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### COLUMNS



By: Elizabeth W. Bauer

## Reimagine Community Mental Health In A Self Determined Way

March 11, 2016

An opportunity exists to light a candle rather than simply curse the darkness. In the heat of discussion regarding the Michigan Governor's Executive Budget proposal for 2016-2017, I see a light. The light generated by the discussion is the light of opportunity.

I am joining my colleague and friend, Tom Watkins, the former state superintendent of schools and state mental health director and current visionary leader of Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority ([www.dwymha.com](http://www.dwymha.com)) in seeing this "threat" as an opportunity to reimagine and reinvent the public mental health system in ways that moves more dollars from administrative layers and bureaucracy to service and support for people in need. See: [The Sky Is Not Falling](#). Let's reimagine and reinvent Michigan's behavioral health system:

<http://dome magazine.com/tomwatkins/tw031916>

Former State Representative, Phil Cavanagh recently wrote in a column on these pages entitled, [DWMHA: Mission Driven Government That Works](#). "DWMHA is leading the state in its programming by utilizing best practices, data driven outcomes and striving for the greatest level of independence of the 70,000 persons with mental illness, developmentally disabled and substance uses disorders they serve annually." I concur (<http://dome magazine.com/cavanagh/pc030416>).



Former State Representative, Phil Cavanagh

The Governor has proposed transferring the funding currently going to the PIHPs (not for profit public entities) to Medicaid Health Plans (for -profit private entities.) There are advocates for both systems. To my mind, neither system is the best answer. Both systems are highly bureaucratic and costly.

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We need to start with the belief that all people are valuable.

While those wielding power over both systems debate the future direction of state funds, people who use the services have a huge opportunity to advocate change that leads to progress. Lt. Governor Brian Calley has offered to lead a work group to address the various concerns of providers and recipients of service. As a parent and advocate I appreciate his leadership. I am told the work group will include individuals who use supports and services as well as their direct support professionals. I hope they will be asked what they want and need to live dignified, self-determined lives fully integrated within their communities.

I have advocated the rights of individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, behavioral health and other conditions at state, national and international levels for 58 years. When I began my career as a speech therapist most men, women and children suffering these conditions were either living in an institution or hidden at home. There was no right to education in 1958 and community-based supports and services were years away.

The driving principle in my life was and still remains: **All people are valuable.**



*Liz Bauer, former State School Board member with her daughter, Ginny*

Believing that means that all should have a say in their life circumstances. While my earliest efforts were driven by principle, they got a turbo boost in 1967 when the third of our four children was born with profound disabilities. Ginny Bauer could not suck or swallow, did not respond to light or sound, did not move on her own, and frequently needed to be resuscitated. When she was nine months old, the eminent pediatric neurologist in our area conducted a week-long exam and then told us, "She is blind, deaf, and profoundly retarded. Put her away and forget her." That was the "treatment" of the day.



*Old State "Hospital"*

Fortunately, my training and experience saved her from that death sentence. I recruited and trained 40 volunteers who worked in shifts in our home for years. We kept Ginny moving. She was touched, sung to, and involved with her family and community. In 1972 The Arc of Pennsylvania successfully sued on behalf of her right to an education and Ginny finally

got to go to school.

Today Ginny is 47. She is not blind or deaf. She can walk. While she still has not spoken, she communicates effectively with gestures and other behaviors. Over the years and with constant, appropriate supports and services, she has increased her skills (remember that her's is a "developmental" disability). She is a "force of nature" so to speak. She is valuable and she has influenced more lives than I or others ever will.

I tell this story (too briefly) to make the point that from nothing came something. With advocacy we got the right to an education, community and behavioral health services and supports and more.

Sadly, over time these systems grew bigger and bigger, and so-called "reforms" consisted of adding more layers of oversight. Lots of people who set out to do good ended up doing well and as the service system grew and grew the amount of public support available to the beneficiaries and those who provide their direct care, shrunk. It is unconscionable that direct support professionals who foster the development of the skills and knowledge of the Ginny's of our world earn poverty wages working 12 hour shifts, while those working in the multiple contractual layers above them make six figure salaries. We can change this. The light of opportunity is shining bright. Individuals who use services need to be asked what they need and desire. Providers of these services need to listen and act accordingly.

What we have today grew from nothing. Just as the tailor of a poor-fitting suit tears out the seams and redesigns it to fit right, we need to tear down this bureaucracy and redesign it to fit people seeking to live self-determined lives as valued citizens in our communities. It will take work. All worthwhile endeavors do. It is possible. It can be done.

Lt. Governor Brian Calley has created a forum seeking our ideas, hopes and dreams to reimagine and redesign a system of care for people we love. He has challenged us to: "Approach this opportunity as if we just discovered this place called Michigan and we had 300,000 people with disabilities that needed care and support, and each year \$2.4 billion washed up on our shores to serve these fellow citizens." He is pushing us to help redesign a system around our shared values to help and support our loved ones.

