

17 December 2013

TO: Members of the MH/DS Redesign Fiscal Viability Study Committee

From: Sen. David Johnson

A constituent asked me to share her thoughts on work activity with committee members. Thank you for your consideration.

I am writing a letter regarding the WAC (work Activity Center) and community employment for many people do not realize these activities provide so much for their self-esteem and self-worth. I worked at an ICF/ MR facility where the staff followed individualized programs to help the clients learn to be more independent and helping them to integrate into society.

I also worked thirteen (13) years on a mental health unit where we would admit many people with different levels of mental health issues. The majority of the "special needs" clients came from either residential or care facilities and were and admitted for either behavioral problems or med changes. The clients admitted were employed either at a WAC or community based, and were often focused on getting back to work or making sure their job would be there when they were discharged. Work was an incentive to these clients, and they took pride in the fact they made their own money and were able to buy something they wanted or needed. The main reason of admittance would be med changes because they or their care managers could no longer afford or find the money available to pay for their medications.

"Special needs" clients vary in their level or degree of disabilities, but all are unique individuals. Some facilities care for clients that range from mildly mentally and or physically disabled to the profoundly disabled. Some clients are able to live in supervised apartments, and some return home with family. The real need for the "Special needs" people is to make their lives better allowing them to do as much for themselves as they can. Each level of care may require a different number of staff and time but being productive is something that gives the client some independence and socialization no matter how limited their disability. Many of these "special people" are set up to fail which is a real shame. Either they are mainstreamed into society without any support or placed in an institutionalized facility/community.

WAC needs to be a core service in the mental health design and as is so very important in the lives of people with special needs. WAC continues to provide a life line to people with special needs in

society and those who continue to support their independence. It is difficult and rough for these special persons to make it within the “norms” of society, but working outside of the care facility or home certainly gives them the opportunity to reach their “unlimited potential”.

An example of a WAC (Work Activity Center) : Palo Alto: Horizons- where they sort cans and run a thrift store

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