

Close connections... a powerful difference

Make it possible for *all* persons with disabilities in Wisconsin to experience the greatest possible quality of life. That is the basic visionary purpose Disability Rights Wisconsin takes up every day.

It is a vision embracing everything that matters in someone's life: dignity, independence, safety, access, community and the right to achieve. And, it is a vision that depends on Disability Rights being present on many fronts. Thanks to an active board and dedicated staff members, Disability Rights is there. We also enjoy close connections with countless other individuals and organizations who believe, as we do, that effective and lasting change comes from working together.

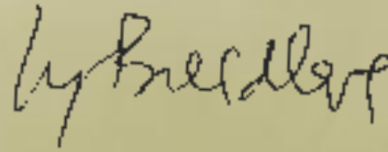
Recalling 2006 achievements helps us appreciate the impact of this truth. The Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women project succeeds on a strongly collaborative foundation. This monumental effort to improve the link to services for women with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse continues, proudly, to evolve into a model for other alliances. The expansion, in 2006, to improve services for Deaf women is proof of that.

Collaboration also is the key where Disability Rights contributes leadership and activist energy to the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force. This is a determined coalition working hard to improve services for people affected by mental illness, including crisis response and recovery. Read here about the success they had last year. It shows that pulling together is the only thing that has a chance in the face of so enormous a challenge.

Education advocacy remains a touchstone of Disability Rights' efforts to help individuals and change the system that purports to serve them. We feature a singular example from 2006 that describes progress made in the Racine County school district. Our presence there is delivering results thanks to coalition work that has opened a serious dialogue between parents and the school system.

These and other snapshots of what Disability Rights achieved in 2006 remind us how important it is to learn

as well as lead. Every door we opened helped open many more that offered positive change for people with disabilities and their families. It is a compelling vision we embrace thanks to skilled professionals, passionate board leadership and steadfast support from people and organizations across Wisconsin. With such strength behind us, Disability Rights Wisconsin will continue to make close connections and a powerful difference.



Lynn Breedlove
Executive Director



Thomas Rhorer
Board President



Amy Judy of Disability Rights Wisconsin (left) coordinates the Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women project with colleagues Armintie Moore-Hammonds of WCADV (center) and Tiffany Lodholz of WCASA (right).

Stand together against violence

Honest conversations, and recognition of the skill and insight everyone brings to the table. Amy Judy, Coordinator for Disability Rights Wisconsin Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women project, says these tools of collaboration set the tone for a unique, ambitious effort to address violence against women with disabilities.

The project began in 2003 under a federal grant from the US Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women. Disability Rights is the lead organization on the project, joining with the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). Amy says the landmark project formalized an already close relationship between Disability Rights and these committed partners, giving each of them greater capacity to respond to the people they serve.

Alliance of understanding

Targeting education and technical assistance, the project helped broaden the alliance of understanding and support between disability groups, and organizations that

provide services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. “No one organization has all the answers, we knew that from the start,” Amy notes. “Only by working together and at the community level, could we find and tap into ideas, enlighten ourselves and others, and inspire change.”

The collaborative received a third grant in October 2006 to continue its work—evidence of support for their success. Amy coordinates the project with Armintie Moore-Hammonds of WCADV and Tiffany Lodholz of WCASA. Jodi Hanna, Mark Sweet, Joan Karan, Dianne Greenley and Karen Lane of Disability Rights also contribute expertise to the project.

Achievements over the past four years include hosting multiple cross-training workshops around the state that brought local groups and resources together. The project published an accessibility guide for domestic violence and sexual assault service providers and other manuals to reinforce training sessions. Project partners also initiated individual agency site visits to provide an assessment of existing services and facilities, and advise on adapting to the needs of women with disabilities.

Last year, the project established closer ties with the Deaf community and now includes technical assistance to help domestic violence and sexual assault agencies improve services for Deaf women.

Overcome the fear

Raising awareness is a major goal of the project. That means defining the barriers to service that women with disabilities and Deaf women face after experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault. It also involves making disability rights and Deaf groups aware that domestic violence and sexual assault *do* have an impact on the lives of the women they serve and should be a priority.

The chance to talk honestly with so many people who daily tackle tough issues also helped project leaders identify attitudes that create another barrier to service—perhaps the most prominent. “We realized domestic

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violence and sexual assault organizations had to overcome the fear of working with people who have a disability, to focus rather on the person and their needs as a victim of violence,” she explains. “As much as changing the physical space to accommodate people, they need policies that promote inclusion.”

