

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Annual Family Support Plan

State Fiscal Year 2012

I. BACKGROUND:

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is organized pursuant to M.G.L. ch. 6 paragraph 74-84 and operates programs authorized by State Law, The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and by 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 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 informed decisions of empowered consumers.

In general, consumers of MRC services are individuals with disabilities who choose to control their involvement with MRC personally. In many cases, the provision of service to the individual is, by nature, a support to the family. For example, assisting a disabled youth who is transitioning to adulthood to find accessible, affordable housing and long term supports necessary to live independently does help that individual's family, who until that time provided all of the help necessary to keep that individual at home. This independence can be achieved with the assistance of such MRC programs as Home Modifications, Assistive Technology, MassAccess Housing Registry, Transition to Adulthood Programs, Turning 22 Supported Living, brain injury services, among others. The individual's economic self-sufficiency can be enhanced through MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services to gain employment, or through MRC's Disability Determination Services that may aid in the individual's application for Social Security benefits.

Despite the fact that MRC is primarily an adult service system, there are a number of

programs that are also available to, or directly benefit, children and youth with disabilities. Specifically, the Turning 22 Supportive Living Program, Transition to Adulthood Programs, Family Assistance Services of the Statewide Head Injury Program, the Home Modification Loan Program, MassAccess Housing Registry, and the services under the Assistive Technology programs, including the AT Loan Program and the MassMatch School Swap program, are utilized to benefit children and/or young adults with disabilities.

MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Community Living Programs continue to collaborate and improve coordination of services for Transition Age Youth. Furthermore, over the next year, MRC will be reviewing the recommendations of both the Autism Commission and The Brain Injury Commission and determining best methodologies for incorporating recommendations of those commissions and collaborating with state agency partners to best serve these populations.

II. SUBSTANTIAL CONSULTATION:

Consumer Involvement is an integral aspect of all MRC programs and services. This begins with involvement of the consumer, and when appropriate, his or her legal guardian, in all aspects of development and implementation of their individual service plan, individual transition plan, or individual plan for employment.

Furthermore, consumer input is solicited through many means, for the purposes of informing agency decision-making, program planning and development. Avenues for consumer involvement include: focus groups, formal and informal advisory committees, surveys and needs assessments, and individual consumer consultants who are hired to share their expertise and consult on specific projects.

In FY '11, specific avenues for obtaining substantial consultation have included:

- Formation of District Advocacy Councils: In response to feedback from the Town Meetings held in FY'10, MRC has reorganized what were VR-specific District Advisory Committees, into broader focused "District Consumer Advocacy Councils" (DCACs). These DCAC's include a broader-based constituency and address issues of concern to both Community Living Programs and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. While these DCACs are still in the formulation stage, 1 to 2 meetings have been held

in each region. Members include consumers and providers of both CL and VR programs, representatives of schools, transit authorities, employers, and others with a vested interest in successful outcomes for MRC consumers.

- Regular meetings of Program Specific and Topic Specific Advisory Committees continue, including: Statewide Head Injury Advisory Board, State Rehabilitation Council, Assistive Technology Act Advisory Council, State Independent Living Council, and the Home Care Assistance Program Advisory Committee, among others
- Unserved/Underserved Focus groups, conducted by the Consumer Involvement Department to gain feedback from consumers of VR services who were unable to gain successful employment
- Focus groups conducted by the Marketing Team to address how MRC is currently perceived and how to better market the agency to better reflect its comprehensive programs and services. Focus groups were comprised of current and past consumers and their family members, providers, employers, and other stakeholders
- Involvement of Individual Consumer Consultants in RFR reviews, interview committees, and program specific projects
- Consumer Satisfaction Surveys
- Consumer Needs Assessment Survey
- Participation at all meetings of the Statewide Independent Living Council and support and consultation to its subcommittees
- An Annual Consumer Conference: This year, co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) and the State Independent Living Council (SILC), the conference was fully driven by consumers of the four cosponsoring organizations with staff support. Workshop topics of interest to families included: “Transition from School to Work to Independence” , “Assistive Technology Funding: Where and How” and “Credit and Independence: How they Can Work Together”
- Regional Transition Teams: comprised of consumers, family members, family organizations, educators and MRC staff, focusing specifically on issues related to transitioning youth with disabilities to the adult service system. This work is supported by the Transition Works grant
- Also through the Transition Works grant is the Family Involvement Subcommittee, led by partner agency, The Federation for Children with Special Needs, formed to address the need for education and outreach to families regarding the transition process.

