

**Department of Mental Retardation
Annual Plan for Family Support
State Fiscal Year 2007 (July 2006-2007)**

Background

The Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) has been providing flexible family support services since 1995. In July 2002, Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002, "An Act Providing Support to Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families," was signed into law. This legislation specifies that all named state agencies, with substantial consultation from individuals with disabilities and their families, need to prepare and submit on an annual basis an individual and family support plan that explains how the department intends to provide flexible supports to families and individuals. This is the Department of Mental Retardation's fourth Annual Family Support Plan.

Overview of Family Support

Definition of family support:

Family support strives to achieve the goal of helping families stay together through:

- Developing the family's natural capacity to meet the needs of family members;
- Offering additional supports such as staff resources, goods and services, and financial assistance; and
- Enhancing the capacity of communities to value and support people with disabilities and their families.

Array of family support services and how funding will be used to deliver these services through network of family support providers:

In the State budget for fiscal year '07, (July 1, 2006 through June 30th, 2007), the Family Support account has been funded at approximately 53 million dollars. Approximately 48 million dollars of that budget allocation will be spent on a range of contracted family support services. Approximately 80% of this total amount provides funding for general family support services through a network of contracted Family Support Provider Agencies across the state. General family support services include the delivery of Core services that are contractually required, and administration of flexible funding allocations. Core services include information and referral, assistance with planning, identification and coordination of other resources, trainings and support groups. The remainder of the state budget allocation is used to fund a variety of enhanced and specialty family support services. Every DMR region funds Enhanced Family Support services that include *Intensive Family Support* and *Medically Fragile Projects*. Each DMR region has funding for an *Autism Support Center*. Also, there is funding for a variety of specialty family support projects that vary from region to region, such as after-school programs, social/recreational activities, camps, and planned facility-based respite services. Some of these services are designed to only provide services for children.

The Autism Division established in Fiscal Year 2006 has been funded at \$3 million dollars. Two million dollars is set aside for an approved Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver program to provide intensive supports for young children with autism. Funding will also be used to fund educational and first responder trainings offered statewide, and for staff and programs in the seven DMR funded Autism Support Centers.

The Department of Education & Department of Mental Retardation Community Residential Education Project (DOE/DMR) continues to be a successful collaborative initiative. It is currently funded at \$8 million dollars. During fiscal year 2006, 334 children participated in this project, which included 49 new participants. Sixteen students were assisted to return from residential school placements to their home communities, and 317 students utilized project resources to obtain a diversity of supports as an alternative to an initial residential special education school placement. There continues to be a high demand for participation in the project. Feedback from families clearly indicates the benefits of these resources and supports to keep their children at home and assist them to be meaningfully included in their communities and schools.

Approximately **11,000 to 13,000 families** of both children and adults are receiving some type of family support service at any given time. These services are delivered through contracts developed with about **74** family support provider agencies across the state. All Family Support Provider Agencies are required to complete and are evaluated on **Performance Outcome Measures** designed around the key family support principles and core service elements.

The delivery of family support services is based on the Department's ***New Family Support Guidelines and Procedures***, last issued in July of 2002. This document describes the goals and principles of family support, the types of family support services available, and all of the operational requirements. This document was first published in 1995, revised in July 2002, and is currently being revised once again. Input from a variety of sources, including DMR staff, the Statewide Family Support Council, MFOFC Board members, a representative group of Family Support Provider Agencies, has been solicited to help inform and offer feedback on proposed changes.

DMR internal family support network:

DMR is organized into four regions with Regional Directors, and 23 Area Offices with Area Directors, all under the umbrella of Central Office. Each DMR region has a Director of Family Support, who works with the Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Planning and Children's Services, the Central Office Director of Family Supports, and the Project Managers for the DOE/DMR Project and the Autism Division. In each Area Office there is a Children's Coordinator who generally works with children under the age of 18 years and their families, and a Transition Coordinator who works with individuals generally between the ages of 18 and 22. Individuals over the age of 22 who have met the adult eligibility criteria for DMR services are assigned a Service Coordinator and participate in an Individual Service Planning process.

