

**Department of Developmental Services  
Annual Family Support Plan  
Fiscal Year '16 (July 1st, 2015 – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016)**

**Human Service Agency Overview of Family Support**

**A. Background**

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has been providing flexible family support services since 1995 to children and adults, who are eligible for services from DDS living at home with their families. This is the thirteenth Annual Plan for Family Support submitted by the Department as required by Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002, "An Act Providing Support to Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families."

The Department is organized into four regions and 23 Area Offices managed by Regional Directors and Area Directors respectively, all under the umbrella of Central Office. Each DDS region has a Director of Family Support. Area Office Service Coordinators provide assistance and supports to individuals/families, with a Children's Coordinator who usually works with children under the age of 18 years and their families, and a Transition Coordinator who usually works with individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 who are in the process of transitioning from school to adult services. Individuals over the age of 22 who have met the adult eligibility criteria for DDS services are assigned a Service Coordinator and participate in an Individual Support Planning (ISP) process.

**B. Overview of Family Support**

The primary goal of family support is to provide a variety of options to individuals with disabilities and their families that enable them to stay together and to be welcomed, contributing members in their home communities. The Department's Family Support system is based on the principle that individuals and families know their own needs. For this reason, and because of the individuality of each family, the range of services available under the program is broad. This approach allows families the flexibility to identify the resources that will be helpful to support their family member in her/his home. The Family Support Centers and other family support programs are designed to be responsive to the dynamic and changing needs of the individual with a disability and his/her developmental stages in life within the family unit.

The Department has *Guiding Principles for Family Support* which serve as the foundation for the delivery of services through the Family Support Centers and all of the family support program services funded by the Department.

Family support strives to achieve the goal of helping families stay together through:

- ❖ developing families' natural capacities to meet the needs of family members;
- ❖ offering additional supports such as staff resources, goods and services, and financial assistance; and
- ❖ enhancing the capacity of communities to value and support people with disabilities and their families.

The Department receives specific funding designated for the delivery of family support services through the Family Support Appropriation Account in the state budget. The FY 2016 budget appropriation of \$55.9 million includes an increase of \$3.5 million dollars in funding. Though the family support budget was increased by \$2.5 million dollars in FY 2015, this new amount of funding was ultimately reduced as part of the Governor's 9c budget reductions, resulting in level funding of \$52.4 million. This FY 2016 increase brings the family support appropriation account back to the pre-recession FY 2009 funding level before significant state budget reductions were made as a result of the nationwide economic difficulties. This increase in funding is a positive direction and will enable

the Department to provide important direct individualized resources to support and assist families in their caregiving roles. Of this total appropriation, approximately \$45-46 million is for specific family support services, and the remainder for other community support services. The array of family support services provided with this funding is described in more detail in Section III, Family Support Resources and Funding.

Additionally, there were several important legislative initiatives signed into law in 2014 that will expand and enhance access to services and supports for individuals with disabilities and their families.

- The *Autism Omnibus Act* will expand supports and services to individuals with autism living in Massachusetts. This legislation establishes a permanent Autism Commission to oversee the implementation of autism services and DDS representatives are members and active participants on the Commission. Other elements of the Act include: the opportunity for families to establish tax-advantaged accounts to use for their family member with a disability; requirements for the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to revise education licensure to provide a mechanism for special education teachers to achieve Autism Endorsement through a mastery of specialty training and skills; and expansion of insurance coverage for specific services for individuals with autism. Specifically for DDS, eligibility for adult services has changed and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Prader-Willi Syndrome, and Smith-Magenis Syndrome have been added. Meeting the IQ (Intelligent Quotient) is not a criterion for this group of individuals, but individuals must meet specific diagnostic criteria and have substantial functional impairments in three or more of seven life areas. Eligible individuals will have access to an array of community developmental disability support services including: employment/day services, family supports, in-home skills training and community integration supports, and individual supports for people who are living more independently.
- The *Real Lives Bill* provides individuals with the option to determine how to best spend their allocated funding resources on services and supports they need, including but not limited to: assistive technology, modifications, therapies, community supports, and residential and employment services to help to incorporate the philosophy of self-determination. The Department has established a statewide self-determination advisory board to advise the department on efforts to implement, publicize, evaluate, improve and develop information regarding self-determination, and will be developing informational materials and training to promote self-determination and participant-directed service options.

