

# ANNUAL REPORT FY 23

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission





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LETTER FROM THE COMMISSIONER  
**Toni A. Wolf**

**DEAR MRC COMMUNITY:**

Dear MRC Community:

In 2023, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) partnered with individuals with disabilities to enter the job market, foster independence, and expand access to rights and benefits in Massachusetts. We also partnered with employers to hire and retain MRC job seekers while ensuring accessible and inclusive work environments for all.

In this report, you will see the data and numbers—but more importantly, you'll meet the people our agency empowers each and every day. People like Beverly Brewington, who, with our partnership, was able to work toward achieving her educational and career goals. You'll see how we continue to innovate—with our service delivery and technology enhancements. You will see how we utilized American Rescue federal funds and increased our ability to build ramps for those in need and how we are utilizing family voice through our Family Inclusion Ambassadors.

As an agency, we empower people with disabilities and their families to provide a first-person voice to guide agency decisions, sharing their collective lived experience and perspective. We heard from the community that the culture and language surrounding

the word "disability" has evolved. In response we began the work needed to rebrand the agency, meeting with people with disabilities, providers, and employer partners in order to find a name that represents the work we do.

On November 2, 2023, Governor Healey filed legislation to change our agency's name to MassAbility. The legislation removes outdated terms that created limitations and fed into negative stereotypes while promoting language that build a path to independence and self-determination.

I, and the rest of the agency, are grateful to Governor Healey, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kate Walsh, and the members of the Massachusetts Legislature for their unwavering support. We are excited to continue working to make Massachusetts a better state for individuals with disabilities—one that is truly equitable, accessible, and inclusive.

Toni A. Wolf  
Commissioner  
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

# Possibility is Our Purpose

Together with our community partners we expand what's possible for people living with disabilities. We lead, innovate, and convene with purpose to create a more equitable, accessible, and inclusive Commonwealth.

To learn more about our services for people living with disabilities please visit [mass.gov/mrc](https://mass.gov/mrc).





# Creating Possibility



## AT MRC'S SECOND ANNUAL SUMMIT

BY NICK PIZZOLATO



**T**he Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's (MRC) second "Explore Possibility Summit" opened the doors at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel and Conference Center to more than 400 registered attendees for a day full of inspiration, information, and collaboration. Individuals with disabilities came prepared to meet with MRC staff, providers, and vendors to communicate their needs and learn about existing services so they can live life on their own terms. The event demonstrated MRC's determination to be a catalyst for careers and independent living for the people we serve.

Jake Haendel, the Summit's keynote speaker, shared his story as the only person to survive stage four toxic progressive leukoencephalopathy. In 2017, he fell into a coma, and when he became unresponsive, medical professionals thought he

## 2023 EXPLORE POSSIBILITY SUMMIT



was braindead. Jake could still hear. He could still think. He could still feel pain in his muscles. He just was unable to communicate with anyone. Thanks to an incredible team of medical professionals and his self-determination, Jake eventually started to communicate and focused on his recovery. Ultimately, he could move independently in his wheelchair but consistently ran into accessibility issues. Sidewalks without curb cuts. Stairs but no elevator. Restaurants with no accessible bathroom.

These experiences led Jake to work with friends to create the Ahoi app, a Waze for accessibility. It uses crowdsourcing technology for users to share notifications of incomplete walkways or locations they might not be able to enter. "With the help of MRC, we can create a comprehensive map of Boston and Massachusetts to share with other people living with a disability, the best way they can get around their community," Jake said.

MRC designed breakout sessions to help foster knowledge, networking, and independence among the attendees. People with disabilities could hear from housing advocates who provided resources for them to use to rejoin their communities and live independently. Seasoned travelers with disabilities shared their tips on exploring the world and encouraging others to travel. MRC's Job Placement Team members advised people on how to succeed in a hybrid work environment. Members of the disability community had the day to network with their peers and other professionals to help the growth of their careers.



We ended the day with a panel sharing their thoughts on what is Disability Pride. Entrepreneur Roxy Rocker said her definition of pride was, "We are passionate about living our lives." Family Inclusion Ambassador Firdosa Hassan added, "We must create an inclusive environment for people with disabilities to achieve what's best for them."

The Summit received rave reviews, with guests sharing on social media that the event was "Empowering" and allowed them to "See what MRC can do for people with disabilities."