Results from learning and leading continue positive. Armed with knowledge gained from workshops, training programs and site assessments, Amy sees participants better connected to resources and ready to be a resource themselves—like a new program in Brown County that aligns critical services into a strong response team (see *A Challenge Met*). She also senses how determined many groups are to respond with new vigor to *all* women who turn to them for help.

Benefits widespread

Linda Morrison, Executive Director of WCASA, says the effort has connected sexual assault service providers across

the state to the right resources. It helps them serve more people and makes them part of something bigger in their communities. Modeling good outreach to providers in its network, WCASA added money for interpreter services in its latest budget and improved the usability of its website for individuals with low vision or those who are blind.

She suggests the project enhances WCASA’s own strength as a resource for sexual assault service providers. The Madison-based group incorporates information on disability rights issues into all areas of its training, including law enforcement and legal. “This increased level of expertise is exciting and benefits not only the community, but provides us with experienced trainers to build skills throughout the state.”

Patti Seger, Executive Director of WCADV, credits the project with helping her organization act on its commitment to serve all victims of violence, especially those in underserved and marginalized populations. “Our work is to help people who have faced traumatic experiences

A Challenge Met

Challenged to act on knowledge gained after a Violence Against Women with Disabilities training session in 2004, a group of disability advocates and professionals working in sexual abuse and domestic violence prevention in Brown County organized a coalition that today makes a huge difference to the people with disabilities they serve.

Pam Malin remembers the reaction of many in the room. “When they said, ‘what are you going to do?’ there was no second guessing, no hesitation.” As Developmental Disabilities Coordinator for the Sexual Assault Center in Green Bay, Pam belongs to the core group that organized ADAPT, or A Disability Abuse Prevention Team.

ADAPT’s active mission brings together people and agencies throughout Brown County with expertise in disability services, sexual assault, domestic violence and other abuses. The 20-member team includes county and state agencies that provide a link to health and human services, and law enforcement. Residential and day-services programs for people with disabilities participate, as does the Wisconsin Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

“Our goal three years ago was to be a group that works and that’s exactly what we are,” Pam notes. “All team members have a genuine, vested interest in stopping abuse to people with disabilities and we see the collaboration that’s come out of ADAPT as the best way to accomplish this.”

The team conducts training programs for caregivers and professionals who work with people with disabilities. They circulate a brochure to counseling agencies and other outlets to build awareness about ADAPT as a local resource. And, day-to-day, with confidence and speed, they know by name who to call when helping clients access critical services.

become whole again,” she notes. “Working on this project has been enriching for people in the domestic violence coalition already committed to that mission. We’ve become more thoughtful about making sure our support and services are there for women with disabilities.”

Trust and accountability

Disability Rights also gains from the collaboration. Colleagues Amy tapped to conduct training workshops or serve as resources say the experience illuminated for them the issue of violence against women and the difficulties facing advocates in that field.

When they learned, for example, how community-based domestic violence and sexual abuse centers struggle to serve women with service animals, Disability Rights approached the opportunity to educate as a partner not an enforcer. Advocates developed information and practical tools to help the groups understand what the law requires and encouraged their efforts to provide effective services.

“The relationship with our partners strengthened and deepened as the project evolved,” Amy says. “We share a level of trust and accountability that will support this collaboration—and what we accomplish together—beyond the connection of one person to another.”

Sustainability is a goal of the latest grant along with identifying how to incorporate different perspectives to reach and serve other women and minority communities.

Powering change

Amy describes the Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women project as the essence of people finding common cause and powering change on an issue critical to Disability Rights. “The inclusion we promote as so important in meeting the needs of people with disabilities exists at the heart of this project. Working together to improve access to important services is how we succeed.” ■

Health advocacy goes to court

Vulnerable people too often must depend on support managed by a complex cross-stitch of funding sources and paperwork. Any snag or problem in that support puts them at risk. In some cases, it denies them their rights.

When a group of people with severe mental illness who frequently seek in-patient care at the Milwaukee Mental Health Complex faced such a problem in early 2005, Disability Rights Wisconsin got involved. The organization heard from a case management agency that people they serve no longer qualified for Medicaid and suddenly had no way to afford their medications.

At issue was a change by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) in how it determined Medicaid eligibility for individuals defined as medically needy. DHFS had long allowed patients of the Mental Health Complex—itsself ineligible for Medicaid payments—to reach the qualifying income level for the federal program by subtracting the value of medical bills from stays there they could not pay.

