

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Annual Family Support Plan Report – FY '07

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's 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.

Feedback via word of mouth from families and professionals plus data gleaned from stats indicated a need for a 4th Children's Specialist. Staffing patterns have been revised which enabled Case Management Department to develop and implement the 4th Children's Specialist for Central Massachusetts Region effective July 12, 2006.

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 are unable to afford the cost. The majority of monies are being used 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:

- Issues and concerns are discussed at SAC and Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meetings on a regular basis

- 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.

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.

Children's Specialist attended a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Autism conference and has set up a website with resources for parents of deaf/hard of hearing children with autism.

Tanya Wheeler, consultant for Chapter 171 provided training about Chapter 171 to Case Managers and Children's Specialists at the department staff meeting earlier this fiscal year.

New Initiatives:

- Under a Memorandum of Understanding with Department of Education, MCDHH will set up a Parent Advisory Group in collaboration with Federation of Children's Services.
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Skills Programs (DHILS) will continue to provide trainings on parenting skills, how to buy a house and money management.
- MCDHH will continue to provide two (2) Town Meetings, locations to be determined at a later date.
- MCDHH will continue to work on recruiting a parent representative for the Statewide Advisory Council (SAC).
- MCDHH will request parent participation in a survey to gather input as to changing needs and supports needed from MCDHH during FY '07.

II. Family Leadership

Current Activities:

Children Specialists attend many of the IEP meetings with the parents to provide advocacy and to teach parents how to advocate for the rights of their deaf and hard of hearing children. The Specialists also work with parents to help them learn how to take on a leadership role.

Information about obtaining Chapter 171 training for the parents was given to DHILS programs as well as The Learning Center. As a next step, Tanya Wheeler, of Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change, was to have made arrangements to provide training to Deaf, Inc. and The Learning Center.

New Initiatives:

- Children's Specialists will continue to provide training on the IEP process and the rights of parents.
- Children's Specialists will continue to provide training about the changes to the IDEA law to parents of deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Case Managers and Children's Specialists will provide information on Chapter 171 to families.

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

Current Activities:

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. Application for the Assistive Technology Act grant was made and transition was completed for MRC to obtain funds and run the program. MCDHH remains an active participant in the AT Act grant Advisory Council; a multi-state agency collaborative effort.

One of the Children's Specialists received her Masters in Social Work last year.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will continue to provide Assistive Technology Funds to families who cannot afford to purchase assistive technology equipment.
- MCDHH will continue to certify parents/families to receive free adaptive telephone equipment from the Verizon Program.
- MCDHH will continue to provide information to families on MRC's Assistive Technology Loan Program (Money and/or Equipment).
- MCDHH will continue to 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's Communications Access, Training and Technology Services Department (CATTS) continue to provide public education on all issues related to hearing loss. In particular, CATTS conducts extensive public outreach targeted to providing 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. Through CATTS, MCDHH updated and re-published the 2006 edition of the Resources Directory for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people; distributed free of charge. This directory has over 600 listings and is also available online. CATTS also revised the Hard of Hearing book which will also be distributed free of charge. Various brochures were updated and are available for distribution as well as plastic cards to be used to request interpreters for emergency services.

The Case Management Services Department and CATTS Department work collaboratively to do outreach to historically underserved regions by exhibiting at the Big E in Western Massachusetts, and by actively participating in community events sponsored by diverse population groups. Case Managers and Case Management Director have been working in collaboration with DMH addressing the issue of lack of substance abuse services for deaf and hard of hearing people. MCDHH has ordered new ASL videotapes that can be loaned to parents of deaf and hard of hearing children.

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 to the Deaf Community News and other consumer-run publications to connect readers with new initiatives at the Commission and encourage parents and family involvement
- MCDHH will continue to develop and provide information packets that include a listing of resources, videotapes and books to the families.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

Current Activities:

MCDHH has identified and utilized resources for case managers to access foreign language interpreters to facilitate communication between signing/English speaking staff and parents and families who speak a different language.

Video equipment was purchased and attached to a cart that can be moved from place to place and is used by deaf staff to communicate with Spanish speaking families via Spanish interpreting relay services. Staff have attended Career Days at various high schools and distributed brochures about MCDHH and the various services it provides.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will continue to hire bi-lingual interpreters for foreign speaking families when needed.
- CATTS staff and Case Management staff will attend a conference at Clarke School (oral school) in the fall as part of the outreach and support services.

VI. Interagency Collaboration

Current Activities:

During FY '06 MCDHH conducted a pilot project with the Department of Education to screen signing skills of educational interpreters and teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students. 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.

Commissioner Reed presented at the Administrators of Special Education (ACES) Board meeting, and also delivered the keynote address for the annual conference of Special Education Directors on working with families of deaf and hard of hearing children. The Commissioner's message was conducted with full communication access using interpreters, realtime captioning, and assistive listening devices, and delivered to 320 participants at the conference.

MCDHH is currently collaborating with key people in DSS to set up training on working with family members who are deaf and hard of hearing. The focus has been on communication access and the importance of having legal certified interpreters present in all situations.

MCDHH's Children's Specialist in the Springfield area has been working with DMR and the newly launched One Stop Shop project. A Director has been hired and a location obtained to set up the One Stop Shop services. This collaborative effort is staffed by an assistant and a "Family Navigator", and recruitment is underway for a part-time "Family Navigator".

Children's Specialist has been attending MRC vocational programs and trainings for youths.

New Initiatives:

- MCDHH will continue to work 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 evaluate signing skills of 30 teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students.

- MCDHH will continue to participate in MRC Employment Strategic Planning Workgroups.
- MCDHH will continue to develop a Statewide Registry for Educational Interpreters in public school systems for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- MCDHH will continue to work collaboratively with DPH in screening newborns for hearing loss.
- Children's Specialists will continue to work collaboratively with Early Intervention Program and provide support to parents of deaf and hard of hearing infants/children.