

A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE - Marion Lieberman
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As a parent and advocate for my adult son who attends a sheltered workshop, I have followed our state's service delivery system for persons such as my son for over 30 years.

The Lanterman Act, the state's promise to carry out these services based upon the individual's program plan, has evolved over the years, which is a good thing. I believe change is good; it is healthy and allows for an expansion of opportunities for our children to become a meaningful part of their communities.

Recently, through legislation passed last year (SB1270), there has been an effort to once again change the Lanterman Act to promote the current ideology of self-directed services and community-integrated employment for everyone.

While I support these program designs as part of a full spectrum of service choices, and based upon the individual's needs and skills, I cannot in good conscience support these new choices if they are meant to replace the so-called older services. Why close down sheltered workshops and traditional day programs that have proven their success?

As advocates for choice, ARC-Long Beach currently serves 60 adults in our Day Training Activity Center, 185 adults in our Work Activity Center, 55 adults in our Special Needs Program and 95 adults in our Supported Employment Program at sites including Home Depots, Mattel, Long Beach Memorial Medical Center, City of Long Beach's Parks, Recreation & Marine Department, Albertsons, Office Depot and Ross.

My son chooses to work in the Activity Center. He loves his workday at Hillside Enterprises. His payday is just as meaningful as his non-disabled sisters' payday. He is just as proud of his work as they are. To disrupt this routine would be traumatic to him.

As parents who are satisfied with our family member's traditional day programs, we need to remain vigilant that this new legislation is not used to force our sons and daughters into community-based services that are often nothing more than wandering the malls and parks.

Forcing change on our family members will also undermine the successful outcomes already achieved in their individual plans. It is unrealistic and unreasonable to force a severely disabled person to work in the community against the good judgment of the family who is more familiar with the person's special needs than the so-called professionals.

These professionals' perception of what is good for the disability community has no connection to reality. For instance, here are a few of the recommendations: *#4 Help individuals....with developmental disabilities who want to start their own business. #8 Start letting people have their own service budgets, decide on the kinds of services they want, and buy their services. #9 Let regional centers pay for services that help people find jobs and get out in the community to do things like everyone else.*

The language in the draft recommendations has begun to ring of the "one size fits all" ideology. *"Individuals choose how they want to participate in their local communities and those who want to work, have a job they choose. All individuals have a way to communicate their preferences and needs."*

Another issue of concern about this new trend is the possibility that funding requirements for self-directed services will be used to divert funds from the current programs that are successfully serving our family members. If this is the case, we need to let our legislators know that we will not accept the closure of our programs. The need to fund traditional services remains as critical as ever.

In the Long Beach area it is already apparent that younger parents are being discouraged from even considering traditional day programs for their severely disabled family members who are preparing for adult services. These younger families are being denied a choice to which they are entitled. They need to know that if they are refused the choice, they still retain the right to appeal the decision.

I sincerely hope that our state legislators do not allow the system to evolve to the point where "self directed services" means that the family's input is dismissed. To prevent this, we need to communicate directly with our elected officials. They must hear from us parents and family members that we are alarmed.