

April 5th, 2010

I am writing to you on behalf of RRAF, a non-profit agency located in the western suburbs of Chicago. Their mission is to support adults with developmental disabilities and their families by providing on-site and community based day programs as well as in-home support, and overnight respite care. This organization is unique because it focuses on adults with disabilities, who are many times forgotten about and programs to assist their families are scarce. This organization is in danger of losing their facility due to late payments from the Illinois government and budget cuts in the recent economy. The state of Illinois currently owes RRAF approximately \$118,000 and with out this money RRAF will have to close its doors as soon as April 30th 2010.

My family has had a long relationship with RRAF because my aunt, Lisa Vetter, was one of the programs first students over twenty years ago. Lisa was diagnosed with autism at a young age and required a lot of care through out her 42 years of life. My grandparents cared for her a majority of the time, but having a day program that she could attend with other disabled adults helped give her a sense of normalcy in life. While caring for an adult with autism is an extreme time commitment, it is also rewarding and life changing. My family was unbelievably blessed to have had Lisa in our lives, and loosing her to seizure complications in 2004 was a hard loss for all of us to over come. My grandmother, Nada, gave 100 percent of her effort in to ensuring that Lisa lived an amazing life and refused to accept that her disability meant fewer opportunities. My grandmother is the strongest woman that I know, and she has taught my entire family the importance of acceptance and over coming any obstacle that life may give you. While Lisa is no longer with us, my family continues to support RRAF any way that we can so that future generations will hopefully be given more opportunities.

If this issue was simply financially based, I think that we could all band together to raise some money, however this would continue to be an on going problem. The Illinois government has created such a large deficit for RRAF and the hole only seems to be getting deeper. If our government does not step up

and recognize that the funding for these types of programs is virtually non-existent then many of these families will have no where to turn, and the repercussions will be catastrophic. Many families are able to receive funding for children with disabilities up until age 18 and sometimes 21, but what are they supposed to do after that? As people with disabilities get older the cost for caring for them goes up, and the funding and support that is needed is forgotten about. Programs like RRAF are the light at the end of the tunnel for many families and they need our support to survive. The executive director of RRAF, Marilyn Flanagan, has truly given her heart and soul to see this program survive, even forgoing a salary when times have been tough. All to ensure that there was a place that these families could turn to. All of the supporters of RRAF are doing all that they can to raise attention to this on going problem, but I fear that it may not be enough. I am asking that you try and raise awareness to this urgent issue, because so many wonderful families would appreciate it. My family may have lost Lisa, but that does not mean that this issue has become any less important to us.

Sincerely,

Evan Marie Murray

