

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Annual Family Support Plan Report – FY10

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

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)
- 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 has five (5) project-focused contracts with three 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, DDS, 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.
- 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.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH contracts with agencies to provide DHILS programs (Independent Living Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people) at five sites throughout the state. MCDHH will provide information and training to families with Deaf/hard of hearing children in collaboration with the Department of Children and Families to provide training and support to families who wish to serve as foster care families or who wish to adopt Deaf/hard of hearing children.

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 greater leadership role.
- Children's Specialists will continue to provide training on the IEP process and the rights of parents; collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs continues, providing training, information and resources to families and MCDHH staff.
- 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.

New Initiatives:

- Training will be provided to early intervention providers in Western Massachusetts to further the agreement between MCDHH and the Department of Public Health Newborn Screening program.

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 NASDSE National Guidelines.
- 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.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will provide technical support and assistance to the Department of Children and Families and the Operational Services Division to establish a statewide vendor for assistive technology for home accessibility for the families of Deaf and hard of hearing children.
- MCDHH is working closely with the EOHHS Information Technology Department (ITD) to select a single Video Relay Service provider (VRS) to handle VRS calls for all EOHHS agencies. The successful outcome of this initiative will enable all agency staff to be more accessible to Deaf/hard of hearing constituents statewide.

IV. Accessing Services and Reports

- 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 Case Management Services Department and CATTS Department work collaboratively to do outreach to historically underserved regions by exhibiting and by actively participating in community events sponsored by diverse population groups.
- Case Managers and the 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.
- MCDHH administers a grant process which is a resource for funding communication access within conferences which provide information and training to families - the Northeast Cochlear Implant Conference, and the Clarke School Mainstream Center Annual Conference are two examples receiving support during FY'10.
- 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

- 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.
- MCDHH has translated brochures for case management and social services into Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese.

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.
- This past year MCDHH has completed the training of all DCF case workers in all regional offices. MCDHH will continue their work with DCF to address issues of communication accessibility, assist with parent training for deaf and hard of hearing people, assist with foster care, and inter-agency trainings.
- MCDHH will maintain the Statewide Registry for Educational Interpreters in public school systems for deaf and hard of hearing students.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH in collaboration with DPH/BSAS is in the process of adapting the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) approach to meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing consumers. When this adaptation is complete, it will enable the DHILS providers statewide to provide substance abuse screening to their constituents.