

Disability groups may cut services

State underfunding training programs in Knox County

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GALESBURG - Four community service organizations say they might have to cut services if they don't get more money from the state, which says it is doing all it can with a tight budget.

"We keep hearing promises about what's going to be happening (with funding)" said Mary Crittenden, executive director of the Knox County Council for Developmental Disabilities. "We are continually expected to provide more and more and more with less and less and less."

Her organization provides work training for people with developmental disabilities.

Crittenden, along with representatives from Kewanee-based Abilities Plus, Galesburg's Bridgeway Inc., the Warren Achievement Center Inc. and the Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities all met Friday. Each group said state money is getting scarce.

"Underfunding has been a chronic problem" that has existed under many governors, said Janet Stover, executive director of the association of rehabilitation facilities.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich "has found monies to put toward programs that were important to his administration," she said. "There are ways for resources to become available."

Tom Green, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Human Resources, which provides money to these types of social service programs, noted a large state deficit.

"This administration inherited a historic \$5 billion deficit and had to make painful fiscal choices to fix the state's financial problems, but not at the expense of those serving our most needy populations," Green said. "In fact, now that the state finances are in better shape today, we've been able to increase funding for many providers, including those serving people with developmental disabilities and others in community-based care."

Green said human services department's fiscal 2007 budget included more than \$1.3 billion for people with developmental disabilities and \$33 million more for home services for people with physical disabilities.

But leaders of the four groups wonder if that money will be enough to prevent cuts.

Crittenden said her organization cut its occupational and recreational therapists from the budget about five years ago.

And all say transportation and high fuel costs have taken a toll on their budgets.

The groups plan to get their message to officials before and after Tuesday's election.

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