

COMMUNITY NOW!

... promoting inclusive communities for all people marginalized because of a disability

Community Now! leadership meets with DADS leadership

Following the January 18th press conference, members of Community Now! and ADAPT met with Chris Traylor, Commissioner of DADS; Chris Adams, Assistant Commissioner on State Supported Living Centers; and Jon Weizenbaum, Deputy Commissioner with DADS. The meeting was held on February 10th to address information found in the Department of Justice (DOJ) Monitoring Team Reports and the Medicaid budget for long-term care supports and services.

During the meeting on February 10th many issues were discussed. Discussion topics primarily focused on...

- the on-going reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation of SSLC residents
- access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and services
- the community relocation process
- increased costs associated with a declining number of residents served in 13 institutions (SSLCs in Texas)
- the growing number of people and time spent waiting on an “interest” list for long-term care community-based services

Clarification on the role of transition specialists was also reviewed. Through a grant provided to DADS by the federal government, transition specialists will work with SSLC staff, residents, family members and legally authorized representatives (LARs) during community relocation. They will assist during the community relocation planning process and identify supports and services needed for transition. They will also work with local authorities (local MR centers) and community-based service providers to obtain needed services.

When asked about the possibility of a long range plan to rebalance long-term care services for Texans who have a disability, Commissioner Traylor confirmed a plan has not been developed at this time. When asked if one would be submitted, he would not commit to the development



of such a plan. This was particularly alarming, especially when Health and Human Services Commissioner, Tom Suehs, has projected a \$15 BILLION dollar deficit in the Medicaid program!

During the 82nd Legislative session, the Texas Legislature adopted a state budget that preserved the expensive system of institutions, despite the declining resident population, while simultaneously cutting cost-effective community-based services for persons who have a disability and a desire to live in the community. We can't let this happen again.

SSLC admissions continue to decline. In 2010 there were 160 admissions. In 2011, there were 128. Of the 128 admissions in 2011, 48 of those were forensic admissions. At the end of January 2012, there were a total of 3912 residents in the SSLCs. As the number of SSLC residents decrease, costs will increase. The time to develop a long range plan is now! Consolidation and closure must be considered a viable option.

While we appreciate the meeting with DADS leaders, Community Now! is outraged at the business as usual attitude and response to our concerns. The abuse, neglect and exploitation must end! Systems of accountability and fiscal responsibility must be in place, and access to community-based services must be provided in a timely manner. Individuals, regardless of where they live, must be safe and treated with dignity and respect!

Until this happens, Community Now! will focus time, energy, and resources on the need for long-term care systems reform that includes consolidation and closure of the SSLCs. We will also follow up with Governor Perry and Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, as they have not responded to numerous requests to meet with Community Now!

As we approach the 83rd Legislative session, we ask that you get involved. Like us on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/communitynowfreedom> and/or join the Community Now! Yahoo group http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Community_Now/ to stay current on issues and Community Now! activities. There will be many opportunities to voice your opinion. DADS is currently seeking stakeholder input regarding the Legislative Appropriation Request (LAR) for FY 2014-2015 through March 16th. This is an opportunity you don't want to miss. For more information, visit the DADS webpage <http://www.dads.state.tx.us/lar/>. Together we can make a difference!

