



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2003

\$48 MILLION IN CUTS TO SERVICES FOR 143,000 ELDERLY, DISABLED, MENTALLY ILL AND MEDICALLY NEEDY PEOPLE

We have all seen the headlines, however with the defeat of Measure 28, the reality of the impact of these cuts is becoming painfully evident. The numbers and the need are almost overwhelming. The temptation to blame ...the legislature, the voters, the economy, is emotionally exhausting and robs us of our energy to deal with the very real new problems that our consumers are facing on a daily basis.

Options as an agency has not been sitting by idly waiting for the axe to fall. We have made contingency plans as best we can. In addition to a great deal of belt tightening, we are working to expand contracts for development and consulting that we have with a variety of agencies around the state and in northern California. Our board of directors has approved using precious reserve funds, saved over the 20 year existence of the agency, to help meet the deficits that we are facing. though the end of June This will give the agency a five month window to investigate other funding sources and workers a chance to seek other employment and make plans where possible. As of July 1, Options will be forced to make significant reductions in staffing which will dramatically affect programs which benefit Josephine County citizens with the most severe psychiatric disabilities.

For these individuals, there is no reprieve to date and no viable solutions are seen on the horizon. We are therefore taking what is for us an unprecedented move. Although we had originally planned this newsletter as a way to increase the community awareness, we are now seeing it as a potential funding vehicle, We are asking that if you were one of the 13,607 county voters who voted yes on Measure 28, please consider sending us a contribution in lieu of that tax. If you were one of the 17,522 "no" voters who did not fully realize the impact of this measure, we would also welcome a contribution.

To figure what your Measure 28 tax would have been, write down your annual income, move the decimal point over 3 places and divide by 2. To find the monthly tax, divide this figure by 12. We would welcome any portion of this amount as a tax deductible contribution. We pledge that all funds we receive from this appeal will go directly to benefit the hundreds of mental health services consumers who were directly affected by these cuts.

On February 4th, Superior Court Judge Sam Slamm, said in denying a consumer generated lawsuit against the state, *"this is not fair to you but the State was within its rights in denying you these benefits, I only hope that other citizens will come forward to assist you."*

Please be one of those citizens and allow us to transform your concern and contributions into services to those who most desperately need both.

The Meaning of Work

Craig will never forget the year 1999. Craig has a serious mental illness, he was unable to live on his own and he was having frustrating physical problems. He was told he would "never be able to work", that he lacked social skills and was unable to follow directions. Today Craig is celebrating his two and a

half years of employment as a part time worker for a local packaging company. His coworkers and friends notice only minimal physical problems, he has benefits and paid vacation time and is moving into his own apartment. Craig has developed warm friendships at work, he no longer receives governmental SSI subsidy and his income has increased by \$548 per month.

When Craig came to Options in 1999 it cost governmental benefits programs a total of \$6,360/year to help him. It now costs \$4,992/year, reflecting \$12,475 of savings in public money in two and a half years.

Craig was helped to get on his feet and gain employment through Options' **Employment Works** program. Employment Works program is an individual placement and support program. Research has shown that an IPS program can be very successful in finding competitive employment for people with sever and persistent mental illness.

The monetary savings to the public are substantial. But the monetary savings only tell part of the story. The meaning of work to individuals in our culture goes far beyond the income. When one has work in our culture, one is "regular", one is "OK". One can identify with parents, with neighbors, with one's own internal models. The dignity and self respect that comes with work cannot be given to another. Only by our own accomplishment do we grant that kind of integrity to ourselves.

Having work, skills to trade, is a deeply ingrained way of granting self worth and emotional empowerment to ourselves. Going to work, coming home, budgeting to pay one's own bills—it's the rhythm of life. Without it a person remains out of step with others in the community, like an awkward dancer on the floor.

The first question that happens when we meet new people is "What do you do?". The community we live in defines who we are by the answer to that question. If we have no answer, we may be partially or wholly invisible in the community. When we are invisible to the community, it is very difficult for us to be visible to ourselves. We tend to believe what the community believes. If an individual can work, they have standing in the community. They have purpose in the whole.

"Given the choice between work and idleness, people will always choose work. Regardless of our stations in life, the conditions of our bodies and minds, or the amount of money in our bank accounts, the need to work remains one of our strongest drives. Work is central to our lives, and as such gives a large measure of structure to our days."

