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Community

Care programs face money woes

By Janis Joseph  
Emerald Reporter

Low wages and poor benefits may force many Eugene area residential care programs to close by next year, said representatives of The Association for Retarded Citizens of Lane County in a press conference Thursday.

"It truly is a crisis; we're not just crying wolf," said Pam Ring, executive director of ARC of Lane County. "There are programs in jeopardy of closing if they don't get more money."

Low pay has led to a 90 percent turnover rate in the last year for Opportunities and Programming for People with Intensive Needs, a Eugene group home for people with severe developmental disabilities, according to a written statement by Sue Iverson, program director.

Jobs in residential care for people with disabilities are demanding and pay extremely low wages. The state gives agencies \$4.35 an hour to pay their staff members.

"We have asked the county and state for increased funding to continue our program and increase staff wages," Iverson said.

Ring said they are asking the state for a 10 percent increase or \$4.7 million for wages and benefits to staff members of residential care programs for the 1989-91 biennium.

"The problem within community programs is not that we do not have the caring, compassion or the know-how to serve people," she said.

"It is the simple fact that we do not have the money to provide the services that people need."

There are seven programs in the Eugene area providing residential care for 200 people with disabilities. If the care programs do not get more money, 89 people will be in a crisis situation, Ring said.

Last April the state agreed to move 300 residents of Fairview Training Center, a residential facility for developmentally disabled people in Salem, to community programs over the next three years as mandated by the Federal Health Care Financing Administration, she said.

"If this mandate is not met, Oregon will lose \$100 million per biennium in federal Medicaid dollars," Ring said.

The state Emergency Board is the agency which may provide the \$4.7 million that ARC of Lane County and other agencies want.

The board meets between legislative sessions and can allocate money from emergency funds, Ring said. The next board meeting is in January.


"More money means better staff-resident ratio. It means more energy and enthusiasm because the staff doesn't have to work 60 hours a week to get by. It means more consistency in the staff, which is vital," said Robert Long, direct care staff of OPPIN and Full Potential, two Eugene residential group homes.

Many of the residential care programs need more than just money for staff wage increases. The OPPIN program will close if it does not receive \$40,000 by January 1, 1990. This money is just to maintain the facility and is not for wage increases, Ring said.

"The residential programs are in a state of crisis and OPPIN is just one example," Ring said. "There will be others not far behind them if the state does not do something."

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