

## Day services at risk for adults with developmental disabilities, say directors of western Minn. programs

The directors of Adult Client Training Service in Olivia and Chippewa Enterprises in Montevideo are urging the state Department of Human Services to apply for a federal waiver to make the nonprofits eligible for federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

Written By: [Tom Cherveney](#) | Aug 2nd 2020 - 6pm.



Karen Borden, left, and Gwen Nokleby are the directors of Adult Client Training Service in Olivia and Chippewa Enterprises in Montevideo, respectively. They are urging the state Department of Human Services to apply for a waiver that would make their nonprofits eligible for federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. Tom Cherveney / West Central Tribune

OLIVIA — News that KandiWorks Developmental Activity Center in Kandiyohi County is ending its operations hit home in neighboring counties, where nonprofits providing services to adults with developmental disabilities are facing similar pressures.

On July 28, the board of directors for KandiWorks voted to dissolve the organization and end its services. “It is with great sadness ...” stated executive director Karen Macik in announcing the decision to the heads of other nonprofit organizations providing the services in their own communities.

“Keep up the good fight,” stated Macik in the announcement, adding: “ — just maybe (Department of Human Services) will see the importance of the services we provide.”

The directors of the Adult Client Training Service in Olivia and Chippewa Enterprises in Montevideo said they are concerned about their abilities to continue serving their adult clients. Both nonprofits provide day services to adults with developmental disabilities, something they have been doing for decades.

“It’s very bleak and there are programs that are closing soon, if not already,” said Gwen Nokleby, Chippewa Enterprises executive director, prior to the announcement by KandiWorks. Nokleby and Karen Borden, executive director of Adult Client Training Service in Olivia, said their organizations were hit hard by the four-month shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. ACTS has lost \$327,000 in expected revenue this year, said Borden, and Nokleby believes her organization’s losses are in the same ballpark.

Both directors are frustrated with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. They want the department to apply for a waiver that would make nonprofit organizations providing the day services eligible for funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. They point out that 35 states, including all of the states bordering Minnesota, applied for and received this waiver.

Legislators have been working to persuade the department to apply for the waiver. Legislators, including state Sens. Jim Abeler, R-Anoka, and John Hoffman, DFL-Champlin, and Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer, R-Big Lake, have also promoted legislation to provide financial help, but no bills have been approved.

Rep. Tim Miller, R-Prinsburg, fired a letter to DHS Commissioner Jodi Harpstead urging her department to apply for the waiver. Miller said he understands the difficulties being faced as a variety of organizations seek state funding help due to the pandemic. But not applying for federal CARES Act funds is a “head-scratcher” for him. He said he has a son with developmental disabilities who has just turned 18, and he sees how important these services are.

The local legislator said he is arranging to meet with a deputy commissioner in the Department of Human Services in the coming days. He said his contacts with the department on the issue have him concerned.

When he asked why a waiver has not yet been sought: “They said ‘well, this is kind of an outmoded model of doing these things and there is not a lot of excitement.’”

There has been a push for an increase in community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities, and away from day centers.

Miller noted that right now there are few options for clients in rural areas and that the existing nonprofits are ready to make whatever changes necessary.

Until the pandemic, ACTS in Olivia was serving 47 clients and Chippewa Enterprises was serving 35. At each location, the adults arrived from group homes or the private residences of their guardians to participate in a range of activities, many aimed at helping them build life skills. Some also took part in work programs.

Both the Montevideo and Olivia nonprofits fielded teams that offered cleaning services in their communities. ACTS in Olivia also operates a thrift store and used furniture store. Its clients worked at sorting donations and helping with retail operations.

Services to the adult clients ended suddenly in March due to the pandemic. It disrupted the lives of their clients, who found themselves confined to homes for reasons some did not really understand, said Borden and Nokleby.

The community of Olivia hosted a 100-unit parade of vehicles in April, so that ACTS staff could ride by the residences of their clients and let them know they were being supported.

The two directors said their staffs have been hurt by the shutdown as well. ACTS has a staff of 27 and Chippewa Enterprises a staff of 15, in both cases including full- and part-time persons. The directors said the nonprofits receive most of their revenue from Medical Assistance payments made based on the service to and transportation for their clients.

Even in the best of times, the revenues make for lean operations, according to the two directors. They acknowledge that their wage scales are lower than they would like.

The two nonprofits reduced hours and laid off staff due to the pandemic and shutdown, and obtained federal Paycheck Protection Program funds and state loan funds to help see them through. The nonprofits have limited reserve funds.

Chippewa Enterprises invested its funds in a new facility just a couple of years ago.

ACTS purchased a former hardware store building to open its furniture store last year. Even with reduced staffing, there are many fixed costs for buildings and insurance and other needs, Borden said.

They have now received the go-ahead to offer some day services, but there are limitations. An individual client may spend no more than three hours in the building each day, as compared to six hours before. And, the buildings must operate at half capacity. That means revenues are proportionately reduced.

The directors said they are also worried about finding support for financial help during these times: People with disabilities are often last in line for funding, they said.



Riders on horses in April led about 100 vehicles in a parade in Olivia as a way for Adult Client Training Service employees to extend their well wishes to clients being confined to group homes and private residences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The community has been very supportive of the nonprofit and its mission to serve developmentally disabled adults, according to Director Karen Borden. Submitted

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