### **C. Process for obtaining substantial input from families on current family support services**

The Department uses multiple approaches, both formal and informal, to seek input from individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families in order to help assess the Department's current system of family support services, and to obtain input on policy development and future directions.

Over the past several years the Department, in partnership with family members and providers, has been engaged in a variety of initiatives to strengthen the information, resources, and assistance provided to families in their caregiving role that are directly responsive to priority need areas identified by families through a strategic planning process initiated in 2011.

In 2012 a report entitled, "*In Their Own Words: The Need for Family Support Services*" was developed based on input from more than 1300 families and was a 'call to action' to help families meet the demands of caregiving across the lifespan. The important supports needed by caregivers and the benefits and cost-effectiveness of family support were identified. Currently there are more than 20,000 families in Massachusetts caring for a child or adult family member at home. As documented in this report, Family Support is 75% to 80% less expensive than serving an individual in an out-of-home placement.

In April 2013, a subsequent report called “*Moving Forward in Enhancing Supports for Families: An Action Plan for Family Support*” was completed and over the past years several new initiatives have been implemented with other action steps and goals under development. Some of these outcomes will be highlighted in other sections of this report, but a few key accomplishments are highlighted below.

- The Rewarding Work Respite Directory was implemented in the fall of 2014 to provide an accessible on-line resource to help families identify potential workers who are available to provide respite and other in-home support services. More information can be found at: [www.respitedirectory.org](http://www.respitedirectory.org). The development and support for this directory was a direct result of the input we received from families about the difficulties they encounter in locating qualified workers to provide respite and support services in their home
- A set of twenty-six fact sheets were developed and distributed in April 2015 on important transition topics. Entitled “Important Transition Information Every Family Should Know,” these fact sheets were developed in direct response to concerns from families about the need for clearer communication around Chapter 688 and transition issues. These fact sheets are available on the DDS web-site and were presented at a full day training for family support center staff with the goal to ensure that every Family Support provider has the necessary tools to assist families through the complex process of transitioning between special education and the adult service system.

A full copy of the plan “*Moving Forward in Enhancing Supports for Families: An Action Plan for Family Support*,” and the report, “*In Their Own Words: The Need for Family Support Services*” are available on the DDS website at: [www.mass.gov/dds](http://www.mass.gov/dds).

Several of the central and ongoing ways the Department obtains feedback and input from families and other stakeholders are described below.

The Department’s **Statewide Family Support Council**, comprised of parents from across the state who have, or who recently had children and adult family members with disabilities living at home with them, provides an important and ongoing vehicle to provide input and consultation to the Commissioner on family support services, practices, policies, and needs. Council members have been an integral part of the Family Support strategic planning process, have been active participants in different Workgroups , and will continue to have an important role in assisting the Department, along with other stakeholders, in the implementation of specific recommendations and action steps designed to build a more comprehensive, coordinated and responsive system of supports.

There is regular information-sharing, discussion, and solicitation of input from the Department’s **Statewide Advisory Council (SAC)** and the regional and area offices’ **Citizen Advisory Boards (CABs)**. These advisory groups play an important role in helping to inform and educate the public and other decision-makers about the needs of individuals and families and the importance of and benefits of the flexible services and supports that are provided.

The Commissioner and other Department leadership staff meet with other representatives of family and individual advocacy organizations to seek input and obtain feedback on services and future directions. This includes representation from the Arc of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change (MFOFC), Advocates for Autism in Massachusetts (AFAM), Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress, and the Developmental Disabilities Council. Monthly meetings are also held with the leadership of the Association of Developmental Disability Providers (ADDP). Additionally, leadership staff in the Department have been actively engaged with advocates and other state agency staff to work on plans and implementation of key recommendations in the Autism Commission Report that was released in March 2013, and the more recent Autism Omnibus Act signed into law in 2014.

#### **D. Focus Areas: Review of Activities and Accomplishments in FY 2015 and Proposed Initiatives for FY 2016.**

The following section provides brief highlights of ongoing efforts as well as new activities the Department has undertaken this past year, and includes where relevant, initiatives for development in the upcoming fiscal year.