Disability Rights Managing Attorney Shirin Cabraal first arranged fair hearings for more than 50 people affected, arguing the change violated state and federal law. In early 2006, after the DHFS Secretary overturned favorable decisions from those hearings, Disability Rights joined with attorneys from Becker & Hickey, S.C., to petition for a circuit court ruling on the case.

Shirin and co-counsel argued DHFS actions contradict federal regulations and uniquely discriminate against people with severe mental illness who were patients at the Complex. They asked for and won a declaratory judgment stating the policy change was applied incorrectly—using a strategy that ensured the outcome would apply to *everyone* affected by the eligibility issue, not the named group alone. As a result, DHFS cannot alter the definition without changing the law.

“We saw this as a problem that was bigger than the individual cases, it was a systems issue,” Shirin says. “Unless we fixed things at the core, the repercussions of a short-sighted policy would be many and lasting.” ■

Advocacy training empowers

Build confidence. Solve problems. Listen and learn. These and other skills were in the spotlight last fall at the 2006 Mental Health Consumer Conference sponsored by the Grassroots Empowerment Project (GEP).

Dianne Greenley, Supervising Attorney with Disability Rights Wisconsin, led a group of her colleagues to conduct advocacy training, and present rights workshops at the two-day conference. Todd Winstrom, Joanne Berman, Karen Lane and Peter Hoeffel from Disability Rights all took part in the program.

GEP is a statewide mental health organization directed and managed by people with mental illness. The group emphasizes peer support, striving to empower people with mental illness to help themselves and one another achieve recovery and wellness. Disability Rights has worked with GEP for years providing advocacy training around the state. The conference training sessions built on those programs and added a powerful new component on mindful communication developed by Disability Rights' Trainer and Consultant Mark Sweet.

"The small-group sessions gave people the chance to work on case examples and apply what they'd learned," Dianne says. "The communication module taught them how to reflect on a situation before reacting, how to recognize emotional responses and engage in effective dialogue. Feedback was great!"

Molly Cisco, Executive Director of GEP, agrees. She commends the Disability Rights trainers for sharing their knowledge with more than 120 participants from around Wisconsin. "I'm proud our agencies worked so well together and could give the consumers who attended the ammunition they need to become powerful self and peer advocates. The willingness of the Disability Rights staff members to empower people with mental illness helped make the conference a huge success."

The conference also benefited from the *Advocacy Tool Kit: Skills and Strategies for Effective Self and Peer Advocacy*. Dianne and Advocacy Specialist Alicia Sidman updated

this important resource last year, now available from Disability Rights.

The association with GEP produces great outcomes, she concludes. "People tell me they always learn something new from our training, something that gives them more confidence to tackle problems they face, but also to advocate for others. It's very satisfying to see people become such able resources within their community." ■

Timely intervention

Moving people with disabilities from an institutional setting to live and receive services in a community setting is a priority for Disability Rights Wisconsin. When a nursing home plans to close and disperse residents to yet another institution, Advocacy Specialist Liz Ford is there to change the outcome.

Liz worked on several cases last year where people affected by closings faced falling through the cracks. Taking strong advocacy action, she made sure they had the chance to return to and thrive in the community.

The cases were similar, individuals sent to a nursing facility for rehabilitation after discharge from a hospital. Once rehabilitated, neither resident needed round-the-clock nursing care. With the right resources and access to appropriate care, they could live with dignity in the community. However, denied long-term care resources and unaware of their rights, the two residents saw few choices.

The closing brought Liz into the picture. She acted in one case before the nursing home could discharge the resident to a homeless shelter, identifying benefits that paid for an apartment, and a mix of personal and supportive care.

In the other case, Liz intervened to keep the resident

Crisis resource a reality

Disability Rights Wisconsin continued its role as a member of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force in 2006 with essential support from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, helping with plans to create a new-model Crisis Resource Center. The task force is a broad coalition of consumer and advocacy groups, community service providers, state and local government agencies, and health care organizations organized over three years ago to identify issues faced by people affected by mental illness, and find ways to address those

from ending up in another nursing home. She advocated for long-term care funding from the county and helped the individual move back into the community with supportive care, meals and case management services.

Months later, both individuals are independent and doing well.

Their cases illustrate the challenges of navigating a complex system that often finds it easier to deny benefits and institutionalize people than provide them with what they need to achieve a degree of independence.