- *A Working Life: the IPS program by Becker and Drake*

Options Receives the Housing Partnership Award

In December 2002, Options received another award. Oregon DHS Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services gave Options the **Housing Partnership Award**. The following is quoted from the presentation:

"...Options has been extremely creative and successful in combining a wide range of financial resources to create high quality residential opportunities that take into account consumer preferences. ... Before it was fashionable to proactively seek input from prospective residents when developing housing, they pioneered techniques which incorporated future residents' ideas into the design of the housing.Options operates some of the most creatively designed and functional apartment buildings for persons with long term mental illness in Oregon. Not only are their buildings beautiful, but they blend beautifully into their surrounding neighborhoods.

All of this development does not happen without thoughtful planning. It also takes financial wizardry. Options has received over \$4.5 million from various federal, state, local and private resources to support development of these housing options. The funding for the bricks and mortar represent only part of the story, Options is also very creative in acquiring donations from local community groups to support its projects, and in the process has developed a wonderful reputation in the community.

Options has not kept their expertise to themselves, but has seen the benefit of assisting others. Options provides consultation and management services to other nonprofit agencies located in Josephine, Jackson, Clackamas, Curry, Coos and Douglas counties in Oregon, and have even done work in New York and California.....While tonight's award honors Options' housing efforts, we can't help but mention

Options' fine reputation as a service provider. Options has embraced a strengths-based case management approach that focuses on consumers' positive attributes rather than "problems". Options also is well known for their supported employment expertise and provides training for employment specialists."

Dan's Dinner

Dan spent a lifetime of feeling outside of the rhythms of "regular" life, not part of the mainstream yet unable to always feel comfortable in his own skin. Big and athletic, he was boyish in his enthusiasm and seemed to feed off of the attention and camaraderie of the group.

Dan hadn't always been upbeat; he grew up in a close family but was saddled in school with the label of being "different." This was a kind of societal code word for being "slow". He developed a personal style that mixed candor and caution in equal parts but did his best to blend in, be regular, to be one of the guys. He attended Options irregularly at first, remaining aloof and detached during formal group discussions and then joking with others and revealing himself more in the lunch breaks.

He was a runner and loved all sports with a passionately ambitious view of his own abilities. The important thing to him was to feel socially comfortable and have some sense of belonging, of being where he was supposed to be. Like so many others, Dan carried the weight of being different.

Close to his family, Dan took great pleasure in meals and gatherings with them and often took along fellow residents from Carnahan Court when he lived there. Living with others, though it challenged him socially, was important for Dan. The structure of the place gave him something to work within and push against. It helped give him a reason to get up in the morning, someplace to go and somebody to go there with.

In 1996, Dan moved into an apartment at Blackberry Knoll Apartments, living by himself for the first time. He loved the sense of himself as a free agent but struggled with maintaining consistently healthy meals. He loved to eat and over time Dan's cooking skills slowly improved. He became an expert at preparing "sloppy Joe's" and for a time, he would eat little else. He gained comfort with his independence and formed strong friendships with the neighboring residents who often joined him for dinners with his family. In 1997, Dan died suddenly, falling victim to a congenital medical condition. His abrupt absence brought profound sadness to all who knew him and deeply affected staff and residents.

The year after his death his family began celebrating his life and his memory in a uniquely generous way. Every November Dan's mother, brother and sister prepare and deliver a traditional Thanksgiving meal for the residents at Blackberry Knoll. Complete with turkey, ham, side dishes and desert, the dinner serves as a sort of memorial gift and remembrance for Dan's involvement with the Options programs. It has now been five years since Dan's passing and the annual dinner has gathered supporters. Friends of the family heard about the event and have joined the memorial. The meal has grown over the years to include many who never knew Dan.

Dan's mother tells a wonderful story about the first year she offered the meal. As mentioned before, Dan was an athlete and had dreams of being a coach. Among the belongings stored in his mom's basement was an old stopwatch. As she was preparing to load the car with food for the dinner, she thought to get a serving tray from the basement. Rushing to get the tray, she heard a muffled alarm. Curiously, she moved aside piles of clothes and personal items to find the stopwatch ringing away. Dan's watch had been sitting silent since being stored. She had to smile. Dan never missed a meal and she wondered if he was reminding her it was time to eat.

Through his generous spirit of inclusion Dan left a warm legacy of caring and connected his family to a living community that holds his memory.

**Options warmly acknowledges the continued
kindness of Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie in
providing the seasonal dinners at Blackberry Knoll.**

This is the fifth issue of the Options Newsletter and marks the beginning of our second year of publication.

We wish to thank all the generous donors who have utilized this avenue to support Options.

We also wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Meyer Memorial Trust, from whom the grant originated to make this newsletter possible.

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