

# COFAR blog

Issues of concern to persons with developmental disabilities

- [Home](#)
- [About the Cofar blog and COFAR](#)
- [COFAR homepage](#)
- [Donate](#)

Type text to search here...



[Home](#) > [Uncategorized](#) > Seven years after the closure of his sheltered workshop, Mark Garrity is still waiting for something to replace it

## Seven years after the closure of his sheltered workshop, Mark Garrity is still waiting for something to replace it

January 12, 2023 [David Kassel](#) [Leave a comment](#) [Go to comments](#)

It has always been his work that has motivated Mark Garrity, his sister Patty says.

When he participated in his sheltered workshop, Mark was productive and social. He derived meaning from the tasks he was given, and he had fun with his friends.

Mark, 52, who has an intellectual disability, doesn't need or care about being paid a minimum wage for it, Patty says. What is important to him is completing an assigned task.

"If Mark sees a pen without a cap, he'll put it on with a twist and be proud of it," Patty says.

But since 2016, when all remaining sheltered workshops were closed in Massachusetts, Mark has faced a void as far as work is concerned.



Mark Garrity (lower right) at a fundraiser for Road to Responsibility with his mother Helen (lower left). In upper row is Mark's sister Marybeth Garrity (left), his sister Patty Garrity, and John Gregory, a staff member at the time in Mark's group home.

Mark's community-based day program is run by the Road to Responsibility (RTR), a provider to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The day program offers a cooking class in the kitchen, but that doesn't interest Mark.

"He just stays in one room where he eats lunch," Patty says. "When they took away his workshop, they took away his meaning. He's not like you and me."

### **Can't function in the community**

In his sheltered workshop, Mark packaged and assembled things such as car door locks. He took pride in that work.

The purpose in closing the workshops, according to the successive administrations of then Governors Deval Patrick and Charlie Baker, was to place people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in mainstream or integrated work settings that pay at least minimum wage. But Patty says that approach doesn't work for Mark.

"He can't produce at the minimum wage level," she said. And now with the minimum wage in Massachusetts having risen to \$15 an hour, she says, it would be even more difficult to find a suitable job for Mark in the community.

Moreover, if Mark were to go off-site and into the community to work, he would need 1-to-1 staffing assistance, Patty said. His day program doesn't have sufficient staffing for that.

A few years ago, Patty proposed to Mark's day program staff that the clients be given objects to pack into gift bags that the clients could then deliver to homeless shelters. She said she was told, though, that the program didn't have the funds to purchase the gift bag items.

"Now his work is long gone," she said, "and we continue to wait, and nothing is showing up."

### **Federal and state lawmakers need to be informed about the value of work activities**

We need to let our state legislators and members of Congress know about the lack of meaningful work activities in day programs, which is not unique to Mark's program.

In the just-ended session of Congress, every member of the Massachusetts delegation, with the exception of U.S. Rep. Richard Neal, co-sponsored legislation ([H.R. 603](#) and [S. 53](#)), which would *eliminate* remaining sheltered workshops throughout the country and require that all clients be paid minimum wages in "integrated" work settings. Fortunately, the bills were not approved in that session, but the legislation will no doubt be reintroduced.

You can find your members of Congress [here](#) and state legislators [here](#). Please let them know that if they support the elimination of sheltered workshops, they need to find ways to replace the work the shelters provided, particularly for those persons who can't function in the community.

### **Sheltered workshop closures left thousands with little to do**

All sheltered workshop programs were closed in Massachusetts as of 2016 after the federal Department of Justice had stated two years earlier that developmentally disabled people should work in integrated employment settings in which a majority of the workers are not disabled.

But while sheltered workshops have been deemed "segregated" settings because they are offered solely to groups of developmentally disabled persons, many clients and their families and guardians argued that the programs provided fulfilling, skill-building activities and did not preclude community integration.

Ever since the closures of the workshops, thousands of DDS clients have been transferred to day programs with little or nothing to replace the work opportunities they previously had.

For a potentially significant number of DDS clients such as Mark, mainstream work settings have never been a viable option. Those persons aren't able to function in those settings or don't desire to do so.

### **Neurologist said sheltered workshop was important for Mark**

While Mark has had an intellectual disability since birth, his cognitive functioning was further impaired when he suffered a traumatic brain injury after being hit by a car in 1995. In a letter written before Mark's sheltered workshop program was ended, his neurologist, Dr. Douglas Katz, a member of the Department of Neurology at Boston Medical Center, stated in that Mark began a long course of rehabilitation after the accident, and that his sheltered workshop activities were an important part of that rehabilitation effort.

Katz added that, "I understand this (sheltered workshop program is ...likely to close... I think this would be a big loss for my patient Mark. I would support efforts to maintain this structured workshop for Mark and others that benefit from this service."

### **Day program found a partial solution**

In some cases, day programs have tried to find ad hoc solutions to the lack of available work activities. After COFAR contacted DDS about Mark's situation in early 2017, RTR staff found a paper shredding activity for Mark to do at the day program site. The activity received verbal approval from the DDS southeast regional director, who determined that it was in compliance with federal regulations.

