

**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind
Report on FY 2004
Flexible Family Supports**

Fiscal Year 2004 was the first year of implementation of MCB's Flexible Family Support Program. MCB's definition of family support is very wide, as is the definition of family. MCB provides direct services to Legally Blind residents of Massachusetts of any age. MCB serves young infants and children with families; young adults on their own for the first time; working adults with children to support; Deaf-Blind-Multi-handicapped individuals living with their families, on their own in the community, or living in community group homes and by far the largest group are the Legally Blind Elderly who are trying to remain in their homes.

All services provided by MCB are aimed at the goal of maintaining or increasing the blind consumer's capacity to be as independent and as productive as possible. Flexible Family Supports has been added to MCB's array of services which go beyond the budget line item categories such as, Homemaker services, Respite Services, Rehabilitation Teachers, Advocacy services, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Adaptive Technology, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Services for Children to the Elderly.

Each Region (there are 6) and several programs have advisory boards, there is a statewide Advisory Council each very active which make recommendations and provide input into policies and programmatic initiatives. Field staff members constantly seek and get feedback from consumers. From discussions with consumer's it has been determined that most Flexible Family Support requests would fall into 3 general categories: Home Adaptations and Vehicle Modifications; Financial Assistance and Clothing; Adaptive Equipment/ Assistive Technology.

Family Empowerment:

MCB continues to seek participation from a diverse group of Legally Blind citizens for Regional (local) and Statewide Advisory Councils.

Family Leadership:

Each Advisory board is routinely asked and informed about that which influences MCB's policies or the delivery of services.

Family Support Resources and Funding:

Currently, MCB allocates around \$75,000.00 towards Flexible Family Supports. Consumers and their families participate in the development of an Independent Service Plan in collaboration with their MCB counselor/case manager.

Accessing Services and Supports

Because MCB counselors provide direct case management to consumers; consumers call their MCB case manager with requests for any services, including Flexible Family Supports.

Culturally Competent Outreach & Support

MCB employs a full-time outreach person who works with the various communities within the state, explaining how MCB services can be accessed and explaining what those services may be. Staff is provided with trainings on the many cultures that MCB serves.

MCB provides services to any resident of Massachusetts. There are many different cultures and languages that are served. When necessary, MCB has contracted with interpreters so that every direct service counselor can communicate with MCB registrants whether in a foreign language or American Sign Language.

Interagency Collaboration

MCB is engaged in numerous interagency activities intended to better serve those blind consumers whose interests are best advanced by an interagency response.

During FY2004 there has been collaboration between MCB and DMR regarding the delivery of services to Blind/MR consumers under the auspices of the Home and Community-Based Waiver. Services have included the delivery of MCB-funded Orientation and Mobility training to Blind/MR consumers residing in community residences in Southeastern Massachusetts.

There has been collaboration between MCB and DMH, DMR, MRC and OSD in the development of a statewide pool of Supported Employment and Community Based Employment Service vendors to, collectively, create more service options for blind and other disabled persons seeking to work, and to establish a common price structure.

There was also the establishment of two ISAs:

1. To assist MRC as we both seek to support the Statewide Independent Living Council.
2. To support the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's network of One-Stop Career Centers as they successfully deliver enhanced services to blind job seekers.

This year, MCB's first in implementing Chapter 171 was a learning year for all MCB staff. All in all it was a successful year. MCB served around 40 consumers, who range in age from the toddler years to some in their 90s. All requests supported the identified goal (s) in the ISP's.

11 (Eleven) persons requested and received funds through FFS to provide housing or van modifications.

Others requested funds to remain in their homes, with heat, electricity and rent being up to date. Some needed furniture after residing in shelters. Some children with respiratory problems, needed air conditioners to prevent hospitalizations.

MCB has some unique requests that reflect the needs of the Legally Blind, such as: Zoom Text, CCTV, Software Programs for the Blind and a printer for an adapted computer. One of the Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers asked for money for a license and for liability insurance to start his own business.

Flexible Family Supports has gotten off to a good beginning. Those to whom we have responded have been surprised and grateful. Case Managers feel more able to meet the unique needs of the consumers they serve.