Moreover, many of the agencies with MRC contracts are required to have advisory councils and other means of consumer input to ensure high quality services that meet the needs of their consumers.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FY'11

Despite this being a time of scarcer resources, MRC has continued to look for ways to expand resources available to individuals with disabilities so that they can continue to pursue their goals toward independence, economic self-sufficiency and community engagement. This past year's accomplishments exemplify collaboration among other agencies and partners for the purposes of maximizing resources. While this is especially highlighted in Section 6, Interagency Collaboration, accomplishments, include a vast array of system improvements that demonstrate such collaboration:

1. Family Empowerment and Substantial Consultation:

- Family Involvement Subcommittee, supported by the Transition Works grant, developed a training curriculum for Families entitled "Planning a Life" to educate families on the need for a robust transition planning process
- Family Involvement Subcommittee developed a guidebook to transition
- Newly organized District Consumer Advocacy Councils have formed and are beginning to develop goals and priorities
- The Statewide Independent Living Council's efforts to expand services to youth, has resulted in one additional ILC responding to the RFR for a Transition to Adulthood Project. If this is accepted, the number of Centers with a TAP will increase to 7.
- The District Consumer Advocacy Councils have included youth with disabilities, their family members, representatives from school systems, and others involved in transition, and have included special education and transition to adulthood

and bullying of people with disabilities among possible agenda items for the next year

- Focus groups held by the Marketing Team to determine how the agency can improve its outreach to enable consumers, family members and other stakeholders to understand the full range of supports and services that they may have access to through MRC

2. Family Leadership:

- Through the Transition Works Grant, and in partnership with the Federation for Children with Special Needs, “Planning a Life” training sessions were held in various locations across the state that enable families to better understand and advocate for a robust transition plan for their family member as they prepare to graduate high school
- Also through this partnership, the Federation has developed a transition handbook for families that addresses the gaps in information currently available and ensures that families have comprehensive information about adult services for their family member with a disability
- Through contract with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, support groups and training sessions were held to enable families to support their members with brain injuries to live successfully in the community
- As MRC’s focus is on empowering the individual with the disability, our work to support and strengthen the knowledge, skills and rights of youth who are served by the agency, continues to include mentoring. The Statewide Mentorship Program, in collaboration with Partners for Youth with Disabilities, made 39 new mentor matches during the year, and currently supports over 100 matches
- In conjunction with the Commonwealth’s state as a model employer initiative MRC placed 30 youth with significant disabilities in paid summer internships in state agencies in the Springfield, Worcester and Boston areas.
- MRC financially sponsored and supported with staff the second Summer Youth Leadership Forum, a two week program in which youth with disabilities were provided with role modeling, and training in advocacy and leadership skills.

3. Family Resources and Funding:

MRC has established Transition Liaisons in all area offices and in each Community Living Program. These liaisons attend trainings and share information regarding service eligibility and application procedures to better connect people to available services in a timely manner. Through the Consumer Involvement Department, the State Rehabilitation Council updated its consumer guide to services to continue to provide information about all available services to consumers receiving service within any department. The Marketing Team is in the process of revising all materials to better describe MRC to consumers and potential consumers of services.

In conjunction with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, MRC has worked with Independent Living Centers and Aging Service Access Points to develop a network of Long Term Care Options Counselors, who have received extensive training in the range options and service opportunities currently available to assist people with disabilities to live in the community. These counselors work with people in Skilled Nursing Facilities and those who are at risk of entering facilities to develop a support plan and gain access to services that will allow them to live successfully in the community.

Beyond working to increase awareness of and access to existing services, MRC is actively working in collaboration with MassHealth to expand the scope of services available to enable people with severe disabilities to leave skilled nursing facilities and chronic hospitals, through the development of Medicaid Waivers.

Together with EHS, MassHealth and UMass, two 1915 Medicaid Waivers have been implemented that are enabling people with Acquired Brain Injuries to leave facilities and live in either Community Residences (Res Hab Waiver) or in their own home or apartment with a broader range of services and case management support than was previously available. To date approximately 20 people with Acquired Brain Injuries have transitioned out of facilities through these new waivers.

MRC is also working with EHS, MassHealth, UMass, and other state agencies to develop two new Money Follows the Person (MFP) Waivers that will expand services to a broader population of people with disabilities currently in facilities. Beyond the Waiver Services that are being developed, the Money Follows the Person grant allows for the development of new demonstration services. The MFP Project Team ensures that there is substantial consultation throughout the development and implementation of MFP services, and MRC has been actively involved in ensuring that its consumers, potential and their family members are represented in this process.

4. Accessing Services and Support:

As mentioned above, MRC continues to expand and improve upon methods of increasing awareness of the availability of services to its constituents. This includes general outreach as well as outreach to targeted audiences.

