

Opinion

A tough Thanksgiving for this nonprofit

Funding cuts in human services have been regular news for several years. To decision-makers in Denver, budget cuts mean changing numbers on spreadsheets to make expenses match revenues. The practice is to cut uniformly across agencies and programs without evaluating the impact of these spreadsheet changes.

On Oct. 1 of this year the state of Colorado cut funding to The Resource Exchange by nearly \$600,000. At the capitol, the faces and the names of people directly impacted by this cut are invisible. In fact, a reduction of \$600,000 is a fraction of a much larger number that results from cuts made across the board for multiple agencies funded by the Department of Human Services. Here in Colorado Springs, sadly, these cuts impact real people with real needs.

As president of the volunteer board of directors of TRE, I have had the challenge of leading board discussions on how to continue providing services to our community's most vulnerable children and adults — neighbors, friends, co-workers and family to all of us — for whom services are essential. Many of our counterparts in the state receive local, dedicated tax funding to support their missions, but the board and I are under no illusions that we'll be as fortunate. No city or county tax dollars will be available to pay for the services needed by members of our community with developmental disabilities.

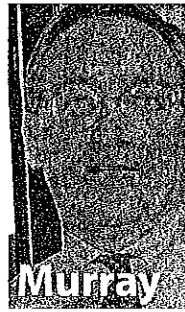
Those hurt most by funding cuts are the children and adults enrolled in the Family Support Services Program. This program allows families with a child or adult with a developmental disability access to a modest array of services that

are critical to allowing these members to remain in the family home. The services also enable many people to have greater independence than they otherwise might enjoy.

Family Support Services Programs include behavioral support, physical and other therapy services, medical and dental care. TRE assists with home modifications to enable those who use a wheelchair to come and go from their family home. The program provides coordination and guidance to families that have a child with a developmental disability so they can access public and private resources in our community.

This program also provides respite services to families. Care giving is an exhausting 24-hour a day, 7-day a week responsibility. Caregivers — in most cases parents — must constantly attend to the needs of the person with the developmental disability. There is no time off. Parents of children with developmental disabilities need an occasional break from the 24-hour demands of care giving — from feeding to bathing to toileting and everything else that those of us without disabilities do independently. The Family Support Program at TRE allows family caregivers of their children with developmental disabilities respite from the endless hard work of care giving.

Our contract with the state requires TRE to serve 152 families. Through careful resource management and partner-



Murray
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ing with other community agencies, TRE has been able to serve as many as 350 people. Funding reductions of about 53 percent have forced a reduction in the number of families we serve.

Do those families who will lose services have lesser need? Of course not. Will these children and adults with developmental disabilities survive the debilitating impact of the loss of services? We hope so. As I write this, we are seeking alternatives for those individuals and families we can no longer serve.

The services we provide to people with developmental disabilities help many become partially self-sufficient or even independent. There is evidence all around of people with various limitations supporting themselves and making significant contributions to our community. Not surprisingly, as people become more independent, they rely less on publicly funded services. They also become productive and contribute to the health of the communities in which they live.

We are all tightening our belts — doing more with less. I strongly believe that we need to take care of our most vulnerable citizens, those who through no fault of their own cannot completely take care of themselves. This is a generous community, and The Resource Exchange has already heard from people who value our mission and are willing to help. This is a good beginning. But we need to ask our decision-makers to be more thoughtful as they address tough budget decisions.

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ISSN 1062