



Richard Rabideau speaks with son Tim, who attends a nonprofit that provides training programs in a school-like setting.

By Sally Mamdooh, Reporter

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NEW PORT RICHEY -- For Richard Rabideau, structure is a huge part of his intellectually disabled 34-year-old son Tim's life.

"He is not a person that just sits there," Richard Rabideau said.

Rabideau says that structure comes from being at A.F.I.R.E, a nonprofit that provides a variety of training programs in a school-like setting.

"He is very outgoing now, where before he didn't have the ability to structure himself to meet anybody," Rabideau said.

Richard says Tim suffered a severe head injury from a car accident at age 10 that affected his short term-memory. He says at A.F.I.R.E his son is not being babysat, but rather taught how to be independent in the real world.

"It gives us a break and it helps Tim to mature more," Richard Rabideau said.

But a tight budget that the facility has been dealing could change that.

"This patio area here flooded," teacher director Lisa Virgilio said.

Virgilio and Denise Haystrand, who run the facility, say the flooding they were hit with last month drained the majority of the fundraising money they primarily rely on for the year-round upkeep of their facility.

The flooding damaged five of their eight rooms that serve an average of 50 students every day. Since then, they've had to repair tiles and are working on replacing carpets.

Virgilio and Haystrand say they have just enough to run their facility, but not enough to maintain it. Something like a warped fence or untrimmed tree like the one in their front yard could get them fined by the city, and that could eventually close their doors.

And closed doors here would mean taking away what these students look forward to everyday.

"The socialization among their peers is so important. We've got 50 students that can relate to each other on every level, when they don't necessarily have that on a weekend or a day off, they are ready to come back," Virgilio said.

Virgilio and Haystrand are scrambling to raise enough money to get them by this year. No matter what, they say they won't give up on their parents' legacy.

"We are working on our parents' legacies. They started this place," Virgilio said.

If you would like to help the nonprofit, visit <http://www.afirepasco.com/>