#### **I. Family Empowerment**

*What is the agency currently doing to promote or enhance family input or direction in the development of agency policies and procedures, program development, and evaluation of services?*

The Department seeks input from individuals and families about agency services and new directions both formally and informally through a variety of organized groups and mechanisms. Family member participation and leadership has been central to the Department's strategic family support planning process and the development and ongoing implementation of the **Action Plan for Family Support** over the past several years. Family members are central participants on the more recently developed statewide self-determination advisory board. Family members and self-advocates were integral members of the Advisory Committee for the Positive Behavioral Supports Initiative that helped explore and develop a framework for the implementation of Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) throughout the DDS system. The goal of PBS is an improved quality of life for all individuals and includes teaching positive, pro-social alternative behavior(s) for individuals exhibiting challenging behaviors.

Family members are integral participants in a **Family Support Implementation Work Group** that provides input on the services, processes, and reporting mechanisms that support implementation of the Family Support Centers and other Family Support programs to help ensure services are family driven and responsive. Individuals with disabilities and family members participate on the Department's Statewide Quality Council to assist in reviewing evaluation data and information about the quality of services provided, and to identify areas for development as part of a continuous quality improvement process. Family member engagement, input and participation is central to many of the agency-wide initiatives the Department is embarked upon, such as the *Employment First: Blueprint for Success and Shared Living Initiative* so that the voices, preferences and concerns of families are understood and addressed as new service delivery approaches are pursued.

*How will agencies change how they are currently doing business to make their agency and services more family-friendly and provide opportunities for families and individuals to have greater input and influence?*

All of the Department's family support services are based on the principles that individuals and their families are recognized as primary decision makers about their lives and supports, and options need to be flexible to be responsive to the unique needs, strengths and cultural values of families.

- The Department's Home and Community Based Waiver Programs for adults provide enhanced opportunities for individual and family empowerment, through increased choice in service providers, choice of service delivery method, and portability of services. Information and education will continue to be offered through Service Coordinators and other approaches to help ensure individuals and families are aware of the options available and to support them to exercise their rights and choices when they are involved in service planning
- Two different approaches to engage in self-direction of services, the *Agency With Choice* model, or Participant-Directed Program services through use of the contracted *Fiscal Management Service*, Public Partnerships Limited (PPL) are offered to individuals and families which allows them more control in service design, hiring of staff, and management of their budget. New regional positions have been established to help promote and support

increased participation of families and individuals to engage in the direction of their own services- a powerful way to exercise their empowerment. Presentations on how these models work, and the successful experiences of individuals and families who engage in participant-directed services will continue to be offered on a regular basis, combined with other informational and resource materials to encourage use of self-directed service options. Ongoing education, support, and development of consumer-friendly informational materials will be provided.

## **II. Family Leadership**

*What training opportunities does the agency currently offer to families/individuals that would enhance their repertoire of skills?*

The Department funds five regional Family Leadership programs and partners with Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change to provide education, leadership training, and mentoring for families of children and adults with disabilities. This training and mentoring is developed and provided by families who have a family member with a disability, an important feature of these programs. One primary vehicle for family leadership development is the sponsorship of a *Family Leadership Series*, which occurs across 6-8 days over a several month period. This past year four regional Leadership Series were held providing leadership development to approximately 100 families. Graduates of this series frequently move into new leadership roles in a variety of capacities. Additionally, each of the regional programs sponsored a training series called "A Full Life Ahead" that offers monthly seminars for families on topics related to transition planning, housing, futures planning, and friendships and had more than 500 participants across the state.

The Department's Family Support Centers and Autism Support Centers provide an array of educational events and trainings on relevant topics of interest to families of both children and adults, and are required to offer a minimum of six training events per year. Leadership development is also promoted through the Centers by facilitating parent networking and mentoring, sponsoring parent support groups and one-to-one parent connections, grandparent support groups, and sibling support opportunities.

