

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee
March 2, 2021
DMHAS BUDGET HEARING
H.B. No. 6439, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS
THEREFORE

Catherine Parker

Greetings Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Catherine Parker, and I am a registered voter in the city of Bridgeport. I want to share with you what Bridge House has done for their members during a very difficult year and to remind you of how the DMHAS (The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services) budget affects real lives.

Bridge House, a psychosocial “work ordered day” clubhouse program in Bridgeport for individuals with serious mental illnesses, went above and beyond for the care of their members. Keeping in mind that our population with mental health conditions can struggle with day-to-day life at the best of times, this past year presented challenges that most of us never lived through before. With the pandemic, race relations, the Black Lives Matter movement, civil unrest, soaring unemployment, social isolation, and domestic terrorism, Bridge House staff members collectively provided our members with everything from an upbeat greeting to reassuring words of comfort and understanding. As they validated our concerns, we knew that they also quietly struggled with their own fears and vulnerabilities without bringing attention to it.

When the building had to be closed because of the pandemic last March, each staff member was given a cell phone to keep in touch with clubhouse members. Their phone numbers were given out freely to their caseloads, with the knowledge that staff could be reached at any time during normal business hours. There was also staff in the building to take phone calls, to troubleshoot or even to just listen.

Collaboratively, staff and members worked diligently and efficiently to create a weekly newsletter that was mailed out weekly to over 200 members and the board of directors. It included a helpful introductory piece and member interviews that were conducted over the phone to see how each member positively handled the chaos that was happening all around us. This was followed by a “Wellness Watchers” recipe or wellness tips, then a closing that invited members to get involved. In doing this, not only was it inclusive to all members—

even those without technology, but it also strengthened the relationships between members. Once the building reopened, we transitioned to a monthly newsletter.

Additionally, every week during this pandemic, members have had the option to have food bank delivered to them.

For those who have smart phones, tablets, and computers, we developed a virtual community. We also provided tablets to a number of our members and taught them how to use the internet and access our services. Bridge House Virtual Community includes our daily morning meeting, weekly house meetings, weekly job club, a weekly cooking show, three-times-a-week virtual stretch, our weekly advocacy meeting, and more. I am certain that I am missing more of what Bridge House is and has been to our community. I am very, very proud of our staff, our members, and Bridge House as a whole. Bridge House is a shining example of how funding affects real life and I hope this year you will increase funding for mental health supports and services.

Thank you for listening to my testimony today.

Cat Parker