

Kim Higgins

Comments on Staff Report

The DADs report states that DADs has admittedly done a poor job of administering services to our disabled and elderly. Because of this, the report cites a shift of duties to the Health and Human Services Commission. What is HHSC's record? After reading this report, I presume that the answer to a government agency not doing its job is to shift those duties to another questionably competent branch.

Decentralization of services began in the late '80s with a push for "least restrictive environment." Take a walk downtown in any of our major cities and you'll see the intellectually and developmentally disabled and our mentally ill -- dirty, disheveled and talking to themselves. But their environment is certainly not restrictive. My loved one, Edwin (Eddie) Rogers lost his home at the Ft. Worth State School (which is what the State Supported Living Centers were once called). This was as a result of the Lez Class Action Lawsuit. Eddie was placed in multiple community placements in Houston where I had relocated. He repeatedly ran away and eventually ended up pumped up on Thorazine in Houston's Neuropsychiatric Center.

My lovely, nonverbal, severely and profoundly developmentally disabled son was in crisis due to "do-gooders" who thought they knew what was best for him. My heart breaks when I remember taking my son to a movie, an activity we had always enjoyed. He was so drugged that he slid down the wall and wet himself. He had no control over his physicality thanks to those determined that they knew what was best for him. After bouncing out of several community placements, Eddie eventually received a placement at the Richmond State Supported Living Center (SSLC). He has been there since 1993. I find it notable that he has never once run away.

For my loved one the Richmond SSLC IS the least restrictive environment. It is a safe and protected place where he can ride his bike to his heart's content. He cannot do this in the community. He can at the Richmond SSLC. Eddie walks slowly with a limping gait due to cerebral palsy, but on his bike -- he has wings! He cannot even enjoy this simple unsupervised pleasure in a community setting. Tell me which circumstance is "least restrictive."

In my experience, community placements are also not adequate for residents that are medically compromised. His community placements were not adequately staffed to take my son to medical appointments. I was called upon to assist in this capacity repeatedly and missed work frequently as a result. I love my son and am always happy to assist him. However, I have two other children and as a single mother this lack of adequate staffing was a hardship relative to my work schedule. Eddie is still medically compromised. He has been hospitalized for pneumonia twice in the last 14 months. When released from the hospital he is always watched at the SSLC infirmary before being released back to the dorm. I doubt if such a medically supervised protocol exists in the community.

Recommendations

If DADs cannot reasonably monitor infractions in 13 SSLCs – how can our fragile disabled population be assured adequate care with proper monitoring with the population spread across the great State of Texas? Texas is not broke. We have a duty to care for our own and not play a shell game with the welfare of our disabled -- moving responsibility and accountability between government agencies. Our dependent and disabled citizens count on us for support.

We must not let them down. Do not close our State Supported Living Centers. Do not cut funding for these vitally important facilities. We are "Texas Strong". We stand proud. We do not derive stature from standing on the backs of our most disabled and fragile citizens. Intellectual and developmentally disabled citizens are individuals. Assistance to these individuals is not a "one size fits all" prospect. We must consider each person's "least restrictive" environment and special needs to ensure quality of life. It is our duty and should be our mission.