

**Department of Developmental Services  
Annual Family Support Plan  
Fiscal Year '15 (July 1st, 2014 – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015)**

**Human Service Agency Overview of Family Support**

**A. Background**

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has been providing flexible family support services since 1995 to children and adults, who are eligible for services from DDS living at home with their families. This is the twelfth Annual Plan for Family Support submitted by the Department as required by Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002, "An Act Providing Support to Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families."

The Department is organized into four regions and 23 Area Offices managed by Regional Directors and Area Directors respectively, all under the umbrella of Central Office. Each DDS region has a Director of Family Support. Area Office Service Coordinators provide assistance and supports to individuals/families, with a Children's Coordinator who usually works with children under the age of 18 years and their families, and a Transition Coordinator who usually works with individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 and who are in the process of transitioning from school to adult services. Individuals over the age of 22 who have met the adult eligibility criteria for DDS services are assigned a Service Coordinator and participate in an Individual Service Planning process.

**B. Overview of Family Support**

The primary goal of family support is to provide a variety of options to individuals with disabilities and their families that enable them to stay together and to be welcomed, contributing members in their home communities. The Department's Family Support system is based on the principle that individuals and families know their own needs. For this reason, and because of the individuality of each family, the range of services available under the program is broad. This approach allows families the flexibility to identify the resources that will be helpful to support their family member in her/his home. The Family Support Centers and other family support programs are designed to be responsive to the dynamic and changing needs of the individual with a disability and his/her developmental stages in life within the family unit.

The Department has *Guiding Principles for Family Support* which serve as the foundation for the delivery of services through the Family Support Centers and all of the family support program services funded by the Department.

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

- ❖ developing families' natural capacities 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.

The Department receives specific funding designated for the delivery of family support services through the Family Support Appropriation Account in the state budget. In FY 2015 there is an increase of \$2.5 million dollars in funding which brings the total for this appropriation account to approximately \$54.9 million dollars. Of this total appropriation, approximately \$44-45 million is for specific family support services, and the remainder for other community support services. This increase in funding will enable the Department to provide important direct resources to support and assist families in their caregiving roles. This represents the third consecutive year of increases in funding, totaling \$8.3 million over the past three years. This is a positive trend and direction,

following a decrease in funding of \$10 million dollars that occurred in FY 2010 as a result of state budget difficulties due to the national recession. The array of family support services provided with this funding is described in more detail in Section III, Family Support Resources and Funding.

### **C. Process for obtaining substantial input from families on current family support services**

The Department uses both formal and informal approaches to seek input from individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families in order to help assess the Department's current system of family support services, and to obtain input on policy development and future directions.

Several years ago the Department initiated strategic planning activities to develop a renewed emphasis on the importance of supporting families caring for a family member at home due to the recognition that we are at an important juncture: there are more and more children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities living at home with their families resulting in a greater demand for family support services. Multiple approaches have been used to seek input and information from families and other stakeholders to help set the course for the future of Family Support Services.

In 2011 a report "*In Their Own Words: The Need for Family Support Services*" was developed based on input from more than 1300 families and was a 'call to action' to help families meet the demands of caregiving across the lifespan. The important supports needed by caregivers and the benefits and cost-effectiveness of family support were identified. Currently there are more than 20,000 families in Massachusetts caring for a child or adult family member at home. As documented in the 2011 report, Family Support is 75% to 80% less expensive than serving an individual in an out-of-home placement.

To address several key need areas and goals identified in this plan, workgroups comprised of Family Support Council members, family members, family support providers, and DDS staff were established to explore the six key areas of focus identified and to propose recommendations and short and long-term action steps for implementation.

In April 2013, "*Moving Forward in Enhancing Supports for Families: An Action Plan for Family Support*" was completed and over the past years several new initiatives have been implemented and other action steps and goals are underway and in development. Some of these outcomes and accomplishments will be highlighted in other sections of this report.

