

# DACs facing critical funding shortage

## Wabasha County DAC day program faces 7 percent cut, putting services at risk, further strain in challenging financial times

Nonprofit here relying on state and federal funds already struggling to hire and retain workers

by Michael Smith

with information from Wallace Group News

Concerned that the State of Minnesota is placing further stress on a complex disability service system that has left Wabasha County DAC in Wabasha and other providers struggling for years, the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR), its service provider members and the families and individuals with disabilities they serve now face a 7 percent cut in funding.

“All we are looking for is for some sense of long term stability,” said Mike Burke, president of MOHR. “Stability in a system that will allow us to pay our staff competitive wages, which ultimately helps thousands of people with disabilities across the state who rely on our services for their quality of life.” Bills have been authored in the Minnesota Legislature to

Schomacker and Senate bill authored by Sen. Paul Utke would alleviate the problem, which, if left unaddressed, could mean damaging cuts that are permanent.

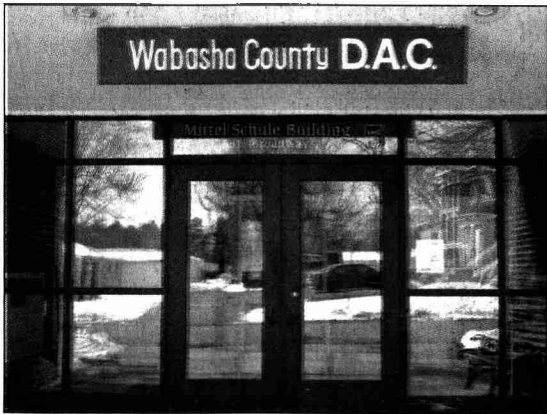
Steve Kohls, Administrator of the Wabasha County DAC worries about how frustrated people who work at our DAC and other human service agencies are. The Wabasha County DAC has received funding cuts the last three years, even though there has been state revenue surpluses.

Kohls reported that expenses which they have no control over continue to increase. “So we are running a deficit even though we have made spending cuts.”

“Along with the funding cuts, we have received numerous state and federal government new unfunded mandates to comply with. We have seen the inefficiency of the state government in many ways, including spending millions upon millions on upgrading computer systems that don’t work right. Yet they will waste more millions on computer systems while ignoring even cost of living wage increases for human service workers whose wage is barely above minimum wage.

“The state will increase minimum wage, but will not increase our funding, so apparently the state expects us to lay off a staff person so we can comply with the minimum wage law. The state RMS billing system pays us for our services. It is a complex, time wasting system that has many formula flaws.”

Kohls pointed out this “case in point”: “We have a client that the

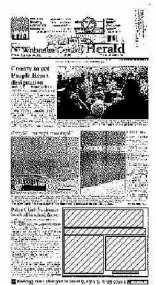


correct the problem.

A direct threat to service providers, the cuts involve complex formulas that determine rates paid to disability

### \*Turn to DAC FUNDING Page 3

service providers which are tied to an inflationary factor and funding agreements with the federal government, he said. A House bill led by Rep. Joe



system will pay us more if the client attends four hours per day than if they attend six hours a day. Our government wonders why there is a human service staff shortage crisis in this state. I believe most people in this state are good, well meaning, hard-working people who care about each other. I believe most people want the government to quit wasting time and money. Spend the money wisely and simplify complex systems that most people including legislators don't understand. Our government needs to start caring about the caregivers.

"By the grace of God we have an excellent DAC staff. They are people who care about making the lives of people who are developmentally disabled better, even though their DAC paycheck makes life difficult for them and their families. However, altruism does have a limit.

"Too often in the last 5 years I have had staff come into my office crying because they have to leave their DAC job for a better paying job for the benefit of their family. If the 7% cut is enacted, I will have more staff forced into career changes. I will also have to lay off staff. This, of course, means higher staff-to-client ratios and reductions in programs and quality of service.

"Funding has always been a challenge, however, now there is no logic in what the federal and state government require our services to be and what they actually fund us to provide. Despite what they claim, they will soon turn our achievement center into an activity center. Functional skill training, exercise therapy and job coached work opportunities will be gone. Most of our clients who have developmental disabilities will be unemployed. Earning even a small

paycheck for our clients is a major accomplishment and contributor to a positive self-esteem.

"If the cutting of funding trend continues, there is no future for the Wabasha County DAC which was established by the citizens of Wabasha County in 1970. Minnesota will become like some other states where most of their citizens who are developmentally disabled will get services outside of their home just a few hours a week. The spin those states take pride in telling their citizens is that they have successfully cut the human service budget while providing all superb community based services."

MOHR is a member of Best Life Alliance, a statewide coalition of people with disabilities, their families and providers of home and community-based services. The group of more than 1,000 rallied at the Capitol in March to draw attention to this situation.

Burke said the rally was an excellent opportunity to help state leaders meet and hear stories from the people who will be affected by these cuts. "It's important for senators and representatives to hear from individuals with disabilities, their families and the people who work closely with them," said Burke. Individuals are also speaking out in their own communities.

More information is available at [mohrmn.org](http://mohrmn.org). Representing more than 100 providers in the state, MOHR members provide skills training, employment services, community involvement, behavioral supports and life enrichment activities to more than 26,000 individuals with disabilities in Minnesota.