

# The Bridge

*PCAs: a bridge to community living*

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANT QUALITY HOME CARE WORKFORCE COUNCIL

Volume 3 Summer 2010

## Vote for PCA of the Year

by Michelle Byrd

The Personal Care Attendant Quality Home Care Workforce Council, 199SEIU Health Care Workers East, and Rewarding Work Resources, Inc. will present PCA of the Year awards at the State House this September. Five PCAs, representing different regions of the state, will be recognized for exemplifying the hard work and dedication shown by all PCAs in their efforts to provide quality care to consumers of MassHealth PCA services.

Nominations are open to all consumers, PCAs, families, nonprofit staff, and governmental agency staff.

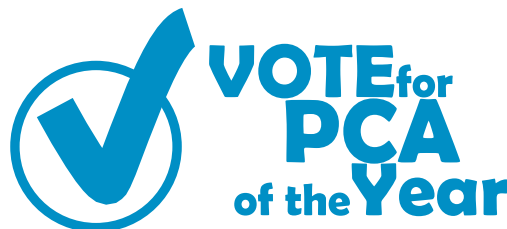
Awards will be given to PCAs who demonstrate

- dedication to their work;
- longevity of PCA service; and
- actions that increase the value and image of PCA work.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Vision Statement of the Personal Care Attendant Quality Home Care Workforce Council
- 3 Making a Difference
- 3 New Member of the Council Appointed
- 4 PCA Pioneers
- 6 Council's PCA Survey Released
- 6 Temporary & Back-up PCAs
- 7 Council Member Paul Spooner Honored
- 8 Employer Alert

If you know of one or more PCAs whose service and dedication to PCA work deserves recognition, you can submit his or her name for consideration. Submissions should be one page (250-300 words), and describe why you feel the nominee should be honored for meeting the criteria listed above. Please remember to provide us with your contact information and the nominated PCA's telephone number, so the selection committee can contact you and the PCA.



Submissions should be sent to the following address.

**PCA Workforce Council**  
600 Washington Street  
ATTN: Room 5189  
Boston, MA 02111

You can also e-mail your submission to [pacouncil@state.ma.us](mailto:pacouncil@state.ma.us). Nominations must be received by **September 24, 2010**.

Further details will be available in the upcoming weeks. Please look for updates on the following Web sites: [www.mass.gov/pca](http://www.mass.gov/pca), [www.1199seiu.org/mass](http://www.1199seiu.org/mass), and [www.mass.gov/findpca.org](http://www.mass.gov/findpca.org).

If you'd like to receive direct periodic updates and reminders for the event, please contact Michelle Byrd in the PCA Council office at 617-210-5715, or e-mail her at [michelle.byrd@state.ma.us](mailto:michelle.byrd@state.ma.us), to be placed on our mailing list.

Para una versión en español, por favor llame a su Agencia de atención personal o al 617-210-5715.

## Vision Statement of the Personal Care Attendant Quality Home Care Workforce Council

*Unanimously passed by the Council on October 15, 2009*

The mission of the Council, to ensure the quality of long-term, in-home personal care by recruiting, training, and stabilizing the work force of personal care attendants, requires a commitment from all Council members and staff to the following principles.

- Ensuring consumer control of the PCA program and the training and employment of PCAs; control by consumers being essential to the independence, dignity and self-sufficiency the PCA program is meant to achieve.
- Diligently representing the interests of consumers as employers and furthering those interests by assisting to resolve policies and procedures that create impediments for consumers as employers.
- Supporting and implementing training methods and policies that increase the skills and knowledge base of PCAs and consumers.
- Assisting PCAs to achieve increased wages, benefits, advancement opportunities and other benchmarks of respected, dignified employment.
- Promoting policies that ensure that consumers exercise their rights with integrity and in a responsible manner.
- Making a continuing dialogue with the consumer community a priority.



*(l to r) Council Chair Jean McGuire, Director Jack Boesen, and Council Treasurer Joe Bellil review the Council's vision statement.*

## Making a Difference

### PCA Referral Directory Aids PCA Hiring

September 2010 will mark the first anniversary of the online PCA referral directory sponsored by the PCA Workforce Council. With aggressive outreach, Council staff and staff from Rewarding Work Resources, Inc. (RWR) have recruited more than 5,000 people who are interested in PCA work. More than 1,000 consumers have used the directory to look for and hire PCAs. When consumers were recently asked what they liked best about the directory, the following sentiments were common:

*“I liked the ability to filter on select criteria and to sort the list by town, date, etc.”*

*“I found it easy to search and easy to use.”*

Below is an excerpt from a letter sent to the Council by a vocational rehabilitation specialist.