The six areas of focus encompass:

- 1) Improving communication about the Chapter 688 process and transition planning;
- 2) Expanding social activities and connections in the community, including opportunities to form relationships that may lead to friendships;
- 3) Providing resources for families regarding planning for their family member's future across the lifespan;
- 4) Developing a sufficient cadre of qualified staff to provide supports to families and mechanisms for identifying staff, such as an on-line directory;
- 5) Developing a comprehensive approach to community education and building local partnerships; and
- 6) Expanding access to information, resources and supports for families and improving communication methods through technology.

As needed, workgroups will continue work on implementation of specific goals and action steps outlined in this Plan and periodic updates will be provided. Family members involvement and participation will continue to be central to this work.

A full copy of the plan “*Moving Forward in Enhancing Supports for Families: An Action Plan for Family Support*,” and the report, “*In Their Own Words: The Need for Family Support Services*” are available on the DDS website at: [www.mass.gov/dds](http://www.mass.gov/dds).

Several of the ongoing and central ways the Department obtains feedback and input from families and other stakeholders are described below.

The Department’s **Statewide Family Support Council**, comprised of 15 parents from across the state who have, or who previously had, children and adult family members with disabilities living at home with them, provides an important and ongoing vehicle to provide input and consultation to the Commissioner on family support services, practices, policies, and needs. Council members have been an integral part of the Family Support strategic planning process, have been active participants in the Workgroups described above, and will continue to have an important role in assisting the Department, along with other stakeholders, in the implementation of the specific recommendations and action steps designed to build a more comprehensive, coordinated and responsive system of supports.

There is regular information-sharing, discussion, and solicitation of input from the Department’s **Statewide Advisory Council (SAC)** and the regional and area offices’ **Citizen Advisory Boards (CABs)**. These advisory groups play an important role in helping to inform and educate the public and other decision-makers about the needs of individuals and families and the importance of and benefits of the flexible services and supports that are provided.

The Commissioner and other Department leadership staff meet with other representatives of family and individual advocacy organizations to seek input and obtain feedback on services and future directions. This includes representation from the Arc of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change (MFOFC), Advocates for Autism in Massachusetts (AFAM), Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress, and the Developmental Disabilities Council. Monthly meetings are also held with the leadership of the Association of Developmental Disability Providers (ADDP). Additionally, leadership staff in the Department have been actively engaged with advocates and other state agency staff to work on plans and implementation of key recommendations in the Autism Commission Report that was released in March 2013.

#### **D. Focus Areas: Review of Activities and Accomplishments in FY 2014 and Proposed Initiatives for FY 2015.**

The following section provides brief highlights of ongoing efforts as well as new activities the Department has undertaken this past year, and includes where relevant, initiatives for development in the upcoming fiscal year.

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

*What is the agency currently doing to promote or enhance family input or direction in the development of agency policies and procedures, program development, and evaluation of services?*

The Department seeks input from individuals and families about agency services and new directions both formally and informally through a variety of organized groups and mechanisms.

Family member participation and leadership has been central to the Department’s strategic family support planning process and the development and ongoing implementation of the Action Plan for Family Support over the past several years. The Department has initiated a significant initiative related to Positive Behavioral Supports and family members and self-advocates were integral members of the Advisory Committee that helped explore and develop a framework for the implementation of Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) throughout the DDS system. The key goal of PBS is an improved quality of life for all individuals and includes teaching positive, pro-social

alternative behavior(s) for individuals exhibiting challenging behaviors. An Informational bulletin and guidance for agencies implementing positive behavioral supports were issued in October 2013 and many training and professional development opportunities have been offered.

As noted previously, family support expansion funding in FY '14 was used for services that directly responded to the needs identified as most important by families, specifically for individual flexible funding allocations and to expand social and recreational opportunities in the community. Input was sought from the Family Support Council about funding priorities and the best ways to allocate the new funding in the FY '14 family support account. Throughout the year Department staff participate in various meetings about family support services with family members and staff for input on what is working well and to identify areas for further development.

