

Stark County Board of DD
Frequently Asked Questions
January 27, 2015

1. *Why is Stark DD closing one of its workshops?*

Over the past several years, Stark DD has been shifting its service delivery model from being primarily a provider of services to function more as a connector between service providers in the community and individuals and families that need those services. We are beginning to see some success with that initiative and are also seeing people choosing other area providers to deliver their day program services. As a result, we no longer have as many individuals working in our sheltered workshops. We will close the Whipple-Dale workshop, while still maintaining West Stark and Lester Higgins Adult Centers so individuals who prefer working in this environment will have that option.

2. *Why Whipple-Dale? Isn't this the most centrally located of your facilities – and the largest?*

After thoroughly assessing our facilities, we determined that consolidating our workshops and closing Whipple-Dale makes the most sense. We have room in the Whipple-Dale facility to consolidate our administrative staff, which will save us the cost of renting space in North Canton. But it's important to note that nothing will actually change until the end of the year, giving us plenty of time to work out the details and address any concerns raised by the individuals we serve and their families.

3. *How many people are currently served in the Whipple-Dale workshop?*

We currently have 182 individuals enrolled at Whipple-Dale, with a daily attendance just under 150. Our enrollment in the three workshops is down 37% over the past four years, making it possible for us to consolidate. This is largely due to our efforts to move as many individuals as possible to employment in the community. There are also many individuals choosing other community providers for their day services. Nevertheless, we recognize that some individuals with disabilities will want to continue working in a sheltered workshop environment, and we will continue to provide that opportunity at the two remaining locations.

4. *Which workshop has the lowest enrollment? Why not just close that one?*

The Higgins Adult Center has 85 people enrolled; West Stark has 124 and Whipple-Dale has 182. However, we did a thorough analysis of the three facilities and decided it would be most effective to close the Whipple-Dale workshop. While this will be the most expensive building to renovate because of the size of the facility, it is the most difficult to bring into compliance with state and federal initiatives requiring that people with developmental disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.

5. *Why not close Higgins, since it's the oldest of the three workshops?*

Based on a thorough analysis of the three facilities, we determined that closing Whipple-Dale makes the most sense. Higgins has space available for consolidation and the size is appropriate for the individuals we serve.

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6. *Who made the decision to close Whipple-Dale, Bill Green or the Board?*

The Board voted to consolidate from three workshops to two, but it was up to the superintendent to determine which workshop to close. This has been an open and transparent process. We have held and will continue to hold meetings with our employees, with the individuals we serve and their families, and with members of the community. We will continue throughout the year to hear their concerns and work out the details. Our highest priority will continue to be connecting individuals with disabilities and their families with the services they need, and doing it in a way that ensures those services are sustainable.

7. *Will the two remaining workshops be able to handle the influx of people from the closed workshop?*

Yes, our analysis shows there is capacity at both the West Stark and Lester Higgins Adult Centers. We no longer have as many individuals enrolled in our sheltered workshops, although we recognize that some individuals with disabilities will want to continue working in a sheltered workshop environment. We will continue to provide that opportunity at these two locations.

8. *Are the workshops losing money?*

Stark DD has lost significant funding. Since 2011, Stark DD has lost \$5.6 million in state funding. Additionally, we have lost \$1 million in property tax revenues every year because of lower property values in Stark County. The Board has been working hard to reduce expenses so it can balance its budget without negatively impacting service to individuals with disabilities and their families.

9. *How much will it cost to renovate Whipple-Dale to accommodate administrative staff from the North Canton facility?*

We expect that the renovations costs will be \$500,000 to \$750,000. Keep in mind that, by consolidating staff, we eliminate the expense of leasing the building in North Canton. Our highest priority will be continuing to connect individuals with disabilities and their families with the services they need, and doing it in a way that ensures those services are sustainable.

10. *Is money the only reason you're consolidating?*

It is certainly a factor, but a number of federal and state initiatives also factor into our decision, many of them in response to a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court declaring that people with developmental disabilities have the right to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Our highest priority will continue to be connecting individuals with disabilities and their families with the services they need, and doing it in a way that ensures those services are sustainable.

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11. What will happen to the people who depend on Whipple-Dale workshop?

