

**Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
Annual Family Support Plan
State Fiscal Year 2006**

I. Background: The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is organized pursuant to M.G.L. c6 paragraph 74-84 and operates programs authorized by State Law, The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Social Security Act. The MRC provides comprehensive services to individuals with significant disabilities, intended to promote equality, empowerment and independence.

The MRC serves individuals with all types of disabilities as its constituency. While each MRC program has its own focus and eligibility criteria, the Commission's overall mandate and purpose are to assist all eligible individuals with disabilities, regardless of age, nature of disability or functional ability, to maximize quality of life and self-sufficiency in the community. Consistent among all services and across all programs, is a consumer-focused and consumer-directed planning and service delivery process that respects and is driven by the informed decisions of empowered consumers.

Generally speaking, consumers of MRC services are competent, independent adults who choose to control their involvement with MRC personally. In many cases, the provision of service to that adult is, by nature, a support to their family as well. For example, assisting a disabled youth who is transitioning to adulthood to find an accessible, affordable home and to receive the supports necessary to remain in that home supports a family who until that time had provided all of the help necessary to keep that individual in the family home. This independence can be achieved with the assistance of such MRC programs as Home Modifications, Assistive Technology, MassAccess Housing Registry, homemaker services, supportive living services, specialized case management, and Independent Living Center services.

In other examples, the economic self-sufficiency achieved through Vocational Rehabilitation services to assist an individual to find and keep a job, or to obtain Social Security benefits, through the Disability Determination Services, are, in effect, supports to the whole family who might be dependent upon the individual's income.

While MRC, by nature, is primarily an adult service system, there are a number of services and programs that are available to disabled children or youth. Specifically, the Turning 22 Supported Living Program, Transition to Adulthood Program, the Family Assistance services of the Statewide Head Injury Program, The Transition Services Program, the Housing Modification Loan Program and the Assistive Technology Loan program have no age minimum for eligibility and are utilized by adults and children.

II. Substantial Consultation: Consumer Involvement is integral component of all aspects of MRC Services and Programs. This ranges from involvement of the consumer, and where appropriate, his or her legal guardian, in all aspects of development and implementation of an individual service plan.

Through exploration of existing program and service options to participation in the Statewide Rehabilitation Advisory Council to connecting with the Independent Living Centers, consumers direct the types of services they receive, provide direction to the administration in terms of how services should be provided and join their voices to advocate for new and/or different services to best meet their needs. An example of this is the launching in 2005 of the Assistive Technology Loan Program which allows people with disabilities of all ages to purchase a wide range of assistive technology devices, including computers, software, vehicle modifications and other equipment that would otherwise be out of their reach.

In FY'05, avenues for obtaining Substantial Consultation have included:

- Individual Consumer Consultants involved in agency projects and activities such as development of publications including the Consumer Voice, the MRC Annual Report and the HCAP Resource Newsletter,
- An On-line Housing Survey with over 1,000 respondents indicating their preferences for types of housing and housing supports,
- Regional Transition Teams, comprised of consumers, families, family organizations and MRC staff, to continue to improve upon the rehabilitation process for transitioning youth
- Regular meetings of Advisory Boards, including the Statewide Head Injury Advisory Board, the Home Care Assistance Program Advisory Committee, the Statewide Rehabilitation Advisory Council and its Regional and Topic-based subcommittees,

- On-going Consumer Satisfaction Survey completion and review.
 - Regular meetings of the Statewide Independent Living Council.
- Moreover, many of the agencies with which MRC contracts are required to have their own advisory councils and other means of consumer input to ensure high quality, satisfactory services.

III. GOALS FOR FY'06: For Fiscal Year 2006, in relation to Ch. 171, the MRC has as its major goal, increasing outreach to youth and families to provide information about the types of services and programs available and to ensure effective input from youth, families, and all individuals with disabilities regarding the effectiveness of all MRC programs in meeting the needs of its constituents. Specific objectives include:

1. Family Empowerment/Substantial Consultation: Incorporate information about Chapter 171 and the agency's Family Support Plan into existing avenues for substantial consultation, including:
 - Providing information about Ch. 171 to, and seek input from, members of all Regional Transition Teams that meet throughout the state to discuss, plan and implement ways to improve transition services, and
 - Incorporate information about Ch. 171 and the Family Support Plan into a workshop at the MRC 25th Annual Consumer Conference which, this year will have an emphasis on bringing youth into leadership.
2. Family Leadership: The Statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP) will continue to fund the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts' I & R services, support group network and prevention programs. It will also continue to offer trainings to families and individuals on such topics of interest to families as substance abuse treatment, pharmacology, and housing, as needed. The Massachusetts Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Board (MBAIAB), which recommends policy, practices and funding for SHIP, is made up of 64% families of and consumers with Acquired Brain Injury.

The Transition to Adulthood Program funds Independent Living Centers to run peer support and independent living planning and support services to disabled teens as they begin to prepare for adulthood.

Also in FY'06, MRC will fund a Statewide Mentorship program through a contract with Partners for Disabled Youth. This project will match disabled youth, between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, with disabled adults for the purpose of mentoring youth and empowering them to make choices about the types of services to access to assist them in fulfilling their employment and independent living goals.

3. Family Resources and Funding: In FY '06, beginning in the fall of 2005, the Statewide Head Injury Program will hold a series of Regional Family and Consumer Forums. The purpose of these forums will be to gather substantial input from consumers and their families regarding the types of services most needed in their communities. The SHIP will gather this information and work with the MABIAB to update the state plan which will drive future program development.
4. Accessing Services and Supports: In '06, the MRC Transition Team has, as its objective, the development of clear and comprehensive materials that will inform consumers and families about the array of services available through MRC to assist disabled youth in their transition to adulthood. This will build upon the recently developed informational brochures entitled "Q & A For Parents" and "Q & A For Students" 'Guides to Vocational Rehabilitation Services for High School Students with Disabilities', and will include information regarding the types of community services available to support both employment and independent living goals. This will include information about Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services, Statewide Head Injury Program Services, the Turning 22 and Adult Supported Living Services, Independent Living Center services, Home Care Assistance Program services, the adult Protective Services system, Assistive Technology and Home Modifications and Benefits planning, all of which are currently available at the MRC.

As MRC staff are facilitators and members of the Regional Transition Teams, they will be able to solicit input from youth and family members which will that the materials are readable and provide the information that families most need.

Moreover, a goal of the Transition Team for '06 and beyond is to increase communication and determine best practices for ensuring that all MRC staff are able to provide the information and/or referrals necessary to assist each individual in formulating as comprehensive a plan as necessary to meet his/her needs regardless of the initial point of contact with the agency. This requires improved informational materials, staff training, integrated Regional teams that represent both Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living/Community Supports services, and integrated Information Technology, all of which are MRC objectives for FY'06.