Family members are integral participants in a **Family Support Implementation Work Group** that provides input on the services, processes, and reporting mechanisms that support implementation of the Family Support Centers and other Family Support programs to help ensure services are family driven and responsive. Individuals with disabilities and family members participate on the Department's Statewide Quality Council to assist in reviewing the evaluation data and information about the quality of services provided, and to identify areas for development as part of a continuous quality improvement process.

*How will agencies change how they are currently doing business to make their agency and services more family-friendly and provide opportunities for families and individuals to have greater input and influence?*

All of the Department's family support services are based on the principles that individuals and their families are recognized as primary decision makers about their lives and supports, and options need to be flexible to be responsive to the unique needs, strengths and cultural values of families.

- The Department's Home and Community Based Waiver Programs for adults provide enhanced opportunities for individual and family empowerment, through increased choice in service providers, choice of service delivery method, and portability of services. Information and education will continue to be offered through Service Coordinators and other approaches to help ensure individuals and families are aware of the options available and to support them to exercise their rights and choices when they are involved in service planning
- The Department offers individuals and families two different approaches to engage in self-direction of services, the *Agency With Choice* model, or participant-directed services through use of the contracted *Fiscal Management Service*, Public Partnerships Limited (PPL). In FY '14, several programmatic changes were made to the Agency With Choice program, a co-employment model of service delivery, to foster increased utilization of this approach. Presentations on the successful experiences of individuals and families who engage in participant-directed services have been offered and will be made available to encourage use of self-directed service options. Ongoing education, support, and development of consumer-friendly informational materials will be provided.

## **II. Family Leadership**

*What training opportunities does the agency currently offer to families/individuals that would enhance their repertoire of skills?*

The Department funds five regional Family Leadership programs designed to provide education, leadership training and mentoring for families of children and adults with disabilities. This training and mentoring is developed and provided by families who have a family member with a disability, an

important feature of these programs. One primary vehicle for family leadership development is the sponsorship of a **Family Leadership Series**, which occurs across 6-8 days over a several month period. This past year four regional Leadership Series were held providing leadership development to approximately 100 families. Graduates of this Series frequently move into new leadership roles in a variety of capacities. Additionally, each of the regional programs sponsored a training series called "A Full Life Ahead" that offers monthly seminars for families on topics related to transition planning, housing, futures planning, and friendships and had more than 500 participants across the state.

The Department's Family Support Centers and Autism Support Centers provide an array of educational events and trainings on relevant topics of interest to families of both children and adults, and are required to offer a minimum of six training events per year. Leadership development is also promoted through the Centers by facilitating parent networking and mentoring, sponsoring parent support groups and one-to-one parent connections, grandparent support groups, and sibling support opportunities.

*What new ideas or proposals would the agency initiate to give families/individuals more opportunities to develop and/or exercise their leadership skills?*

Families have opportunities to further develop and/or exercise their leadership skills as members of the Department's Statewide Advisory Council and twenty-three Citizen Advisory Boards, through participation in the DDS funded Family Leadership Projects, as well as through the Family Support and Autism Support Centers which are expected to actively engage families and seek their consultation to identify interests and needs in developing activities and the array of service options they will offer.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities and family members play an important role in making presentations as part of the Department's orientation and training for new staff which reaches both departmental and provider staff. Sharing information about their experiences, perspectives, and what is most supportive and helpful to them, provides both a positive learning experience for staff and a way for individual and families to expand their own repertoire of skills.

Peer Support and Family Training, two services available through the Department's Home and Community-Based Waiver Programs, provide interested and qualified individuals and families the opportunity to provide training and mentoring to others, as well as provide learning opportunities for self-advocates and families who want to enhance their own leadership skills.