We will work closely with people impacted by consolidation so they can make as smooth a transition as possible, whether that's to one of the other workshops, to another service provider, or to employment in the community. We recognize that some individuals with disabilities will want to continue working in a sheltered workshop environment, and we will continue to provide that opportunity at the other two locations.

12. How will you help those people and their families adjust to such an enormous change in their routine?

We will meet one-on-one with individuals and families to address their concerns and provide assistance. We know this will be difficult for some of these individuals and their families, but remember, we will have a full year to prepare for the actual consolidation. That will give us time to work with our families and smooth the transition.

13. What will happen to the Stark DD staff at the Whipple-Dale workshop? Will they lose their jobs?

This consolidation should not result in loss of current jobs. Positions that may become open will not necessarily be filled, so staff size will be reduced by attrition. We are committed to working with our employees to make any workplace transitions needed as smooth as possible, and we welcome their input and questions.

14. Stark DD closed the Cohen-Joliet workshop in 2010. Why is it necessary to close another one?

Over the past few years, we have undertaken a dramatic shift in the way we deliver services to individuals with disabilities and their families. We've moved from being primarily a provider of services to functioning more as a connector between service providers in the community and individuals and families that need those services.

We have placed more people with disabilities in jobs in the community and others have chosen different providers in our community. This is in keeping with positive changes in the way society views individuals with disabilities and overall trends, including court decisions that support the rights of those with disabilities to live and work in the community rather than in segregated environments.

15. Will closing another workshop take care of Stark DD's financial issues?

Stark DD is directly accountable to the individuals we serve and their families, and also to the local taxpayers who regularly approve levies that provide more than half of our funding. We are good stewards of those funds, but we must be constantly vigilant. Over the past several years, local property tax revenues have declined due to lower property valuations, while the number of individuals receiving services has steadily increased. The Board must continue to work hard to reduce expenses so we can balance our budget without negatively impacting service to individuals with disabilities and their families.

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16. Do you foresee closing another workshop, leaving just one open?

I'm not going to speculate on what may happen in the future. What I can tell you is that right now, we are executing on our three-year plan to shift our business model to be less a provider of services and more of a connector between service providers in the community and individuals and families that need those services. This is in keeping with state and federal initiatives, many of them in response to a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court declaring that people with developmental disabilities have the right to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. We will continue to honor our commitment to those we are currently serving as well as be a safety net provider for those individuals who can't be served by another area provider.

17. Do you foresee getting out of the workshop business altogether?

We recognize that some individuals with disabilities will want to continue working in a sheltered workshop environment, and we will continue to provide that opportunity. Although we will continue to provide adult support services, we expect to adapt those services to support our mission and better serve people with disabilities. In general, the people we serve will be much more involved in their community. We expect to provide workshop services only as a safety net provider for those individuals who can't be served by another area provider.

18. Aren't there other ways the Board can save money?

By transforming the way we deliver support and services, we anticipate annual savings of \$1 million beginning this year. We have also implemented cost-saving strategies to maintain our budget. For example, we have taken advantage of new technologies to make our processes more efficient. We have worked to renew grant programs. And we are maximizing federal Medicaid dollars by increasing the number of new Medicaid-supported waivers for people going into adult services.

By doing this and keeping vigilant watch over the funding environment, our organization will remain financially healthy through 2019. Our goal is to continue protecting our funding levels, and continue delivering on our strategic plan so the Board is sustainable well beyond 2019.

19. What will you do if your funding gets cut even further?

We hope that doesn't happen. Since 2011, we lost \$5.6 million in state funding. Additionally, we have lost \$1 million in property tax revenues every year because of lower property values in Stark County. We have implemented difficult cost-cutting strategies to cope with those losses while still providing support and services to the people who count on us. Our goal is to continue protecting our funding levels, and continue delivering on our strategic plan so the Board is sustainable well beyond 2018.

20. How will this closure impact the local economy?

We do not anticipate an economic impact in the broader community since we do not anticipate any loss of jobs as a result of this consolidation. Our highest priority will continue to be connecting individuals with disabilities and their families with the services they need, and doing it in a way that ensures those services are sustainable.