

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Annual Family Support Plan

State Fiscal Year 2013

• **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 a comprehensive array of 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 services and supports necessary to live independently does help that individual's family, who until that time may have provided all of the assistance necessary to keep that individual at home. This independence can be achieved through the provision of such MRC programs as Home Modifications, Assistive Technology, MassAccess Housing Registry, Transition to Adulthood Programs, Turning 22 Supported Living, and Brain Injury Services, among others.

The individual's self-sufficiency can be enhanced through MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services to gain employment, or through MRC's Disability Determination Services that may aid the individual's application for Social Security benefits. The VR Division 3487 individuals in obtaining competitive integrated employment during State Fiscal Year 2012.

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 Turning22 Supported 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 Programs and the MassMatch School Swap program, are utilized to benefit children and/or young adults with disabilities.

Overall, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission approaches “Family Supports” by way of supporting and empowering the family member with a disability first, and by doing so, strengthening and supporting the family unit.

- **FAMILY EMPOWERMENT AND 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 evaluation, 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’12, specific avenues for obtaining substantial consultation have included:

- Continuing development of the newly formed District Consumer 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 DCACs include a broader based constituency and address issues of concern to both Community Living Programs and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. While these DCACs are still developing and formulating priorities, quarterly 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 top-specific advisory committees continue, including: State Rehabilitation Council, Assistive Technology Advisory Council, and the Home Care Assistance Program Advisory Committee, among others.
- On-going communication with disability awareness and advocacy organization including the Massachusetts Brain Injury Association, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, the Spinal Cord Injury Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, and United Cerebral Palsy, to maintain regular feedback regarding the needs of their constituents and feedback regarding the effectiveness of MRC programs and services.

- 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: for the second year, MRC co-sponsored with 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 included “The Benefits of Mentoring Youth with Disabilities,” “Benefits Planning” and “Driving Your Way to Independence” among many others
- Through the Transition Works grant, 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 school-age to adult transition process

Moreover, many MRC contracts require providers to have advisory councils and other means of gathering consumer input to ensure high quality services that meet the needs of their consumers.

- **FAMILY LEADERSHIP:**

MRC is committed to enhancing the skills and confidence of individuals with disabilities and the families that support them as illustrated by:

- The development and continuation of the training program entitled “Planning a Life” to educate families on the need for a robust transition planning process. This project has been funded by MRC, with the Federation for Children with Special Needs conducting the sessions. In FY’12 3 sessions were conducted, in Worcester, Boston and Springfield, with 50-60 individuals attending each one.
- The “Guide To Transition” developed by the Family Involvement subcommittee, was prepared for publication
- The District Consumer Advocacy Councils have included youth with disabilities, their family members, representatives from school systems, and others involved in transition, and continue to discuss special education and transition to adulthood and bullying of people with disability as potential priority areas of focus.
- The Brain Injury and Statewide Specialized Community Services (BISSCS) Department offers Technical Assistance to schools, whether addressing a specific student’s needs or providing

general information and assistance to special education and general education teachers on working with students with brain injuries

- BISSCS also provides family assistance and consultation to support families in managing behavioral or other challenges related to the family member with a brain injury, thereby enhancing the family's ability to successfully support their family member.
- Through a contract with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, support groups and training sessions are 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 and youth leadership development. The Statewide Mentorship Program, in collaboration with Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD), continues to make mentor matches throughout the year, and currently supports over 100 matches. PYD conducted a workshop at the Annual Consumer Conference about the benefits of mentoring which had immediate results of new mentor and mentee recruits.
- Also this year, MRC contracted with PYD to expand its reach to include Springfield and surrounding towns, with the use of Federal Stimulus funds.
- MRC supported Boston Center for Independent Living and Easter Seals, in conjunction with the Institute for Community Inclusion, Partners for Youth with Disabilities and the Center for Human Development, to conduct a three day Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). This program connects youth with disabilities to peer mentors in order to promote job readiness, civic engagement and policy advocacy.

