

Why Would You Do This to Us?

The Florida Senate wants to cut \$180 million from adult community mental health services, eliminating the capacity to serve more than 180,000 Floridians who cannot afford to pay for their treatment. But those are just the numbers.

What about the people.... the Floridians who are receiving treatment now or who are well now because of past services? Here's a look at some of them:



Joan Andrade, diagnosed with bipolar disorder, experienced joblessness and homelessness, along with minor brushes with the law, before she got the treatment services she needed at the Suncoast Center in St. Petersburg. Because she was indigent, her therapy, medication and other services were provided through DCF for only a small co-pay. After two years, Joan was able to "graduate" from being a client to becoming a staff member at the Center. Employed by Suncoast since 2005, she is now the onsite liaison at the crisis stabilization unit in Pinellas County. She assists in linking patients with aftercare/outpatient mental health services at the center and in getting other community services. "If it had not been for treatment I received at Suncoast, I would not have been able to successfully recover, reinvent and build a new life," Joan said.



"Dan", 62, has a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. He manages his illness by taking care of himself, going to learning and support groups, staying active in the local drop-in center and in his faith community. He contributes to his community through volunteer work. He receives outpatient services from Circles of Care in Brevard County, including medication management, psychotherapy and drop-in center services. Before Dan had these services, he lived in the woods and under bridges for 15 years, spent time in jail as a minor and was in state hospitals. His past care cost taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars. Under the Senate proposal, the outpatient services that Dan and others receive at an average cost of \$1,551 a year, will be eliminated. His friends fear that without treatment, Dan's mental illness and other serious medical conditions could result in his death.



Joyce McInerney first tried to kill herself at the age of 12, spurred by the voices in her head. That was the start of a lengthy battle with severe mental illness, marked by frequent hospitalizations and stays in community crisis care units. The turning point came in 2002, when she entered a short-term residential treatment facility operated by Peace River Center. Soon, she moved into supervised apartments and then became an outpatient, receiving case management and therapy services. In 2009, she got a part-time job as a peer specialist on the Center's state-funded FACT (Florida Assertive Community Treatment) team. She now works fulltime for the team and is a Certified Recovery Peer Specialist. If the Senate proposal is adopted, Joyce will not only lose the services that support her recovery but will also lose her job.



Adam O'Connor, 36, spent years battling bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression. The symptoms of his illness ended a promising career, put him in the hospital twice and once led him to attempt suicide. Unable to hold down a job, he lived on disability benefits and roomed with a family member. The drop-in center operated by his local mental health center started him on the path to recovery. That support, along with medication management and outpatient counseling from the center enabled Adam to get well. He now works 40 hours a week as a Certified Recovery Peer Specialist at another community mental health and substance abuse agency and is no longer on SSDI. The state-supported services that helped him succeed would be eliminated under the Senate's proposal and his job could be in jeopardy.