

Rural citizens express views

Local disabled citizens discuss disability-related issues with area legislators

Amanda Boyle
Staff Reporter

Everyone wants a voice, including the disabled citizens of rural communities.

Nine area legislators faced a room full of inquiring citizens Monday at the Missouri Department of Mental Health's regional center. The Region II Council for Developmental Disabilities, an advocacy group for the rights of developmentally disabled individuals, sponsored the event. The group invited all legislators running for office in the area to the legislative forum, council director Donna Brown said.

The legislators who attended responded to a series of questions regarding issues facing the disabled community in the area as well as questions regarding Medicaid. The panel included legislators running for Missouri House Representative, United States House Representative and United States Senator.

"The main purpose [of the forum] is to really see the election candidates and what their views are on disability-related issues and to also educate them on our disability-related issues," Brown said. "Of course we want to know where they stand because people with disabilities vote too."

Brown said that when legislators think of disabled people, they often think of people who cannot do anything for themselves. She said she wants them to know that a disability does not mean the person cannot get out and vote.

Members of various disability-related organizations asked the legislators questions, and each legislator had a chance to respond. These organizations included

Chariton Valley Association for Handicapped Citizens, Learning Opportunities, The Sheltered Workshop, People First, Adair County Senate Bill 40 Board, Preferred Family Health Care and the Rural Advocates for Independent Living, Brown said.

She said the Region II Council has sponsored this event for around 30 years, but this year requested that other organizations ask questions as well. She said this helped show the array of disability-concerned organizations in the area.

A number of the legislators spoke about the lack of voice from the rural community regarding disability and Medicaid issues.

Brown said living in a rural area is especially difficult for people with disabilities or those in need of health care. She said families often are forced to drive hours for medical treatments because no therapy is available nearby, that schools can't afford to offer therapy because they don't have the necessary funding and that programs have no funds to meet transportation needs.

"In bigger cities, there are always more funds available for programs and services," Brown said. "We're just not fitting money or funds into building programs or services in rural counties like we should. ... If the programs or services were in [the rural] counties or at least in the next county over, it would just make such a difference."

Toward the end of the program, Brown opened up the floor for audience members to make comments or ask questions to the legislators. Pam Stokes, graduate student and LaPlata resident, commented to the panel about the impact of living in a rural community.

"These are real issues," Stokes said, her voice breaking. "These are real people, these are real hurting people. ... We farm. We have no money. We are really,

"These are real issues. These are real people, these are real, hurting people."

Pam Stokes
Graduate Student



Amy Deis/Index
U.S. and Missouri representatives answered questions at a forum Monday night at the Kirksville Regional Center. From left, Nancy Summers, Rebecca McClanahan, Erik Buck and Duane Burghard listen to citizens' inquiries.

really hurting right now. It's as bad as it was in the '80s. You don't see farmers committing suicide yet, but it is really, really bad right now on the farm. And we're cutting services at a time when rural America is really in crisis. I know there are different opinions here, but gosh, I'd like to see everybody working together to provide services."

Stokes said she attended the forum because she was curious to hear the differences between the various candidates' responses.

"I felt like the Republican candidates were saying that everything is fine and that we have to balance the budgets," Stokes said. "If I could have asked them again, if I could have personally talked to each of them, I would have liked to have said, 'Why don't we increase taxes on industry?' ... The large agro-business companies are making more money than all of the farmers in the U.S. put together,

so people are getting poorer and poorer, and the industries are showing more and more profits."

Stokes said she will graduate in December with a master's degree in English but is unable to find work in the area. She said that as a farmer's wife, she is not able to move to a larger city, so she might be forced to work part-time at Wal-Mart, Hy-Vee or Home Depot.

Despite everything, Brown said she thinks forums of this type are beneficial to informing the public where candidates stand.

