

# STATE AGENCY VOCATIONAL SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Prepared by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee  
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A number of Massachusetts state agencies provide vocational education and training. This flyer discusses services offered by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Youth Services.

## **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission**

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) operates programs for persons with disabilities (except visual impairments).<sup>1</sup> MRC's mandate is to assist eligible individuals with disabilities, regardless of age, nature of disability or functional ability, to maximize quality of life and self-sufficiency in the community. To do so, MRC works to help people live and work independently.

### *Vocational Rehabilitation Program*

One of MRC's programs is the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program. The VR Program assists people with a disability who would like to find or return to work. If an individual is found eligible for MRC's VR services, a vocational rehabilitation counselor will work with the person to define a vocational goal and develop an employment plan. This plan is called an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and includes the vocational goal and the services needed to achieve that goal.

Depending on what the individual requires, services may include counseling, vocational guidance, work evaluation, planning, skills training at a college or community rehabilitation program, adaptive equipment, benefits counseling and support services while completing training or placement services.

Placement services may include job-seeking skills training, work tryouts and on-the-job services, such as job coaching and arranging for reasonable accommodations, employer referrals, occupational tools and occupational clothing.

MRC also offers post-employment services to help an individual keep a job once employed. However, MRC services tend to be time-limited and typically do not include long-term support once employed.<sup>2</sup> An exception is the On-Going Support program, discussed below.

A complete list of services is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/ses/>.

More information about MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/>

MRC also publishes a Consumer Handbook for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services, <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/consumer-handbook.html>

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program Area Offices can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/vr-area-offices/>. You can reach MRC at 1-800-245-6543.

For more information about Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), see:

- U. Mass. Medical School, Transitions RTC, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): A Young Adult's Guide (2012), <http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1070&context=pib>
- Institute for Community Inclusion, Getting the Most from the Public Vocational Rehabilitation System (2004), [http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article\\_id=129](http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=129)

### ***Vocational Rehabilitation Program for Transition Age Youths***

The VR program offers vocational rehabilitation services to transition age youths as well as to adults.<sup>3</sup> More information is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/training-education/edu-guidance/vr-services.html>. MRC recommends that students be referred to the VR program while in their last two years of high school, preferably at the beginning of their junior year or (for special education students) two years before turning age 22.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to accessing VR services through referrals to local MRC Area Offices, within the VR division there is also the Statewide Employment Services Department (SES). SES has been designated to administer the federally funded Supported Employment Program (SEP). This program was created in 1986 to serve individuals with the most severe disabilities who, at that time, were not served or were underserved through traditional Vocational Rehabilitation.

SES serves individuals in need of continued supports to maintain employment. Although, individuals in need of supported employment may be served by all MRC Area Offices, SES *only* serves individuals with the most severe disabilities. SES has Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (QVRC) who are specialized in serving this population. SES is a statewide program serving individuals throughout Massachusetts.

### ***Statewide Employment Services' On-Going Support Program***

Through SES, MRC also offers additional service for individuals with severe disabilities who have been successfully placed in competitive integrated employment, but need long term supports in order to retain employment. This program is called the On-Going Support Program. This program SES serves individuals across the state.

SES provides On-Going Support services to consumers who are not eligible to receive comparable services with any other state agency. SES individually determines the type(s) and frequency of support services needed amount to maintain competitive employment after their VR case is closed.

Consumers, parents, advocates, vocational services providers and MRC area offices all may refer individuals to the program. Individuals also may contact the program directly.

SES is located at 600 Washington Street, Boston, (617) 204-3854. More information is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/ses/>.

### ***Transition to Adulthood Program***

In addition, through its Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP), the MRC T22 Independent Living Program contracts with the Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in Massachusetts to provide early intervention to students with disabilities, regardless of the type of disability. Students receiving TAP services attend public, private, and residential schools throughout Massachusetts. Experienced skills trainers, who themselves have a disability, provide advocacy, skills training, and peer counseling to young people with disabilities in their school setting.<sup>5</sup>

Students learn skills and self-confidence to better prepare them for independence. Exposure to adult peer role models, as well as skills training, helps students learn how to take on the responsibilities of living independently in the community of their choice. The ILC staff coordinates with supported living staff at the time of transition to the community and on an ongoing basis, as needed.<sup>6</sup>

Transition age youths are eligible for TAP if they are:

- between the ages of 14-22;
- enrolled in special education (regardless of the type of disability); and
- seeking to learn independent living and self-advocacy skills.<sup>7</sup>

One can apply to TAP by phone.<sup>8</sup> To do so, contact the T22 Program Coordinator at (617) 204-3618 (voice) or (617) 204-3815 (TTY) who will make a referral to the appropriate Independent Living Center.

