

In support of SB 173 -

Sunflower Diversified Services, a non-profit agency, provides Residential, Employment, Medical, and Retirement/Enrichments supports as well as children's services to persons with I/DD in five central KS counties – Barton, Pawnee, Rice, Rush, and Stafford.

When the DD Reform Act was passed in Kansas, Sunflower rapidly changed support patterns to comply with the need to move from dependence to independence and to assist persons served in becoming fully integrated, contributing members of their communities. This involved changes from congregate living settings to independent living in homes and apartments rented from community landlords, expanding employment opportunities, building medical supports that involved the person in understanding and taking an active part in treatment plans, building enrichment and retirement programs that involved more active involvement in the community and the state, and developing strong self-advocacy training and involvement. All of these changes require more staffing and resources to accomplish than the congregate, sheltered, minimal choice provided in the support patterns of the past.

The result of the changes made here over the past twenty-plus years has been astonishing when we look at what the people we serve have accomplished and the overall improvement in the quality of their lives. They now have not only high expectations for themselves but of us as providers. They choose where and with whom to live with an average of sixty persons served in nearly fifty locations. They also choose what type and where they want to work, with our agency provided work opportunities paying an average \$17,000 per month in wages to fifty plus adults and transition students that choose to work here in order to supplement or replace benefit income and/or community employment. All persons working in our employment settings receive at least minimum wage.

All of the changes made provide opportunities that people with disabilities have the right to expect from their providers, but have significantly increase the cost of support provision. The quality of supports depends on the quality of the staff that provide those supports. We provide extensive initial and ongoing training with multiple methods of oversight but recruiting and hiring quality people to fill Direct Support positions remains difficult as we struggle to provide competitive wages and benefits for our staff. High turnover rates and staff shortages not only increase initial training and general employment expenses but also result in high overtime expenses. The ability to hire and maintain a stable group of support staff is critical in ensuring quality in the lives of those we serve.

Rates have been stagnant while expectations of support providers have increased through *unfunded* state and federal mandates for change. The problems created by woefully inadequate reimbursement rates, and the resulting difficulties in establishing competitive wages, have been exacerbated in the past few years by a failure of the HCBS and KANCARE systems to meet the needs or seemingly even understand the unique issues pertaining to the I/DD service systems. Many agencies across the state are having to consider whether they are able to accept requests for new or transfer services due to the inability to attract staff. As KDADS attempts to address the waiting list issues (in very small numbers), they have failed to resolve the issues of capacity that have resulted from a failure to increase reimbursement for nearly a decade.

The system, as it currently exists with ever-increasing costs and requirements and no increase in service provision reimbursement, simply cannot be sustained in the long-term. The potential need to make

decisions affecting the quality of even one person's life, based on scarcity of funds, is simply unacceptable.

Sunflower Diversified Services 140 staff members, the hundred adults, several hundred children, and all the families and advocates that support our efforts ask that you support SB 173 and begin to correct the severe difficulties created by a lack of adequate funding.

Ladeska (Decky) Makings, ED