

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Annual Family Support Plan Report – FY '06

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 3 Children Specialists covering the State of Massachusetts. They are located in Boston, Plymouth, 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

Every year MCDHH is awarded a small amount of dollars to be made available to families who need to purchase assistive equipment but unable to do so due to affordability. The majority of monies are being use to purchase hearing aids for family members as well as elderly people.

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

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:

- Hosted an annual Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) meeting and Town Hall meeting in Worcester on September 2004
- Issues and concerns are discussed at SAC and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meetings on a regular basis
- Family Support Act Input Survey

- 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.

NOTE

During FY '05 there were a number of vacancies at the management level as well as direct line staff, forcing MCDHH to put many of the goals that were identified in last year's report on the back burner. Recently, after 6 months of vacancy, a new Director of Case Management Department was hired, a number of the front line staff positions have been filled and two management positions will be filled in the next two or three months. These recent hires have enabled MCDHH to revisit last year's annual report, make some changes with the goals and established new initiatives for FY '06.

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. Instead of having town meetings in FY '05, MCDHH hosted eight SAC meetings.

MCDHH has been very active under EOHH with the Virtual Gateway portal to assist case managers and families to better access other government agencies for additional benefits and services.

Children's Specialists have attended the Career Day event that took place in Worcester in FY '05 and information was shared with parents of older deaf and hard of hearing children.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will set up a Parent Advisory Group in collaboration with Federation of Children's Services as part of our agreement with Department of Education.
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Skills Programs (DHILS) will provide trainings on parenting skills, how to buy a house and money management.
- MCDHH will provide two (2) Town Meetings, one in Boston and one in Western Massachusetts, in FY '06.
- MCDHH will work on recruiting a parent representative for the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC).
- MCDHH will send out a survey to parents to get feedback from them as to what they would like from MCDHH.

II. Family Leadership

Current Activities:

A new Director of Case Management Services at MCDHH was hired March of 2005. He has met with Margaret VanGelder and Tanya Wheeler at various times to learn more about Chapter 171. He has also attended a Family Support Plan Conference put on by Massachusetts Families for Organizing Change (MFOFC) as well as attending a meeting where various agencies responsible for submitting annual Family Support Plan Reports to update the status of the reports.

The new Director of Case Management Services has been working with the Bureau of Transitional Planning to develop a better tracking and reporting system for MCDHH so Chapter 688 referrals are addressed and followed up.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will provide training to parents about Chapter 171.
- MCDHH will provide training on the IEP process and the rights of parents.
- A Children's Specialist will provide training about the changes to the IDEA law to parents of deaf and hard of hearing children.
- MCDHH will develop and implement a new tracking and reporting system within MCDHH in FY '06.

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

Current Activities:

MCDHH was able to obtain additional funding from the Elderly Grant specifically for deaf and hard of hearing citizens who reside in the North Shore region and Central Massachusetts to purchase assistive technology equipment.

MCDHH formed an Assistive Technology Advisory Council as part of re-applying for a federal Assistive Technology Act grant. Of the 29 council members, 5 are parents and bring specific experience related to assistive technology within family situations.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will provide Assistive Technology Funds to families who cannot afford to purchase assistive technology equipment.
- MCDHH will provide information to families on MRC's Loan Program (Money and/or Equipment).
- MCDHH will provide training in the public school systems on making classroom and curriculum accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

IV. Accessing Services and Reports

Current Activities:

MCDHH continues to provide online informational newsletter that provides timely information on the Commission's services.

MCDHH's Communications Access, Training and Technology Services Department (CATTS) continues to provide public education on all issues related to hearing loss. It also runs a public outreach program whereby it will provide 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. This year they published an updated (2005) Resources Directory for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to be distributed free of charge. This directory has over 600 listings and is also available online.

The Case Management Services Department and CATTS Department continue to work collaboratively to do outreach to historically underserved regions by attending Western Massachusetts Big E and case manager attendance at community events sponsored by diverse population groups.

MCDHH completed the development of posters about their rights to request interpreters in hospitals.

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 about new initiatives at the Commission and encourage parents and family involvement to the Deaf Community News.

- MCDHH will distribute the following updated brochures to families, service providers and other interested parties: **“Hearing Aid Technology and Hearing Loss”, “Case Management”, Assistive Listening Systems and Devices”, Communication Access Realtime Translation”, Children’s and Family Services”, “Caring for Elders with Hearing Loss”, Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing”.**
- MCDHH will develop and provide information packets that include a listing of resources, videotapes and books to the families.
- MCDHH will distribute posters for hospitals to make deaf and hard of hearing people aware that they can request sign language interpreters.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

Current Activities:

Due to extreme staff shortages in FY ‘05, MCDHH was unable to have a Commission-Wide Open House for families and their children to learn about MCDHH programs and services. This initiative has been postponed to FY’06. The plan to have a “Meet Case Management” event was also postponed to FY ’06 for the same reason. MCDHH was unable to establish a Multi-Cultural workgroup for the purpose of providing information about Chapter 171. This will be done next year.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will have a Commission-Wide Open House for FY ’06.
- Establish a Multi-Cultural workgroup to share information about Chapter 171. Workgroup members will include representation of the following consumer organizations: Asian Deaf Association of New England; Boston Black Deaf Advocates; Boston Latino Deaf Association.
- MCDHH will hire bi-lingual interpreters for foreign speaking families when needed.
- MCDHH will provide a workshop with CATTs Department and Case Management Department at the Annual Federation of Children’s Conference in FY ’06 focusing on diversity and will talk about deaf and hard of hearing children, including deaf children from diverse families.

VI. Interagency Collaboration

Current Activities:

During FY ’05 MCDHH developed and established evaluation tools (EIPA and SCPPI) with the Department of Education to screen signing skills of educational interpreters and teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students.

March of 2005, a new Director of Case Management Department was hired and for the next 3 months, in order to learn about Chapter 171 and how to write an Annual Family Support Plan Report, he met with Margaret VanGelder from DMR, Tanya Wheeler, consultant for Chapter 171, attended the Family Supports Conference in Sturbridge, attended the MFOFC Conference in Westborough and gave an overview of MCDHH’s draft report for FY ’06.

MCDHH’s Director of Case Management Department is currently on the “New Hospital” workgroup providing consultation on accessibility for the new state hospital that will be constructed in the next year for mentally ill Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients.

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's Children's Specialist in the Springfield area has been working with DMR and their One Stop Shop project. A person has been hired to manage the funds for the One Stop Shop and they are close to hiring a Director for the project. They are still looking for a place to house the One Stop Shop services.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will establish a collaborative relationship with DSS to address issues of communication accessibility and will work with DSS to help them set up parent training for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- MCDHH will implement a pilot project to evaluate signing skills of 30 teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students.
- MCDHH will participate in MRC Employment Strategic Planning Workgroups.
- MCDHH will develop a Statewide Registry for Educational Interpreters in public school systems for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- MCDHH will provide training to Special Education Directors in the State of Massachusetts.
- MCDHH will work collaboratively with DPH in screening newborns for hearing loss.
- Children's Specialists will work collaboratively with Early Intervention Program and provide support to parents of deaf and hard of hearing infants/children.