

Letter to the Editor

Re: "At State-Run Homes, Abuse and Impunity", March 13, 2011

As president of GROW, Advocates for the Developmentally Disabled, a voluntary group made up mainly of families of persons with developmental disabilities, I read with dismay, but unfortunately not surprise, about the abuses at state-run homes.

While blame must be placed primarily at OPWDD, and then the arbitrators and the Civil Service Employees Union, I was surprised to find no mention of the effects that budget cuts to OPWDD have had on this sorry state of affairs.

Since 2008, even before the current recession, OPWDD has sustained cutbacks. These cutbacks eliminated nearly any new development. They also affected the quality of existing services for state-run programs as well as those run by not-for profits:

Oversight: Several years ago a program involving Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSC's) was instituted to ensure that people receiving a less costly form of care were guaranteed the services they required. The MSC was to provide monthly contact (in most cases visits) to the person with developmental disabilities. These services were cut back to 3 times a year. Obviously less oversight allows for more abuse.

Training: There are ways to restrain someone without punching them in the eye! OPWDD has never provided enough training to its direct care workers, and there are no minimum state training requirements for the many not-for profits who also service people with developmental disabilities. In addition, MSC's should be trained to spot abuses.

Fire Safety: GROW has long advocated for enough staff, and /or appropriate structural changes to ensure the 3 minute evacuation requirement. Obviously in the case Mr. Monsour pointed out, more staff was required. In other cases structural changes are required. However without appropriate funding neither will occur. We have also requested that OPWDD personnel monitor surprise fire drills at not-for-profit residences, and that some outside agency monitor state-run house fire drills. Once again with cutbacks in OPWDD personnel and cuts in overall funding this is not going to occur.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, and we have been told to expect further cutbacks. This is occurring without any input from individuals with developmental disabilities, family members, provider agencies, and other advocates. We fear that until these cutbacks are stopped there will continue to be these and other abuses.

We also hope that the person Governor Cuomo is nominating for Commissioner of OPWDD has some knowledge and/or experience in the field of developmental disabilities and not someone put in place to make further cutbacks.

Barbara Masur, GROW President

(914)-793-2274, (914)216-1613, 49 Cliffside Drive, Yonkers, New York 10710

GROW, PO Box 1692, White Plains, NY 10602, Helpline (914) 493-1318