

**MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**  
**Ch. 171 - Annual Family Support Plan Report – FY 12**

**OVERVIEW OF FAMILY SUPPORT**

MCDHH defines “family support” as those services offered by the Commission within its statutory mandate that provide assistance, education, training, and planning to the families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents of the Commonwealth.

MCDHH has four (4) service areas that currently provide a number of family support services.

**1. Case Management and Social Services**

MCDHH has four Children’s Specialists who provide services to families statewide. They help families identify needs and assist them in coordinating and accessing supports from other agencies as needed. They also consult with, or provide training to, other agencies about the special needs of children who are deaf or have hearing loss.

Services include:

- 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 by bilingual staff
- Development of resources and natural support systems
- Outreach
- Individual consumer education
- Case management for ‘gap’ populations, such as visually disabled deaf/hard of hearing persons, seriously mentally ill deaf/hard of hearing persons, uneducated deaf/hard of hearing persons, or immigrants

**2. Interpreter/CART Referral Services**

MCDHH also administers 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)**

- Public education on all issues related to hearing loss

- 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)
- General information related to deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people and their unique needs and services

#### **4. Independent Living Programs**

- MCDHH contracts with Independent Living Programs throughout the Commonwealth to provide the services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and their families. These specialized programs are known as Deaf & Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services (DHILS). They provide:
  - Skills 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 employs the following mechanisms to gather information from Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and their families about their support needs:

- On a regular basis, issues and concerns are discussed at Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) meetings and regional town forums in addition to ongoing meetings with DHILS providers
- Individual conversations and consultations with families utilizing MCDHH programs and services
- Information gathered by Case Management staff and Independent Living Services program staff
- Children’s Specialists are in close contact with other state agencies and programs including DMH, DCF, and CBHI to ensure that they are in touch with issues impacting families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

### **FOCUS AREAS**

#### **I. Family Empowerment**

##### **Ongoing Activities:**

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

- MCDHH renewed a Memorandum of Understanding with DESE which includes outreach and support to families with Deaf/Hard of Hearing children.
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Skills Programs (DHILS) will continue to provide information and support on parenting skills to families with Deaf or Hard of Hearing children.
- MCDHH will continue to participate in at least two Town Meetings annually. Town Meetings are hosted by local community agencies statewide and are an important means of collecting information regarding questions and concerns from our constituents regarding current legislation, changes in service delivery, and local information and resources which have an impact on residents.

## **II. Family Leadership**

### **Ongoing Activities:**

- Children’s Specialists attend IEP meetings with parents to provide advocacy and to teach parents how to advocate for the rights of their Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.
- Children’s Specialists will continue to provide training on the IEP process and the rights of parents.
- Case Managers and Children’s Specialists will provide information on Chapter 171 to families.

## **III. Family Support Resources and Funding**

### **Ongoing Activities:**

- 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 National Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

## **IV. Accessing Services and Supports**

### **Ongoing Activities:**

- MCDHH’s Communications Access, Training and Technology Services Department will (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 on outreach to historically underserved regions by actively participating in community events sponsored by diverse population groups.
- 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 family involvement.
- MCDHH will continue to provide resources and information to families.



## **V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support**

### **Ongoing 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.
- MCDHH staff will continue to attend conferences to extend their outreach and support services.

## **VI. Interagency Collaborations**

### **Ongoing Activities:**

#### **Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

- Improve the quality of teacher sign language communication through use of the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) as a condition of employment among teachers working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.
- Improve the quality of sign language interpreting by educational interpreters through use of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) as a condition of employment among interpreters working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.
- Identify and provide training to school administrators, teachers, and parents related to implementing needed systemic improvements for the education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing school children.
- Partner with Federation for Children with Special Needs to work with parents on educational initiatives, outreach, resources, training and technical assistance.

#### **Department of Children & Families**

- Case management collaboration from both agencies.
- Policies and procedure for obtaining and using qualified interpreters.
- Enhancing accessibility of DCF program and services by involving Deaf people in the service delivery system.

#### **Department of Public Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse Services**

Through an ISA with MCDHH, the MA Department of Public Health (DPH) allocates annual funding for communication access for Deaf people who need substance abuse prevention and treatment programs.

#### **Department of Public Health/Early Intervention Program**

MCDHH is a mandated member of the Department of Public Health's Newborn Hearing Screening Council which works on improving the identification of and service delivery for families with Deaf or Hard of Hearing children. As a result of these efforts, families receive information and referral to services as soon as there is identification of a hearing loss.

**Department of Mental Health**

MCDHH works closely with DMH and the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative to facilitate cross-agency training and to provide technical assistance to improve services for Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals.

**Administrative Office of the Trial Courts**

MCDHH has an agreement with the AOTC to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals have equal and full access to the trial courts. The partnership focuses on expediting interpreter requests for the courts, increasing the number and availability of qualified legal interpreters and improving the administrative operations to reduce barriers to access.

**Executive Office of Health & Human Services**

MCDHH works closely with all EOHHS agencies to improve service delivery for Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals including the Children, Youth & Families Advisory Committee, MassMatch Advisory Council, EHS Interagency Housing Workgroup, Emergency Preparedness, Chapter 688 Coordinator Workgroup, and the Massachusetts Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council.