

Students protest elimination of adult health services

Facebook used to facilitate action

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Amanda Summat, a junior English major, collected 664 signatures in three days this month in an effort to save California Adult Day Health Centers.

People around the state have been petitioning to save the centers ever since Gov. Jerry Brown proposed last January to eliminate the services in order to save more than \$177 million.

The centers provide day services to 37,000 disabled and elderly adults statewide, affording their families a reprieve from full-time caregiving and offering social and some health services to participants.

Summat, who wants to be a geriatric nurse, found out about the health centers through a posting for an internship on Aggie Job Link with the Yolo Adult Day Health Center in Woodland. After visiting the center, she was impressed by the compassionate care and dynamic services offered.

Summat decided to reach out to students after learning that the centers might be shut down last year, but only had a few days to collect signatures before the petitions were due.

"It was the demographic most accessible to me. [Students] are people who, for the most part, are active and want to make a difference in society. You know, fulfill the cliché student activist role," she said.

Summat downloaded the petition online and went around campus asking people to sign it. She spoke at her lectures and some bigger ones, as well, but was not able to reach her goal of 1,000 signatures. She said she was most astonished by how many people chose not to sign the petition and that this is a cause students should care about.

"We may be in our early twenties now, but we'll be there one day. We're the people that can make a difference," Summat said. "I hope if I'm in this position some day, someone is going to be there advocating for my best interest when I can't."

Senior English and philosophy double major Amani Liggett signed the petition while in her Irish literature class.

"My brother has autism, so [the petition] made me think of him, and I was like, 'Wow, that could be him in 40 or 50 years and if they take away that kind of stuff and I'm not around, then what would he do?'" she said. "As we get older it makes me think what are these people supposed to do, and I don't think it's right."

Allison Moore, a senior community and regional development major, also joined the effort to save Adult Day Health Centers. She took the protest to Facebook and has inspired people to get involved around the state.

Two weeks ago, Moore came to campus and began taking pictures of people holding signs that read, among other things, "I love my grandma" or "I love old people."

"It started out as silly and took off. It became huge," Moore said.

After a few hours on campus, Moore took pictures of over 330 people holding signs. After putting the pictures on Facebook, other California centers got involved and put their own pictures up. Moore said Planned Parenthood began a similar campaign to protect their own budget cuts a few days later.

As an intern at the Yolo County center, Moore said working with the adults there has changed her life.

"The first time I went to the center I knew it was where I was supposed to be," Moore said. "[Working with adults] is the best of both worlds. They're like kids, but you speak to them like adults and can connect as adults. It has taught me so much."

Jodie Valley, a medical social worker at the Yolo County center, worked with both Summat and Moore in their efforts to protect the centers.

"I have seen an increase in interest among younger people all around. Often times it's because of a personal experience with a grandparent or family friend that helps open their eyes to issues among older adults. What people need to realize is that there are long-term effects here. Even though the proposed elimination may not impact them immediately, it will impact everyone eventually," Valley said in an e-mail interview.

She added that saving the centers is more financially efficient, as well.

"When these older adults have to go into skilled nursing facilities, it's the tax payers who will pay," she said. "Skilled nursing costs approximately \$4,000 per month."

Valley said she thinks it's great that students are taking notice of this important issue.

"I don't usually get involved in this kind of stuff and I'm not too into politics," Summat said. "But I definitely think that if there's something worth fighting for, you should be a part of it."

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