

State of Wyoming

By Shawn Humberson, June 2016

There are several concerning issues facing individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities in our state. Over the course of two years, the state legislature has passed bills which change the mission of our only ICF-IID. This new mission is to include additional populations (persons with dual diagnosis, persons who have been civilly committed, and geriatric psychiatric patients; all of whom are currently served at the Wyoming State Hospital). In addition, the Wyoming Life Resource Center (WLRC) will no longer provide long term care. Instead, clients will be assessed, stabilized, and then placed in a community program or family home. The legislation also removed informed consent or choice from the statutes regarding placement at the Life Resource Center. VOR assisted members in Wyoming with an e-mail campaign asking legislators to vote against these changes. We successfully recruited the assistance of one legislator who insisted replacing part of the statute regarding the multi-disciplinary team (who are responsible for making the determination of appropriateness of a placement); thereby tying informed consent into the current statutes through said statute's definitions.

While we were successful in keeping our ICF-IID open and protected those who currently reside there from forced transitions, several alarming incidents/situations have guardians questioning the safety and well-being of their loved ones. As of May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Protection and Advocacy has an ongoing investigation for staff shortages, imminent danger to clients, and possible medical neglect/malpractice. Centers for Medicaid/Medicare Services have sent their federal surveyors in to investigate staff shortages, possible neglect/abuse/exploitation, and imminent danger. We have not been provided with an estimated report date.

In the coming year, we will continue to advocate for the rights of those served at the WLRC, for their safety, well-being and quality of life. Also, we will continue to follow the Legislative and Executive Task Force on Department of Health Facilities as they work toward capital construction at both the State Hospital and WLRC. Due to a sharp decline in state revenue, construction may be placed on hold until such time as the state budget will allow such an expensive project.

In addition to the problems at the Life Resource Center, the State Department of Health presented the legislature with their Medicaid Waiver for I/DD and ABI Rebasing Report. This report stated community programs could continue to provide waiver services for less than the payments received for these services in 2007. As a result of combined advocacy and education, the legislature rejected the report, directed the Department of Health to produce an accurate report, and set aside funds for community programs on the verge of bankruptcy. If these community programs are forced to close, legislators believe the individuals served in them will have to be placed at the WLRC until such time a more appropriate placement is identified.

Our family group, Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center, is very appreciative of VOR's support and efforts. We look forward to working together to give a voice to those who haven't one through education and advocacy throughout our nation.