# AGENCY INNOVATIONS



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE NEW WAYS OF SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROGRAMS

Change refers to the act of making something different. It's a response to an existing situation. Innovation, on the other hand, proactively generates new ideas and solutions. It's not a reaction; it's a proactive force for positive change. To foster a culture of innovation or change an organization must start from within, and that's exactly what the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) has done under the leadership of Commissioner Toni Wolf.

"We are building an environment where curiosity is reinforced and creativity is encouraged and developed," said Wolf. "This generates the kind of culture that innovates, measures outcomes, and goes back to the drawing board to continually improve."

Wolf said this kind of environment often involves embracing disruptions to patterns of work. In recent years she established the Office of Learning and Community Engagement, which ensures individuals with disabilities and their family members participate in decision-making spaces within the agency and serve as ambassadors. Individual and family voices build trust and engagement with the disability community, the heart of who the agency serves.

The office recently developed, designed, and launched the agency service experience survey, an innovative data collection platform to assess participant, staff, vendor, and employer experiences and engagement with MRC services. By having a more complete, real-time understanding of the experiences of MRC participants, the agency will be better positioned to develop and design services and to deliver services that meet the changing needs of the disability community.

### INTEGRATED ELIGIBILITY AND TECH ADVANCES

Individuals seeking agency services have varying needs ranging from linkages to employers to home modifications to community supports. Prior to the pandemic, each of MRC's programs required a separate application and eligibility process, which created a lengthy, multi-step, and repetitive process.

In July 2023, the agency fully launched MRC Connect, a virtual gateway to apply for programs and services. Now, individuals complete a single online application that connects them to a broad range of services in Career Services and Home and Community Life. In addition to the online application, the agency also created the MRC Connect Unit, a dedicated team that supports individuals looking for information, assists them through the application process, as well as determines their eligibility.

The agency also creates a dedicated team that supports individuals looking for agency information, assistance with the application process, as well as determines their eligibility for services.

"OneMRC empowers our team to be more efficient, communicate effectively, and share information, which leads to improved service delivery for participants. This is the next step in how we better serve our participants," said Leigh Collupy, Chief of Staff.

In 2024, the agency plans to launch a virtual portal that will allow participants as well as the provider community to access documents, upload information, request appointments, and more. Similar to a doctor's office "My-Chart," the portal is another example of how the agency utilizes technology to improve the participant experience.

### SUPPORTED LIVING EXPANSION

Created in 1989, the Supported Living Program has assisted people living with severe physical disabilities by providing case coordination and PCA surrogacy. Since its inception, there have been several pilot programs that looked to expand services to other individuals with disabilities by adjusting our current model and learning as we assisted people with other barriers.

In September 2023, MRC launched the Supported Living Regional Expansion Project transitioning individuals with behavioral health conditions from nursing facilities back to their communities of choice. "What makes the supported living expansion program unique is our ability to focus on a population that has previously been underserved," says Anna Hermann, the Supported Living Expansion Manager. By bringing together current and new provider agencies with the individual and their families, we will move service provision into a new direction.

This project was made possible through funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and will run until April 2025.

The program will provide behavioral health services and supports, ongoing case coordination, household management, transportation, assistive technology and financial wellness. MRC will also assist participants access to social recreational, educational and career opportunities.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, WHILE HONORING THE PAST

The agency was established in 1956 with employment—and what it brings to people's lives—at its foundation. Over the years, MRC has expanded its role in the community, providing services that meet people with disabilities where they are, literally and metaphorically. The agency today is about pride and self-determination. It's about rights and equal access. It's about building a future and being fully present and counted in the world. Wolf added, "to foster a culture of innovation or change we must start from within. It's not enough to simply say that you value innovation and change - we must live it and breathe it every day. That means making it part of our DNA and infusing it into every aspect of our work."



# Celebrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility



**A**t the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), we take every opportunity to amplify the voice of our community. We work together to break down barriers and make a better state possible for people with disabilities—one that is truly equitable, accessible, and inclusive. The agency achieves its goals by building a supportive work community that embodies this mission.

The agency has immersed staff's voices, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences in day-to-day operations to advance its commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), led by staff, bring team members who

share or support characteristics such as ethnicity, identity, lifestyle, or interest together and provide a safe space for staff to bring their authentic selves to work. The agency's ERGs include the Black Employee Resource Group, Young Professionals Resource Group, Statewide Bilingual Group, LGBTQ+Allies Committee, and most recently, the newly formed Disability Voices Committee and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee.

**The Disability Voices Committee** is a group of employees with disabilities and allies at MRC that work together to champion education, awareness, and access to support the disability community. Since its inception, the group has advocated and assisted in redesigning the agency's reasonable accommodation process and has acted as a thought leader for the agency.

