

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
Annual Family Support Plan Report – FY ‘09

BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) was established in 1986 by the Legislature (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 6, 191-197). MCDHH is a commission under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and serves as the principal agency representing the Commonwealth’s 560,000 Deaf, late deafened, and hard of hearing people within state government.

The objectives of MCDHH are as follows:

- To promulgate and coordinate public policy that affects the deaf and hard of hearing residents of Massachusetts
- To deliver technical assistance and resources to other state agencies to help them fulfill their missions to deaf and hard of hearing people
- To advocate on behalf of deaf and hard of hearing residents of the Commonwealth and their families
- To provide direct case management and social services to deaf and hard of hearing people and their families
- To provide public education on issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing people
- To ensure the accessibility and quality of existing services and recommend new services as needed
- To provide the Governor’s office, through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, with recommendations on how the Commonwealth can best serve the needs of deaf and hard of hearing residents and their families.

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY SUPPORT

MCDHH defines “family support” as those services offered by the Commission within its statutory mandate and subject to legislative appropriation that provide assistance, education, training, and planning to the families of deaf and hard of hearing residents of the Commonwealth, as the term “families” is defined in Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002.

MCDHH has four (4) components that currently provide a number of family support services and they are listed as follows:

1. Case Management and Social Services

- Cross-agency case coordination
- Crisis intervention (including assistance on the protection phase of abuse cases)
- Specialized information and referrals regarding communication access and services available to deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing people and families
- Client needs assessment by specialized, bilingual staff
- Client plan development (cross-agency)
- Individual case work (intensive, complex cases)

- Chapter 688 transitional case management
- Personal counseling (bilingual staff)
- Development of resources and natural support systems
- Outreach/case finding
- Individual consumer education
- Certification services
- Case management for ‘gap’ populations, such as visually disabled deaf/hard of hearing persons, less-than-severely mentally ill deaf/hard of hearing persons, uneducated deaf/hard of hearing persons, or immigrants.

Children Specialists

MCDHH has 4 Children’s Specialists covering the State of Massachusetts. They are located in Boston, Plymouth, Worcester, and Springfield. They help families identify needs and assist them in working with other agencies for the betterment of their children. They also consult with, or provide training to, other agencies about the special needs of children who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Assistive Technology Funds

Annually, MCDHH has been able to allocate a small amount of dollars to be made available to families who need to purchase assistive equipment but are unable to afford the cost. The majority of monies are used to purchase hearing aids for family members as well as elderly people. During FY’08, MCDHH supplemented this funding with an assistive technology grant from the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation; these funds provided equipment to an additional 10-12 individuals. In response to steadily increasing requests, and to eliminate the barrier of the resulting waitlist, MCDHH identified a collaborating entity with more substantial resources, and beginning with FY’09, families requesting AT assistance will be provided with information and referral materials for services from the Boston Guild Clinical Programs of the Speech-Language and Hearing Center at Northeastern University and a listing of resources outside of the Boston region.

2. Interpreter/CART Referral Services

MCDHH also administers the Interpreter and CART (Communication Access Real Time) Referral Services. These services are vital to deaf and hard of hearing families because they provide communication access for deaf and hard of hearing children and adults in a variety of public settings.

3. Communication Access, Training, and Technology Services (CATTS)

- Provides public education on all issues related to hearing loss
- Provides free communication accessibility training and technical assistance to state agencies, public and private entities seeking to ensure compliance with the relevant provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Produces MCDHH’s informational materials
- Manages MCDHH’s website
- Provides general information related to deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people, their needs and services via telephone, TTY, and e-mail

- Maintains a Technology Demonstration Center featuring a broad variety of assistive listening systems, visual communication devices, and signaling systems that alert individuals to sounds in their environment.

4. Independent Living Programs

MCDHH contracts with ten (10) Independent Living Programs throughout the State of Massachusetts to provide the following services to deaf and hard of hearing people and their families:

- Skill training
- Self-advocacy training
- Peer mentoring/counseling
- Alternative support and recreational services
- Topical workshops for consumer education and advocacy

PROCESS FOR OBTAINING “SUBSTANTIAL CONSULTATION” FROM FAMILIES REGARDING FLEXIBLE SUPPORT NEEDS

MCDHH employed the following mechanisms to gather information from deaf and hard of hearing people and their families about their support needs:

- Issues and concerns are discussed at Statewide Advisory Committee (SAC) and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meetings on a regular basis
- Individual conversations and consultations with families utilizing MCDHH programs and services
- Information gathered by Case Management Information and Referral Specialist
- Children Specialists attend various state and private meetings and workgroups such as DOE, DMH, DMR, wraparound projects (mental health and children/adolescents) and obtain information regarding what is happening with families in the community.

FOCUS AREAS

I. Family Empowerment

Current Activities:

MCDHH Case Managers and IL Specialists in DHILS programs throughout the State of Massachusetts continue to work closely with Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers/clients and their families to empower them by providing them with training and supports in order to develop their Independent Living Skills.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH renewed their Memorandum of Understanding with the Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education to provide information and training to families with Deaf/hard of hearing children in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs.
- MCDHH established an agreement with the Department of Public Health to improve support, intervention and services for families and their newly-diagnosed infants and children with hearing loss. DPH and MCDHH will focus on educating staff at both agencies about the range of services available; expanding access to services; and

strengthening communication and collaboration between the two agencies. The state expects that the initiative will result in an expedited process for early intervention referrals and expanded opportunities for staff to better serve children and families.

- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Skills Programs (DHILS) will continue to provide trainings on parenting skills, how to buy a house and money management.
- MCDHH recruited a parent representative for the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC).

II. Family Leadership

Current Activities:

Children Specialists attend many of the IEP meetings with the parents to provide advocacy and to teach parents how to advocate for the rights of their deaf and hard of hearing children. The Specialists also work with parents to help them learn how to take on a more leadership role.

New Initiatives:

- Children's Specialists will continue to provide training on the IEP process and the rights of parents.
- Children's Specialists will continue to provide training about the changes to the IDEA law to parents of deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Case Managers and Children's Specialists will provide information on Chapter 171 to families.
- Case Managers and Children's Specialists will be involved in the EOHHS Person Centered Planning Implementation Grant

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

Current Activities:

- MCDHH will continue to certify parents/families to receive free adaptive telephone equipment from the Massachusetts Equipment Distribution Program (MassEDP).
- MCDHH will continue to provide information to families on MRC's Assistive Technology Loan Program (Money and/or Equipment).
- MCDHH will continue to provide training in the public school systems on making classroom and curriculum accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students according to IDEA and the new National Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will provide referral assistance for families who cannot afford to purchase hearing aids; requests will be connected to the Boston Guild Clinical Programs of the Speech-Language and Hearing Center.

IV. Accessing Services and Reports

Current Activities:

MCDHH's Communications Access, Training and Technology Services Department (CATTS) continue to provide public education on all issues related to hearing loss. In particular, CATTS conducts extensive public outreach targeted to providing free communications accessibility training. The CATTS Department is responsible for producing the Commission's informational materials, providing general information related to deaf and hard of hearing people and managing the Commission's web site.

Through CATTS, MCDHH updated and re-published the 2008 edition of the Resource Directory for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people, distributed free of charge. This directory has over 600 listings and is also available online.

CATTS also revised the frequently requested book titled "The Savvy Consumer's Guide to Hearing Loss," which will also be distributed free of charge and is available online.

The Case Management Services Department and CATTS Department work collaboratively to do outreach to historically underserved regions by exhibiting at the Big E in Western Massachusetts, and by actively participating in community events sponsored by diverse population groups.

Case Managers and Case Management Director have been working in collaboration with DMH addressing the issue of lack of substance abuse services for deaf and hard of hearing people.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will continue to maintain the Assistive Technology Demonstration Center with updated technology allowing families to try out equipment to determine which is the best fit for them.
- MCDHH will continue to submit articles to the Deaf Community News and other consumer-run publications to connect readers with new initiatives at the Commission and encourage parents and family involvement
- MCDHH will continue to develop and provide information packets that include a listing of resources, videotapes and books to the families.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

Current Activities:

MCDHH continues to identify and utilize resources for case managers to access foreign language interpreters to facilitate communication between signing/English speaking staff and parents and families who speak a different language.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH has translated brochures for case management and social services into Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese.
- MCDHH will continue to hire bi-lingual interpreters for foreign speaking families when needed.

VI. Interagency Collaboration

Current Activities:

MCDHH Children Specialists continue active participation in the Wraparound Workgroup facilitated by Walden School and the Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham. The workgroup's goal is to identify needs of behaviorally/emotionally-disturbed children and their families and provide community supports for the families. The workgroup continues to pursue development and implementation of statewide services for the families with their children who have critical mental health needs.

MCDHH Children Specialists continue to actively participate in Interagency Coordinating Council at Perkins School in Watertown. The ICC purpose is to monitor the State of Massachusetts Compliance with Part C of the IDEA. In turn, the Children Specialist will share the current issues and trends of Part C of the IDEA with other Children Specialists and their families.

MCDHH staff participates in DMH advisory committee. MCDHH is also working collaboratively with DMH reviewing some grants to help deaf and hard of hearing youth and young adults with mental illness.

MCDHH is currently collaborating with DSS and has begun training all DSS staff in working with family members who are deaf and hard of hearing. The training, which is expected to be completed within the current year, will focus on communication access and the importance of having legal certified interpreters present in all situations.

MCDHH's Children's Specialist in the Springfield area has been working with DMR and the newly launched One Stop Shop project. A Director has been hired and a location obtained to set up the One Stop Shop services. This collaborative effort is staffed by an assistant and a "Family Navigator", and recruitment is underway for a part-time "Family Navigator".

Children's Specialist has been attending MRC vocational programs and trainings for youths.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will continue their work with DSS to address issues of communication accessibility, help them set up parent training for deaf and hard of hearing people, assist with foster care, and inter-agency trainings.
- MCDHH will continue to participate in MRC Employment Strategic Planning Workgroups.
- MCDHH will maintain the Statewide Registry for Educational Interpreters in public school systems for deaf and hard of hearing students.