

## Mental health consumers fear program cuts

By Barry Eberling | DAILY REPUBLIC | April 07, 2009 16:22

FAIRFIELD - A couple of dozen people pleaded with the county Board of Supervisors Tuesday to spare the Neighborhood of Dreams program serving those experiencing mental health challenges.

The county has yet to officially propose cutting funding for the program run by Crestwood Behavioral Health. Still, state budget woes trickling down to the county has made this a possibility and some program users wanted to make their voices heard well before the June budget hearings.

Justin Quintena told supervisors during the public comment session that he has used drugs in the past and experiences anxiety. Neighborhood of Dreams is a like a second family where people accept him as he is, he said.

'We don't want this -- we need this. There's no place else to go,' he said.

Neighborhood of Dreams has three centers in Fairfield, Vallejo and Dixon. The county has talked about cutting funding by \$900,000 to \$1.1 million, which could force the program to close, program director Travis Curran said before the meeting.

The centers offer services such as vocational training and support. Several speakers predicted some of the mentally ill will seek help at hospital emergency rooms or will end up in jail if the program is discontinued.

Supervisor Barbara Kondylis said she knows how important the program is for the community.

'I haven't seen the budget yet,' she said. 'But if any cuts have to be made this would probably be the hardest, so I hope it doesn't happen.'

Supervisor Jim Spering advised the group to contact their state legislators. Solano County administers such services as mental health for the state and supervisors are faced with the prospect of having to use county dollars to backfill for state budget cuts or discontinue some programs.

'Make sure that your voice is heard in Sacramento,' Spering said. 'That's where the problem lies.'

County Health and Social Services Director Patrick Duterte said before the meeting that Neighborhood of Dreams is doing a great job. But the program officials wanted more than praise.

The program is providing a service the community wants us to do, said Jackie Shepherd, site supervisor for the Fairfield center.

'They say, 'We love you, we love what you're doing, but we're going to cut your funding in half.' '

Rosanne Aylworth of Vacaville has a 16-year-old son with a learning disability attending the Dixon center. He's been off of drugs for 65 days, but she dreads what might happen if Neighborhood of Dreams closes and her son must return to school district programs she doesn't believe will work for him.

'It's just a fear he's going back, he'll be back in the system,' she said with tears in her eyes.

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