**The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee** supports the agency in providing linguistically and culturally competent engagement with the deaf and hard of hearing community. They bring their lived experience and resources to the agency to break stigmas and preconceived notions about deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. They work with hearing colleagues to create resources and provide support to those hearing staff at the agency who work and communicate with those who are deaf and hard of hearing. Since its inception, the group has advocated to improve EOHHS's reasonable accommodation process and has acted as a thought leader for the agency.

## Providing Learning and Community Building Events

During the year, MRC's ERGs host events focusing on bringing the Agency closer together through educational opportunities, cultural awareness, and community-building events. This year, the Statewide Bilingual Group (SBG) hosted two events during May to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Cultural Heritage Month. The SBG invited all staff to test their knowledge by playing AAPI trivia, an exercise to build agency unity and share cultural information. The group also hosted a panel discussion that raised staff awareness of mental health issues and stigma in Asian communities. The discussion allowed the agency to learn how we can help support these communities by listening and creating open lines of communication.

In June, the Black Employee Resource Group and the LGBTQ+ Allies Committee hosted events that would help boost awareness and cultivate knowledge. On Saturday, June 10, 2023, 30 agency employees and their families participated in the first Boston Pride for



the People Parade. Members marched and danced with thousands of other members of the LGBTQ+A community and handed out MRC stickers and flyers, promoting the agency and awareness to people along the parade route. Later in June, the Black Employee Resource Group hosted a Juneteenth poetry reading to celebrate and commemorate the national holiday recognizing the emancipation of some enslaved African Americans. ERG members shared with their colleagues the inspirational words and voices of renowned black poets to acknowledge their voice and culture and spread awareness and appreciation for this historic day.

In July, the Disability Voices Committee ERG took center stage and hosted a discussion about July being Disability Pride Month, which educated the history of Disability Pride Month and hosted a discussion surrounding the meaning of pride within the disability community. The panel was made up of members of the MRC community, including staff, a member of the community we serve, and an MRC Family Inclusion leader, as they shared their personal stories of breaking down barriers.

These events allow the agency to hear and learn from people within our community. Their voices are essential and benefit the agency to expand our collective knowledge.





# FISCAL YEAR AT A GLANCE (SFY 23)

## Career Services

State Fiscal Year (SFY)	23
Individuals Actively Receiving Services	21,704
Individuals Enrolled in Training/Education Programs	16,026
Individuals Employed	2,823
Cost Per Individual Served	\$3,992

## Home & Community Life

State Fiscal Year (SFY)	23
Individuals Actively Receiving Services	12,306
Total Funds Expended	\$ 78,369,195
Cost Per Individual Served	\$6,368

## Disability Determination Services

Federal Fiscal Year (FFY)	23
Claims Processed	58,859
Total Budget	\$48,635,926.00
Cost Per Case	\$ 826.31
Accuracy of Initial Decisions	98%
Federal Accuracy of Decision Standards	95%

## Overall Funding

	SFY 2023	FUNDING SOURCE					% of Program Budget
		State	Federal	Trust	Capital	Total	
NET AGENCY FUNDING	Career Services	\$ 34,072,400	\$ 43,346,200	\$ 9,218,937		\$ 86,637,537	40%
	Home & Community Life	\$ 70,181,472	\$ 3,017,304	\$ 1,369,260	\$ 3,801,159	\$ 78,369,195	36%
	NextGen Services	—	\$ 2,697,234			\$ 2,697,234	1%
	Disability Determination Services	—	\$ 48,635,926			\$ 48,635,926	22%
	Commissioner's Office	\$ 480,994	—			\$ 480,994	0%
	Agency Funding Total	\$ 104,734,867	\$ 97,696,663	\$ 10,588,197	\$ 3,801,159	\$ 216,820,886	100%
Percentage of Overall Budget		48%	45%	5%	2%		