I and others are rolling up our sleeves and ready to get to work. We will continue to advocate keeping the "Community" in our mental health system.

Shine on.

**Elizabeth W. Bauer** consults worldwide on human rights and civil society. The mother of a woman with profound intellectual/developmental disabilities, her professional credentials span the fields of education, behavioral health and advocacy.

March 10, 2016 · Filed under [Elizabeth Bauer](#)

## 10 responses so far ↓

- [Anagnorisis](#) // Mar 11, 2016 at 7:41 am

This is true, which I have seen firsthand, persons who would otherwise be relegated to dustbin conclaves able to function in the world. In the 70's especially I noted the existence on the streets of those formerly in state hospitals as the emptying of those archaic medieval structures transpired. Certainly the cost of bureaucracy takes up most of the money allocated. I have pondered this outcome since having become immersed in jail and prison advocacy imbroglios for these are the repositories of those still falling through the netting. It is past time to reengage that research into realizable denouement.

- [2 Elmer Cerano](#) // Mar 11, 2016 at 9:46 am

Liz, you are right on target. With the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley, we have a unique opportunity to re-establish Michigan as the national leader in providing the best possible array of supports and services to people with disabilities. The guiding principles and values imbedded in the concepts of "self-determination" "Person Centered Planning" and true community inclusion for all people, give us the foundation to re-Imagine what can be.

Future generations of people with disabilities are counting on us to set the stage for previously unimaginable opportunities.

Elmer

- [3 Tricia Luker](#) // Mar 11, 2016 at 1:05 pm

We join with Liz Bauer and Tom Watkins and a chorus of others who are encouraging the Michigan legislature to reimagine the mental health service system in Michigan. We all have protested the layers of bureaucracy that siphons funds that truly are intended for the care and treatment of our state residents with disabilities. With the proposed boiler plate language diverting service provision to for-profit entities, we only can imagine what dastardly services and systems would await those who most need our help.

We embrace self-determination, person-centered planning and the principles of living in the community that inform providing the services our mental health customers want and need. We encourage Lt. Governor Calley and the legislature to walk with us down this road to achieve a services system that spends its money on care and services rather than on bureaucracy and profits.

- [4 Jim Dehem](#) // Mar 11, 2016 at 3:24 pm

Self-determination is clearly a significant part of system change that puts services and supports into the hands of the person who needs them. One major flaw in our system that costs lots of money is that services have been determined and delivered through professionals and providers rather than by the person or their trusted allies themselves. Real person centered planning seeks the person's aspirations first in planning their own lives. Self-determination then gives them control over resources to achieve that life. We need to replace the traditional program model to a support model. This means changing from living in residential facilities to living in homes they choose and control with support. It also means spending their days working or participating in their communities rather than sheltered day programs. The new system needs to cater to the people it serves—not the other way around.

- [5 Lois Shulman](#) // Mar 12, 2016 at 2:36 pm

thank you Liz. your

- [6 Re-imagine Community Mental Health In A Self Determined Way](#) // Mar 12, 2016 at 6:25 pm

[...] Community Mental Health In A Self Determined Way

<http://domemagazine.com/bauer/show/116> Currently, every dollar appropriated to support people who use behavioral health, I/DD, SUD, SED [...]

- [7 Alex Cintron](#) // Mar 12, 2016 at 9:11 pm

All People are Valuable... My Candle is Lit. Education is a powerful need for all, especially those who suffer from mental illness. No one should live in the shadows of darkness. Thank you for leading the path and continuing to open the eyes of upcoming generations.

- [8 Tom](#) // Mar 13, 2016 at 10:35 am

The opportunity remains to address serious and needed reforms and reinvent behavioral health in ways that:

- \* enhances services and support to consumers, families and communities
- \* flattens administrative and duplicative administrative layers
- \* integrates care at the consumer level
- \* strengthen governance
- \* reduce/ eliminate conflicts and
- \* redirect savings back to service

- [9 Mark Schireson](#) // Mar 13, 2016 at 1:16 pm

It's shockingly simple: Did you ask me (those who receive services)? It's the difference between a plan that purportedly saves the state money, allows for-profit insurance companies to make money, all at the expense of the the most vulnerable of our citizens. Or craft legislation that secures more benefits for this population by streamlining the process to deliver these services. Thank you, Liz, for your always brilliant guidance!

- [10](#) **Mary Olson** // Mar 14, 2016 at 10:05 am

Liz,

Yes! It is an opportunity.  
Systems change is also developmental. Let's keep evolving and improving – including making the changes needed in Michigan and for all our citizens.  
Thank you for a great message, Mary

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