#### Goals for FY'13

- Building on the popularity and success of the Youth Leadership Forum, MRC is now supporting a year-round youth leadership network to provide year-round activities for youth to participate in advocacy and develop leadership skills. Currently funded through September 2012, MRC is exploring funding options to continue to support such a network into future years.
- While funding from the Transition Works grant will no longer be available, MRC will provide guidance and support to the Federation for Children with Special Needs as it seeks alternative funding to support not only continuation, but expansion, of the "Planning a Life" transition workshops to allow more families, from more areas of the state, to participate.
- The DCACs will review their 'bucket list' priority areas to address and develop work plans for the year.
- MRC will work to foster relationships between the Autism Self Advocacy Network and the Independent Living Centers to identify models for working with individuals on the Autism Spectrum to enhance independent living and self-advocacy skills.

- **FAMILY SUPPORT RESOURCES AND FUNDING:**

Particularly during a time of scarcer resources, MRC is committed to maximizing efficiency of available resources for the benefit of individuals with disabilities. This involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of the needs, as is gathered through all means of substantial consultation described above, and then collaborating with partner organizations to either develop new resources, supports and services, or to adapt existing resources meet the needs of those with a variety of disabilities, and finally, to ensure that consumers have the knowledge of and access to these resources.

This is demonstrated through much of the work MRC has been involved in over the past several years:

- 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 Aging and Disability Resource Consortia that have Long Term Care Options Counselors (LTCOC) who have received extensive training in the range of 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 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. The LTCOC curriculum is reviewed and refined on a regular basis.
- The Aging and Disability Resource Consortia (ADRCs) ensure that an individual with a disability or an elder will get the Long-term services and supports information and direction they need no matter which entity they first make contact with.
- 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 significant disabilities to leave skilled nursing facilities and chronic hospitals through the development of Medicaid Waivers.
- Together with EHS, MassHealth, and UMass, two 1915 (c) Medicaid Waivers have been implemented that are enabling people with Acquired Brain Injuries to leave facilities and live in either Community Based 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.
- MRC is also working with EHS, MassHealth, UMass and other state agencies to develop two new Money Follows the Person (MFP) Waivers that will further expand services to a broader population of people with disabilities currently in facilities. Beyond the Waiver Services, the MFP grant allows for the development of new demonstration services that, if proven cost-effective, may become Medicaid funded for a broader population of people with disabilities in the future. 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 consumers and their families, are represented in the process.
- MRC consistently seeks out other sources of funding to expand, or at least maintain, services. This

has included use of federal VR Reallotment funds and Federal Grants to support such initiatives as the BISSCS Veterans Outreach Program, Assistive Technology Programs, Benefits Planning, and the ADRCs.

- This summer, the PYD Young Entrepreneurs Project offered three workshops for MRC youth transitioning to employment. A combination of 30 youth from Springfield, Brookline and Worcester participated. Youth were trained in work-readiness skills such as phone etiquette, professionalism in the workplace, and building a resume. Youth participated in these workshops to prepare for paid internships provided by MRC as a variety of government and private sector jobs. MRC is looking at ways to expand this youth entrepreneurship program statewide in the coming year.

#### Goals for FY'13:

- MRC will work with MassHealth to submit and implement MFP Waivers to enable more individuals, currently in nursing homes, to move to the community with a higher level of supports than is currently available.
- MRC will again seek VR Reallotment funds to support on-going efforts to maintain or expand services and continue to build on initiatives to support youth mentoring, youth leadership and other opportunities for youth with disabilities to succeed in their goals.

#### • **ACCESSING SERVICES AND SUPPORT:**

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

- 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, GetATstuff.org, School Swap and the AT Demonstration Centers that all work to information about assistive technology out to consumers and their families and service providers
- MRC also supports the MassAccess Housing Registry as a means to make information about accessible and affordable housing readily available to consumers and their families
- The Annual Consumer Conference, attended by over 400 individuals with disabilities, employers, state agency representatives, and providers, hosts provider tables to allow for broad dissemination of information about resources to consumers
- Independent Living Centers and their Long Term Care Options Counselors conduct outreach to individuals in nursing facilities, and in FY12 assisted over 170 people successfully transition to

the community.

