

Cuts could limit help for at-risk children

By Eric Timmons
etimmmons@qconline.com

State funding cuts mean fewer low-income children will have access to counseling services in the Quad-Cities that help keep them in school, according to a local agency.

The Youth Service Bureau of Rock Island, which provides home-based counseling to families and at-risk children, is set to lose a \$70,000 federal grant from the state in July.

"With that money gone we'll be working with less low-income families," said YSB Executive Director Richard Connor.

The agency had expected to lose \$77,000 in block grant funding from Nov. 1 of last year, but a couple of weeks before that state officials changed their mind, Mr. Connor said.

"It was just a really messy process," he added.

The loss of \$70,000 in funding in the summer will be a blow to the small organization, which has annual rev-

enues of about \$500,000 and employs six therapists and a clinical supervisor, Mr. Connor said.

YSB provides counseling to low-income families that would be less likely to go to an office to meet with a counselor.

Children and teens often are referred to the agency by the police or schools, and more than 200 families were served in the 2011 fiscal year.

Most of those served by YSB were on the west side of Rock Island and the Floraciente neighborhood in Moline.

Local politicians, school administrators and officials working in the criminal justice system asked the state not to cut funding to YSB in letters sent to the Illinois Department of Human Services last September.

"The potential social costs are too high for us not to provide these services," State Sen. Mike Jacobs, D-East Moline, wrote.

Retired Moline High School guidance counselor Timothy

Bell, who sits on the board of YSB, said the group would be forced to reduce its family therapy staff by 1 and a half counselors if state funding is cut.

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David VanLandegen, Rock Island County Court Services director

"The counselors at the YSB work to get the runaways back home, get truants back into school, work with parents on effective parenting skills, and teach the kids the importance of an education and of staying out of the criminal justice system," he said.

State funding to YSB has been steadily reduced in recent years, Mr. Connor said. But the organization does get money from Rock Island

County and the United Way. Cutting funding for the counseling YSB provides to at-risk youth and their families may avoid higher costs to the state in the future, David VanLandegen, director of the Rock Island County Court Services wrote.

"It is my belief that, at some level, this is a pay now or pay a lot more later quagmire for the department (of humans services)," he wrote in a letter to the state.

For fiscal year 2011, 37 YSB clients were identified as truant or irregular in their school attendance, according to a report by the group for the state. At the conclusion of services, 24 of those clients no longer exhibited truant behavior. Other clients improved their academic performance or behavior in the classroom.

YSB also helped 53 families with concerns about physical safety in fiscal year 2011 and 32 of the families reported that relationship violence was no longer a concern after working with the agency.