## Annual Report by Division

SUM OF ACTUALS		FUNDING SOURCE			
Agency Division	State	Federal	Trust	Capital	Grand Total
Commissioner's Office	\$ 480,994.20				\$ 480,994.20
Community Living Services	\$ 47,808,194.26	\$ 3,017,303.60	\$ 1,369,259.96		\$ 52,194,757.82
Disability Determination Services		\$ 48,635,926.11			\$ 48,635,926.11
NextGen Services		\$ 2,697,233.55			\$ 2,697,233.55
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	\$ 32,825,272.91	\$ 43,346,199.75	\$ 9,218,936.66		\$ 85,390,409.32
Agency Funding Total	\$ 81,114,461.37	\$ 97,696,663.01	\$ 10,588,196.62		
ANF Funding					
Career Services	\$ 167,658.90				\$ 167,658.90
ANF Funding Total	\$ 167,658.90				\$ 167,658.90
Partnership with State Agencies					
Home & Community Life	\$ 22,373,278.20			\$ 3,801,159.00	\$ 26,174,437.20
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	\$ 1,079,468.51				\$ 1,079,468.51
Partnership with State Agencies Total	\$ 23,452,746.71			\$ 3,801,159.00	\$ 27,253,905.71
Grand Total	\$ 104,734,866.98	\$ 97,696,663.01	\$ 10,588,196.62	\$ 3,801,159.00	\$ 216,820,885.61

## Annual Report by Program

AGENCY DIVISION	PROGRAM	SUM OF ACTUALS
Commissioner's Office	Commissioner's Office	\$ 480,994.20
	Commissioner's Office Total	\$ 480,994.20
Home & Community Life	Assistive Technology & Independent Living Services	\$ 17,444,063.35
	Beyond Bridges	\$ 207,510.07
	Home Care Services	\$ 4,224,870.87
	Home Modification Loan Program	\$ 3,801,159.00
	Housing Registry	\$ 150,000.00
	Statewide Head Injury Program	\$ 36,193,019.58
	Turning 22 Services	\$ 183,454.81
	Moving Forward Programs	\$ 16,165,117.34
	Division of Home & Community Life Total	\$ 78,369,195.02
Disability Determination Services	Disability Determination Services	\$ 48,635,926.11
	Disability Determination Services Total	\$ 48,635,926.11
NextGen Services	NextGen Services	\$ 2,697,233.55
	NextGen Services Total	\$ 2,697,233.55
Career Services	Supported Employment Services	\$ 2,293,493.02
	Career Services	\$ 83,852,295.03
	Work Incentives Planning and Assistance	\$ 206,349.21
	Workforce Development (DTA)	\$ 285,399.47
	Division of Career Services Total	\$ 86,637,536.73
Grand Total		\$ 216,820,885.61



# CAREER SERVICES

## Take on the Modern Workplace

Prepares participants to take on the modern workplace on their own terms. Together with public colleges and universities, professional training programs, and employers statewide, the agency partners with people with disabilities to break down barriers and expand what's possible in their career and work life. Our programs give them the opportunity to explore many industries and sectors so they can find what's best for them and their situation. We also guide and support employers to create the accessible and inclusive environment our service recipients deserve.

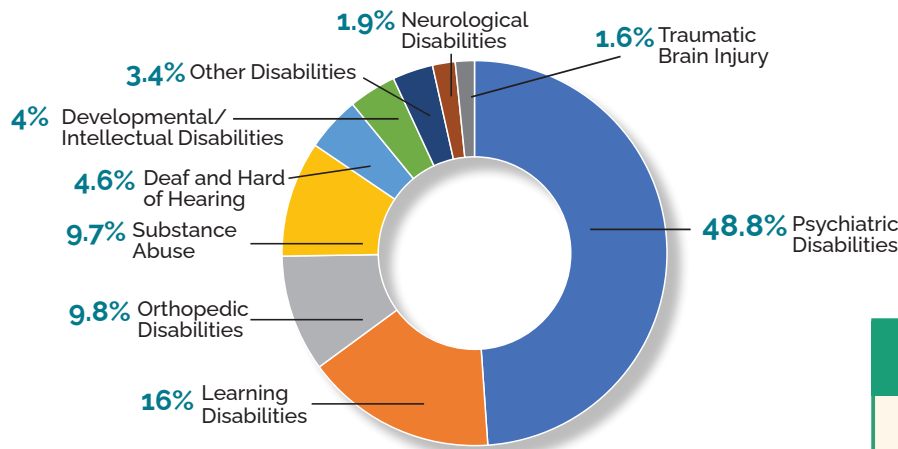
### Services Include:

#### For individuals with disabilities:

- Counseling and guidance
- Job-driven training and skills training
- Interest and aptitude testing
- Job placement assistance
- Diagnostic evaluations
- College or vocational training
- Assistive technology
- Financial wellness
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students
- Communication access services: ASL interpreters, oral transliterators, Communication Access Real-Time (CART) translation, multiple language translation

