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‘Atalissa Men’ Doing Well In Post-Bunkhouse Life

DES MOINES, Iowa – Nine of the 14 “Atalissa men” who are still in Iowa have found jobs, 13 have settled into permanent housing with roommates, and all seem to be adjusting well after being removed from an unsafe bunkhouse 20 months ago, according to Department of Human Services Director Charles Krogmeier.

“We’re providing the support and dignity that these men deserve, and it’s pleasing to see how well they have responded,” Krogmeier said.

The men are among 21 men with mental retardation who were removed from a bunkhouse in Atalissa after the fire marshal declared it to be dangerous in February 2009. For decades, the men had been employees of Henry’s Turkey Service of Texas, which took most of their earnings in return for room and board at a dilapidated bunkhouse.

All of them were originally from Texas and seven have returned there to live with relatives or receive services in that state.

The others – all determined by a court to be dependent – have been in the Waterloo area ever since. Services are being provided by Exceptional Persons Inc. and paid for by Medicaid, which is a division of the DHS.

Krogmeier said nine of the men have gained competitive employment in the community, mostly service jobs in grocery, department, or thrift stores. Three of the men consider themselves retired, he said, and two are attending job skill programs.

All of the men have individual care plans to help them with daily living skills, such as how to use a cell phone or public transportation. Several enjoy memberships at a nearby church and others have taken up gardening, Krogmeier said.

Krogmeier said 13 of the men are living in apartments with an average of four roommates, all peers from Atalissa, plus staff. One man is living in a larger group setting.

Krogmeier said the men are in generally good health.

He said DHS case managers regularly monitor the men’s progress, and a monthly report is prepared for him to review.

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