*What new ideas or proposals would the agency initiate to give families/individuals more opportunities to develop and/or exercise their leadership skills?*

Families have opportunities to further develop and/or exercise their leadership skills as members of the Department's Statewide Advisory Council and twenty-three Citizen Advisory Boards, through participation in the DDS funded Family Leadership Projects, as well as through the Family Support and Autism Support Centers which are expected to actively engage families and seek their consultation to identify interests and needs in developing activities and the array of service options they will offer.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities and family members play an important role in making presentations as part of the Department's orientation and training for new staff which reaches both departmental and provider staff. Sharing information about their experiences, perspectives, and what is most supportive and helpful to them, provides both a positive learning experience for staff and a way for individual and families to expand their own repertoire of skills.

Peer Support and Family Training, two services available through the Department's Home and Community-Based Waiver Programs, provide interested and qualified individuals and families the opportunity to provide training and mentoring to others, as well as provide learning opportunities for self-advocates and families who want to enhance their own leadership skills.

### **III. Family Support Resources and Funding**

*What are the current resources/funding that the agency allocates to family support? What are ways that the agency provides flexible funding to families that allow them to customize their services?*

DDS provides funding for **Family Support Centers** which are designed to establish a local community presence and act as a hub for offering a wide range of general family support services and activities to families of children and adults eligible for DDS services. Centers are expected to develop strong local affiliations and partnerships with other state and community agencies, to become experts in generic resources and services, and to work to maximize natural supports. Services provided include: information and referral, support groups, family trainings, parent networking and mentoring, facilitation of social/recreational events, among other activities. Centers also provide Service Navigation that includes comprehensive and individualized information, guidance, and support to families to address their needs, connect them to potential resources, assist with problem-solving and help them navigate the service system. Centers administer flexible funding/stipends to families who are prioritized to receive an individual allocation which can be used flexibly by families to purchase allowable services and goods as defined in the Department's updated Addendum to the Family Support Guidelines and Procedures. There are 34 Centers funded across the State with funding totaling approximately \$9 million dollars. These Centers along with the Cultural/Linguistic Specific Centers provide some type of individualized assistance to about 10,000 families a year, plus reach many more through information and referral, trainings and recreational and community events.

**Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers** are designed to respond to the unique needs of specific cultural and linguistic family groups in specified areas or regions of the State. English is not the primary language for many of these families, and as a result they face linguistic barriers in accessing services and require more individualized and specialized assistance to learn about and access the service system. These Centers offer a similar array of services as the Family Support Centers described above. There are nine Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers with funding totaling approximately \$800,000 dollars.

**Autism Support Centers** provide an array of information and referral services, resources, and supports to children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders. The array of services and supports includes, but is not limited to, information and referral, family clinics, support groups, access to the latest information on autism, family trainings, parent networking and mentoring, and social/recreational events. There are five large and two smaller regional autism support centers funded at approximately \$2.0 million dollars, which covers the community based initiatives and other center activities outside the Autism Waiver Program. They typically reach about 6,000 families a year with information and resources.

**Intensive Flexible Family Supports (IFFS) Programs** are designed to help families who are experiencing severe stress which can lead to the child being at-risk of an out-of-home placement. Intensive case management services are provided to help families integrate the variety of available resources to support their family member in crisis, and flexible funding to purchase additional supports or goods. These program services were originally designed to assist families with children between the ages of 3 and 18, but were recently expanded to age 22 to be responsive to the emerging needs of the 18 to 22 age group of young adults living with their families. Annually, about 620 children and their families receive services through the 19 regional and area based programs across the State, funded at approximately \$2 million dollars.

**Medically Complex Programs** support families who are caring for children/young adults up to the age of 25, with significant cognitive, physical, and complex health care needs who are living at home. Intensive medical wrap-around case management services are provided that help families integrate the variety of resources and supports they are receiving and offer flexible funding/stipends to assist the family in the purchase of additional supports and goods not covered by health insurance. This program complements and is supplemental to other MassHealth State plan and third party insurers. Annually, these programs provide services to about 350-375 individuals and their families. These five regionally based programs are funded in total at approximately \$600,000.

There is currently one **Planned Facility Based Respite Program for Children** that offers planned, out-of-home respite services for children in the Central/West Region. This program provides short-term temporary relief for families, and include overnight, weekend, and/or vacation stays. Individuals are provided with a variety of recreational, social, cultural and/or educational activities during their stay. On average, 100 children and their families are able to utilize this service annually and the total funding amount is approximately \$200,000.

