

OUR SON FORREST

Submitted by Rebecca Sargent
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Our son is at Fircrest, an RHC. Our son's life was literally saved by Fircrest. Our story is one you should listen to, because there are thousands of people like our son who are entering the system and many of them will need the services that the RHCs offer which cannot be met 'in the community'.

A year ago our son, Forrest, was 18 years old and 6'2" we were getting attacked more and more as were his teachers and group home staff. He was scratching and biting intensely.

He sent 3 people to the emergency room. Everyone agreed that this was a medication issue.

He had been hospitalized at Children's Hospital two times and he got a psychiatrist. He got more new medications. He got worse.

No one really knew what to do. Children's Hospital, his neurologist and his psychiatrist recommended that he go to Fircrest for observation and med change. This was denied to us as an option.

Things escalated. His group home had him arrested. He was strapped to a board and hauled to Harborview. He was refused admittance to Children's and Harborview. Everyone wanted to send him to Fircrest but this was denied. He was sent to a hospital filled with homeless adults. They asked us: Why wasn't he sent to Fircrest? Good question.

He was drugged with more medications and left in an unheated padded cell to sit in his own feces and urine. We were there. Finally, after much pressure, DSHS admitted Forrest to Fircrest.

Within a month, with new medication and behavioral intervention, he was lucid and improving. The Fircrest doctors and staff took him off most of the meds he was on and started over. They understood severe autism and knew what to do.

Within six months he was completely non-violent at home and we have now him every weekend. He is speaking more and making amazing progress. Soon he will be able to live in the community without harming himself or others

If Fircrest is closed, there will be NO WHERE people like my son can go to get appropriate help. They just go to jail. RHCs are a critical part of our mental health safety net. No one should be sent to jail because of Autism, yet many are.

Autism is an epidemic. Many more like my son are coming. Closing places that can deal with this looming crisis is absurd and it will cost much more in the long run. Closing down Fircrest will not get rid of severe autism.

A compromise plan is possible but it is clear- the RHCS are needed. The RHC feasibility study recommends that the state provide crisis beds at the RHCs for clients like Forrest. These can be staffed with on-call staff. Several creative and positive solutions can be found!

SIMPLY CLOSING THE RHCs WILL HARM WASHINGTON FINANCIALLY, LEGALLY AND ETHICALLY AND WILL DEVESTATE SEVERELY AUTISTIC CITIZENS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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