*“First of all, I want to commend you on the work that you have done in putting together the new [www.mass.gov/findpca](http://www.mass.gov/findpca) program. I used it with one patient recently who would have gone to a skilled nursing facility but who was discharged home instead, all because we were able to screen and interview five immediately available PCAs through the Web site.”*

RWR and Council staffs are committed to improving the directory in order to make it as useful as possible. Comments on your experience with the directory, as well as ways to improve it, are welcome.

Please send your comments to:

PCA Council  
600 Washington Street, Room 5189  
Boston, MA 02111.

Or e-mail us at [pcacouncil@state.ma.us](mailto:pcacouncil@state.ma.us).

## New Member of the Council Appointed



*New Council member Tony Williams.*

The members and staff of the PCA Quality Home Care Workforce Council are pleased to welcome Maurice (Tony) Williams as a new member of the Council. Tony was recommended by the State Independent Living Council (S.I.L.C.) and was appointed by State Auditor Joe DeNucci. Tony is Executive Director of the Multi-Cultural Independent Living Center of Boston. Tony has been involved with the Center since 2003 in a variety of positions, including peer counselor and program coordinator. He acted as interim director of the Center beginning in 2007 and started his role as executive director in February 2008. In this new position, he combines his skills in program management and project implementation, providing access and inclusion programs for individuals with a disability.

# PCA Pioneers

This new feature will include interviews and stories of people we are calling “PCA Pioneers.” Pioneers have been using PCA services to live in the community for more than 30 years. They will share the importance of having a PCA and the impact of PCAs on their lives.

---

## Paul Kahn

### Interview by Karen Langley

The first person I asked to interview for this series was Paul Kahn. Paul was not only an old friend but also a strong PCA program advocate over the years. Unfortunately, Paul passed away before the interview could be conducted. Paul’s widow, Ruth, agreed to “speak” for Paul as well as for herself about the importance of PCAs in his and their lives.

**Karen:** Ruth, tell us a little about why Paul needed personal care assistance.

**Ruth:** Paul was born with a rare neuromuscular disease called centronuclear myopathy, which resulted in overall weakness and inability to walk. He started using a power wheelchair for mobility as a young man. Later on in the mid-1980s, he needed assistance breathing and used oxygen during the day. He progressed to a trach with ventilator support in 1987. Paul needed



*Paul and Ruth Kahn*

PCA support for his personal care—washing, dressing, using the toilet, trach/vent care, as well as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and many other activities.

**Karen:** Paul moved from his parents’ home to Wellington Hall, a transitional living program, then to his own apartment in the late 1970s. How did the use of PCAs make it possible for him to live in the community with his level of physical disability?

**Ruth:** Moving into his own apartment was an important milestone for Paul, and as hard as it was to leave the comfort and security of his parents and the transitional living program, he wanted to prove to himself that he could live on

his own. Paul recognized the need to have several PCAs to support him during the day and night. He rented a two-bedroom apartment so that he could have live-in PCAs available during the night and as back-ups and had other PCAs come in for his morning, afternoon, and evening care. Hiring, training, [and] supervising the PCAs was his responsibility and he ensured they understood that he was their boss.

**Karen:** How did having PCAs affect your dating and marriage to Paul?

**Ruth:** We began dating in 1987, and having PCAs around was awkward at first, but a necessity. When we would go out, the PCA would drive Paul's van and drop us off. Paul would arrange for the PCA to come back for assistance using the bathroom and to drive us home. Later, when we married in 1988, we found that we needed more privacy. Some PCAs assumed I was "in charge," and Paul needed to reinforce that he was the employer. If they couldn't learn that, they didn't stay long.

**Karen:** What aspects of the PCA program do you feel supported Paul's independence?

**Ruth:** That he was "the boss!" Paul knew his body better than anyone, and also knew what he needed and when. Certainly, choosing whom he could hire and train to perform such intimate personal care was very important to him. He wanted to train them to his specifications, not retrain them from what they learned somewhere else. So the program allowing the person to make the decision to hire and take responsibility for

training the PCA he saw as essential. Another was the flexibility of the program in using the hours he was allowed when he needed them.

**Karen:** How did the PCA program positively impact Paul's life?

**Ruth:** First and foremost, it gave Paul the freedom to live on his own terms. It allowed him to pursue his art, writing, teaching, and advocacy activities. Without PCAs, he would have remained institutionalized. It also allowed me to be his wife, not his caretaker. I couldn't physically perform his care, so without the PCAs, we would never have married. It also allowed me to have my own independent life, not worrying about Paul.

**Karen:** Is there anything you would recommend changing in the PCA program?

**Ruth:** No. I think Paul would agree the program has evolved, but the principles of consumer control and consumer choice have stood the test of time. Allow the program to maintain its flexibility and not impose any requirements that impede the ability to hire PCAs when needed.

If you are a "PCA Pioneer," or know of one and would like to share your experiences using PCAs, please contact the PCA Workforce Council at [pcacouncil@state.ma.us](mailto:pcacouncil@state.ma.us).

