

# 'MOST VULNERABLE' TAKE A HIT

Services to disabled lose almost \$600K in funding

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Services to help developmentally disabled people and their families in the Pikes Peak region are hard to come by. Beginning today, they could shrink even more.

Today is when The Resource Exchange loses almost \$600,000 in state funding, threatening services to about 300 of its 2,300 clients in El Paso, Teller and Park counties.

The nonprofit, which manages care for the developmentally disabled and funnels money to agencies that provide direct services, has a waiting list of about 1,500, executive director David Ervin said.

It's the third cut in funding in recent years and has the agency working on creative

ways to maintain services.

"It's more than a little frustrating, because the last couple of years, we always seem to face reductions in funding, and the need is not doing anything but going up," he said Thursday. "We are working triple-overtime to mitigate the impact on people receiving services."

The cut in the agency's budget of nearly \$11 million will weigh heaviest on its Family Support Services program, which is losing about 53 percent of its funding. The program offers respite services for family members taking care of a developmentally disabled child, funding for mental health services, home and car modifications, and help plugging into such programs as Medicaid and Social Security.

Ervin said that the agency's contract with the state mandates treatment of about 150 clients through Fam-

ily Support Services, but it's been able to serve about 350 people through partnerships with other agencies.

Even with the cuts in state money, he said, the agency should be able to meet its mandate, but that leaves about 200 people hanging.

He hopes to work with businesses to find volunteer or job opportunities for the program's clients, which would reduce the need for a respite program.

"If that person can actually go out and volunteer at a local business or become employed, we've accomplished the same outcome — that person is not sitting at home, unsupervised, while mom and dad are at work," Ervin said.

Another program, which provided 24/7 care to the most critically challenged people, has been eliminated, but Ervin said arrangements have been made for the eight

people who were in it.

The third program, Supported Living Services, is losing 4.5 percent of its funding, but Ervin believes the agency will be able to absorb the cut and help the 75 clients who need assistance, but not 24/7 care.

The Resource Exchange isn't the only agency with less money. The state cut \$3.1 million to all the so-called community center boards that serve the same role in their area.

It troubles the executive director of Cheyenne Village, which works with The Resource Exchange.

"I think we need to educate people better about the impact that government funding has on ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens receive the care that they need," Ann Turner said.