The paper shredding seemed at first to be a good solution for Mark. But Patty said that Mark soon sensed a lack of structure and purpose in the activity and became bored with it.

In 2016, we first urged state legislators to recognize that like Mark, not every DDS client is capable of or desires to participate in the mainstream workforce.

In 2019, we asked those lawmakers to support H.88, a bill which would have required that meaningful work activities be provided in DDS community-based day programs. But the language in the bill was subsequently removed by the Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities Committee and replaced with language establishing a Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

### **Day program staffing shortages have made problems worse**

Day programs around the state are currently struggling with staffing shortages, which have made it even more difficult for them to provide meaningful activities to clients.

Mark's day program is no exception. Mark, who stayed home from the program during the height of the COVID pandemic in 2020, is now back attending the program only one day per week due to the insufficient staffing.

Mark is still doing the paper shredding activity there, Patty says. But for most of the four-hours he spends at the day program site, "he's mostly a spectator," she said.

Patty herself takes Mark out of his group home on Mondays for coffee and errands. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, she takes him to the YMCA where he works with a personal trainer. On Wednesdays, after his day program ends, Patty takes him to a weekly bowling program. And on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, she takes him out for coffee and to visit friends.

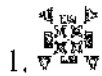
"As far as the community goes, Mark has a very balanced life," she said. "It's his work piece that is missing."

Patty is planning to introduce Mark to her local legislators. She thinks that may help them to understand "what Mark can and cannot do."

"I sometimes feel defeated," Patty said, "I but will never give up the fight for Mark. "He's capable of so much more, but the system needs to respond."

Categories: [Uncategorized](#) Tags: [developmental disabilities](#), [integrated employment](#), [sheltered workshops](#)

[Comments \(4\)](#) [Trackbacks \(0\)](#) [Leave a comment](#) [Trackback](#)



1. M.J.

M.J.

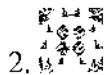
January 12, 2023 at 12:40 pm

[Reply](#)

Mark is a very lucky man to have you Patty! Wonder how many other folks that had success in workshops are doing? Just sitting at home or maybe in a day program that they as Mark don't find fulfilling or valued in any way or that meets their needs.

When are our legislators and even disability advocates going to stop and think, we are all different and need different things. Workshops and facilities are given a bad name when someone gets the bright idea they shouldn't be an option for those with disabilities. Yet all options should be available as everyone flourished when they are "allowed" to get their needs met. Yes those needs as with Mark can be stripped away to easily. What Marks needs was taken from him because people advocated to take them away. Wake up inclusion means many things and Mark was included in working, being with friends, knowing disabled and non-disabled at work and feeling valued and happy in his sheltered workshop! Sad situation taking away what works because why? We need to advocate for everyone, what works for some may not for others but do not take away what works because people think they now better.

★ Like



2. Carol O'Donnell

January 12, 2023 at 1:35 pm

[Reply](#)

I also feel defeated. I don't know how to fight this anymore. The last time a group of parents at my daughter's program tried to fight for some kind of job training ended with me being told by the director of my daughter's program that I was making them look bad. Nothing could be further from the truth. She has been there since 2007. She likes the people there. I like the people there. They really try to keep clients busy. But the reality is that very few clients have outside jobs. It is not from lack of trying on the part of my daughter's program. It's just reality. And I don't know how to explain the difference between reality and delusional ideology.

★ Like



3. Anonymous

January 12, 2023 at 2:22 pm

[Reply](#)

The day program seems to be trying The family is providing great community support. Staff shortages are everywhere. There aren't even enough pilots to fly planes anymore. We have to keep advocating for the best outcome at his day program.

★ Like



4. Leigh Swigart

January 13, 2023 at 7:32 am

## Reply

My older brother, who lives in a group home, has experienced the same frustration. However little he earned through his packaging activities in a workshop, he took pride in them and the little money he earned. He felt like this gave him some normality and always reported on what he had been doing "at work." Needless to say, he would never be hired by an employer at \$15/hour, especially now that he is approaching 70.

★ Like

1. No trackbacks yet.

## Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

[Update: Problematic SDM bill dies at end of legislative session](#)

[RSS feed](#)

## Recent Posts

- [Seven years after the closure of his sheltered workshop, Mark Garrity is still waiting for something to replace it](#)
- [Update: Problematic SDM bill dies at end of legislative session](#)
- [SDM bill close to passage in Legislature, yet still lacks safeguards to protect individual and family rights](#)
- [DDS placing client in a 'Catch-22' position to force her to leave her shared living caregiver](#)
- [Mother says daughter's health has declined at day program where she has few meaningful activities](#)

## Archives

- [January 2023](#)
- [December 2022](#)
- [November 2022](#)
- [October 2022](#)
- [September 2022](#)
- [August 2022](#)
- [July 2022](#)
- [June 2022](#)