

MCB Family Support Plan FY'10

Overview of Family Support

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind provides family support services consistent with the principles of the agency's mission: To provide the highest quality rehabilitation and social services to blind individuals, leading to independence and full community participation. This critical mission is accomplished by working in partnership with legally blind consumers, families, community agencies, health care providers, and employers.

MCB is committed to the following principles:

1. Providing responsive, high quality services.
2. Promoting full access to community services.
3. Offering individuals choices among services tailored to meet their unique needs.
4. Eliminating barriers to employment and community integration.
5. Exploring and applying new technologies to enhance opportunities.
6. Valuing input from a wide public audience and recognizing that community advocacy and advisory groups are an essential component of system planning.
7. Promoting the registration of legally blind individuals to ensure that services are offered and rights are explained and protected.
8. Providing education and training to community organizations, employers, health care providers, and schools to promote awareness of blindness and the abilities of persons who are blind.
9. Assuring that the cultural and ethnic diversity of consumers and staff are respected in the design and delivery of services.
10. Ensuring that through recruitment, retention, advancement, and monitoring, the workforce of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind reflects the diversity of the population it serves.

Family support is a way for consumers to identify service needs beyond those for which MCB has a traditional line item budget. MCB is primarily a rehabilitation agency and a wide array of services may be necessary to assist a consumer to remain in his/her home and to be an independent as possible. For low incidence populations, highly individualized and customized services are the norm.

The majority of MCB family support services are targeted to assist consumers in the Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Program. The individuals in this program have very significant disabilities in addition to their blindness including deafness; cognitive, emotional, and behavioral challenges. This group of individuals present complex needs, and need a continuum of supports to live and work in the community. MCB has targeted this group for participation in the PCP Self-Direction pilot program. There are 816 people receiving services managed by this unit including 24 hour residential services, day programs, respite, homecare, low vision services, and adaptive technology. Services are highly individualized. It is our plan to advance the practice of self-direction and Person Centered Planning throughout our programs by developing an infrastructure to support

self-direction as an option for everyone currently receiving residential services and for those turning 22, to develop and implement a person centered planning process for this group, and to develop options for individual budgets. In FY 09, this service model was offered to all families of transitioning youth with residential needs. In addition, MCB piloted a program of supported housing for individuals with multiple challenges in FY 09. Each service plan began with a PCP process and through that process, highly individualized services were developed to help each individual reach their goals and dreams. PCP training has been provided to all staff in our Vocational Rehabilitation and Deaf Blind units. MCB fully embraces this philosophy.

Examples of support services currently provided include: funding for housing adaptations, private-duty nursing, rent, utilities, transportation, and short term PCA services. Such services are provided when there is no other traditional resource such as MassHealth available to the family.

MCB also has a more limited program of family support services under its Independent Living Social Services Program. Services provided under this program have included: hippotherapy for children with multiple challenges; furniture and household goods for a consumer leaving a shelter moving into an apartment; funding for swimming lessons to enhance community integration; and funding for basic services such as winter clothes and utility bills.

MCB's primary network is comprised of counselors, social workers and consumers, working in partnership toward goals that are agreed upon after full consultation. Self-direction and consumer choice are the guiding principles in all service planning.

MCB seeks input and advice from its various advisory boards; MCB listens to and responds to our consumers.

I. Family Empowerment

MCB has for many years sought and received input from legally blind consumers. Our consumer community is very well organized and very effective in advocating at the local, state, and national level. MCB seeks input and advice from its various advisory boards as well as individual consumers and families. MCB's program of flexible family supports is incorporated into its Comprehensive Annual Independent Living Services Plan. Public hearings on this plan are held across the state in September of each year. MCB publicizes these hearing on its website, through its weekly taped telephone consumer information line, and through the radio reading network. Hearing notices are mailed to agencies and consumers who have expressed interest. These forums provide the opportunity for families to provide substantial input into our policies.

MCB has a number of active advisory boards that meet regularly. These include six Regional Advisory Councils, and a statewide Rehabilitation Council that has a major role in the agency's policy development. The majority of the members of these councils are

legally blind consumers. Some parents of legally blind children and family members of legally blind persons also attend and participate on these advisory boards. There are also positions on the council designated for key stakeholders including the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Federation for Children with Special needs, and the National Federation of the Blind. In addition, the agency has developed a Youth Advisory Council during FY 09 to increase the input from this group and to hear their fresh and creative ideas. Leadership skills development is a focus of this group.