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

*What are the current resources/funding that the agency allocates to family support? What are ways that the agency provides flexible funding to families that allow them to customize their services?*

DDS provides funding for **Family Support Centers** which are designed to establish a local community presence and act as a hub for offering a wide range of general family support services and activities to families of children and adults eligible for DDS services. Centers are expected to develop strong local affiliations and partnerships with other state and community agencies, to become experts in generic resources and services, and to work to maximize natural supports. Services provided include: information and referral, support groups, family trainings, parent networking and mentoring, facilitation of social/recreational events, among other activities. Centers also provide Service Navigation that includes comprehensive and individualized information, guidance, and support to families to address their needs, connect them to potential resources, assist with problem-solving and help them navigate the service system. Centers administer flexible funding/stipends to families who are prioritized to receive an individual allocation which can be used

flexibly by families to purchase allowable services and goods as defined in the Department's updated Addendum to the Family Support Guidelines and Procedures. There are 34 Centers funded across the State with funding totaling approximately 8.8 million dollars.

**Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers** are designed to respond to the unique needs of specific cultural and linguistic family groups in specified areas or regions of the State. English is not the primary language for many of these families, and as a result they face linguistic barriers in accessing services and require more individualized and specialized assistance to learn about and access the service system. These Centers offer a similar array of services as the Family Support Centers described above. There are nine Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers with funding totaling approximately 1 million dollars.

**Autism Support Centers** provide an array of information and referral services, resources, and supports to children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders. The array of services and supports includes, but is not limited to, information and referral, family clinics, support groups, access to the latest information on autism, family trainings, parent networking and mentoring, and social/recreational events. There are five large and two small regional autism support centers funded at approximately 2.0 million dollars, which covers the community based initiatives and other center activities outside the Autism Waiver Program.

**Intensive Flexible Family Supports (IFFS) Programs** are designed to help families who are experiencing severe stress which can lead to the child being at-risk of an out-of-home placement. Intensive case management services are provided to help families integrate the variety of available resources to support their family member in crisis, and flexible funding to purchase additional supports or goods. Annually, about 560 children between the ages of 3 and 22 and their families receive services through these 19 regional and area based programs across the State funded at approximately 2 million dollars.

**Medically Complex Programs** support families who are caring for children/young adults up to the age of 25, with significant cognitive, physical, and complex health care needs who are living at home. Intensive medical wrap-around case management services are provided that help families integrate the variety of resources and supports they are receiving and offer flexible funding/stipends to assist the family in the purchase of additional supports and goods not covered by health insurance. This program complements and is supplemental to other MassHealth State plan and third party insurers. Annually, these programs provide services to about 300-325 individuals and their families. These five regionally based programs are funded in total at approximately \$600,000.

There are two **Planned Facility Based Respite Programs for Children** that offer planned, out-of-home respite services for children in the Central/West and Metro regions to provide short-term temporary relief for families, and include overnight, weekend, and/or vacation stays. Individuals are provided with a variety of recreational, social, cultural and/or educational activities during their stay. On average, 100 children and their families are able to utilize this service annually and the total funding amount is approximately \$200,000.

**Family Leadership Development Programs** provide education, mentoring and support to families. A major focus is a comprehensive and intensive family leadership series which provides information and education about "best practices" and helps families gain knowledge about policy making at the local and state level to assist them in assuming leadership roles in their local community and the disability community. There are five regionally based Family Leadership Programs funded for a total of approximately \$275,000.

**The Autism Division** at DDS received \$5.6 million dollars in FY '14 to provide services and supports to children with autism. The Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Autism Waiver Program served about 250 children under the age of 9 over the course of the past fiscal year. The community-based activities offered by the Autism Support Centers reached at least 2000 families from across the Commonwealth during the past fiscal year. The Autism Division also helps fund a specialty community program designed to train first responders called the Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition (ALEC). The program remains a successful initiative and this past year was featured on a national news program that highlighted the merits of this important training initiative.

**The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education & Department of Developmental Services Community Residential Education Program (DESE/DDS)** is a successful collaborative initiative designed to provide supplemental supports to children/young adults determined to need services to prevent a more restrictive educational or out of home residential placement, or to assist families whose children are coming out of a residential placement. The intent of the program is to increase family capacity to support their child in the home and community, as well as to provide an individualized plan of supports that promotes skill building, independence, and social integration across the spectrum of the child's home, school and community.

