



TO: Wisconsin State Senators and Representatives
FROM: C. Thomas Cook
DATE: November 4, 2009
RE: Prevocational Services Definition

Over the past several weeks, RFW has been working to raise awareness of a Department of Health Services action that threatens the future of Wisconsin's 66 Work Centers. **At the center of this concern is a new definition of prevocational services that specifically places a time limit on prevocational services.**

Many of your offices have heard from those directly affected about the value of these work center programs. A majority of those you have heard from have spent many rewarding years working in the work center environment and are terrified that this could someday cease to be an option for them. Despite claims by DHS that there is nothing to worry about, without the removal of the time limits in the definition, we still believe they have every reason to be concerned.

DHS wants us to believe that, despite putting specific language in the new waiver definition that makes prevocational services a time-limited option, they have no plans to follow this rule. We simply cannot accept this explanation. Especially in light of the fact that the definition was crafted, in part, by groups who have a public goal of putting an end to all sheltered work centers for the disabled.

At the heart of the difference in opinion between DHS and RFW is the disconnect between scholarly thought on issues surrounding work opportunities for the disabled (represented by DHS and some of its consultant allies) and the real-world impact that these changes would have by those who actually provide services to the disabled (RFW).

At the idealistic level, both sides share the same goals – to move all disabled persons into integrated community work environments with seamless efficiency. With the practical implementation of these goals, there are many difficulties associated with reaching 100% placement in community-integrated employment, including: lack of placement opportunities, the desire for some to remain in an environment they find comfortable and lack of job coaches. **RFW and its allies across the state are on the front lines when it comes to working directly with disabled citizens and their families implementing these policies and must take seriously DHS's written policies because, more often than not, the government demands they follow the rules as written.**

This new definition of prevocational services that includes time-limits is still DHS's official, written position. DHS has requested that RFW provide them with some acceptable, alternative language by the end of this week and RFW will meet that deadline, but the department's ongoing efforts to convince the legislature that all is OK, does not make us optimistic that this language will be taken seriously.

As long as the department refuses to change its official, written definition for prevocational services to exclude any time limits on prevocational services, we must assume that they are making this change with the future intent to enforce these time limits.

If the department has no intention of enforcing these time limits, as they seem to claim now, then a revised definition removing this language, while still working toward our mutual goal of moving as many people into community-integrated services, should not be a point of contention. We look forward to DHS altering its Family Care Waiver application to reflect their real plans to preserve the choice for permanent prevocational service placement and thereby preserving the opportunity for continued success of the program for the disabled it serves, as well as the many fine community and business partnerships that have developed at these work centers across Wisconsin.

We will continue to speak strongly for those we represent and hope that each of you will take the opportunity to visit your local work centers over the holiday break so that you can hear from those who would be directly affected if prevocational services become only a time-limited option. While it is difficult to briefly explain the impact that these centers have on an entire community, its ripples will help you understand why we cannot just take the department at its word.

If you need any assistance in setting up a visit with your local work center, please feel free to contact us.