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Bethany programs cut in budget battle

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Reporter

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The Illinois budget battle is forcing two programs for kids to close and slashing funding for a teen parenting program by 75%. That means Bethany for Children and Families must also cut nine jobs.

Tuesday marked the last day for the Therapy Recreation Program. There's a lesson about life at the pool table.

"Get up," said Clay Huffstutler. "Look at the ball you want to hit."

Supervisor Huffstutler is losing his job after 15 years at Bethany.

"For me, it's heartbreaking," he said. "This is kind of like my baby."

After decades of serving at-risk kids and their families, this is the latest victim of the state budget crisis.

"It affects all of us," Huffstutler said. "And it hurts all of us because we love the job that we do. We love the kids that we work with. It's an essential service."

Bethany also will lose funding for its Juvenile Justice Diversion Program. Nine employees will be on a forced furlough using up vacation time with hopes that the state will restore funding before July 15.

Since Bethany is losing more than \$100,000 in state funding, this longtime program must be suspended. That's tough on parents who wonder where to turn.

"It takes a village to raise a child," said Dorothy Cotton, an adoptive parent whose kids attend the program. "That's true because you need help. Sometimes you run out of ideas."

But the state says it's just not in the cards. This after school and summer outreach will end. It also forces Chrissy Adair, a skill development specialist, out of a job.

"The hardest part about it is that we're like a family here," she said.

Cutting this program will likely cost the state much more money in the long run. That's because kids won't get the help that they need.

"There's no need to budget on the backs of children who cannot vote," said Ginny Manske, a parent whose son attends the program. "Kids have already been traumatized and have problems."

Problems that find solutions with positive support. Worry now about the future.

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"All that's going to be gone," Hufstutler concluded. "And what are they going to be doing? They're going to be out in the streets."

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