Autism Commission

Employment and 22+ Sub-Committee

500 Harrison Avenue

November 16, 2016 – 1:00pm – 3:00pm

Present are Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Todd Garvin, Lea Hill, Dian Bohannon, Michael Stepansky,

Carolyn welcomed all to this first meeting of Employment and Higher Education. This sub-group was formed from the Employment and 14-22 year old sub-group that had combined last month due to the nature of similar discussions. After last months’ meeting, some expressed a need to still have a group that focused solely on Employment of older adults (over age 22) and higher education. This group will continue to meet and discuss issues related to these topics.

The meeting started with Carolyn discussing the over 800 newly eligible adults with DDS. She then asked the group what barriers they are seeing around higher education and employment. She also discussed that there is no funding in the IT Bond for data collection but we will be able to compile information from DESE, DDS and Mass Health on who is requesting services. The DESE information dates back from 2003 and will give us a good indication of the numbers of adults.

Todd said that he is seeing and hearing that some people do not have any access to services or just minimal services. He did say that some do know about MRC but others just depend on their family to support them financially. Also, some individuals have applied for services but have been denied because of the lack of funding. Carolyn asked if they are also applying for SSI – he said some are but not all.

Dian talked about a large population that doesn’t apply because they do not think that they are eligible. They also find the applications to be a burden, especially now knowing there is no funding. Lea said that the application is fairly simple but gathering all of the data and back up material to go along with the application is difficult. Carolyn talked about the Autism Support Centers and how they will assist with the application process.

The group discussed that a lot of adults are under employed and need supports in soft skills: resume writing, application process, social skills in the workplace. Carolyn talked about MRC, JVS and Aspire – they provide support in these areas. MRC also has funding for supported employment and has a contract with the Best Buddies job program. BB provides white collared job opportunities with extended support in the work place to help people advance in their jobs.

Dianne mentioned that at one of the employment sub-committee meetings there was discussion around doing a PSA to employers to let them know the unique skills that individuals with ASD have to offer. Should we explore? This could also be used to get information about support services to individuals with ASD. The Ruderman Foundation could be a good place to contact about funding a PSA.

It was discussed that we also need to identify the employers and educate them on ASD. There were two recent conferences for employers, MRC and Work Without Limits. Who are the employers in the room for these conferences? What are the next steps?

There was discussion around adults with ASD that didn’t receive supports in high school and beyond but are now having difficulty keeping their job and require social skill and soft skill support. There needs should be addressed. DDS used to have a program where they approached small business that included: florist, animal grooming, culinary. They set up the adults with a job coach and it started as an unpaid internship that grew into paid employment.

Michael talked about the DTA and their employment program around Career Centers. They offer computer time, classes and support on writing resumes. There are about 35 across the state and you can connect with them through the Office of Labor and Workforce Development. Carolyn will reach out and get a list of the Career Centers. Michael said that the Career Centers have not been accessible for this population. He also discussed Mainstream Employment Resource – could we give them information on Autism Resource Centers so they can direct people? Lea said that there is a Career Center located in Lynn on the campus of Northshore Community College.

It was mentioned that DEI (Disability Employment Institute) has a contract with Career Centers – Work Without Limits is involved and they also run Beneplan. Project Impact and Beneplan – they are the benefit experts in the State.

Dian discussed that many of the unemployed have advanced degrees but are unable to keep their jobs due to lack of social skills. Todd also said that some who have jobs cannot advance to the next level. Carolyn said she would ask for a representative from MRC to join us – they have programs that support social skills in the workplace. They also offer support around resume writing and interview skills. They now offer extended support after the 90 days in the workplace but only up to age 25.

Michael asked if most of these services are located in the Greater Boston area – we are not sure but the more rural areas have difficulty with an array of employment and transportation. It was also asked what is out there online for support – Facebook pages? AANE has a FB page that could convey information. Exceptional Lives is a web based tool that gives information on how to navigate the state agencies and apply for services. It was also asked if MRC is doing the disability determination for SSI and SSDI, if so, could they flag autism as a persons’ main disability. Carolyn said it is possible but MRC’s numbers served with autism were small but Carolyn will ask Commissioner Osborne.

Dian said that she felt there were three topics of priority right now:

1. Identify a way to give people information to get supports. She has access to an email list – could they do an email blast to people and ask if they are willing to self-identify and give them information.
2. List of supports that are available- we cannot predetermine if they are eligible for the supports but could craft language that will say; here is a way to connect to see if you are eligible.
3. How will they get funding once they are determined eligible.

Carolyn said that hopefully the funding deficit is short-term. Our role is to make recommendations on what are the unmet needs of this population and any policies, regulations or legislative action. We will inform about the needs but the advocates can play a different role. Dian said that they could advocate separately. Michael also said that some folks on the sub-committees are state employees and are prohibited from lobbying.

Lea informed the group that DDS held six information sessions in their region with over 300 people attending. The audience was mostly parents of children and adults but it was a great way to get the word out regarding services provided by DDS.

Carolyn said there is a willingness to get the word out regarding what is available by either a video or brochures to target individuals that need support. Carolyn will also ask if the state is allowed to have a Facebook page. Michael said that DMH has an fb page and he believes it is managed by their communications department.

Michael said that their employment programs at DMH are specific to people with mental health issues. Carolyn discussed that for many with ASD their mental health issue is what becomes their greatest disability and prohibits them from working. DMH offers clubhouses that have some support for employment. They also have Community Based Family Support and focus on person centered planning and competitive work. DMH also has Impact Teams providing intensive supportive housing with employment services.

Dian will look into sending out an email blast and will work with Carolyn on the language. Todd will send out information regarding a benefits conference – could we set up at table at the conference?

Michael asked how often this group will meet and what are the priorities. Since this is the first meeting of this group we will wait to pull out the priorities from the minutes after our second meeting.

The next meeting of this sub-committee was scheduled for January 18th from 1:00pm-3:00pm.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:50pm.