Process for obtaining "substantial" input from families regarding current family support services:

The Department has used and continues to develop different approaches to seek input from family members, in order to help assess the Department's current system of family support and to assist in revising and crafting this Annual Plan for Family Support. This past year input and feedback was obtained through a variety of approaches:

- Quarterly meetings with the Statewide Family Support Council (SFSC)
- Meetings that involve the Commissioner, the Assistant Commissioners for Operations and Policy, Planning & Children's Services, Statewide and Regional Directors of Family Support, the Regional Office Directors and the Board members of Massachusetts Families Organizing For Change (MFOFC).

- Regional meetings with families
- Feedback from the DMR Statewide Advisory Council (SAC)
- Involvement in the “National Core Indicators Project” a multi-state collaborative effort to improve performance in state services for people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. Activities include dissemination of mail surveys to: 1) families who have an adult family member living at home who is receiving some funded DMR services; 2) families of children who are DMR eligible; and 3) personal interviews of adult individuals receiving DMR services.
- A *Family Support Survey* was developed and distributed to families in the spring of 2006. This survey was organized around the six major areas of focus in our Annual Plan for Family Support.

Following are some key themes that has emerged from the input and feedback provided by family members and consumers through these different forums.

- Interest and need for increased access to information. This includes: information about DMR services, as well as other agency or community services and resources available to families; information about and a better understanding of DMR policies and how family support resource decisions are made; and information on how to navigate the service system.
- Increased opportunities for training on a wide range of topics that are locally available to families.
- Increased communication with case managers, both at family support provider agencies and DMR staff.
- Increased responsiveness to the needs of families in the family support planning process, and flexibility in accessing services and supports.
- Information and support in transition planning from school to adult life.
- Assistance in working with local school systems to obtain effective educational services.
- Increased access to a variety of specific services including: in-home behavioral supports; after school and vacation programming; assistance with development of independent living skills, with a specific emphasis on preparing for adulthood; recreational and social programs; options for overnight respite, and assistance in obtaining PCA supports.

Efforts and approaches will continue to evolve, through both organized and informal mechanisms, to gather ongoing feedback about DMR’s family support services and the implementation and effectiveness of this Plan.

Focus Areas

Review of Activities & Accomplishments & Proposed Goals/Initiatives for FY ‘07

I. Family Empowerment: Opportunities for families and individuals to be involved in the development of agency policies and procedures, program development, and evaluation of services.

Activities/Accomplishments:

- Regular meetings have been held with the Statewide Family Support Council and the Council will have an ongoing role in providing input and guidance on service and policy development
- Involvement of the Statewide Family Support Council in providing input to help develop approaches for creating a more standardized, consistent and equitable system for making decisions about family support resource allocations. The Council has provided and will continue to offer input on ways to re-design our system of family support services.
- The Council provided input on the key characteristics of individuals and families that should be considered in the development of a standardized needs assessment process. Based on the information gathered, DMR is now piloting a tool for children and their families/caregivers to see how well it distinguishes salient support needs among groups of children and families.

Proposed New Activities/Initiatives:

- The Department is hosting Stakeholder meetings across the state during the summer of 2006 to provide information about the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver program and to get input on re-designing how the Department funds and delivers community based services. Hundreds of families and individuals with disabilities will have the chance to offer input on the services and design of the Home and Community Based Waivers the Department will be developing.
- DMR Quality Management staff will be seeking input and consultation from families and the SFSC throughout the fall of 2006 to help inform the development of quality assurance and evaluation processes for family support and self-directed services.
- DMR will seek to better utilize the information that Family Support Provider Agencies obtain through the required annual satisfaction surveys they conduct with families to whom they provide services. Several standardized questions will be identified for all providers to use and these responses will be compiled statewide. This will provide another avenue for reaching many more families to obtain feedback which will assist in informing areas that need to be addressed and/or new initiatives to pursue.

II. Family Leadership

Activities/Accomplishments:

- Expanded funding to MFOFC in the Metro Region to implement family leadership training and hire a part-time coordinator to do outreach and training for families. This now provides a baseline of funding across all regions for family leadership development activities.

Proposed New Goals/Initiatives:

- Explore options to offer advanced leadership training opportunities for interested family members with MFOFC, the Department of Public Health through their Family/Professional Partnership Institute, and other interested agencies and groups.

