“Be The Change You Wish to See...” - Mahatma Gandhi

Social Services are particularly vulnerable during difficult economic times. The Minnesota Legislature directly affects our funding because our business and funding comes from government contracts.

Even during the best economic times, social services funding is a large portion of the state budget, yet it lags behind most other industries in wages as well as profitability.

Orion Associates, Meridian Services and Zenith Services are diverse organizations in terms of the types of programs and services we offer. This has made us more resilient during the current economic downturn.

Last year the legislature cut our services by 2.58%. Our response to the cuts was to eliminate three positions and freeze wage increases. We also closed one of our Zenith programs. Cutting costs wherever we could, we stayed in business while a number of smaller social service organizations were forced to close their doors.

We also resolved to TAKE ACTION and formed a company-wide legislative action committee. The committee devised strategies for contacting our legislatures and for staying abreast of the developments in the legislature as they related to the State Health and Human Services budget.

The Governor initially announced that he would cut provider rates by 2% this year. The Minnesota House of Representatives and the Senate recommended no cuts.

Our legislative action included representation by 27 clients, managers and direct service staff at the Day at the Capitol for People with Disabilities on April 6th. Our group spoke with eleven legislatures while we were at the capitol.

We also sponsored two days at the Metro Office to organize and help staff members to contact their legislators. We set a goal of 30 contacts per week during the legislative session, meeting or exceeding this goal each week.

Thank you again to all who took action and contacted your legislature. We believe that our legislative action along with the advocacy of other providers, staff, self-advocates and parents made a difference.

Cheryl Vennerstrom
Chief Operating Officer

Headwaters is Traveling to Haiti | July 2010

Headwaters Relief Organization is taking 12 volunteers to Haiti July 17-23, 2010 in response to the Haiti disaster.

We are teaming up with ACTS World Relief Effort, an organization that has been sending volunteers to the region since the January earthquake. www.actswr.org

As part of our fundraising efforts we are sponsoring a 5K (3.1 mile) Fun Run! Come join us for a jog or walk on the beautiful trails of Elm Creek Park, located in Maple Grove on July 31 to raise funds for our volunteering efforts.

For information about the race, visit www.active.com, www.raceberryjam.com or by emailing Emily Ford at eford@orionassoc.net. Register early to receive a race T-shirt!
**No Rate Cuts for Services to People with Disabilities!!**

On Monday, May 17th, the Minnesota Legislature reached an agreement with the governor that included no provider cuts to services for people with disabilities. The agreement also preserved medical assistance funding for occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy.

This is a very important outcome that affects our organization, our staff, the people we serve and their families. Last year’s cuts resulted in decreases to our agency budget that affected our staff and our clients.

I think that one of the reasons we feel so good about this is because many of us actively participated in lobbying our legislators to reconsider cuts to services for people with disabilities.

Our political action, while new to many of us, was rewarded. While we have done some lobbying in the past, this was the first time we organized and made a plan to make a difference.

Services to people with developmental disabilities have benefited for years from excellent advocacy from their parents, the ARC, provider trade organizations and organizations such as ours. Our collective voices were heard by our legislators.

This is a good lesson and one we should not forget in years to come. So, while the legislative session is over, look for more legislative action from the staff and clients at Meridian Services, Orion Associates and Zenith Services.

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**Program Highlight | Edgewood Specialized Services**

Edgewood Specialized Services (ESS) opened its doors on March 17, 2010 to become Meridian Services’ 22nd residential program. Located in Crystal, ESS serves adults with developmental disabilities who are in problematic situations. Individuals are referred to ESS through the Metro Crisis Coordination Program (MCCP). These individuals stay at Edgewood for an average of 45 days.

Edgewood provides a structured environment that is supported by positive reinforcement and meets the unique needs of all individuals. Meridian Services develops individualized behavior management plans for each resident and also reviews medication regimes with a consulting psychiatrist. Residents also have the option to receive Occupational Therapy Assessments.

Successful programming elements for each individual resident are introduced into their placement programs once they are discharged from Edgewood.

ESS is operated by experienced and well-trained staff with the mission to help each individual grow and succeed every day.
CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT | Remembering Benjamin

The staff and consumers at Wirth Park lost a very special person that we all held near and dear to our hearts. Ben’s passions were chocolate and sensory items. One thing that we all miss is Ben’s infectious smile.

Ben showed all of us that in order to see a rainbow, you have to endure some rain. He will truly be missed and will always hold a special place in our hearts. We would like to thank the Marfield family for sharing Ben with us. There are no other words to describe him but perfect. Ben was true perfection!

Benjamin Marfield
April 29, 1980 to March 5, 2010

The Value of a Smile

“A smile costs nothing but gives much. It enriches those who receive without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. No one is so rich or mighty that he cannot get along without it and none is so poor that he cannot be made rich by it. Yet a smile cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as no one needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.”

