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Emergency funding needed to keep the lights on at Minnesota's day and employment service providers

"There are many programs that just don't have the ability to weather this storm."

Written By: Michael Brun | Apr 10th 2020 - 1pm.



An organization representing Minnesota's day and employment service providers for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities has sounded the alarm that many nonprofits won't be around by the time the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Day and employment service providers have suspended programs in response to the pandemic and statewide stay-at-home order, but fixed infrastructure costs remain, said Julie Johnson, president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation, or MOHR.

MOHR represents over a hundred day service providers in Minnesota, including many in small towns where there is only one such organization connecting people with disabilities to their community through group activities, skills training and employment support.

MOHR is circulating a legislative proposal and urging supporters to contact lawmakers to provide emergency funding to help cover fixed costs. The Minnesota Legislature is scheduled to convene April 14.

“There are many programs that just don’t have the ability to weather this storm,” Johnson said of the impact of shutdowns related to COVID-19. All of the state’s day service providers are nonprofits and only bill for services when clients attend programs.

ProAct, which provides life skills and employment services for individuals with disabilities in southeastern Minnesota, [announced April 8](#) it plans to resume day services and work at group employment sites starting Monday, May 11 — a week after Gov. Tim Walz’s extended stay-at-home order expires. ProAct also has continued production work at its Red Wing and Eagan locations for businesses deemed critical by the governor’s order.

Though larger organizations such as ProAct are getting by with many services suspended, their monthly costs can be staggering. Johnson, who also is CEO of the Twin Cities-area nonprofit MSS, said the organization has paid upwards of \$700,000 on leases, utilities and vehicles sitting idle since shutting down March 17.

“So no matter how financially stable an organization is, this is a huge financial strain,” she said.

MOHR members provide services to more than 26,000 Minnesotans with disabilities, [according to the organization's website](#).

LeadingAge and the National Adult Day Services Association have also requested \$425 million from federal lawmakers to cover a month of lost revenue.

“Federal funding is necessary at this time to ensure that the more than 260,000 Americans who rely on adult day services are able to continue receiving these services once the COVID-19 pandemic ends,” [according to an April 3 letter](#) sent to legislative leaders.

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