

Cutbacks go deep at Head Start

86 children in Dutchess lose out on programs

Poughkeepsie Journal - September 10, 2013



As a result of the sequester budget cuts, employees with Astor Services for Children and Families in Dutchess County placed chairs inside the playground at their Poughkeepsie facility to represent the 86 children in Dutchess County who will not receive services from Head Start after \$340,000 and 22 positions were cut from the program. / Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal

Empty seats were displayed outside of the Poughkeepsie Head Start Center of Astor Services for Children & Families to symbolize the 86 children who were pulled from their programs in Dutchess County due to budget cuts forced by congressional inaction.

According to Mary Sontheimer, assistant executive director, budget cuts were enacted when a deadline for adopting the federal budget passed last April, which triggered sequester reductions for various federal programs.

Astor is a nonprofit organization that provides children's mental health services, child welfare services and early childhood development programs, according to its website.

In Dutchess, the cut resulted in a \$340,000 reduction in funding, which meant that 86 children would lose monetary support, Sontheimer said.

"Fifty-eight kids were denied from this location alone," Sontheimer said at the Monday event. "We're going to continue advocacy efforts and hope for the best in Washington."

Sontheimer confirmed that all Astor locations were affected, including Poughkeepsie, Wappingers Falls, Millerton, Red Hook, Beacon, Wingdale and Pine Plains. Teachers, teachers' assistants, cooks, mental health officials, nurses and family advocates were among the 22 jobs cut from the programs.

A press release disclosed that \$405 million has been cut and 3,847 children were forced to leave Head Start and Early Head Start programs this year.



Nancy Ogden, of Rhinebeck, discusses how the Astor Head Start program has helped her daughter, Summer Warren, pictured, with her autism during a ceremony Monday at the organization's Poughkeepsie location. / Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal

The Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide education and services in literacy, math and social skills as well as nutrition and health.

Students are given two meals a day and provided with transportation to and from school.

Poughkeepsie resident April Boykin is a single mother affected by the recent budget cuts. She received a letter in March 2012 that informed her of future cuts. By May, another letter was sent saying that bus transportation was cut. Between May and June of last year, friends helped get her daughter to school.

“I want her here, but I’m not sure I’ll be able to find a way to make it happen,” Boykin said. “It’s sad and frustrating.”

Sonia Barnes-Moorhead, executive vice president of Astor Services, helped reach out to donors and advocates to support the empty seat event. She said that busing alone costs more than \$100,000.

“We need to advocate,” said Elizabeth Strelchun, Astor Center director for Poughkeepsie. “It obviously affects the lives of people.”

Cooper LaRocque is a Journal intern: clarocque@poughkeepsiejournal.com, 845-437-4884

<http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/article/20130910/NEWS01/309100015/Cutbacks-go-deep-Head-Start>