ACTIVITIES | Golden Hills’ Future Firefighters

Heather Olson, a lead specialist with Meridian, came up with a great idea to take a few of the boys at Golden Hills Specialized Services to the fire station where her dad works. The boys were excited to see a fire truck up close and were even more excited when they were taken for a ride in one of them.

They got to turn on the lights on the truck and were shown how everything works. To make the day even better, the boys got to dress in full firefighter gear. Thank You to Heather and her dad for an experience the boys won’t forget!

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT | Tina Virts

Tina is a resident at Timber Crest SLS, one of Meridian Services’ SLS sites. She has been battling breast cancer since October 2009. Tina has completed her chemo treatment and is currently going through radiation therapy.

Throughout her battle with breast cancer, Tina has been very positive and has kept her spirits up. Even when she was too sick to talk, she would still fight to exercise saying how strong she is and that she is going to beat this.

Tina is very fortunate to have supportive staff at Timber Crest. Her staff have stood by and encouraged her through the most difficult days; they always try hard to cheer her up.

While going through chemo, one of Tina’s housemates was diagnosed with a different type of cancer. Tina took this as an opportunity to encourage her roommate and to share their experiences, saying they will beat this together.

Some of Tina’s favorite things to do are going out to eat, to the movies, bowling and watching Wheel of Fortune. Throughout her illness she has found time to enjoy all of these activities. Tina also loves meeting new people and making new friends.
February Employees of The Month

Johnetta Freeman - Timber Crest SLS

Johnetta Freeman has worked at Timber Crest for almost 10 years. She is very dedicated to the ladies in the house. Johnetta is always very reliable and does a great job when performing her job duties. She has been very dependable when dealing with the different medical issues that have arisen in the last year with the ladies.

Garrett Lakkonen - Swan Park SLS

Garrett has been a great asset to Swan Park SLS. The consumers really enjoy when he works. Garrett is willing to help out where he is needed and often changes his schedule to help out the company. Garrett is truly a great direct care staff and is very much appreciated at Swan Park.

March Employees of The Month

Deb Bartz - In-Home Metro

Deb is a dedicated employee who consistently goes above and beyond her job expectations. She is highly reliable and adjusts her schedule according to her family’s needs. At times, Deb encounters challenging behaviors but works with the family to come up with creative ideas and adaptations to ensure health and safety. Deb is up to date with her training, maintains positive communication with her team members and is greatly appreciated by the family with whom she works.

Heidi Muellner - Swan Park SLS

Heidi has worked at Timber Crest for about one year. She has adjusted very well to her position. Heidi takes on a lot of job duties without having to be asked and is very reliable. One unique thing Heidi does at the beginning of her shifts is she greets and chats with the clients individually. She is a great addition to the team!

April Employees of The Month

Robert Gill - Palmer Lake SLS

Robert Gill has impressively stepped up to the plate during recent staff turn over. He has taken the initiative to help newer staff, is always available to answer questions and has become a strong leader. Robert is always in a good mood and ready for whatever is to come his way. The consumers are always happy to see and greet him with smiles and hugs. He is truly an asset!

Matt Roering - Edgewood, Golden Hills, Hampshire

Matt has worked for Meridian Services for five years. He currently works full time between Edgewood, Golden Hills and Hampshire. Matt does a great job of de-escalating and managing challenging behaviors by always remaining calm and helping his co-workers. Always with a positive attitude, Matt is more than willing to pick up additional shifts when needed. He is also known to assist with any construction or computer needs.
MAY EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Stacey Werner - Zenith Services

Stacey has been the Program Manager for Zenith DSC for two years. She is well liked and respected by her staff and the consumers alike. Stacey is always willing to go above and beyond her duties to provide meaningful programming to the individuals we serve. Stacey has also participated in several company volunteer events such as Feed My Starving Children, the Headwaters 5K, Project Homeless Connect and River of Hope in New Orleans.

Rosanna Salzer - Orion ISO

Rosanna has been the corner stone for Orion ISO Payroll for the past 2 1/2 years. Our customers love her as she is always there to meet their needs, whatever they may be. Rosanna continuously goes above and beyond in both her everyday challenges and customer service to our clients.

TEAM ADVOCACY | What Qualities Make an Ideal Direct Care Staff?

**QUESTION:** What qualities would make an ideal direct care staff?

**RESPONSE:** Team Advocacy feels that an ideal direct care staff is one who gets to know each consumer as an individual. The ideal staff would not base their information on a diagnosis or what they have read in the consumers’ paper file, but rather get to know each consumer as an individual person. They would learn the interests of each consumer and participate in those interests.

