

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
Annual Family Support Plan
State Fiscal Year 2014

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 a comprehensive array of services to individuals with significant disabilities, intended to promote equality, empowerment and independence and “create opportunities for independent living and work.”

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 located in Independent Living Centers, Turning 22 Supported Living, and Brain Injury Services, among others.

The individual’s (and thus their family’s) economic status and 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.

Although MRC is primarily an adult service system, there are a number of programs that are also available to, or of direct benefit to, children and youth with disabilities. Specifically, the Turning 22 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.

II. 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 his/her 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’ 13, specific avenues for obtaining substantial consultation have included:

- Continuing development of the District Consumer Advocacy Councils (DCACs). These DCACs include a broader based constituency and address issues of concern to both Community Living (CL) Programs and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services. ~~As they are districtly based,~~ Each District Council develops its own set of goals and priorities based upon the needs of the communities that make up the 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. In FY 13, an all day retreat was held with members of all 3 DCACs and MRC Senior Staff to share knowledge and information from the various perspectives of group members and to further define the mission, vision and goals of the councils.
- Regular meetings of program-specific and top-specific advisory committees continue, including: State Rehabilitation Council, Statewide Independent Living 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 third time, MRC co-sponsored this event 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.

- The consumer conference was also used as a site to hold both workshops and focus groups on topics of interest to consumers, including the development of the CL Division's mission/vision statement, and the MassHealth One Care, duals demonstration
- 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.

III. FAMILY LEADERSHIP:

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

- MRC was able to provide one more year of support for the Federation for Children with Special Needs to conduct the training program entitled "Planning a Life" to educate families on the need for a robust [school to work/adult life](#) transition planning process. In FY'13, sessions were not only conducted in Worcester, Boston and Springfield, but expanded to two additional sites.
- The final draft of "[The Family Guide To Transition Services in Massachusetts](#)" has been completed in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs and agency approvals have been obtained from MRC and DESE. The goal is to have the guide published by the end of the Transition Works Grant on September 30, 2013. The Federation for Children with Special Needs will then be responsible for maintaining and disseminating the Guide.
- 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 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. BISSCS Homeless Project also provides supports to families in need of housing and stabilization services

- 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 50 matches. PYD conducted workshops at the Annual Consumer Conference and the State Independent Living Council Conference, and members spoke at various VR Offices and Independent Living Center staff meetings about the benefits of mentoring which had the immediate results of identifying new mentor and mentee recruits. PYD uses the ARC Self Determination Scale to gauge mentees' improvement with respect to 5 outcome areas: self-esteem, community involvement, healthy relationships, independent living and education and employment. A recent assessment showed 94% of the mentees improving in at least one of the five areas and overall improvement in autonomy and self-determination.
- In FY' 12, MRC contracted with PYD to expand its reach to include Springfield and surrounding towns, and continues to support this expansion. At least 5 matches have been made and continue to be supported by PYD in this new service area.
- MRC continued to support Easter Seals, in conjunction with the Boston Center for Independent Living, 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.
- Building on the popularity and success of the Youth Leadership Forum, MRC is now supporting a year-round youth leadership network which offers continuous to provide year-round activities in which for youth can to participate in advocacy and develop leadership skills. In FY' 13, this Network expanded to include a fourth location.

Goals for FY'14

- MRC will assist the Federation for Children with Special Needs in seeking alternative funding to support continuation and expansion, of the "Planning a Life" transition workshops to allow more families, from more areas of the state, to participate.
- The DCACs will develop work plans for the year based upon the list of priorities they were able to formulate at the all day retreat.
- MRC will work with the Northeast ARC to conduct a series of training sessions for Independent Living Centers and other Community Living Providers entitled "Promoting Independence of Youth and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder" with the goal of improving the ability of enabling Independent Living Centers and other providers to better meet the needs of

consumers with ASD as these consumers ~~they~~ work towards ~~supporting their~~ self-determination, independence and increased empowerment.

- MRC will continue to seek resources to provide a on-going support to the continuation of the Youth Leadership Forum and the Youth Leadership Network

IV. FAMILY SUPPORT RESOURCES AND FUNDING:

MRC continues its commitment to maximizing efficiency of available resources for the benefit of individuals with disabilities. This involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of people's ~~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 to meet the needs of those with a variety of disabilities, ~~and~~ finally, this involves to ensuring ~~finally, to ensure~~ that consumers have the knowledge of and access to these resources. For example, efforts will be made to disseminate information about ~~A recent~~ A significant expansion of services to new populations which is a result of ~~result of~~ new Medicaid Waivers, including the Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Waivers and the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Waivers. These new Waiver programs, ~~that~~ are a result of extensive collaboration among state agencies and the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services.

Further, as an agency serving people with a wide range of disabilities, MRC continues to provide training for staff and providers on disability-specific issues and collaborates with a wide range of disability-specific organizations and advocacy groups. A particular area of focus in FY 13 and 14 is Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). MRC continues to build the capacity of its staff and provider network to ensure that individuals with ASD are able to access programs and services offered by the Commission.