In FY '14, the program continued to receive \$6.5 million to provide capacity building supports and related services to 500 participants ranging in age from 8 up to 22. These FY '14 participants include an additional 85 individuals enrolled into the DESE/DDS Program during the fiscal year that came forward through the Open Enrollment Period in 2013. An additional 45 participants are being prioritized for assessment into the DESE/DDS Program during the beginning of FY '15.

#### **FY'14 Family Support Funding Increase**

The increased funding of \$2.8 million dollars in the family support appropriation account for FY '14 was used primarily to offer individual flexible funding/stipends to families in need who were not previously receiving funding support, and resources for the development and expansion of social and recreational opportunities, two of the most important need areas identified by families. In addition, as needed, this funding was used to expand capacity in local Family Support Centers and Intensive Flexible Family Support programs. Major outcomes of this funding include:

- Approximately 850 individuals/families received flexible funding allocations for respite or other in-home or community supports that enabled them to better care for and support their family member at home.
- More than 1800 individuals benefited from participation in about 95 new or expanded social and recreational programs and initiatives. These programs encompass a wide variety of opportunities including vacation programs, activity clubs, karate and zumba classes, family community fun days, music therapy, sibling support activities, after-school programs, social skills classes, and drama and theater groups, etc.

Additionally, the Department funded the **Medical Respite Home** in Southeastern, MA that provides an important service for adults with complex medical, physical and developmental needs who require 24 hour, specialized nursing care and their families. First opened in 2012 in response to the need identified by families for this service option, this program has continued to evolve, and includes transportation, a variety of community-based activities, and other supports to assist individuals and families in using this service. Approximately 25 individuals and their families have been able to use this resource with 334 days of overnight respite provided, offering important relief and respite for families and a new experience for the adults.

## **FY'15 Family Support Funding Increase**

In FY'15, after consultation with its Family Support Council and other stakeholders, the Department plans to use the \$2.5 million increase in Family Support funding to provide: flexible funding stipends to families (\$1.46 million); increased services in the Medically Complex Programs (\$240,000) and; \$200,000 to each of its four regions to address specific service needs within their geographic area. Use of this increased funding will be monitored regularly by DDS throughout the fiscal year. Periodic reports will be shared with the Family Support Council and other interested stakeholders.

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

*What are current examples of ways the agency is educating families on how to access services in a timely and effective manner? What are some illustrations of different services and resources which promote good access to information and referral?*

The DDS funded Family Support and Autism Support Centers provide Information and Referral services to families of children and adults within their geographic area. This includes assisting families to identify resources and service options available in their local communities, to learn about other financial and/or state services for which families may be eligible, and to provide guidance on how to navigate the service system. They use a variety of approaches to disseminate information to families, including email, list-serves, web-sites, on-line newsletters and training calendars, webinars, and social media, as well as create and maintain a "library" of resources. These Centers engage in a variety of outreach activities to connect with families in different venues who may benefit from their information and resource services

Families are sent a 'welcome flier' with information about the Family Support Centers in their area at the time their son or daughter is found eligible for services. This notice is made available in multiple languages to be responsive to families for whom English is not their primary language.

A 'Statewide Family Support Directory' is available to help families find the Family Support Center and other family support programs in their area to promote easier access to these resources. The Directory is widely disseminated through DDS, service providers, and is posted on the Department's website.

The Department has provided funding for "The Real Friends Project" to assist in expanding opportunities for friendships and community participation through training and the development and distribution of information and resources. Key accomplishments include the development of a website with resource information, the delivery of 70 "Introduction to Friends" presentations across the state reaching approximately 2,000 people including parents, people with disabilities, and DDS and provider staff, offered five 'train the trainer' sessions, and supported six demonstration projects to illustrate different approaches to supporting people with and without disabilities, in developing friendships.