The ideal staff would work or plan to work with the consumer long term. The ideal staff would also encourage the consumers to live a healthy lifestyle through good cooking and physical activities. They would be someone who helps them with their problems and listens to their concerns. The ideal direct care staff would also be someone who does not talk on their cell phone while working with a consumer.

TEAM ADVOCACY is a group led by seven Meridian Services consumers that are learning the skills to advocate for themselves and those around them. Team Advocacy works by the motto, “I am here to help other people and be helped by others; to speak out so I can be heard.” The group meets monthly and is always looking for new members!

If you are interested in learning more about Team Advocacy or becoming a member, please contact Erin Huldeen at 763-450-5046 or ehuldeen@orionassoc.net

TRAINING DEPARTMENT | Strategies to Create Behavior Change

Challenging behavior occurs when the demands of the environment exceed a person’s capacity to respond adaptively. The Training Department presents a series of classes for understanding, preventing and managing challenging behaviors.

**ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

This class explores strategies to help the agitated individual regain control and calm down while keeping everyone’s safety in mind.

**WHY BEHAVIORS HAPPEN**

This class explores the several factors that affect the behaviors of individuals with disabilities. The group discusses several common deficits of people with developmental disabilities and how they contribute to problematic behaviors.

**POSITIVE STRATEGIES FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE**

This class introduces participants to several techniques that any staff can use to decrease problematic behaviors. It will discuss various skills and tools that can be used to promote behaviors that are more desirable and acceptable.

Please visit the Training Department website or contact Jason Hoffrogge for scheduling and registration.

jhoffrogge@orionassoc.net
www.orionassoc.net/training
763-450-5029
Attitude is everything. When you have a positive attitude, there is a real commitment that you will perform at a much higher level, says Dr. Michael Roizen, Cleveland Clinic’s Chief Wellness Officer and coauthor with Dr. Mehmet Oz of the best-selling YOU series of books.

Consider the nuns: Researchers read the autobiographical essays of 180 U.S. nuns written back in the 1930s and ‘40s when they were young (average age 22) and found that those nuns who used optimistic verbiage went on to live longer lives—on average seven years longer—than more pessimistic nuns.

Optimists age well and their health is unusually good, according to psychologist Martin Seligman’s book Learned Optimism, which notes, “Literally hundreds of studies show that pessimists give up more easily and get depressed more often.”

One study found patients deemed pessimistic in a personality study 30 years earlier had a 19 percent increase in the risk of mortality. In a 2008 Duke University study, cardiac patients who were pessimistic about their recovery were twice as likely to die early as those who were optimistic.

Many studies show that cancer patients who visualize healthy cells eating or taking over cancer cells helps them battle certain forms of the disease. Many health professionals encourage patients to use such visualization techniques.

Tips for nurturing your inner optimist: “I write three thank-you notes at night. It’s one of the last things I do whether at work or at home,” Roizen says. Start a gratitude journal to recall why you’re grateful. (A bonus for you: Fifteen minutes of daily gratitude can make stress hormones plummet, he says.)

Taken from the article in SUCCESS, May 2010, written by Sally Deneen

What Is MERSC?
MERSC, a nonprofit professional association, is dedicated to helping member companies improve employee satisfaction and enhance employee well being by offering discounts to local businesses and retailers.

Who Belongs to MERSC?
Over 225 vendor companies belong to MERSC, offering discounts and value added services on a wide variety of activities, services and products. Examples include Nickelodeon Universe, Oil Changes, Xcel Energy Center, Let’s Dish, Hotels and Resorts, the Minnesota Zoo and more!

How Does it Work?
1. Check out the great deals at www.mersc.org
2. Tell the vendor prior to purchase that you are an employee of a MERSC member company or if buying online, enter the MERSC code.
3. Be prepared to show proof of employment, such as company ID or recent paycheck stub.

How Positive Attitude Boosts Physical Health

“Is giving yourself a pep talk every day silly, superficial, childish? No. On the contrary, it is the very essence of sound psychology. ‘Our life is what our thoughts make it.’”

~ Dale Carnegie

Trash Talk

Every day in the US, we produce enough trash to equal the weight of the Empire State Building.

We throw away 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour, produce enough styrofoam cups annually to circle the earth 436 times and trash enough office paper to build a 12-foot wall from Los Angeles to New York City.

We throw away 570 disposable diapers each second and toss out enough aluminum cans to rebuild our commercial air fleet every three months.

Each year we fill enough garbage trucks to stretch from Earth halfway to the moon (115,000 miles).

What’s the point?
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!

Stats from www.WebEcoist.com

Mersc Employee Discounts

For ALL Employees!!!!

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## Employment Anniversaries

### February

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<td>Catherine Cashman, Jeremy Faus, Heather Lovelace, Amandy Myhre, Bethany Prosser, Brian Sakowicz, Munah Sieh</td>
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