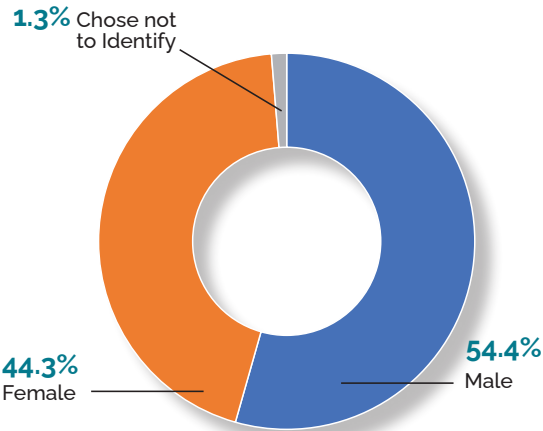
#### For employers:

- On-the-Job Training (OJT)
- Job and Employer-driven Training (JDT)
- Financial support for paid internships/practicums
- Tax incentives
- Disability inclusion support
- Consultation: ADA, disability sensitivity training, worksite modifications

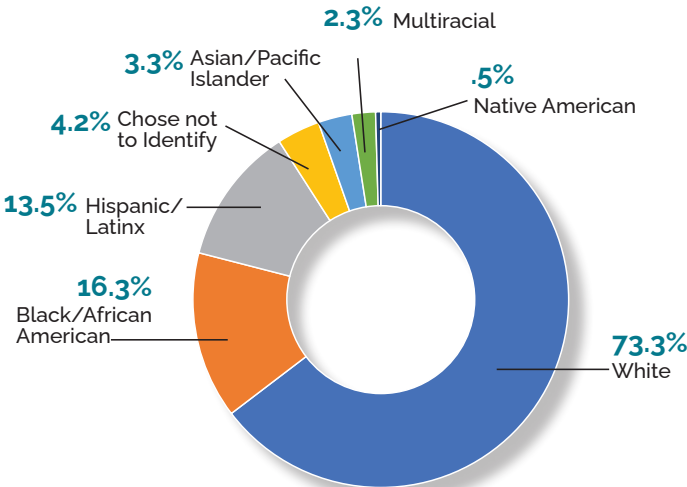


### PARTICIPANTS

Average age at application: **33.4**



### GENDER



### RACE

### KEY FACTS

**2,823** job seekers with disabilities have been successfully placed into competitive employment based on their choices, interests, needs and skills.

The earnings of these successfully placed employees in MA in the first year were **\$75.6** million.

Estimated public benefits savings from people rehabilitated in MA were **\$21.2** million.

Average Hourly Wage: **\$18.73**

Average Work Hours Weekly **27.5**

The returns to society based on increases in lifetime earnings range from **\$14** to **\$18** for each **\$1** invested in the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation program.

**\*\$5** is returned to the government in the form of increased taxes and reduced public assistance payments for every **\$1** invested in the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation program.

New referrals: **10,213**

Applicants: **7,783**

Job seekers actively receiving services: **21,704**

Participants enrolled in training/education programs: **16,026**

Placements Leading to Successful Employment Outcomes: **86.5%**

Participants employed with medical insurance: **99.4%**

\* Based on Commonwealth Corporation Study





## BEVERLY BREWINGTON

# Pursuing a Career Full of Purpose

A life-long resident of Boston, Beverly Brewington recognizes that her career journey has not been the same as others. She reached out to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) in 2004 when she started studying for a career in food preparation. Twenty years later, she pivoted her career goals to acquire a degree in psychology and focus her professional life on helping those who have survived domestic abuse and substance use. She wants to be an advocate and support individuals to fulfill their dreams and reach their full potential, despite their challenging past.

Beverly's story is painful and inspirational as she has continued to fight against the odds to achieve her career goals. A physical confrontation resulted in a head injury that caused her to be legally blind. Lying in a hospital bed, doctors told her she would not be the same and would have to relearn how to talk, walk, and other things she had taken for granted.

But that did not deter the former scholastic athlete. A testament to her perseverance and resilience, Beverly set a goal to finish high school while navigating the challenges of her new life. "They wanted to put me in a GED program, and I said no," Beverly remembered. "A GED is not a diploma; I wanted to say I graduated from high school." Beverly did just that.

That's when she began looking for a path toward a career she would love. In 2004, she enrolled in Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) to study food preparation. During this time, she partnered with MRC to help her pay for tuition, books, and find tutoring services. Beverly chose food preparation because she loves to nourish people. "Food brings people together," she laughed. "I love cooking. I'll go to restaurants and come back home and try to imitate what I had and put my little twist on it."

