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[Home](#) / [news](#) / [local](#) /

Possible State Cuts Coming to Work Program for Special Needs Adults

By Devon Walsh



A local non-profit agency that employs people with special needs, is facing state funding cuts. Mobile Arc, formally known as MARC, may be forced to close its work-training program. Over 120 people with developmental disabilities are in the program.

News Five was there as the Mobile Arc employees made wooden furniture and lattice work to be sold around the country, as well as plant sleeves that are sold to florists. The sheltered work training program is paid for with Medicaid dollars from the State of Alabama. Mobile Arc has been told, that the funding will come to an end, in the next three years, as sheltered training programs are being phased out.

Parents are expressing concern that the training program may end. They say many of their their children wouldn't be to able to hold regular jobs in the community. Anne Smith's 41 year old daughter, Margaret, has worked with at Mobile Arc for over 20 years. She says, "The clients here may get a minimum monetary bonus, but they get the maximum benefit from the program." She adds, "There are people who

are intellectually disabled and able to work in the community and handle a job, and there are those who are not."

Lindsay Hutchisson with Mobile Arc, says, they are not being told specifics about the cuts, just that they are coming. "We hope that this doesn't happen for us, for the people we serve here every day. It would be devastating." She says, the clients "are excited about working. They are enthusiastic about the products they make for the community. They know it goes into the community, and they are excited about the paycheck they get every two weeks because they get to decide what they want to do with that paycheck."

Jeff Shackelford, a spokesperson with the Department of Mental Health issued this statement to News Five:

"Like every state agency, the Alabama Department of Mental Health is examining future budgets and funding in these tough economic times. Providing the best treatment and services is our goal. While programs with sheltered workshops, for only individuals with disabilities, provide some work opportunity, it is often below minimum wage. Individuals with mental disabilities have the same desires as those without disabilities. Many want to have market economy jobs and contribute to society. This integration is deemed more therapeutic and meets federal policy while funding source requirements are changing to encourage supported and integrated employment."

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