

**Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
Annual Family Support Plan
State Fiscal Year 2008**

I. BACKGROUND:

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is organized pursuant to M.G.L. c6 paragraph 74-84 and operates programs authorized by State Law, The Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and by the Social Security Act. The MRC provides comprehensive services to individuals with significant disabilities, intended to promote equality, empowerment and independence.

The MRC serves individuals with all types of disabilities as its constituency. While each MRC program has its own focus and eligibility criteria, the Commission's overall mandate and purpose are to assist all 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.

Generally speaking, consumers of MRC services are competent, independent **adults** who choose to control their involvement with MRC personally. In many cases, the provision of service to that adult is, by nature, a support to the family. For example, assisting a disabled youth who is transitioning to adulthood to find an accessible, affordable home and to receive the supports necessary to remain in that home supports the family who, until that time, had provided all of the help necessary to keep that individual in the family home. This independence can be achieved with the assistance of such MRC programs as Home Modifications, Assistive Technology, MassAccess Housing Registry, homemaker services, supportive living services, specialized case management and Independent Living Center services.

In other examples, the economic self-sufficiency achieved through Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist an individual to find and keep a job, or to obtain Social Security benefits through the Disability Determination Services, are, in effect, supports to the whole family who might be dependent upon that individual's income.

While MRC is primarily an adult service system, there are a number of services and programs that are available to children and youth with disabilities. Specifically, the Turning 22 Supported Living Program, Transition to Adulthood Program, the Family Assistance Services of the Statewide Head Injury Program, the Home Modification Loan Program, the Housing Registry and the Assistive Technology Loan program are utilized by adults and children.

MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Community Service programs have been focusing efforts over the past 2 years on collaboration and coordination of services for Transition Age Youth.

II. SUBSTANTIAL CONSULTATION:

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

Through exploration of existing program and service options, to participation in the Statewide Rehabilitation Advisory Council, to connecting with Independent Living Centers, consumers direct the types of services they receive, provide advise and consultation to the administration in terms of how services might best be provided, and join their voices to advocate for new and/or different services to best meet their needs.

In FY'07, avenues for obtaining Substantial Consultation have included:

- A Needs Assessment revised by the Vocational Rehabilitation Division in conjunction with the Statewide Rehabilitation Council, in which over 300 responses were received,
- Individual Consumer Consultants involved in agency projects and activities such as development of publications including the Consumer Voice, the MRC Annual Report and the HCAP Resource Newsletter,
- Regional Transition Teams, comprised of consumers, families, family organizations, educators and MRC staff, to continue to improve upon the rehabilitation process for youth transitioning from the Educational to the Adult Service system,
- Regular meetings of Advisory Boards, including the Statewide Head Injury Advisory Board, the Home Care Assistance Program Advisory Committee, the Statewide Rehabilitation Advisory Council and its regional and topic-based subcommittees,
- On-going Consumer Satisfaction Survey completion and review,
- Regular meetings of the Statewide Independent Living Council,

Moreover, many of the agencies with which MRC contracts are required to have advisory councils and other means of consumer input to ensure high quality, satisfactory services.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FY'07:

For Fiscal Year 2007, the MRC has continued its focus on streamlining agency transition activities and increasing outreach to youth and families. This goal was formulated in response to input received from youth and families in many of the various forums listed above.

Families consistently reported the need for timely information about the adult service system, particularly as it differs from the special education system. The need for earlier referrals to adult service programs was another common theme that informed the work of the MRC and highlighted the importance of such an agency-wide Transition Initiative.

1. Family Empowerment and Substantial Consultation:

- a) In FY '07, MRC's Transition Staff continued to provide outreach to youth and their families regarding MRC Services and the Transition process. Presentations by Transition Staff have included: Brockton Area ARC Transition Training, Yesodot

Transition and Beyond Training, and Mass. Consortium for Children with Special Health Care Needs sponsored trainings in Springfield and Framingham.

- b) The Regional Transition Teams met regularly throughout the year. The goal of these teams is to provide support and technical assistance to young adults, families, and professionals involved in the transition process, to facilitate linkages and collaboration among all those involved in transition at state, regional and local levels, and to build capacity to provide and access transition services.

2. Family Leadership:

- a) The Statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP) continues to fund the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts' I&R services, support group network and prevention programs. It also offers trainings to families and individuals on such topics of interest to families as substance abuse treatment, pharmacology and housing. The Massachusetts Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Board (MABIAB), which recommends policy, practices and funding for SHIP, is comprised of 64% families of, and consumers with acquired brain injury.
- b) The Transition to Adulthood Program funds Independent Living Centers to run peer support and independent living planning and support services to disabled teens as they begin to prepare for adulthood.
- c) Also in FY'07, MRC expanded its Statewide Mentorship program through a contract with Partners for Disabled Youth. This partnership matches disabled youth, between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, with disabled adults for the purpose of mentoring and empowering youth to make choices about the types of services to access to assist them in fulfilling their employment and independent living goals. The number of matches has almost doubled since this initiative began in FY'06.
- d) Finally, as mentioned above, the MRC Transition Program was actively involved in providing essential information to youth and families at various conferences and workshops, some of which are listed above.

3. Family Resources and Funding:

Besides the outreach work done by the MRC Transition Team, much work has been done internally to streamline the referral and service delivery process, and to better prepare MRC Staff to meet the unique needs of the younger disabled population that now seeks to access vocational rehabilitation services and community service supports.

In FY'07, the Transition Team conducted its first ever Intra-Agency Transition Conference. This conference was focused on educating staff about the issues surrounding transition to adulthood, enabling them to better meet the comprehensive needs of transitioning youth as well as on identifying and addressing obstacles to successful transition. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the conference, entitle "No School Left Behind" was to increase and improve relationships between vocational rehabilitation staff in area offices, with the school systems in their area to better facilitate smooth and timely referrals.

The work of the MRC Transition Team in educating families about available services and facilitating the referral process to the adult service system has had measurable results. The number of referrals to MRC of Transition Age Youth increased from approximately 700 in FY '06 to close to 1,600 in FY '07.

IV. GOALS FOR FY '08:

Accessing Services and Supports:

As a result of the Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Survey findings, the agency will review, and if necessary revise, policy and practice surrounding the agency's ability to address transportation needs of consumers, and of supporting VR consumers wishing to attain self-employment or start a home-based business. Again, these are goals that were developed as a direct result of input from consumers of the agency's programs, but are not specific to youth/family needs.

Related specifically to youth, the MRC will be focusing on continued improvement of Intra-agency collaboration and information sharing that will enable all staff to address the more comprehensive needs of a new younger population. This will be done by increased information-sharing regarding all of MRC programs and services, reviewing the MRC orientation processes to ensure that all consumers are made aware of the range of MRC Services available to them and reviewing agency materials to ensure information provided is clear and comprehensive. This has been identified through the work of the transition team, as well as by consumers through the Needs Assessment.

Furthermore, the Training Department will be working with the Transition Team to develop a series of staff training to enable counselors to successfully address issues that are unique to serving a younger population.

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission continues to recognize the importance of Inter-Agency collaboration in ensuring the best possible array of services is made available to children with disabilities, transitioning youth, and their families. The collaborative work of the Transition teams, and the Intra-agency transition initiative will continue to identify future goals for collaboration and inter-agency work.