And as much as Beverly loved learning and earning credits toward her degree in food service, she couldn't help but feel this wasn't her purpose. "It was something inside of me, and I felt like I was meant to help people," she reflected. "I want to help people who have been through similar situations as myself, and this is my calling."

She changed her field of study from food preparation to psychology. She was determined to stay on track to graduate in 2024, even if that meant doubling up on coursework during future semesters. But Beverly isn't afraid of hard work or asking for help when she needs it. "Yes, it's challenging. But I'm doing it!" she said. "This is where I'm supposed to be."

Since Beverly started working towards her degree, MRC has been instrumental in providing her with support, services, and resources. MRC has equipped her with a computer and connected her with services that have facilitated a conducive learning environment, enabling her to excel in her academic pursuits. "If I know I need something, I'm not accepting no as an answer. We all need help. But if you don't ask for help, you're not going to get it."

Her MRC counselor, Desiree Etienne, has been a part of her journey during the past few years. "I trust Desiree," Beverly shared. "It has been great working with Beverly. She is a big advocate for herself," said Desiree. "She is a goal-oriented person and through it all she strives every day to be the best version of herself."

Beverly looks forward to 2024 and earning her psychology degree from BHCC. "I'll be the first one in my immediate family to earn a college degree," she shared. "And I'm going to invite everyone for a graduation party and cook for everyone. To say thank you."

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*"I'll be the first one in my immediate family to earn a college degree."*

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# What's Next in NextGen Careers?



Thanks to a competitive \$17 million Innovation Grant from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the Massachusetts

Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) launched NextGen Careers—a program that helps young adults ages 18-30 with disabilities explore the world of work. Now over a year since the program launched, 328 young adults have enrolled in the program.

"Working with NextGen is incredible," said Sarah M. "This entire experience has been such a game-changer for my career and my confidence. I'm finally getting the support I need to accomplish my goals and the encouragement from my career counselor and team helps keep me motivated towards success." She added, "thanks to NextGen, I've been able to take courses and return to education! The folks working at NextGen also make the process far less daunting and have been amazing at accommodating for my specific disability. The tailored approach makes this experience enjoyable and I feel like my goals, values, and needs are truly being thought about. I'm so glad I found out about the opportunity."

NextGen collaborates with MRC offices to help reach young adults who may face career boundaries. The program currently serves individuals in the Boston, Roxbury, Braintree, Lawrence, Lowell, Springfield, and Worcester areas.



Whether NextGener's are interested in a certificate program, on-the-job training, apprenticeship, or an internship in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM), the program will pair individuals with a team of dedicated experts in counseling, benefits, and peer support that supports them every step of the way. Made up of mentors, counselors, benefits advisors, and employment specialists, the NextGen Career team focuses on partnering with participants to find their best career pathway. As a team, they help job seekers build their confidence and expertise in whichever field they want to pursue.

"I have been working with NextGen Careers for a few months and they've already helped me get enrolled in a Carpentry training program at Greater Lowell Tech through MassHire," said James R. "I'm learning how to frame and build houses and will be earning an OSHA 10 certification. I'm currently looking for employment and the team at NextGen is helping me with my resume and helping me find opportunities to apply for. I'm excited for these new possibilities!"

NextGen recently launched the "Career Exploration Academy," a training with employer partners, NextGeners and their families, to connect to opportunities in the STEM field.



Training partners have included Mass General Brigham, Middlesex Community College, Quinsigamond Community College, and Roxbury Community College. The program also established the "NextGen Job Club," where participants receive in-house training on soft skills, business etiquette, and job searches in a post-pandemic economy.



# Do Better Business, Together

## Massachusetts Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC)

The Disability Employment Tax Credit (DETC) is a Massachusetts program that gives employers a tax credit when they recruit and hire individuals with disabilities.

### Employees with Disabilities

**Why Should You Certify?** By certifying your disability, you make it easier for people with disabilities to land the jobs they want at competitive companies in the Commonwealth. The more that people self-disclose, the more inclusive workplaces become. To help your company earn credit, you must be a Massachusetts resident with a disability who was hired after July 1, 2021.

#### Self-disclosure is Worth It

Choosing to self-disclose can be hard, but it paves the way for others and makes your workplace more inclusive. Getting certified also proves just how valuable people like you are to your employer's success. Remember that MRC is here to help you, no matter where you are in your career.

#### How to Get Certified

1. Complete the online certification form (use QR code here)
2. A tax credit coordinator will review your application. Within 2 business days they will let you know if your application was accepted. If any information is missing, they will reach out to you and explain what's needed to complete your application.
3. Once you're approved, the tax credit coordinator will send you a copy of your Certificate of Eligibility.



