Community Support Services

The seven concrete stairs to Patricia Tejeda’s home in suburban Chicago are steep, especially when the petite woman is alone and has to carry her 9-year-old daughter Ana and Ana’s wheelchair up the steps while also transporting her 5-month-old baby and 5-year-old son.

On many days, she does it, but Community Support Services Inc. in the Chicago suburb of Brookfield provides a break for her.

Her case manager, Samantha Cortez, is comfortable enough in the Tejeda home to pick up the baby and make him laugh, while also helping the 30-year-old Spanish-speaking mother to schedule doctor appointments, school meetings and respite care workers to come into the home to care for Ana. Ana suffers from cerebral palsy and a seizure disorder and cannot walk or talk, save for a few words.

Community Support Services, which operates on a budget of about $6 million, serves 650 children, adults and seniors. After the start of the fiscal year, the state cut the agency’s grant for respite care and family support by $88,000 or 12 percent, says president Gaye Preston. That meant every family, including Ana’s, had their respite care slashed by about 20 percent.

Other funding sources could not help the organization make up the difference. “The agency’s annual golf outing brought in just about half of the $100,000 it usually counts on,” Preston says. The agency also downsized plans to partner with other nonprofits to open a new building in suburban Cicero as part of an effort to reach the underserved population in the area.

“We didn’t want to stop serving people, but we had to respond in some way,” Preston says of the changes.

With the loss of hours, Tejeda faces those stairs alone more days. She is grateful for the help but could always use more assistance. In Spanish, Tejeda says, “It helps us a lot. Ana enjoys it, and we get to rest.”

Crystal Yednak is a Chicago-based free-lance writer.