**Family Leadership Development Programs** provide education, mentoring and support to families. A major focus is a comprehensive and intensive family leadership series which provides information and education about “best practices” and helps families gain knowledge about policy making at the local and state level to assist them in assuming leadership roles in their local community and the disability community. There are five regionally based Family Leadership Programs funded for a total of approximately \$282,000.

**The Autism Division** at DDS received \$5.6 million dollars in FY 2015 to provide services and supports to children with autism. The Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Autism Waiver Program served about 250 children under the age of 9 over the course of the past fiscal year. The community-based activities offered by the Autism Support Centers reached at least 2000 families from across the Commonwealth during the past fiscal year. The Autism Division also helps fund a specialty community program designed to train first responders called the Autism and Law Enforcement Education Coalition (ALEC). This program remains a successful initiative which has received national recognition.

**The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education & Department of Developmental Services Community Residential Education Program (DESE/DDS)** is a successful collaborative initiative designed to provide supplemental supports to children/young adults determined to need services to prevent a more restrictive educational or out of home residential placement, or to assist families whose children are coming out of a residential placement. The intent of the program is to increase family capacity to support their child in the home and community, as well as to provide an individualized plan of supports that promotes skill building, independence, and social integration across the spectrum of the child’s home, school and community. In FY 2015, the program continued to receive \$6.5 million to provide capacity building supports and related services to about 480 participants ranging in age from 8 up to 22.

**FY 2016 Family Support Funding Increase**

After consultation with the Family Support Council and other stakeholders, the Department plans to prioritize use of the increased funding of \$3.5 million dollars in the family support appropriation account to offer individual flexible funding/stipends to families in need who were not previously receiving funding support, one of the most important need areas identified by families. Additionally, some of this funding will be used to expand staffing resources and capacity in local Family Support Centers, the Medically Complex programs, and the Intensive Flexible Family Support programs, as well as increase resources for the five Family Leadership Development programs. Use of this

increased funding will be monitored regularly by DDS throughout the fiscal year. Periodic reports will be shared with the Family Support Council and other interested stakeholders.

Additionally, the Department operates the **Medical Respite Home** in Southeastern, MA that provides an important service for adults with complex medical, physical and developmental needs who require 24 hour, specialized nursing care, and their families. First opened in 2012 in response to the need identified by families for this service option, this program has continued to evolve, and includes transportation, a variety of community-based activities, and other supports to assist individuals and families in using this service. Approximately 36 individuals and their families have been able to use this resource for a total of 840 overnight stays, providing important relief and respite for families and a new experience for the adults.

#### **IV. Accessing Services and Supports**

*What are current examples of ways the agency is educating families on how to access services in a timely and effective manner? What are some illustrations of different services and resources which promote good access to information and referral?*

The DDS funded Family Support, Cultural/Linguistic-Specific, and Autism Support Centers provide Information and Referral services to families of children and adults within their geographic area. This includes assisting families to identify resources and service options available in their local communities, to learn about other financial and/or state services for which families may be eligible, and to provide guidance on how to navigate the service system. They use a variety of approaches to disseminate information to families, including email, list-serves, web-sites, on-line newsletters and training calendars, webinars, and social media, as well as create and maintain a “library” of resources. These Centers engage in a variety of outreach activities to connect with families in different venues who may benefit from their information and resource services

Families are sent a ‘welcome flier’ with information about the Family and Autism Support Centers in their area at the time their son or daughter is found eligible for services. This notice is made available in multiple languages to be responsive to families for whom English is not their primary language.

A ‘Statewide Family Support Directory’ is available to help families find the Family Support Center and other family support programs in their area to promote easier access to these resources. The Directory is widely disseminated through DDS, service providers, and is posted on the Department’s website.

The Department has provided funding for a friendship project called “Widening the Circle” to assist in expanding opportunities for friendships and community participation through training and the development and distribution of information and resources. Key accomplishments include the development of a website with resource information, the delivery of about 100 “Introduction to Friends” presentations across the state reaching more than 2,000 people including parents, people with disabilities, and DDS and provider staff, as well as ‘train the trainer’ sessions. In the past they supported six demonstration projects to illustrate different approaches to supporting people with and without disabilities in developing friendships and are currently focused on partnerships with providers to help promote friendships between co-workers and individuals with disabilities working at jobs at businesses in the community, and with students participating in post-secondary educational opportunities.

