



United Way Community Matters

By Mary Lou Goeke

Helping Disabled People Live Independently in Our County

Doug Patrick, a volunteer member of the Santa Cruz County Commission on Disabilities and Karen Gosling, a physical therapist from Dominican Hospital recently presented an excellent and comprehensive report to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors. They very carefully cataloged the current programs and services that aid disabled people to live independently in the community, as opposed to the alternative of costly institutional living facilities.

They examined the current government funding environment and concluded that, without intervention, major cuts in public and private funding threaten to significantly reduce, or eliminate, programs that address the needs of county residents with disabilities. Significant cuts will make it difficult for many individuals to sustain care plans that support community living.

They presented the story of one young woman who was paralyzed in a car accident. She is the single mother of two small children. Without her Lifeline paratransit transportation and in-home supportive services worker who helps her with household chores and personal care, she would be forced to live in a nursing home there would be no one to raise her two small children.

The report acknowledged that in this budget environment the County Board of Supervisors is faced with many difficult decisions regarding reduction and elimination of services. They suggested guidelines for the Board to use in determining the importance of a service and the impact of its reduction or elimination. The Commission's intent is to direct attention to program areas that are critical elements of an infrastructure that sustains county residents with disabilities.

The Commission's Report made nine recommendations to the Board of Supervisors:

- Maintain outreach programs that identify, address and monitor those not able to manage

their own care.

- Ensure that there is effective intervention when people with significant disabilities are facing homelessness.

- Ensure that complaints of neglect and abuse are monitored at adequate levels.

- Sustain support services that allow people with disabilities to retain independence, live safely and avoid the higher cost of out-of-home care facilities.

- Continue efforts to increase Medicare reimbursement rates.

- Increase the supply of affordable, accessible housing.

- Increase focus on the disability component of homelessness and the difficulty of maintaining care plans in unstable environments.

- For essential services, maintain funding at levels required to see the participation of other funders.

- Sponsor a collaborative effort to establish processes for the on-going assessment of the coverage and effectiveness of services provided to elderly and disabled county residents.

If you are in agreement with these recommendations for keeping disabled individuals living independently in the community please express your opinion to the Board of Supervisors, visit <http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/bds/ctysupvs.htm> for their contact information.

To view the entire report, visit <http://www.sccod.net/communitysurvey.pdf>.

For the past 16 years Mary Lou Goeke has been the Executive Director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County. She has 32 years of experience providing social services to elders, children and families. The mission of United Way is to improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz County by convening the community to seek solutions to their needs and by efficiently raising funds for the human care programs the United Way supports. Their website is www.unitedwaysc.org.