"It's education," Brown said. "I mean, legislative forums like this on our issues, because we have such a large population of people with disabilities in this area, this really empowers self advocates to be able to speak up about their issues and empowers them to talk to their legislators. But we also educate the legislators on our issues."

Rebecca McClanahan, Democratic candidate for the Missouri House of Representatives for District 2, said she was thrilled to attend the forum.

"I feel very strongly about the issues," McClanahan said. "I think there are very important issues being discussed this evening, and I think we need to get the word out that there is a different voice here, and there are people that are willing to make a change, and we are willing to do something that is different than politics have usually done."

After the forum, McClanahan said she was pleased with the discussions.

"I think it's been excellent tonight," she said. "I think we saw some differences among candidates tonight, and that appears to really illustrate for the participants how important this kind of forum is because they can really tell that there are differences, and it may influence their vote."

Carpet conundrum confuses students tired of tiled floors

Stefani Wittenauer
for the Index

Junior Angela Fortner got a quick lesson in carpet installation on move-in day.

Fortner and her roommate bought a carpet for their Centennial Hall room after receiving a letter in the mail about an option for on-campus residents to purchase carpeting.

She and several other students were unhappy to find that their carpeting was not installed for them when they returned to campus.

"We already had carpet from last year that we could have used, but we paid the extra money because we thought it was going to be installed," Fortner said.

The National Residence Hall Honorary arranged the carpet sale as a fundraiser, said senior Nick McKeever, NRHH's treasurer.

NRHH is an honor society that recognizes leaders around campus. McKeever said that NRHH set up the fundraiser through On-Campus Marketing, a company that specializes in selling products to college students. On-Campus Marketing is the same company that sells care packages and diploma displays to Truman students.

Junior Jamie Matthews, president of NRHH, said this is the first year of the carpet sale fundraiser at Truman.

"[NRHH] had heard [of] other universities that were successful, and that's where we got the idea," she said.

In July, students living in Ryle, Centennial, Grim and Dobson halls received a letter and e-mail informing them they could purchase carpeting for their rooms.

The letter said students could choose from light blue, gray, green, beige or navy carpeting. McKeever said the carpeting cost about \$150 depending on the size of the room, and 31 students purchased a carpet through the program.

Students were guaranteed the correctly sized carpet at a student discount, and it would be waiting in the student's room on move-in day, according to the e-mail.

Many students took this to mean that the carpeting would be installed in their rooms for them before they arrived to campus.

Sophomore Ryan Brewer, a Centennial resident, ordered a carpet through the program. He said the letter he received from NRHH and On-Campus Marketing did not clearly state that he would be required to install the carpeting himself.

"I was under the impression that they would install it for me," Brewer said. "I thought that was how they worded it on their advertisement."

Mark Lowry, an adviser for NRHH and Ryle Hall's hall director, said the letter did not explicitly state that the carpeting would be installed for students.

"[The letter] said the carpeting would be in the room, not installed in the room," Lowry said.

Lowry also said NRHH did not receive any refund requests from students who were upset about having to install the carpeting themselves.

McKeever said NRHH had considered installing the carpeting for students but eventually decided against it.

"[NRHH] determined that it was logistically impossible for us to put down the carpet," McKeever said. "Also, it wouldn't be practical because if someone decided that they didn't want carpet ... they would have to remove it themselves."

Not all students were disappointed with the carpeting program. Junior Andrea Cluck, a Ryle resident, acknowledged that the letter explaining the program was ambiguous but said she was happy with her carpeting.

"I think I kind of got what I paid for," Cluck said.

Lowry said that because NRHH is a fairly new organization in only its third year of existence, the carpet sale helped the organization get its name out to the campus community. Because some students were dissatisfied, however, Lowry said he will mention the installation misunderstanding in his feedback to On-Campus Marketing and suggest a change in the company's wording on future letters about the carpeting program.



Ross Houston/Index
Sophomores Steve Lee and Ryan Brewer study in their room in Centennial Hall. Some Centennial residents chose new carpeting this semester.

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