“Disability Rights commits a lot of time and energy to this and always will,” Liz says. “Being in an institution where they don’t belong has an enormous impact on people, mostly negative. By contrast, it’s a benefit to both society and the individuals when they can stay home and stay engaged in the community.” ■

issues with better mental health services.

The Center concept came out of a study begun in 2004 that identified the scarcity of places besides jail or the emergency room where people in crisis might end up. Last year, the task force sought funding and, thanks to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and local matching gifts, the Center will open in the fall of 2007.

Advocacy Specialist Peter Hoeffel, a leader of the task force for Disability Rights, says the group identified this early on. “There was no place where people could connect with practical, perceptive help to avert a crisis, no place besides the ER or jail where the police could take them.

“This contrast of a non-threatening, accessible, respectful resource center fills an enormous void for everyone in the community.”

The Center will be open 24 hours around the clock. Staff members include mental health consumers, nurses and a doctor on call. It becomes a link to other resources and a lower-impact point of entry, if needed, into the mental health system. The Center also hopes to have access to eight crisis respite beds operated by the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division.

Unique in the country because it emerged from such an influential partnership, the Center joins an earlier task force initiative—expanded in 2006—that provides mental health training for law enforcement officers.

As the Crisis Intervention Team training equips law enforcement to make different decisions in crisis situations that involve people affected by mental illness, the Center offers a hopeful alternative. An alternative, Peter notes, that became a reality thanks to a strong, broad-based community partnership. ■

Liz Ford

Peter Hoeffel



Survey spotlights education issues

Ask parents of children with disabilities who depend on special education services to rate those services and you learn what a negative impact the system can have if it fails those children.

That was what Disability Rights Wisconsin found when it joined an effort in Racine County last year to spotlight serious shortcomings in the school district's special education programs. A survey of parents of children in special education generated valuable data that could spur change in what Advocacy Specialist Cathy Steffke says is a hurtful culture of discrimination.

With a coalition of advocacy groups, private advocates and family members, Disability Rights met with the District Superintendent to ask for backing to conduct the survey and share its findings with a consultant hired to assess special education issues facing the district. The coalition also asked to hold a training session about special education for Board of Education members.

Securing the district's backing of the survey was an important first step, Cathy says, reflecting their concern over a program that does not work as it should.

Survey responses affirmed what she and other advocates see often—children suspended or segregated, poorly written education plans, teachers ill-equipped to respond and children literally criminalized by a system that fails to understand their needs. “We learned what parents think of the education their children receive and it is not good. I hope this effort serves to turn that around.”

A level of trust between the district and advocates for children with disabilities is essential. Cathy hopes the coalition can use progress made to improve the rightful school experience for thousands of families. ■



Cathy Steffke

Recover a life—out of prison

What stands out in the case Disability Rights Wisconsin Attorney Todd Winstrom uses to illustrate ongoing advocacy efforts to improve mental health services for individuals in Wisconsin jails and prisons is the chance to trade crisis for hope.

His client, a young woman, was incarcerated at Tayceedah for several years. Authorities there addressed behaviors related to her mental illness with segregation, placement in the prison's Special Management Unit and, at times, brief commitments to a state mental health institution.

“She went from place to place and crisis to crisis, never receiving the services necessary to help her stabilize,” Todd recounts. “With each move, the cycle started again and things would fall apart.”

Eventually, the woman faced criminal charges for her behavior in prison. Todd worked with her defense counsel and managed to secure a sentence of probation rather than more prison time.

But the sentence required her to spend 30 days in a county jail where mental health services were no better than in prison. Disability Rights advocated with jail administrators and the probation agent to stay the sentence until jail services met her needs. The woman went on to complete her sentence living in the community, feeling healthier and picking up the pieces of her life.

Individual advocacy efforts like this inevitably shine a light on systems issues affecting many. Mental health services for women incarcerated do not measure up, Todd says. Services for men are marginally better and include more resources for effective evaluation and response.



Todd Winstrom

In the fight for improvements and parity, Todd says one strategy is to reduce the number of people with mental illness in prison or jail. Last year, Disability Rights worked with other advocates to promote a conditional release program for people with mental health issues that applies the approach of a successful state program for treating and releasing people found not guilty by

reason of insanity. The approach effectively answers the needs of people leaving incarceration.