### MA Employers & Businesses

You already recruit from the entire talent pool. Every day, people with disabilities help you do better business by increasing your company's employee retention, productivity, and profitability—so why not take it one step further by claiming your employer tax credit?

#### Get the Credit

Employers can get a tax credit for any employee you hired after July 1, 2021, who is a Massachusetts resident with a certified disability. After 12 months of continuous employment, a business can claim a state tax credit equal to 30% of the wages paid to each qualified employee with a disability in the first taxable year of employment, up to \$5,000. In each subsequent tax year, they are able to claim a credit equal to 30% of the wages paid, up to \$2,000.

#### How to do Better Business

- Apply for both the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit program and the MA Disability Employment Tax Credit.
- Spread the word about how hiring people with disabilities helps improve culture and your business's bottom line.
- Remember, any employee you hire through MRC may already be certified. That's just one of the many ways MRC can support your company.

**Learn More at:**  
[mass.gov/mrc-employer-and-business-services](https://mass.gov/mrc-employer-and-business-services)





# HOME AND COMMUNITY LIFE



**Building a Life on Your Terms**

MRC's Home and Community Life empowers service recipients to participate in their community and build a better life on their own terms. We partner with participants to expand what's possible for adults and youth with disabilities, providing them with the support, technology, and training they need to become self-sufficient. Together, we're breaking down barriers to create a Massachusetts that's truly equitable, accessible and inclusive.

- Our Programs and Services Include:**
- Independent living centers
  - Turning 22 Youth Transition to Adult Human Services
  - Supported Living
  - Home Care
  - Accessible Housing Registry
  - Assistive Technology training, devices, and resources
  - Community-based residential, day, and support services for persons with brain injuries

By the Numbers	
Participants Housed	45
Independent Living Centers:	5,956
Turning 22 Services:	707
Assistive Technology:	1,565
Supported Living Services:	285
Brain Injury Services (SHIP & TBI Waiver):	1,087
Home Care Services:	1,366
Protective Services:	356
Moving Forward Program:	984
<b>Housing Registry</b>	
Number of units on Housing Navigator and MyMassHome Registries:	31,243
<b>Fast Facts</b>	
Total participants actively receiving services:	12,306
Percentage of participants maintaining independence in the community:	99.7%





# BRINGING PEOPLE HOME

## WITH THE HELP OF ARPA

At the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) we provide programs and services that foster independence and expand participation in community life.

The agency received American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to promote accessibility and agency responsiveness for individuals with disabilities, recognizing that providing resources and services will create jobs for providers and builders and offer opportunities for people with disabilities to thrive in their communities. ARPA provides federal dollars to boost the U.S. economy after the COVID-19 pandemic; MRC uses these dollars to hire contractors to build ramps, install stair lifts, and complete other home modification projects to make houses accessible to people with disabilities.

This year, MRC met its goal of funding 150 projects, giving people like Steve access to his home. Steve was diagnosed with ALS and uses a wheelchair every day. However, his house was unsuitable for someone



who needed a wheelchair. It was difficult for him to move freely in his community and home. MRC worked with him to improve access to his house and reduce his risk of falling by funding a ramp from the driveway to his front door. Steve shared that he loves his ramp and now doesn't have to worry about leaving and returning home.

Nefta Russell, MRC's ARPA Project Coordinator, says that these projects don't just provide a pathway to independence; they offer service seekers a voice. "Individuals feel seen," Russell shared. "They feel as though they can be a part of the community again, on their terms."



In Chicopee, Marvin's story is similar. Marvin uses a wheelchair and depends on his family to enter and exit the home he shares with them. Due to the home's inaccessibility, he had to move into a skilled nursing facility, and his discharge was dependent on his family to provide a ramp to their home. Stavros, an Independent Living Center that partners with MRC, spearheaded the ramp's design and construction, and when it was complete, Marvin could independently enter and leave his home. "The wheelchair ramp is a lifesaver," he shared.

These federally funded projects allow MRC to work in communities across the Commonwealth to expand what's possible for people with disabilities. Everyone deserves the right to feel safe at home and empowered to live life on their own terms.

To learn more about ARPA funding opportunities, visit <https://www.mass.gov/MRC/ARPA>.





Opening Doors

You can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) through the Social Security Administration (SSA). SSA works to assess your situation and eligibility. If you are determined eligible, SSA sends your application to DDS, and we will work with you to gather necessary information, make a determination, and return your application to SSA for you to get the assistance you need. If your ability to work is limited because of a disability, MRC's Disability Determination Services (DDS) division is here to help determine if you are eligible for disability benefits.