The Department sponsored multiple training events this past year for family support programs and DDS staff, all designed to promote capacity-building to enhance the supports and services provided to families. These events provided opportunities for staff to share information, promising practices, and new initiatives in specific topical areas, and fostered an opportunity for networking. About 400 staff participated in these events. A successful conference focused on the theme of "Supporting Families Across the Lifespan" was held in June. The conference included compelling presentations by family members who shared their perspectives on what is important to them and most helpful at different life stages, and there were multiple workshops offered on topics relevant to providing supports to individuals and families at different periods across the lifespan. Some of these topical

areas will be further developed through additional professional development opportunities in the upcoming year.

The Department provides funding to help support the Autism Insurance Resource Center at New England INDEX which provides information, training and consultation about the Massachusetts Autism Insurance Law (aka ARICA). The Department also helps disseminate information about this resource to families and staff through multiple strategies.

Publications and informational materials are posted on the Department's web-site to help families learn more about services and how to access them. Examples include a guide on transition from school to adult life, "The Road Forward," "School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities," resources related to the Department's Home and Community Based Waiver programs, and semi-annual newsletters developed by the Office of Quality Management called, "Living Well."

*What new initiative(s) will the agency undertake to promote good local access to information and resources?*

- All Area Offices will continue to sponsor informational and training forums for families on transition to adult services to help families better understand the process and learn about adult service options and service providers. The guide "The Road Forward" was updated in the fall of 2013 and these publications were widely disseminated. A work group is developing a common curriculum and key resources on transition that will be made available to DDS and family support provider staff to help ensure consistent information is provided to families at different points in the transition planning process.
- The Department has provided funding for a three year project with The Arc of Massachusetts, *Widening the Circle*, to build upon and expand the work of the "Real Friends Project." These project activities were developed in response to the feedback and concerns raised by families related to the social isolation of their children, and the challenges individuals face in developing real and lasting friendships.
- To respond to the needs identified by families about the difficulties they experience finding qualified and available respite and in-home workers, the Department has initiated a pilot project with Rewarding Work, to expand their web-site to include a directory of workers and other resources related to accessing respite and hiring in-home staff. Rewarding Work is currently available through support from MassHealth for individuals and families to find Personal Care Attendants (PCAs). Additionally, a pilot respite training project is being implemented through partnerships between several Family Support Centers and local colleges, to recruit students who need internship experiences, provide them with training and supervision, and place them with families who will receive free respite support in the home. Based on the experiences learned from this pilot, it may be expanded to other sites across the State and may help both in recruiting more individuals interested and trained to provide respite, while also directly benefiting families by offering them respite support.
- For use by Family Support and DDS staff as they assist families with planning and accessing services, the Department will be making available a new resource developed by the Missouri Family to Family Project, entitled: "Charting the Life Course: A Guide for Individuals, Families, and Professionals."

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

*What are the current activities or services that the agency offers that ensure culturally appropriate access and supports to ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and individuals?*

The Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers provide bi-lingual and bi-cultural assistance to identified groups of families for whom English is not their primary language. They are expected to provide broad outreach and are frequently called upon by other organizations to help provide interpretation and translation assistance to families. These Centers primarily provide services to families who speak Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Russian, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Cape Verdean Creole. In addition, all Family Support Centers and providers are expected to develop resources and capacity to do outreach and be responsive to the diverse cultural and linguistic communities in the geographic area in which they are providing services.

There are an increasing number of children and families from a variety of diverse cultural and linguistic communities who receive services through the Autism Waiver Program. Interpretation services are provided as an integral part of these program services.

The Department makes available translated informational materials for individuals and families in multiple languages. Positive working relationships have been established with several entities that provide interpretation and translation services and they have developed a good understanding of disability terminology and concepts that lead to providing more culturally relevant and responsive information.