- The Vocational Rehabilitation division continues to ensure the presence of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in every public High School in the state for the purposes of identifying students with disabilities and assisting them to access the adult services 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 Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury grant, provides outreach and training to veterans and their families. In FY'12, this included collaboration with Project New Hope to hold a retreat for veterans with brain injury, and their families, to share resources, learn about services, and provide emotional support. This project also collaborated with the Chelsea Soldiers Home to hold a screening clinic for veterans who may have sustained a combat-related brain injury and may be eligible for services
- The Family Guide to Transition Services, once published, will be made available on-line via websites of the Federation for Children with Special Needs and the Institute for Community Inclusion. It will also be distributed at the Federation's March 2013 conference. Pending available funding, the guide will also be made available in Spanish. Topics include: Transition Laws, Parent and Student Participation, Transition Planning in High School, Transition Assessment, Graduation-related Issues, Post-school Options and Adult Services.
- Through contracts with Independent Living Centers, MRC supports the Transition to Adulthood Programs that provide skills training, peer support, advocacy and information and referral to transition age youth with disabilities. Through exposure to adult peer role models, and through skills training, students learn skills, develop confidence and learn about supports and services that may be available to them, to better prepare for independence. They gain knowledge of the supports available to them and how to access them so they are equipped to make choices as they set their personal goals for independence. This was the first year that additional funding was made available through contracts to build a strong employment focus and to develop working relationships with their VR area offices to better prepare youth for employment. MRC continues to explore funding options to expand this model throughout the state.

#### Goals for FY'13:

- MRC will work with the Federation for Children with Special Needs and the Institute for Community Inclusion to disseminate the Family Guide to Transition, make it available on-line, and seek funds or resources to have it translated to other languages.
- As the Transition Works Grant ends, MRC will identify lessons learned and best practices

and determine the best ways to get this information out to VR staff.

- **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 partnered with Urban Pride to ensure that schools service minority populations are fully aware of MRC's services and how to access them.
- BISSCS 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 among diverse communities.
- The DCACs and Unserved/Underserved Subcommittee of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council have, as part of their agenda, to explore how individuals across culture, race and ethnic backgrounds access MRC programs and to encourage involvement of various cultural communities.
- The DCAC in the Western District, for example, has engaged the Native American community which has resulted in outreach to the community about MRC services as well as active membership on the DCAC.
- In the Community Living division, programs work to translate documents to other languages and, in addition to existing contracts for face-to-face translation, have recently contracted with a telephone translation service to ensure immediate access to staff for all consumers.
- The Vocational Rehabilitation division supports Bilingual Counselors and Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf in its area offices.
- MRC also contracts with many multicultural providers across the state including the Multicultural Independent Living Center, multicultural home care providers and many cultural outreach organizations.

Goals For FY'13:

- The Consumer Involvement Department will sponsor an Individual Consumer Consultant to engage minority parents with disabilities in the Worcester area as a means of connecting them to agency services and gaining a greater understanding of unmet needs.
- The DCACs will develop specific goals, including ensuring cultural competence of the agency's programs and services.

- **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 are 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. Furthermore, MRC, whenever possible, ensures that its work in developing new initiatives is interagency as well. This is clearly illustrated by some of the following activities that MRC has been a part of in FY'12:

- The DCACs invite representatives from other state agencies, as well as from cities, towns, school departments and transportation authorities so the range of issues impacting community living and employment for people with disabilities is fully represented and so collaboration to address these issues is fostered.
- For the second year, the Consumer Conference, held in June 2012, was cosponsored and co-lead by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Massachusetts 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 the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Public Health, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, and University of Massachusetts
- MRC and the Department of Developmental Services have finalized 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 once placed receive on-going supports through DDS.
- The MRC Commissioner serves on the Autism Commission with other state disability agency commissioners, EHS leadership and leaders of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education
- The MRC Commissioner also serves on the Jobs Commission, representing the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to work across secretariats with private sector employment leaders, union officials, economists and labor organizations to identify a blueprint for improved job development and job creation
- 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 together to support the development of Aging and Disability Resource Consortia and the Long Term Care Options Counseling
- An MRC representative participates on the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council and works to ensure that MRC is available to offer support to its constituents and their families wherever possible
- An MRC representative participates on the Lt. Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness to assist in developing a unified approach across all aspects of government in concert with the private sector to ensure that those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless have the

appropriate supports for diversion or placement in permanent housing.

- An MRC representative services on the Veterans Services Committee to coordinate the public-private response that supports veterans from previous wars or from Iraq and Afghanistan with services such as housing education, counseling and employment.

For FY'13, MRC will continue to build upon the established relationships and collaborations described above.