There is growing political support for expanding this model, Todd notes. "If we can help people when their level of need is highest, we stop that destructive cycle and recover a life." ■

Parents heard in schools case

The class action lawsuit filed by Disability Rights Wisconsin against Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on behalf of students with disabilities enrolled in Milwaukee public schools inched closer to a decision after a two-part trial that concluded in early 2006.

Disability Rights Managing Attorneys Monica Murphy and Jeff Spitzer-Resnick continue to manage the case, brought six years ago to address serious and persistent inadequacies in MPS special education services. Both sides presented testimony from expert witnesses in late 2005 as part of phase one of the trial. They presented fact witnesses and exhibits in the spring of 2006 and presented post-trial briefs in mid-June.

Among those taking the stand for Disability Rights were parents of children named in the suit. Monica says they did an excellent job of making real the struggles they and their children faced. "These parent advocates really came through for us and for the case, in part because they voiced such a strong commitment to their child's education, but also to changing the system for every child."

Monica says Disability Rights presented a strong case, brought after wide-ranging efforts at individual advocacy failed to persuade MPS to put required special education policies into practice.

"The biggest obstacle remains a reluctance on the part of people in charge to admit they have problems and to fix those problems," she says. "The system as a whole does not improve. There is a pattern of denial that's apparent to many outside groups who, like Disability Rights, monitor this issue closely."

Monica notes that delays in getting the case to trial means students named in the suit have graduated. Nonetheless, children enrolled now continue experiencing the same lack of services. The plaintiffs eagerly await the judge's decision. ■

Case coverage in *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 4, 2005.



Advocates earn recognition

For the professionals of Disability Rights Wisconsin, recognition from their peers is welcome affirmation of a commitment shared. In 2006, two of the organization's advocates saw their determined efforts honored by the disability rights community.

Work for broader impact

Shirin Cabraal, Managing Attorney based in the Milwaukee office of Disability Rights, received the *Robert Bradford Smith Award for Advocacy on Behalf of People with Mental Illness* from Transitional Living Services, Inc., the largest private, non-profit provider of community-based services for people with mental illness in south-

eastern Wisconsin. The award honors individuals or groups that exemplify a man known for advocating on behalf of those who shared his mental illness. Shirin's approach to helping people with mental illness stood out for Transitional Living. They applauded her efforts to change the status quo for an individual or group of individuals while, at the same time, translating that change into social policy initiatives with a broader impact for all consumers.

Support a child's success

Children Come First works with children and families in Wisconsin's Dane County to provide wraparound individualized mental health care service plans that incorporate a collaborative team-based approach. Advocacy Specialist

Phyllis Greenberger was honored at the Children Come First Conference last year with the *2006 Individual Advocacy for Children Award*. Agency leaders noted how Phyllis believes that for a child to succeed, many things in his or her life need to be in place and adjusted over time—the principle behind wraparound services. They said her tireless advocacy for children and families, and respect for teachers and all the people involved in helping a child succeed contributed greatly to many positive outcomes. ■



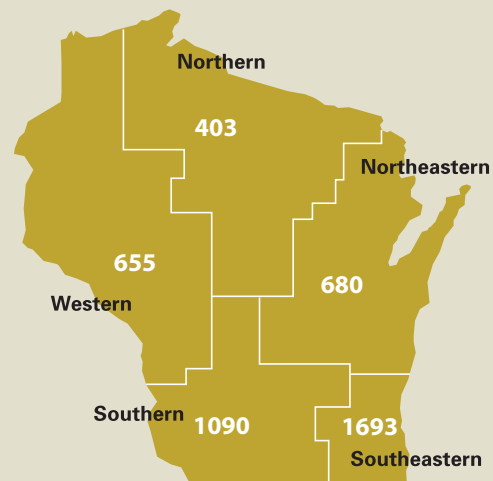
Financial and Service Highlights

The numbers also tell a story about 2006. Our work statewide expanded last year as Disability Rights reached more individuals one-on-one. We also provided valuable training programs and other assistance to a wide range of groups and organizations. The commitment to change through action and collaboration that defines Disability Rights Wisconsin stayed strong, continues strong.