The Department sponsored multiple training events this past year for family support programs and DDS staff, all designed to promote capacity-building to enhance the supports and services provided



to families across the life span. These events provided opportunities for staff to share information, promising practices, and new initiatives in specific topical areas, and fostered an opportunity for networking. About 400 staff participated in these different training events. A successful conference focused on the theme of "Family Diversity in Our Contemporary Society" was held in June. The conference included a compelling keynote presentation by Tawara Goode from the National Center on Cultural Competence at Georgetown University, and family members who participated in a number of workshops in the afternoon about their experiences which included a focus on immigrants and refugee families with a member with a developmental disability, grandparents caring for their grandchildren with disabilities, siblings as primary caregivers, supports for parents with intellectual disabilities, and supports for LGBT individuals and their families.. Some of these topical areas will be further developed through additional professional development opportunities in the upcoming year.

The Department provides funding to help support the Autism Insurance Resource Center at New England INDEX which provides information, training and consultation about the Massachusetts Autism Insurance Law (aka ARICA). The Department also helps disseminate information about this resource to families and staff through multiple strategies.

Publications and informational materials are posted on the Department's web-site to help families learn more about services and how to access them. Examples include a guide on transition from school to adult life, "The Road Forward," "School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities," resources related to the Department's Home and Community Based Waiver programs, and semi-annual newsletters developed by the Office of Quality Management called, "Living Well."

*What new initiative(s) will the agency undertake to promote good local access to information and resources?*

- All Area Offices will continue to sponsor informational and training forums for families related to transition to adult services, to help families understand the process and learn about adult service options and service providers. A particular highlight this year was the development and distribution of a series of fact sheets on key topics related to planning for the transition from school to adult life. "Important Transition Information Every Family Should Know" is a set of 26 fact sheets available to families and can be used in a flexible way to help families build their knowledge and resources about all aspects of this transition process. This information was distributed and complemented by a full day training event for family support and DDS area office staff, and is available on the DDS web-site. The Department will continue funding for the three year project with The Arc of Massachusetts, *Widening the Circle*, to build upon and expand the work of the "Real Friends Project." These project activities were developed in response to the feedback and concerns raised by families related to the social isolation of their children, and the challenges individuals face in developing real and lasting friendships.
- To respond to the needs identified by families about the difficulties they experience finding qualified and available respite and in-home workers, the Department has initiated a pilot project with Rewarding Work, to expand their web-site to include a directory of workers and other resources related to accessing respite and hiring in-home staff. Access to this expanded web-site was rolled out in the fall of 2014 with information and training provided to staff of all the Family and Autism Support Centers and the local DDS Area Offices. Individuals and families who receive services through DDS can access this directory at no cost. The Rewarding Work web-site was already available through support from MassHealth for individuals and families to find Personal Care Attendants (PCAs). In addition, a pilot respite training project is being implemented through partnerships between several Family Support Centers and local colleges, to recruit students who need internship experiences, provide them with training and supervision, and place them with families who will receive free

respite support in the home. A new planning tool and resource entitled: "Charting the Life Course: A Guide for Individuals, Families, and Professionals" developed by the Missouri *Family to Family Project* was made available to family support and DDS staff to assist families with planning and access of services.

## **V. Culturally Competent Outreach & Support**

*What are the current activities or services that the agency offers that ensure culturally appropriate access and supports to ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and individuals?*

The Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers provide bi-lingual and bi-cultural assistance to identified groups of families for whom English is not their primary language. They are expected to provide broad outreach and are frequently called upon by other organizations to help provide interpretation and translation assistance to families. These Centers primarily provide services to families who speak Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Russian, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Cape Verdean Creole. In addition, all Family Support Centers and providers are expected to develop resources and capacity to do outreach and be responsive to the diverse cultural and linguistic communities in the geographic area in which they are providing services.

There are an increasing number of children and families from a variety of diverse cultural and linguistic communities who receive services through the Autism Waiver Program. Interpretation services are provided as an integral part of these program services.

The Department makes available translated informational materials for individuals and families in multiple languages. Positive working relationships have been established with several entities that provide interpretation and translation services and they have developed a good understanding of disability terminology and concepts that lead to providing more culturally relevant and responsive information.