MCB will continue to encourage more participation of parents of legally blind children and family members of legally blind persons on these various advisory boards. In FY 09, parents of individuals with deaf blindness organized a "town hall" forum with the Commissioner and Assistant Secretary to share their concerns.

All MCB social, vocational and independent living services are planned and provided in partnership with the consumer; consumer choice is an overriding principle and policy that all MCB direct service staff honor.

II. Family Leadership Development

Families and consumers are informed of conferences and trainings by MCB counselors. MCB staff and consumers participate in a wide variety of conferences on topics ranging from Transition from School to Work, Low Vision Rehabilitation, and Employment issues to name a few.

A number of family members are involved in the activities of the Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments and the Massachusetts Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired.

Many other consumers have participated on agency advisory boards and have developed exceptional leadership skills.

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

MCB tries to serve as many consumers as possible based on availability of funds. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the family support services that MCB provides are targeted to consumers in its Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Program. During FY 2009, MCB allocated \$240,000 for family support services for this group. Approximately, 200 consumers and families were served, double the number served in the previous year. The typical expenditure per family was between \$500 and \$1000, however the amounts were flexible based on need. MCB is projecting that approximately 200 consumers/families will be served in FY 2010 depending on funding, MCB is currently working on an RFR as our current procurement vehicle (DMR-DDS) has expired.

During FY 2009, MCB has also been able to provide flexible family supports to approximately 76 consumers/families under its social services and independent living programs with approximately \$134,000 in combined state and federal funds. The agency

expects to have the same funding available in FY 2010 and to serve the same number of consumers/families once our new contracts are in place.

IV. Accessing Services and Supports

During the development of the individual service plan, the consumer/family identifies the customized services that will be needed to reach the identified goals. During regularly scheduled home visits, progress is discussed and possible options explored.

MCB will continue to utilize our field based counselors as the frontline to disseminate information. MCB Advisory Boards will continue their role of advising MCB about consumer/family needs.

It should be mentioned that all legally blind persons have very good access to MCB services due to the mandatory reporting of legal blindness required by Massachusetts law. All newly reported legally blind persons are registered with MCB and contacted by a social worker or counselor to offer services.

Periodically, MCB conducts a census of the approximately 37,000 registrants and, at the same time, renews its offer of information and services. A census began in FY 2009 and is being conducted on region by region basis.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach & Support

MCB is charged with providing services to all persons residing in the Commonwealth who are registered as legally blind. MCB contracts with the Language Line and Catholic Charities for language interpreters. MCB also contracts for ASL and specialized Interpreters for individuals who are deaf blind.

The agency's Staff Development Unit has for a number of years worked to assist staff to better address the needs of traditionally under-served minority groups. As in previous years, a training program on cultural diversity and rehabilitation issues was offered to vocational rehabilitation staff during FY 2009. Cultural competence, especially regarding attitudes about legal blindness, is crucial for the successful rehabilitation of the many ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistically diverse consumers/families that we serve.

In addition, the agency has a Director of Multi-Cultural Outreach who coordinates a formal program of outreach to all minorities and under-served populations in cooperation with grass-roots community organizations and the State Office of Refugees and Immigrants.

VI. Interagency Collaboration

MCB has greatly expanded its collaborative efforts with a wide variety of community partners as well as other EOHHS agencies. MCB staff participate in many inter-agency workgroups on EOHHS initiatives, including those related to person-centered planning.

MCB has long required that our counselors and social workers collaborate as much as possible with any other agency (private or public) that is involved with MCB consumers/families. The MCB-DDS partnership is quite notable and regional offices and programs often collaborate to pool resources to meet consumer/family needs. MCB has collaborated with community partners as diverse as the Knight of Columbus, the Lions Clubs, Habitat for Humanity, Kiwanis, the Urban League, the Cambodian Mutual Aid Association, and many neighborhood health centers.

The success of the agency's Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Program, in particular, depends on extensive and effective collaboration with a number of agencies, including the Department of Developmental Services, the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults, and the Perkins School for the Blind.