Total Individuals Served Statewide in FY2006

One-to-one Advocacy: 4521 (see map below)

Training/Consultation: 5,761

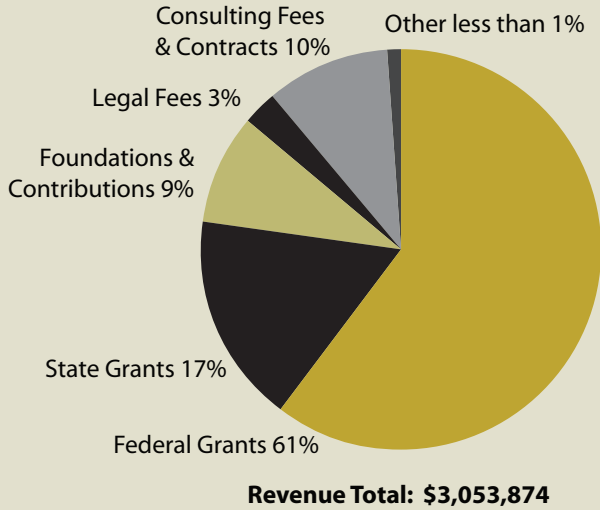


Foundation Partners

Thanks to these giving organizations, Disability Rights Wisconsin connects and makes a difference for the people we serve.

- Helen Bader Foundation
- Otto Bremer Foundation
- Faye McBeath Foundation
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation:
Conrad J. Ruehle Fund and Locke A. Sprague Fund
- Wisconsin Attorney General Discretionary Award
- Wisconsin Equal Justice Fund
- Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation
- Ziemann Foundation

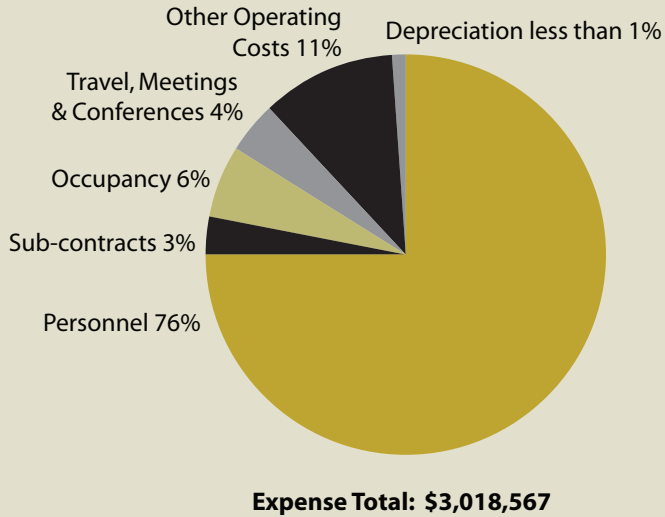
Revenue FY06



Statement of Revenue and Expenses for FY05 and FY06

Revenue	FY06	FY05
Federal Grants	1,863,465	1,968,383
State Grants	510,591	270,548
Foundations & Contributions	269,947	208,546
Legal Fees	82,426	112,281
Consulting Fees & Contracts	310,046	201,792
Other	17,399	8,119
Revenue Total	3,053,874	2,769,669
Expenses		
Personnel	2,304,454	2,225,925
Sub-contracts	86,780	45,030
Occupancy	169,869	139,923
Travel, Meetings & Conferences	108,724	102,040
Other Operating Costs	325,657	231,613
Depreciation	23,083	25,174
Expense Total	\$ 3,018,567	\$ 2,769,705
Net Income (loss)	\$ 35,307	\$ (36)

Expenses FY06



Statement of Financial Position for FY05 and FY06

Assets	FY06	FY05
Current assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	297,997	221,929
Accounts receivable	12,505	16,780
Grants receivable	203,592	124,207
Prepaid expenses	73,881	66,386
Total current assets	\$ 587,975	\$ 429,302
Property and equipment, net	303,436	57,437
Total Assets	\$ 891,411	\$ 486,739

Liabilities and Net Assets

Current liabilities:		
Accounts payable	70,767	41,360
Accrued payroll	66,104	0
Amortized rent	3,421	3,421
Leasehold improvements payable	26,269	5,566
Accrued vacation	131,875	108,681
Grant funds received in advance	116,457	49,447
Deferred revenue	66,097	132,580
Total current liabilities	\$ 480,990	\$ 341,055

Long-term liabilities:

Amortized rent	17,674	20,240
Leasehold improvements payable	231,996	0
Total long-term liabilities	249,670	20,240
Total Liabilities	\$ 730,660	\$ 361,295
Unrestricted net assets	160,751	125,444
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 891,411	\$ 486,739

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Disability Drug Benefit Helpline: 800-926-4862 statewide

* for persons with disabilities and their family members

disabilityrightswi.org

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