A variety of training opportunities are offered for family support and DDS staff focused on increased understanding of families from diverse communities and to learn more about resources and strategies to provide culturally respectful and responsive services. Workshops have been sponsored to hear from families from diverse communities about their experiences and perspectives in raising a child with a disability, and from providers about the approaches they have developed and used to offer culturally responsive services. Department staff continue to work collaboratively with providers to share positive practices and support them as they further develop their capacity to provide services to individuals and families from diverse communities.

There are active statewide, regional and central office Diversity Councils that offer a variety of opportunities for education, training, and cultural experiences to promote increased understanding of different cultural and linguistic groups, and support the delivery of more culturally responsive services.

*What new ideas/initiatives will the agency propose to outreach and meet the needs of culturally diverse families and individuals?*

- Workshops and forums focused on the development of culturally responsive services will continue to be provided for Family Support providers and DDS staff.
- Specific opportunities to bring together staff from the Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers across the state with DDS staff and other family support programs will be provided to foster information-sharing, networking, and to identify ways to strengthen efforts to provide more culturally competent services to families.

## **VI. Interagency Collaboration**

Department staff participate in various inter-agency activities with other Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) agencies to promote more effective service delivery and to maximize resources. Regional and area office DDS staff participate in local inter-agency planning teams to promote more effective communication, and when there are individuals involved with multiple agencies, to work toward coordination and collaboration in service delivery. Representation on these teams usually includes staff from the Departments of Children and Families, Mental Health, Transitional Assistance and Public Health, and in some situations, representatives from local school systems.

DDS, in partnership with the Office of Elder Affairs, other human service agencies and community organizations, has completed the third year of a three year Lifespan Respite Grant from the Administration on Aging and has a one year continuation grant to address sustainability planning. A unique aspect of this project has been the cross-disability/special needs focus across the lifespan. A statewide lifespan respite coalition has been established, a website with respite resources and information on varied respite options has been developed, and training approaches and innovative models to expand the network of respite providers available to caregivers are being identified. The *Massachusetts Lifespan Respite Coalition* hosted the successful national respite conference in Boston in the fall of 2013 which drew presenters and attendees from across the country and provided a great opportunity to hear about innovative approaches and promising practices being used in other states to expand respite options. An informative and energizing statewide conference for caregivers was held in May 2014. Additionally, with supplemental grant resources mini-demonstration projects were funded to support the delivery of respite services to unserved and underserved populations.

DDS leadership staff have been active members of the **Autism Commission** and have been working in partnership with other state agencies, advocacy groups and other stakeholders to support implementation of some of the key recommendations identified in the report that was issued in 2013.

The Department continues to work collaboratively with the Office of Medicaid, and the Departments of Mental Health and Children and Families, on the implementation of the **Children's Behavioral Health Initiative** (CBHI). There is a specific focus on how these services can be more responsive to the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders and what will support capacity building in this area. DDS makes information available to the Department's children's service coordinators and family support providers so they are knowledgeable about the eligibility criteria and service options available in order to facilitate access to these services for children and families who may be eligible.

Department staff participate in **Unified Planning Team** meetings when requested for individuals who are eligible for DDS services and also continue to participate on the *One Child, One Plan* EOHHS initiative.

DDS family support staff and children and transition service coordinators are collaborating with the Department of Public Health Care Coordination Program to help facilitate planning and smoother transition from school to adult life for individuals with significant and complex medical, physical, and developmental needs.

*What new activities or initiatives does the agency propose to demonstrate the above goals?*

- Department staff will continue to work closely with the Office of Elder Services and other human service and community organizations, family members and individuals to continue to successfully implement the federal Lifespan Respite grant and to support the Massachusetts Lifespan Respite Coalition.
- The Department will continue to work in partnership with the Office of Medicaid in the implementation of the Home and Community Based Waiver Programs for adults, and the Autism Waiver Program for Children.
- Additionally, Department staff will collaborate with MassHealth staff to identify the specific needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, especially those with significant medical and health challenges, to promote access to necessary services to live with their families successfully in the community.