

**Illinois Commission on Human Services**

*Respectfully submitted by Patrick Norris on 09-21-11, Springfield, IL*

My name is Patrick Norris, and I am a success story of recovery standing before you.

I would like to draw attention to the remarks of the late Senator Edward Kennedy, who warned about balancing the budget on the backs of the poor. He told us how wrong it was to expect the vulnerable to bear the brunt of budget necessities while they are burdened with economic hardship.

Two of the more vulnerable populations are those experiencing homelessness and those living with mental health conditions. One worries about housing, and the other can't always make sense of complicated things like forms and requirements. In my experience, help is needed to fill out forms and meet requirements when applying for assistance. There is a critical need for guidance at this point of their lives in order to move beyond the level of the most basic needs, and agencies and support programs have been able to help in the past.

In my own experience, I needed shelter from the street life, and I needed psychiatric help. I received support from a shelter, from a community hospital, a crisis center, Call For Help, supported housing, and Chestnut Health Systems. Step by step I have established myself in recovery and continued my progress by getting a part-time job in the mental health field. Eventually, I got a second part-time job to get more money and prepare for a permanent job. Then I was informed that I would have to be on spend-down for medicaid assistance and the spend-down amount is more than the income from the second job. How does this figure? (Am I going have to give up my second job, in order to keep from losing my mind?)

I was undergoing counseling as part of my psychiatric treatment, and the counselor thought I was making such progress that I should plan to move on from the counseling. At this time, severe circumstances overwhelmed me and I required more counseling. Unfortunately, the counseling was not available, and I have been under an enormous strain trying to deal with my emotions and mental stresses without proper help and I am in danger of having a relapse which would put me in a psychiatric unit. Here the cost for counseling is in the hundreds and the cost for hospitalization is in terms of thousands of dollars per day. The counseling is clearly cost effective. The populations mentioned above are often unable to maintain housing or medications and often end up using up valuable space on psychiatric units at enormous cost to Medicaid, when supported housing and medication supports are more effective at preventing repeat hospitalizations at a fraction of the cost.