A variety of training opportunities are offered for family support and DDS staff focused on increased understanding of families from diverse communities and to learn more about resources and strategies to provide culturally respectful and responsive services. Workshops have been sponsored to hear from families from diverse communities about their experiences and perspectives in raising a child with a disability, and from providers about the approaches they have developed and used to offer culturally responsive services. Department staff continues to work collaboratively with providers to share positive practices and support them as they further develop their capacity to provide services to individuals and families from diverse communities.

There are active statewide, regional and central office Diversity Councils that offer a variety of opportunities for education, training, and cultural experiences to promote increased understanding of different cultural and linguistic groups, and support the delivery of more culturally responsive services.

*What new ideas/initiatives will the agency propose to outreach and meet the needs of culturally diverse families and individuals?*

- Workshops and forums focused on the development of culturally responsive services will continue to be provided for Family Support providers and DDS staff.
- Specific opportunities to bring together staff from the Cultural/Linguistic-Specific Family Support Centers across the state with DDS staff and other family support programs will be provided to foster information-sharing, networking, and to identify ways to strengthen efforts to provide more culturally competent services to families.

## **VI. Interagency Collaboration**

Department staff participate in various inter-agency activities with other Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) agencies to promote more effective service delivery and to maximize resources. Regional and area office DDS staff participate in local inter-agency planning teams to promote more effective communication, and when there are individuals involved with multiple agencies, to work toward coordination and collaboration in service delivery. Representation on these teams usually includes staff from the Departments of Children and Families, Mental Health, Transitional Assistance and Public Health, and in some situations, representatives from local school systems.

DDS, in partnership with the Office of Elder Affairs, other human service agencies and community organizations, has completed the fourth year of a federal **Lifespan Respite Grant** from the Administration on Aging. A unique aspect of this project has been the cross-disability/special needs focus across the lifespan. It is well documented and understood how essential respite is for caregivers providing daily assistance and care for family members with disabilities. A statewide lifespan respite coalition has been established, a website with respite resources and information on varied respite options has been developed, and training approaches and innovative models to expand the network of respite providers available to caregivers are being identified. An informative and energizing statewide conference for caregivers was held in May 2015 - the third one that has been sponsored. Additionally, with supplemental grant resources, mini-demonstration projects were funded to support the delivery of respite services to unserved and underserved populations.

DDS leadership staff have been active members of the **Autism Commission** and have been working in partnership with other state agencies, advocacy groups and other stakeholders to support implementation of some of the key recommendations identified in the report that was issued in 2013 and to implement provisions of the Autism Omnibus Act.

The Department continues to work collaboratively with the Office of Medicaid, and the Departments of Mental Health and Children and Families, on the implementation of the **Children's Behavioral Health Initiative** (CBHI). There is a specific focus on how these services can be more responsive to the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders and what will support capacity building in this area. DDS provided a training session in this area for our Children's Service Coordinators and makes information available to the Department's staff and family support providers so they are knowledgeable about the eligibility criteria and service options available in order to facilitate access to these services for children and families who may be eligible.

Department staff participate in **Unified Planning Team** meetings when requested for individuals who are eligible for DDS services, consult to EOHHS Unified Planning Teams for children who are not eligible for DDS services, and also continue to participate on the *One Child, One Plan* EOHHS initiative. DDS family support staff and children and transition service coordinators are collaborating with the Department of Public Health Care Coordination Program to help facilitate planning and smoother transition from school to adult life for individuals with significant and complex medical, physical, and developmental needs.

*What new activities or initiatives does the agency propose to demonstrate the above goals?*

- Department staff will continue to work closely with the Office of Elder Services and other human service and community organizations, family members and individuals to continue to successfully implement the federal Lifespan Respite grant, support the Massachusetts Lifespan Respite Coalition, and promote use of the Rewarding Work Respite Directory.

- The Department will continue to work in partnership with the Office of Medicaid in the implementation of the Home and Community Based Waiver Programs for adults, and the Autism Waiver Program for Children.
- Additionally, Department staff will collaborate with MassHealth staff to identify the specific needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, especially those with significant medical and health challenges, to promote access to necessary services that will enable them to have a meaningful life in their community.