Over the past several years, MRC has been involved in partnerships and initiatives aimed at either expanding services or ensuring the right services get to those in need in a timely manner. This includes:

- 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 receive 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 enable them to transition successfully in the community. The LTCOC curriculum is reviewed and refined on a regular basis as new services and options become available.
- The Aging and Disability Resource Consortia (ADRCs) ensure that an individual with a disability or an elder will get the 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 nursing homes and other facilities and to live in either Community Based Residences (ABI Res Hab Waiver) or in their own home or apartment with a broader range of services and case management support than was previously available (ABI Non Res Waiver). On May 1, 2013, these Waivers were approved by CMS for another 5 years and new applicants continue to move into available slots in both waivers.
- MRC also continues to collaborate with EHS, MassHealth, UMass and other state agencies to develop and operationalize two new Money Follows the Person (MFP) Waivers that will further expand services to a broader population of people with disabilities currently in facilities. In April 2013, the two MFP Waivers were approved by CMS, providers of the various services available have been approved and applications are being processed for both MFP waivers.
- 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.

Goals for FY'14:

MRC will work with EHS, MassHealth, UMass and other state agencies to implement the new Community Living MFP Waiver, with a goal of identifying, assessing, planning and coordinating services for approximately 100 people in the first year.

- MRC will continue its collaboration in its work to implement and manage the ABI Non Residential Waiver with the goal of serving an additional 100 people in the next year.
- MRC will continue to work with EHS, MassHealth, UMass and other state agencies to implement the new Community Living MFP Waiver, with a goal of identifying, assessing, planning and coordinating services to transition 100 people to community living in the first year.
- MRC will also work with the Aspergers Association of New England (AANE) to provide staff training, support and consultation around working with individuals with Aspergers.
- MRC will also contract with AANE to pilot Life MAP coaching to VR Consumers with Aspergers who could use such one-on-one assistance to address job-readiness issues.
- MRC will continue its collaboration with the Northeast ARC to ensure providers and staff have an understanding of best practices for providing services to people with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

V. 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 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, GetATstuff.org, School Swap and the AT Demonstration Centers that provide information about assistive technology to consumers, their families, school systems 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 FY13 assisted close to 170 people to 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.
- ~~In anticipation of As~~ the Transition Works Grant ~~phaseingsphases~~ out, MRC has conducted 3 Regional Transition Trainings ~~for the purpose of to sharingto share-~~ best practices ~~that were as~~ learned through the grant work, with agency staff ~~who that~~ work with transition age youth ~~participating~~. Those involved in the Transition Works grant since its inception also participated in national and state transition training activities to disseminate these best practices at such forums as: “The National Transition Conference; College and Careers for Youth with Disabilities” in Washington, D.C., and the “Secondary Transition Capacity-Building Conference” sponsored by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- MRC’s Statewide Head Injury Program, through the Northeast Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury grant, provides outreach and training to veterans and their families.
- 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 ~~these supports~~ ~~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 ~~help youth~~ develop working relationships with ~~localtheirtheir~~ VR area offices ~~so as to improve preparation better prepare-~~ ~~youth~~ for employment. MRC continues to explore funding options to expand this model throughout the state.

Goals for FY’ 14:

- The Family Guide to Transition Services, once published, will be disseminated and made available on-line via website of the Federation for Children with Special Needs.
- MRC will build on its collaboration with agencies providing services to people with Autism Spectrum Disorders to ensure that those consumers with ASD coming to MRC for services are made aware of other services and supports that may be available to them.

VI. 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 which service minority populations are fully aware of MRC's services and how to access them. Though the grant is ending, these partnerships proved successful in bringing MRC services to underserved populations, and the collaborations will continue.

- 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 the Unserved/Underserved Subcommittee of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council have included in ,as part of their agenda, the exploration of 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 into 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 Community Living Division held a half-day mandatory staff training on cultural competence entitled "A Diversity Conversation" to raise staff awareness about diversity within the workplace, cultural competence and needs of unserved and underserved communities
- The Consumer Involvement Department supported an Individual Consumer Consultant to engage minority parents with disabilities in the Worcester area and assisted them in connecting with needed supports.
- 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' 14:

- MRC will work with the Federation for Children with Special Needs to look for resources to be able to make the Family Guide to Transition available in other languages.
- Through its contract with Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD), MRC will increase in ~~increasing~~ mentoring opportunities for minority youth with disabilities through a partnership between PYD and the Roxbury and Springfield VR Area Offices.

VII. 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'13:

- The DCACs invite representatives from other state agencies, as well as from cities, towns, school departments and transportation authorities to their meetings, so that 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 third time, the Consumer Conference, held in June 2013, 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, demonstrating 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 works in close collaboration with EHS, MassHealth, UMass, and DDS to implement and manage the ABI and MFP Waivers
- MRC and the Department of Developmental Services continue 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 Jobs Commission, representing the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to work across Ssecretariats,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 improve better assistance toassist consumers with psychiatric disabilities in attaining their employment goals
- MRC and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs work together to support the continuation 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
- MRC has been closely involved in the CMS-MassHealth Duals Demonstration “OneCare” project to ensure MRC consumers’ needs are understood and will be addressed by the demonstration, as well as to ensure that MRC is able to assist consumers appropriately as the demonstration unfolds.
- 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; the purpose is to ensure that those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless have the appropriate supports for diversion or placement in permanent housing.

- The MRC Commissioner sits on the EHS and DHCD interagency housing committee to collaborate and coordinate housing initiatives across both ~~sSecretariatssecretariats-~~ that serve our consumers to receive or maintain affordable, accessible 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.
- MRC has representatives on Department of Public Health Partnerships that focus on issues related to disability including the Health and Disability Partnership and the Partnership on Substance Abuse in Older Americans.
- MRC has representatives on the MassHousing-sponsored statewide Hoarding Taskforce

For FY'14, MRC will continue to build upon the established relationships and collaborations described above.