

Good afternoon/evening Senators and Representatives:

Here's the view from the ground.

I'm Patty Burke, Director of Social Rehabilitation at Gilead Community Services in Middletown for the last 18 years. Gilead is a non-profit that serves individuals diagnosed with chronic mental illnesses and substance use issues in Middlesex County. Our team at the Rehabilitation Center and our clients built a large, successful program over a 10 year time frame from 2002 – 2012. We had 7 full time line staff and a part time van driver. Plus me. We serve approximately 30 – 50 clients per day and are committed to at least one healthy meal for them daily, not weekends.

After 2012 we ran into LOTS of roadblocks. Now we have 2 full time line staff and a part time van driver who also cooks lunch. Plus me.

Here's the list of enjoyable and personally rewarding things we learned, things we did, groups we ran with clients as leaders, friends we made, relationships we formed that helped clients and ourselves think big about what we wanted and needed in life ... the concepts and ideas were just popping out of everyone's heads and the sky was the limit ... if a client asked me, 'Patty can we –' I would say 'yes' let's figure out how to do that ... and by the way we didn't have a whole lot of money then either. We're experts at finding free stuff, not only furniture or pots and pans, but activities that are important to us.

So, remember this list is of things that we formerly did BUT NO LONGER CAN AFFORD TO DO BECAUSE OF LACK OF STAFF ...

ALSO PLEASE REMEMBER THIS IS A CENTER THAT PROVIDES SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHRONIC, DEBILITATING MENTAL ILLNESSES. WE ARE EXPERTS AT ENGAGING PEOPLE, BUT THE LACK OF STAFF WILL ALWAYS MEAN THAT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE ENGAGE IS LIMITED NOW. THINK OF THE TRULY ILL PEOPLE WHO NO LONGER HAVE ACCESS TO OUR SERVICES.

OUR CENTER IS ABOUT ENGAGING WITH CLIENTS SIDE-BY-SIDE TO LEARN AND DO THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ALL OF US.

SO, WE USED TO:

Have a winning softball team that plays other teams statewide all spring and summer. We've got 8 gorgeous trophies from prior years. We can't pull together a driver to get around the state any more.

Go sailing in Westbrook through CT Sail – a non-profit. Trips were every Friday from May to September. The distance is too far from Middletown to drive, and it takes one staff person away most of the day.

Travel to the LOB and protest, make appointments with our legislators, create group opportunities for our legislators, have a legislative breakfast at our clubhouse, spend the time to review bills and data about funding, go to statewide protests, testify at hearings, meet with our federal representatives, travel to other sites to talk about legislative advocacy. We don't have enough staff to pull from the center to drive to these things.

Have an 80+ client and staff week-long Camping Trip Annually at Camp Harkness in Waterford. We have cut back to 40 people, denying some clients the opportunity to have their vacation, because we don't have enough staff to plan, shop for food and prepare meals, drive clients, supervise activities, and most importantly ensure safety on a 200 acre property.

Keep up a beautiful 400 sq foot vegetable garden because we don't have enough staff to lead a group to maintain it.

Coordinate 50 clients, family members and community members to write to our legislators regarding Raised Bills we either agreed or disagreed with. This happened every year.

Invite church groups and scouting groups to help us with in-kind projects like landscaping and building walkways.

Offer trips to 6 clients weekly to Toivo in Hartford for Chair Yoga and Tai Chi because we don't have someone to drive.

Run a bead making group in the Social Rehabilitation Center because we don't have a staff person who knows how to do that.

Use Ted Talks on our beautiful 4 foot internet TV, because we don't have staff with the skills to navigate a smart TV.

Have an extensive Earth Day celebration with 35+ clients and staff because we don't have enough people to train clients and others how to plant, where to plant, choosing what to plant.

Take a weekly hiking trip locally because we don't have a free staff member to go with clients.

Pick up 15 clients in a wider area because, even though we have two vans, we don't have the availability of staff to drive a further trip.

Host students from Wesleyan University and Goodwin College and Middlesex Community College and Manchester Community College as interns, training future social workers, because we don't have staff to supervise them.

Go to the Annual CT River Clean Up with a team of 10 clients to help clean the CT River tributaries because it is usually on a Saturday and we don't have staff to work that day.

Take 10 clients bowling every weekend in the winter, because no one works Saturdays any more. That includes the Big E, local fairs, amusement parks.

Put out an 8 page monthly newsletter because we don't have a staff member to supervise and help write that. We also have a strict office budget which includes printer paper. We are working on a way to do this on internet only, but it still has to be written. It used to include creative writing of clients, a calendar with next month's offerings, a lunch Menu, important phone numbers for problems with the system, how to advocate for yourself, techniques for getting rid of bedbugs, a coaching article on legislative advocacy, prior notices of hearings to go to, and a hundred other articles that clients got mailed to their homes every month so that they knew we were still out there and thinking of them.

And this is just what I could think of in the 20 minutes I was able to spend to write this.

Please help us.

Please put people of this great state before other non-people projects. Please focus on human needs and care. We are experts – ask us how to save money and we will help you figure it out.

Thank you for listening, Patty Burke