Fall, 2022

Newsletter from the Executive Director

It is the time of year when folks gather to express gratitude for all those things we have to be thankful for. If you are like me, you might spend some time thinking about the little stuff which goes unnoticed the rest of the year. Things like my house is warm in the winter. My refrigerator has food in it. My family and I are healthy. I am able to make an okay living. We live in a part of the world where existential fears from war, disease, or famine are not a common everyday occurrence.

As we get busy with what we think is important, it’s too easy to forget that of the eight billion people presently on earth, only a minority of them can lay claim to the modest blessings listed above. For much of the world, each day is a struggle to survive to the next. In many of those places, supports for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are only what their families can provide.

We are blessed to live at a time and place in history when so many of our basic needs are met without having to struggle. For our residents, that is even more true. It is hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that it has only been 50 years or so that our IDD friends and family members have been removed from institutionalized facilities and welcomed into our communities. Prior to this, it was considered normal for families to send their IDD loved ones away. Back then, even under of the best circumstances, when the human needs for food, clothing, and shelter may have been met, the equally important need for love, for connection, and for purpose were never going to be met.

It has been said “Nothing in life is certain but for death and taxes”. There is nothing certain about the presumption the disabled will continue to receive necessary supports to continue to live as contributing members of our society. No guarantees that they will continue to make strides towards an ever more inclusive and integrated existence in our communities. In fact, the direction in which care services for the disabled is now trending is more than concerning: It is downright frightening.

On November 23rd, KTVQ news ran a segment about the staffing crisis facing nursing homes, specifically how Parkview Care Center had transferred patients out, with at least one moved into the Billings Clinic Psychiatric Center. The newscast went on to describe how at least a dozen nursing homes have closed statewide because of the inability to find staff to work in those homes and the inadequate rates Medicare/Medicaid pay. This is not a trumped-up crisis, with residential providers for the disabled trying to get their fingers into a bigger slice of the pie. This is a very real crisis of care.

We are better than that. Right now, the boomer generation is becoming reliant on the system for their own care. Right now, elderly parents of IDD people are aging to where they can no longer keep their loved ones home as they wait for a slot to open up on the wait list. Everyone has an interest in finding a real solution. Before the decade is out, this crisis will touch every family.

It might be that you cannot locate a willing nursing home for your own parents. Maybe your loved one with a mental health disorder commits suicide because there wasn’t an open bed at the psychiatric center when he/she needed it most. Perhaps you or your spouse cannot take a job, but must remain home in order to provide care for a family member because there are no residential options left out there for your loved one.

As we celebrate the Holidays, please remember that each of us has a role in what the future looks like for our loved ones. The best thing any of us can do is get involved. Whether you are volunteering of your time, giving of your resources, speaking with your legislators, or being there for someone in crisis to lean on when they need it most, every one of us has something to give. Remember, during this season of giving, it will take something from all of us to change the world for the better.

Happy Holidays to you and to all those you hold dear,

Calvin Calton,

Executive Director,

Residential Support Services