

Unlock The Doors To Real Communities

Listening Tour – Quitman, Brooks County

Quitman, Brooks County Georgia

Home of the Camelia, and the home of James Pierpont, the author of Jingle Bells

The Arc of Brooks County, Hosts

Attendance, 20 people

Transportation Straw Poll: 20 Yes 0 No



Quitman Listening Tour Meeting



It was hard to start talking before digging into the fabulous food that the Arc of Brooks provided for us. After kidding me that “they were not a cooking group” they put out pans of fried chicken, potato salad, green beans, rolls, and lime jello whip on the side counter. We were also treated to homemade chocolate cake with “Welcome GCDD” written on the top.

Before too many people arrived, we had a conversation with some of the staff about waivers.

There would be questions, the director said, about the short term and long term lists, how the waivers were allocated, what were they to do with students graduating from high school, etc.

And then I learned a startling fact — the last new waiver to be awarded in Brooks County was FIVE YEARS AGO.

Five years since anyone has received a waiver. That’s sobering. Much longer than a short term list represents.

The Director said she felt that lots of people put their kids on the list because they have been told that the wait would be long. Someone asked, what does “short term” mean? I answered that in some states, courts had decided that short term meant a need that had to be met within 60 to 90 days. But with only 100 waivers proposed in the budget, ‘short term’ in Georgia was relatively meaningless. In the metro area I was told while pursuing services for a family, there were 10 waivers for 999 people on the list. So what constitutes crisis in a context like that? It really does come down to life threatening situations.

We asked what people thought was going well, for themselves or their families, and those responses were about shelter and safety, taking care of each other, and concerns about keeping things going. They valued the center we were meeting in because it did provide some community, and a break for families. But the group also recognized that some of the individuals with disabilities who used the center needed something more, and the staff felt challenged to provide it.

We asked, what’s the challenge? More training for staff, particularly for staff who would be supporting individuals who were coming out of hospitals, and individuals who had dual diagnoses in mental illness. More resources for more staff, so individuals could get more personal attention. Transportation options. More flexibility with their funding. One provider stated that she might have money in her contract for supported employment, but no one who needed that service. Yet she couldn’t reallocate those funds to the mom who had called her and was desperate for someone to take her adult daughter out in the community one afternoon a week so she could get a break. The provider really felt that if decisions about services and support

could be made closer to home, by the people who needed and used them, then a group of families might decide it was better for all the families to have one or two days of support instead of one or two families having five days of support. But she had no flexibility to make those adjustments. "Some support is better than none," she said. She said it a few times.....

There seemed to be little knowledge of family support, what it could do for people. We shared where the application was located, and the list of services it could provide. A CSB staff person was there, and she stated that there were 20 family support "slots" for a 10 county area. Given that there were family support resources in the budget as a result of the DOJ Settlement, would they be getting more "slots?" This to me was an a curious way of putting the question, since we had never thought of family support in terms of "slots." Why weren't they allocated a lump sum and told to make it serve as many people as possible? And if what I have reported here is NOT the case, why is that the understanding? How well is information about what is available being shared?

We passed out a lot of information, about the crisis services, the DOJ settlement, Olmstead, and the transportation referendum. Fortunately for us, a member of the Regional Commission Roundtable was there, and he backed up everything I said. Toward the end of the meeting, he asked me, "Could I do a little politicking?" I told him I couldn't, but he could go ahead. He said to the group that the transportation referendum was the best thing to happen to their area, and they should support it!

Individuals could liken the state budget situation to their own checkbooks and household finances. When things get tough, you cut back. If you still don't have enough to pay your bills, members of the family get a little side work. All agreed the state could not cut any more. Where would new money come from? The roundtable representative stated Georgia needed to invest in new business, bring new enterprise to the state. I agreed, but added, what business needs when they are considering relocating is a transportation system that works and an education system that provides a competent workforce. How are we doing there?

In the end, when we asked about what they value enough to vote for, it was all about quality of life in their own communities. Support for folks. Waivers. Transportation. Quality education. Self-sufficiency. Health. Flexibility. Jobs and opportunities for meaningful work.

As I stated in one of my Mia's Space columns, what's so special? Isn't this what we all want?

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