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

Activities/Accomplishments:

- Funding received in Fiscal Year 2006 for the new Autism Spectrum Division resulted in the following expansion of programs and new activities: funding for each of the 7 Autism Support Centers across the state to hire additional staff to provide services through their centers, as well as one-time funding to provide additional social and community recreational programs, including school vacation camp programs: a first responder training initiative, a pediatrician awareness project; and mini-grants to local organizations across the state to develop partnerships and innovative projects to better support children with autism and their families.

Proposed New Goals/Initiatives:

- An application for a Home and Community Based Waiver to serve a designated group of children with high support needs will be developed.
- Release of updated sections of Family Support Guidelines and Procedures that focus on flexible funding options and a description of the allowable and disallowable expenses. Training & support will be provided to DMR Area Office staff who review and approve Family Support Plans as well as to Family Support Provider Agency staff to facilitate common understanding and interpretation of the Guidelines and support consistency in implementation.
- Self-directed funding options that offer individuals and families more control in designing services and choice of providers will be increased through the Home and Community Based Waiver applications that DMR will be preparing and submitting this year.

IV. Accessing Services and Supports

Activities/Accomplishments:

- The Autism Division has developed quarterly newsletters which are broadly distributed and posted on the DMR web-site
- The DMR web-site continues to evolve and be updated to include more information about DMR services as well as posting of other relevant information that might be helpful to families and individuals receiving services
- DMR funded Family Support Provider Agencies were provided training on and access to the Virtual Gateway- a “single-point of entry” tool developed by EOHHS. Access to the Virtual Gateway enables family support agency staff to assist families in applying for public benefits they may be eligible for as well as complete applications for other disability agency services.

Proposed New Goals/Initiatives:

- DMR will be developing new brochures to provide information about the array of services offered and how to apply and access services. These brochures will be translated into multiple languages.
- The DMR Family Support Resource Guide that has been under development will be completed and distributed in the fall of 2006.
- Completion and distribution of an Autism Resource Guide.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

Activities/Accomplishments:

- Informational and training materials on a variety of subjects have been translated and made available to families and individuals. This has included information on autism, Asperger's Disorder, the 688/transition process, and intake and eligibility forms, etc. Written translations have expanded to include Haitian Creole and Mandarin Chinese.
- Ongoing and successful implementation of a federal grant in Springfield designed to create a "one stop family center" for economically disadvantaged, culturally diverse families with a member with a disability to help them navigate the service system.
- DMR has been funding a demonstration project in Lynn, MA- the Lynn Time Bank- as alternative approach to community development and expanding access to resources in a community with large numbers of individuals who are culturally and ethnically diverse.
- DMR has provided a variety of training opportunities on diversity and culturally competent service delivery for both DMR and family support provider agency staff.

Proposed New Goals/Initiatives:

- Continue work on developing a more comprehensive and streamlined system for the translation of DMR information and materials, expanding the range of information provided, timeliness, and access to materials.
- A Diversity Conference for 300 DMR staff will be sponsored in the fall of 2006 and DMR will continue to offer an array of training opportunities to improve understanding of the needs of families from culturally diverse backgrounds and enhance the delivery of culturally relevant family support services.

VI. Interagency Collaboration

Activities/Accomplishments:

- Worked jointly with the Department of Public Health and other human service agencies in the development of "Emergency/Disaster Plans" and "Disaster Preparedness" information. Guidelines and a packet of 'emergency preparedness' information was shared with all Family Support Provider Agencies to distribute to families.
- Participation on the six regional Planning and Review Teams, an EOHHS inter-agency initiative. This initiative is designed to develop a coordinated effort to better serve youth and children who require services from multiple EOHHS agencies.

Proposed New Goals/Initiatives:

- Work jointly with the Department of Public Health to provide training and resource information to DMR funded Family Support Provider Agencies on emergency preparedness.

- Work jointly with Department of Public Health in community forums to discuss local emergency planning activities and strategies for responsiveness and specialized supports to individuals with disabilities and their families.
- The Department will maintain an ongoing coordinating role with the other designated human service agencies named in the Chapter 171 legislation to discuss and monitor progress on family support initiatives, and to work collaboratively on improving and expanding flexible support services for individuals and families.