

April 2021

Dear Friends of UCP Heartland,

I have been fortunate and blessed to have the opportunity to have a career focused on serving people and families living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The past 22 years of working in this field, it is normal and very easy to get caught up in the day-to-day services and making sure everything is the best it can be. Human beings lives is the mission and because of this there are many challenges along the way, however, I always remind myself that for the past 68 years of existence of UCP Heartland.... the people and families we support have had to overcome so many obstacles and challenges just to be where we are today. 68 years of advocacy from not only thousands of people that have been on this journey with us but countless others that have stood up, been a voice, joined many calls to actions to make positive change for people and families.

As you may know, the Missouri Legislature is in full working mode and is winding down this year's session. The Budget portion of the session is a significant piece to the process and for intellectual and developmental disabilities services, there are line items in the budget that cannot continue to not be addressed.

- Appropriate competitive rates for community providers that serve people with disabilities. It is crucial the Missouri Legislator allocate \$86 million from the general revenue for Developmental Disabilities Rate Standardization. Currently, the budget draft includes only \$49 million. This appropriation is a cornerstone in supporting providers like UCP Heartland to solve the Direct Support Professional crisis. This will allow providers to have adequate resources in order to increase wages for direct staff, not only to address rising minimum wages, but also allow providers to appropriately compete for employees. This allocation is also a must because the State of Missouri has outdated reimbursement rates and the Center of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) at the federal level has given the state an ultimatum to fix this issue.
- One of the priorities for the State of Missouri is to ensure people with disabilities have the opportunity to work in a competitive, integrated setting as the first and preferred choice. In order to meet this priority, the Legislature needs to establish Employment First legislation to bring focus to maintaining Missouri's status as a model employer for people with disabilities. 75% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the state of Missouri are unemployed and we have to do better. A major part of the supporting people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment is to adequately fund this Vocational Rehabilitation Services. It is important the State of Missouri include state revenue in the budget for these services so we can take advantage of receiving the full match for the federal government. Having an Employment First philosophy but not investing in the supports needed to make this happen, would defeat the purpose.

Over the past 68 years, services, supports and overall quality of life has improved for people and families living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It takes a village to make this happen. There is still much work to be done and advocacy is an important piece to these continued advancements. UCP Heartland will continue to work with our partners at the Missouri Association for Rehabilitation Facilities (MARF), but it is important for the lawmakers to hear from our all of you.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about MARF and to send your message to your Missouri Senator. For your convenience, please see your respective senator and which area of UCP Heartland they benefit:

- Senator Mike Bernskoetter (Jeff City Gibbs Center for Independence)
- Senator Caleb Rowden (Columbia Child Development Center)
- Senator Jill Schupp (St. Louis Oak Tree Respite Home)
- Senator Brian Williams (St. Louis Community Services – North)

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clint Bolser', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clint Bolser
President and CEO
UCP Heartland
636.779.2252