## Council's PCA Survey Released

The previous issue of The Bridge included a story about the first comprehensive survey of consumers, which was sponsored by the Council. As a companion to this survey, the Council also funded a survey of PCAs working in the MassHealth program. The PCA survey was conducted by JSI Research & Training Institute (JSI), the firm that conducted the consumer survey.

A telephone survey of more than 500 PCAs was conducted during the spring and summer of 2009. Preliminary results of the survey were presented at the Council's October 2009 meeting, and a final report was published in November. "This study clearly shows the remarkable commitment of PCA workers to the health and well-being of the consumers they work for," said Dr. James Maxwell of JSI, who directed the survey project. The following information was taken from the sample of PCAs surveyed.

- The majority of PCAs are women between the ages of 30 and 65.
- The PCA population is ethnically diverse and has a varied educational background.
- Many PCAs provide companionship for their employers and act as advocates for them on medical matters.
- While low wages and the lack of benefits were widely seen as the largest problems associated with PCA work, almost all PCAs received great satisfaction from the caring nature of their work.

"The information contained in this survey provides an important benchmark that will assist the Council as it works to strengthen the PCA workforce," said Council Director Jack Boesen. A PowerPoint presentation on the survey is available at [www.mass.gov/pca](http://www.mass.gov/pca). When you get to the site, scroll down to and click on *Reports & Publications*. The full text of the report will be posted in the near future.

## Temporary & Back-up PCAs

Almost every consumer has encountered a time when a PCA was unable to attend work. Many times, this happens with little or no advance warning. When you need a back-up PCA, you should know that

- the Council PCA referral directory at [www.mass.gov/findpca](http://www.mass.gov/findpca) asks all PCA applicants whether they are available for emergency or back-up work. You can search the directory for persons who answered "yes" to this question; and
- consumers needing a PCA in an emergency may be eligible to get a home health aide as a replacement. Contact a skills trainer at your PCM agency for details.

## Contract Benefit Funds Paid to PCAs

The labor contract that the Council signed in 2008 with the union representing PCAs, 1199SEIU United Health Care Workers East, includes a provision for three years of funding for a paid time-off benefit. The provision included \$500,000 for 2008, \$750,000 for 2009, and \$1,000,000 for 2010. Shortly after the start of negotiations on how to use this money, it became clear the amounts available were not sufficient to support a continuing paid time-off benefit for a significant number of the approximately 25,000 PCAs currently in the MassHealth system.

For this reason, the Council and the union agreed to lump-sum payments, recognizing length and continuity of service, made to all PCAs who had worked a minimum of 1,500 total hours and who also averaged at least 25 hours per week for June, July, and August 2009. Under this formula, \$1.25 million was distributed to more than 5,000 eligible PCAs in December 2009. The agreement provides that the same formula, applied to 2010, will be used to distribute the \$1 million allocated for this year.



*Paul Spooner (right) receives his award from Courtland Townes III (left), Interim Deputy Director for the Boston Center for Independent Living*

## **Council Member Paul Spooner Honored**

Paul Spooner, vice-chair of the PCA Quality Home Care Workforce Council and a long-time advocate in the disability-rights movement, was one of three recipients of the Marie Feltin award presented by the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL). The award was named in honor of the late Dr. Marie Feltin, founder of the Boston Community Medical Group and a leader in working with patients who have disabilities and chronic illnesses. Paul, who was cited for his work as a leader and warrior in the independent living movement, received the award in March at a dinner held in Boston.



## ***Employer Alert!***

As a consumer, you are the employer of record for your PCA. Besides providing other benefits and carrying various responsibilities, being an employer means

- federal labor laws require you as the employer to pay your PCA within six days of the end of the pay period; and
- you must submit your PCA timesheets to the fiscal intermediary (FI) in accordance with the schedule provided by the FI.

To ensure that your PCAs are paid on time, please submit your timesheets to the FI at the end of each pay period.

Filing time sheets on time = your PCA getting paid on time.

Late time sheets = late paychecks.

### *Contribute to the Bridge*

The Bridge is a newsletter for MassHealth members who use PCA services. We are very interested in your letters, articles, and thoughts about the PCA program and improving the PCA workforce. Please send your ideas to [pcacouncil@state.ma.us](mailto:pcacouncil@state.ma.us). We can't promise to print everything we receive, but all submissions will receive our serious attention. For consumers without e-mail, please call 617-210-5715 or forward your ideas to the address on the back of this edition of The Bridge.

## How to Contact Us

### PCA Council

600 Washington Street, Room 5189

Boston, MA 02111

Telephone: 617-210-5715

Web site: [www.mass.gov/pca](http://www.mass.gov/pca)

E-mail: [pcacouncil@state.ma.us](mailto:pcacouncil@state.ma.us)

**Staff:** Jack Boesen,  
*Director*

Michelle Byrd,  
*Executive Assistant*

**Please share this publication with your PCA.**