If you are found to be disabled, you may also be eligible for health care coverage through Medicaid and Medicare. For many Massachusetts residents like you, DDS is part of our team that can improve your quality of life by helping you live more independently.

By the Numbers	(SFY 23)
58,859	claims processed for individuals applying for SSI/SSDI benefit
60,048	claims received
98%	claims processed accurately
14,842	continuing review claims successfully completed by the MRC/DDS
34,877	initial claims processed by the MRC/DDS
22%	favorably processed claims for houseless individuals to provide SSI and SSDI monthly benefits which improve a disabled claimant's ability to obtain stable housing

Massachusetts SSI/SSDI Overall Summary	
(from SSA Data)	
Total MA Population:	6.98 million
MA SSI Recipients, 2022:	168,056
MA SSDI Recipients, 2022:	197,049
Annual SSDI Benefits Paid:	\$3.19 billion
Annual SSI Benefits Paid:	\$1.21 billion

DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES





# FAMILY INCLUSION AMBASSADORS JOIN TEAM MRC

**B**uilding trust and engagement with the disability community requires leading with individual and family voices. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) empowers individuals with disabilities and their families to be active participants in agency decision-making processes and serve as ambassadors.

The Office of Learning & Community Engagement recently created the Family Inclusion Ambassador team to provide a first-person voice to the agency, sharing their collective lived experience and incorporating essential perspectives and voices of family members and caregivers of young adults with disabilities.

## THE TEAM INCLUDES EIGHT UNIQUE AND HIGHLY MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS:

**Firdosa Hassan** joined the team to be a voice that can help those in communities where deep-seated stigmas surrounding people with disabilities still exist. She wishes to help people understand that culturally preconceived notions shouldn't contain individuals with a disability. Born in Somalia, Firdosa has strong ties to the community and understands many families' confusion regarding transition and guardianship services for their children.

**Gillan Wang** is always willing to go the extra mile to help connect people with the resources they need. She enjoys making personal connections and sharing her family's experiences with other families to share resources and be a source of support.

**Roxi Harvey** wants families to be able to find resources and services easily. While raising her children, Roxi spent years researching special education programs, state support agencies, and community living programs. Roxi focuses on reaching out to families to share what she's learned about navigating services. She knows that a sense of belonging matters, especially if people aren't seeing families that look like theirs, and representation matters when there are strong stigmas present in different cultural and racial groups.

**Yan Zhang** takes advocacy seriously as an advocate for people with disabilities in the Chinese community, where she shares resources with other parents. She acknowledges, because of perceived stigmas, that some people are passive in advocating independently but feel empowered to ask questions when surrounded by others who share their experiences. Yan hopes to help bridge the gap between language barriers and be a reason families feel empowered to find solutions.

**Aimee Clemmey Rodriguez** joined the team to help create a guidebook for families to navigate resources, like creating an individualized educational plan (IEP). She's learned to find resources and has become an experienced family advocate, ensuring her children have equitable educational opportunities. Her goal is to help empower families that might start the process intimidated like she was. She wants to be a part of a team that can help alleviate the stress and help parents guide them through the hardships they could face.

**Bonnie Thompson** began her role of assessing the existing resources within the Agency. She brings her lived experience as a family advocate to the FIA. As a parent, she has extensive experience navigating the healthcare industry and has shared what she learned with other families. Bonnie acknowledges navigating the bureaucracy can sometimes get families stuck in the weeds, which takes their focus off the goal of getting their children the services they need, and she wants to offer assistance and compassion to those struggling.

**Elizabeth "Liz" Topaz** focuses on developing educational components for families by working with the team. As a training provider for the Federation for Children with Special Needs, she loved providing parents with the information they needed to help guide them through the system. She'd like to educate educators on available support services so they can also participate in helping parents and caregivers navigate resources.

**Kristen Flynn** wants to connect people, especially when they need help finding where they can turn to find help. She wants to create streamlined processes to assist family members through processes that can be especially confusing for children transitioning to young adults.

## BUILDING A BRIDGE FORWARD

The Family Inclusion Ambassadors focus on being a conduit for families by increasing awareness and education opportunities for families in the disability community. Family Inclusion Ambassadors support families in identifying MRC and other disability-related resources and advise the agency on elevating services and supports for the disability community and their families.



At the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

# POSSIBILITY IS OUR PURPOSE



Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111 | Phone (617) 204-3600 | [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov)