

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fraying safety net pressures parents of disabled youths

The recent layoffs at Gulfstream Goodwill Industries ("Bad economy forces Goodwill to lay off 40 workers," Sept. 18) may not be due only to a downturn in the economy but also reflect the domino effect of continued social-service budget cuts in assistance for the disabled community, and the havoc they are creating.

For the most fragile in our society, Florida is the Titanic. Families who attend our not-for-profit organization's workshop, "Protecting the Future and Benefits for Your Special Needs Child," we say, are on the lifeboats. My 20-year-old son has severe autism and lives in a wonderful group home in Manhasset, on Long Island, N.Y. This facility would cost \$100,000 per year for his care were it not for the Medicaid services he receives in New York.

Scott Badesch, chief executive officer of United Way of Palm Beach County, was quoted as saying, "We are going to start seeing agencies falling by the wayside." In fact, that downfall is well on track, as further evidenced by the cuts in services to families, for supportive and therapeutic services,

especially to the young and school-aged.

Our not-for-profit organization, Prosperity Life Planning (www.prosperitylifeplanning.org), has been teaching families since the early 1990s how parents can develop the legal documents and financial resources to better provide for their child's (and adult children's) present and future care, as well as take advantage of possible tax savings along the way. Director Karen Greenberg, who holds a master's degree in taxation and is a certified financial planner, teaches parents in South Florida what she has done for her own child, Ricky.

October is National Disability Awareness month, and in light of the Florida Legislature's scheduled meetings over the next 10 days on budget cuts for services, and the attending petitions for an injunction against these cuts, now is a great time for parents to learn ways to develop resources for their kids and, we only can hope, be less dependent on social services.

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