



730 NORTH STATE ST. PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, WI 53821  
(608)-326-6486 fax: (608)326-8332

July 1, 2015

ACICEID COMMITTEE

Testimony for July 13, 2015 Committee Meeting

Given by: Pam Ritchie, CEO, Opportunity Center, Prairie du Chien, WI

**Our mission:** To help people reach their full potential in society.

- Demographics: Rural county in Southwest Wisconsin;
  - City population 6,000 County 16,000
  - Largest Community in a 50 mile radius
  - # of people served: 100 in all programs
  - Operate 7 bus routes daily, transporting people in all programs
- Prior to 2010 Supported employment was not a service that was funded in Crawford County. Upon entering managed care, we implemented a supported employment program. We have also added community based prevocational services and most recently, community based day services. Since that time we have:
  - Placed 21 of 23 referrals in CIE since starting our program in 2011, 50% of which came from prevocational services.
  - DVR reports that our referrals reflect a 100% satisfaction rate.
  - 47% of our facility based prevocational clients also participate in community based prevocational services, which leads to exposure to make an informed choice regarding the type of CIE they are best suited for.
- We are regularly asked by both care managers and guardians to limit the jobs and income of clients because it is affecting their benefits. We need the ACICEID Committee to reform the benefit to income formula that prohibits people from full employment.
- 3 people currently leave facility based prevocational services, where they earn \$9.04/hour to go to a CIE job where they earn only \$7.25/hour. This loss of income is solely for the purpose of community integration.

#### **Why is Facility Based Prevocational Services Important?**

#### **Meet Crystal:**

Crystal is a 24 year old that has been coming to the Opportunity Center on a daily basis for 5 years. She also works at a local restaurant 4 hours per day. She's been there for 4 years. Crystal lives in a rural area 45 miles from the only community that has employment

opportunities in the county. She utilizes the Opportunity Center's transportation services to get into town each day; she starts her day on the work floor and takes a taxi to and from her CIE job site. She finishes her day at the center and takes our transportation back home. Without the work center, Crystal would not have the wrap around services needed to support her in CIE.

**Meet Tom:**

Tom is a 51 year old man with significant disabilities. Until the age of 46 Tom was never given the opportunity to participate in any kind of programming outside of his home. For the majority of his life, due to his physically aggressive behaviors, he was institutionalized. Upon relocation to the Prairie du Chien area, Tom was referred to us to attempt day programming. Tom started coming 1 day per week for 1 hour in a 1:1 ratio. With the proper supports, Tom has been able to increase his hours in the work center to 5 days a week for 2 hours a day. Although he still requires 1:1 staffing, Tom's behaviors have become much less severe and he now brings home a paycheck for the first time in his life. Without the services of the work center, Tom would never have had the opportunity to experience life in the community.

**Meet Eric:**

Eric is a 37 year old who had been served by a number of work centers in the state, only to be discharged due to violent behaviors. The Opportunity Center was Eric's last hope before institutionalization. He has been at the center for 4 years. The beginning was difficult, but with a positively reinforced behavior management plan and a 1:1 staff ratio, Eric has not had a violent incident in 3 years. He is now able to work independently on the work floor and enjoy community integrated day service activities. Without the services of the work center, Eric would be institutionalized.

As you can see from the above stories, not everyone can be served the same way. The Opportunity Center believes in informed choice, we believe in community integrated employment and we believe in facility based employment for those that need or choose that setting.

Eliminating facility based prevocational services would have left all three of the above people without adequate services to meet their needs. It would prohibit us, a 50 year old community asset from achieving our mission of helping people reach their full potential in society.

Please remember Crystal, Eric and Tom as you move forward with your committee's charge.