy looking out for his child's needs.

In 2001, New Hampshire was the sixth richest state based on per capita income.

We must do all we can to prevent it from becoming among the poorest in spirit.

How to talk with your Legislators as a Grassroots Lobbyist

Whatever the issue, whatever your interest, to effectively influence decisions by your Legislature, you need to make your voice heard as a grassroots lobbyist. Here are some tips on working with your legislators:

- 1 Be informed.** Effective grassroots lobbyists are well-informed. Know your legislators and their views; know the issue and the proposed legislation, including, if possible, the bill's legislative number.
- 2 Be honest.** Credibility is invaluable. When you talk with legislators, tell them the truth - every time. If you do not know the answer to a question, just say "I'll find out" - then find the answer and get back to them.
- 3 Be persuasive.** All politics are local. Don't talk in generalities. Talk about the impact of the issue on your child and on your life. Support your argument with data and rationale. Give examples from your own experience. Make your concern come alive by showing the impact on real people.
- 4 Be courteous.** Basic human relations are key to lobbying. Don't threaten, whine, beg or bark. A calm, reasoned approach with documentation will accomplish more than an emotional outburst.
- 5 Be informative.** Become a dependable source of information for your legislators. Don't wait for some hot issue to provoke action – communicate regularly.
- 6 Be supportive.** The best way to build a relationship with a legislator is through an election campaign. If you have legislators you like, support them with money and campaign assistance.
- 7 Be helpful.** Legislators need to get their message out and hear what the voters are saying. Help them out by inviting them to your school, association meeting, or community event.

Other things to keep in mind:

Being a legislator in New Hampshire is hard work at very little pay. It requires extensive travel and long times away from home and family. Be affirming - let them know their work is appreciated. Even if they disagree on the issue you are presenting, there may be a time in the future when you will influence them, so don't be adversarial. Make your points about issues, not individuals. Always be brief and to the point.

Being a legislator in
New Hampshire is
hard work at very
little pay.

Keeping in touch with your Legislators

There are several ways to contact your representatives, by phone, by letter, in person, and by email. All are effective in and of themselves, and each elected official may have their own preferred way of hearing from their constituents. A common way is by phone followed up by either an email or letter.

While it is true that they do work for us (as it is we who voted them in), be mindful of not interrupting family times (dinner, etc.) and always be respectful. Ask if it is a good time to speak; don't just assume it is because it's good for you. If it's not a good time, respect that, and ask when a better time would be.

If you've spoken with them before, remind them of what you discussed in the past. It will help you to develop a relationship with your legislator. It has happened that after a few calls, the relationship becomes two-way, in that the legislator may call you about a bill or issue that he or she feels you may be knowledgeable about to help them formulate an opinion as to its value.

Always feel free to tell your legislator you will get additional information for them and if you do not know the answer to a question -- tell them you will get back to them about that. Then remember to follow through.

As part of this Family Support Special Edition Newsletter, we have enclosed a sheet that contains the names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of all the Strafford County elected legislative delegation that are published on the State of New Hampshire website. We hope you will keep it as a resource to advocate for legislation that will benefit individuals with developmental disabilities.



BHDSSC

Behavioral Health and Developmental
Services of Strafford County, Inc.
113 Crosby Road - Suite 1
Dover, NH 03820

Phone:603-749-4015

Fax:603-743-3244

Email: hphilbrick@bhdssc.org

It's about good legislation.

www.dssc9.org

Current Legislative Bills of Note

House Bill 1 - the NH 2004-2005 Developmental Services Budget. Read it at:
http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2003/HB1_Introduced.pdf#050113 (slow loading)

Senate Bill 216 - An Act to fund the Developmental Services Waiting List (Senate Version). Read it at:
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2003/sb0216.html>

House Bill 421 - An act to fund the Developmental Services Waiting List (House version) Read it at:
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/legislation/2003/hb0421.html>

(Continued from page 1)

letters, make phone calls and “deck the halls” of Concord with our presence. Numbers count in this fight, we also sign in as opposed or in favor of the particular bill we’re there for that day. We do not leave until the hearing is over. If you are reading this newsletter it is your fight and it’s far from over, or at this point lost.

Pete Eldredge has also written a letter for this newsletter, it contains all the information you require to carry on an effective campaign against the budget. Please read it carefully and get involved. Hugh Philbrick has also written an article dealing with current legislation and what we need to do to support our cause. Updates will be published, if you want updates please contact Hugh or I and we’ll provide it.

If you want to go to Concord but need a ride, call us; we’ll set something up. Make no mistake this is a serious time and we must fight with all we have for a budget without cuts, and possibly an increase.

Contact me with any questions, my phone number is 743-3909, and email: chuck.raymond@attbi.com.