- MRC contracts with UMass to support the Mass Network of Information Providers (MNIP) that encourages communication, collaboration and information sharing among human service providers in the state, and includes a support network, access to a resource database and topic-specific fact sheets, and newsletters
- MRC is the lead agency for Assistive Technology and supports MassMatch, GetAT stuff.org, School Swap and the AT Demonstration Centers that all work to get information about Assistive Technology to consumers and their families and service providers
- MRC also supports Mass Access Housing Registry as a means to make information about accessible and affordable housing readily available to consumers and their families
- ILC centers and their Long Term Care Options Counselors conduct outreach to individuals in nursing facilities, and in FY 11 helped 149 people successfully transition to the community
- The Vocational Rehabilitation division continues to ensure the presence of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in every High School in the state for the purposes of identifying students with disabilities and assisting them to access the adult service system by participating in transition plans whenever possible, and by providing information regarding MRC services
- MRC continues to refine its 688 program internally to ensure that consumers come into the VR program in an informed and seamless manner so that an appropriate individualized transition plan can be developed
- MRC's Statewide Head Injury Program, through the Northeast Veteran's with Traumatic Brain Injury Grant, provides outreach and training to veterans and their families

5. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

The Transition Works Grant has established Transition Counselors in area offices that serve diverse populations, with the specific goal of ensuring outreach and better connections with traditionally underserved communities. In Boston, for example, MRC is partnered with Urban Pride to ensure that the schools serving minority populations are fully aware of MRC's services and how to access them.

The Brain Injury and Statewide Specialized Community Services continues to conduct outreach to diverse communities and has partnered with community organizations to provide information about MRC's programs and services in general and to facilitate access to services for diverse communities.

6. Interagency Collaboration

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission recognizes the importance of interagency collaboration in ensuring that the best possible array of services is made available to people with disabilities, whether they be children, transition age youth, adults or seniors. To that end, MRC ensures that there is representation on working groups and committees that address cross-disability, cross-age or cross-population issues, or that address shared service areas. Furthermore, MRC whenever possible, ensures that its work in developing new initiatives is interagency as well. This is clearly represented by some of the following activities that MRC has been a part of in FY '11:

- The newly formed District Consumer Advocacy Councils invite representative from other others, as well as from cities, towns, school departments and transportation authorities so the range of issues impacting life and employment for people with disabilities is fully represented and so collaboration to address these issues effectively is fostered
- The Consumer Conference held in June 2011 was cosponsored, and co-lead by the Mass. Commission for the Blind, the Mass. Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Statewide Independent Living Council
- MRC has been actively involved in the Money Follows The Person Demonstration Project, led by EHS and MassHealth, and in collaboration with state agencies including Department of Developmental Services, Department of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Mental Health, Department of Public Health, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and University of Massachusetts
- MRC and DDS are finalizing a statewide collaboration to support VR consumers who are also being served by DDS to ensure our mutual consumers with intellectual disabilities receive vocational training and job placement and when placed, DDS will cover the cost of ongoing supports for the individuals working life
- MRC is also working with MassHealth on its initiative to create a system of Integrate Health Care Management for "Dual-eligibles" and is a member of the PHCAST Advisory Committee, a

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collaborative effort of EHS, MassHealth, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and UMass to design a core training curriculum for direct care workers

- The MRC Commissioner serves on the Autism Commission with other state disability agency Commissioners, EHS, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Department of Higher Education
- The MRC has representatives serving on the Brain Injury Commission, which also is represented by state disability agencies and EHS
- The Vocational Rehabilitation offices work closely with the Department of Mental Health and have implemented pilot programs to improve working relationships with DMH, Clubhouses and DMH providers to better assist consumers with psychiatric disabilities in attaining their employment goals
- MRC and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs work closely to support the development of the Aging and Disability Resource Consortia and the Long Term Care Options Counseling
- Other Interagency collaboration includes: agency representation of the statewide Hoarding Task Force, the Respite Coalition, the Massachusetts Council Developmental Disabilities, the Interagency Council on Substance Abuse, the Department of Public Health's Health and Disability Advisory Committee, the Building Partnerships Initiative, among others.

IV. GOALS FOR FY 2012:

- MRC will continue its work to assist people in transitioning from facilities to the community. Through its array of services including IL Centers and their transition counselors, support of the ABI waivers, Supported Living Services, Statewide Head Injury Program services, Rolland transitions, and other community supports, and with the development of the new Money Follows the Person waiver services, MRC expects to assist at least 100 people to transition from facilities to their families and their communities in 2012
- In partnership with the Federation for Children with Special Needs, MRC will ensure the guide to adult services is complete and is made available to families throughout the state.
- Also in partnership with the Federation, at least three "Planning a Life" training sessions will be held across the state
- In preparation for the recommendations of the Autism Commission, MRC will ensure that staff have access to training on Autism Spectrum Disorders as it relates specifically to their work, and will conduct an internal assessment to identify areas of need in preparation for

serving this population where appropriate and anticipates funding one or two model programs that can be replicated to serve youth and adults on the spectrum

- Through its contract with Partners for Youth with Disabilities, MRC will expand youth mentoring statewide
- The Statewide Independent Living Council will continue its work to enhance access to services for youth with disabilities, and further align their Transition to Adulthood and other youth leadership activities
- MRC will continue its support of the Mass Brain Injury Association's training and supports for individuals experiencing brain injury and to their family members who support them
- Through the work of the Marketing team, MRC will implement a new outreach and marketing program that will provide a clearer image and better educate the public about MRC's mission, philosophy and range of services available