### ***Independent Living Centers***

MRC also supports 11 Mass. Statewide Independent Living Centers (ILCs) across the state. The centers assist people with disabilities access vocational education and training and employment. More information is available at <http://www.masilc.org/membership/cils>. Some ILCs, like Boston Center for Independent Living, have youth programs -- <http://bostoncil.org/youth/index.htm>.

### **Department of Mental Health**

Executive Office of Health and Human Service agencies, including the Department of Mental Health (DMH), assist clients in seeking employment opportunities in the competitive market.<sup>9</sup> This differs from past practice, when clients were directed to sheltered workshop type employment settings.

DMH operates the Community Based Flexible Supports (CBFS) program which provides vocational and employment services.<sup>10</sup> The program is designed to be individually tailored. However, it is less specifically focused on training programs than the Services for Education and Employment (SEE) program which it replaced.

For more information about DMH's CBFS program, see MHLAC's flyer on the CBFS program.

DMH also funds regional programs which offer vocational services. These include:

- 6 Recovery Learning Communities across the state. Learn more at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/behavioral-health/mental-health/recovery-learning-communities.html>
- 32 Recovery and Rehabilitation Centers known as Clubhouses. Learn more at <http://www.massclubs.org/>.

You can reach DMH at 1-800-221-0053.

### **Department of Developmental Services (DDS)**

Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Employment Supports provide supervision, training, and/or transportation that enable individuals to get paid jobs. DDS provides help with career planning and job development as well.

DDS has a guide designed to help families of young adults get started with the school-to-work transition process entitled *School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities*. It is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dmr/employment-support-school-days.pdf>

You can reach DDS at 1-888-367-4435.

### **Department of Children and Families**

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) offers a number of programs to its clients. For more information on any of these programs, as well as contact information for each program, visit <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/adolescent/education.html>.

#### ***Foster Child Tuition Waiver and Fee Assistance Program***

This program provides free undergraduate tuition and fees (at the in-state rate) to foster children at any one of Massachusetts' 29 state and community colleges and universities. Youths eligible for these waivers include:

- a current or former foster child who was placed in DCF custody and remained in custody through age 18 without subsequently being returned home. The youth must have been in custody for at least six months immediately prior to age 18; or

- a youth who had been in DCF custody and whose guardianship was sponsored by DCF through age 18.

Eligible youths may use the voucher until age 25.

### ***Foster Child Grant Program***

The Foster Child Grant Program provides grant monies for youths attending public and private post-secondary school full-time in a degree-granting program. Eligible youths were in DCF custody until age 18 and unable to return home and were not adopted. Eligible youths must also meet other conditions.

The maximum award per academic year is \$6000 for eligible students enrolled in public institutions or private non-profit or private for profit institutions.

### ***DCF Education and Training Voucher Program***

The DCF Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program provides up to \$5000 per academic year for post-secondary educational or vocational training programs, including colleges and trade schools and related costs of attendance (tuition, fees, room and board, books, transportation, day care). Eligible youths are:

- youths who were adopted through DCF after attaining age 16;
- youths who were in DCF custody (any type) until age 18, unable to return home and have not yet reached age 23; or
- youths who were in DCF-sponsored guardianships with kin after attaining age 16.

Youths must be US citizens or noncitizens lawfully admitted for permanent residence (a green card). Youths must have achieved a high school diploma or GED certificate to be eligible for ETV funds. Youths must apply to the program before they turn 21 and may use the ETV Program until their 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

### ***William Warren Scholarship Program***

The William Warren Scholarship Program provides scholarships for educational and vocational programs to any youth under age 25 who was in DCF care/custody for a minimum of one year. Scholarships range from \$250 to \$4000. Both current and former DCF youths are eligible.

## **Department of Youth Services**

The Department of Youth Services (DYS) is in charge of youths found delinquent and committed to DYS to age 18 and, in certain instances, to age 21. After a series of reports indicating DYS youths were being provided inadequate preparation for reentry into society, DYS engaged the Commonwealth Corporation to help strengthen its offerings. The result was an improved course offering for youths in custody and an expanded program called Bridging the

Opportunity Gap (BOG) to assist youths who had returned to the community through pre-employment training and, in some cases, specific vocational training.<sup>11</sup>

More information about BOG is available at  
<http://commcorp.org/initiatives/program.cfm?ID=48>.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> MRC is organized pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6, para. 74-84.

<sup>2</sup> DDS, School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities (2010), <http://www.communityinclusion.org/schooldays/>, at 19.

<sup>3</sup> MRC, Annual Family Support Plan, State Fiscal Year 2008, <http://www.mfofc.org/2008/massrehab2008.pdf>, at 1.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/training-education/edu-guidance/vocational-services.html>.

<sup>5</sup> MRC, Turning 22 Independent Living Program (Apr. 2008), <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/living-supports/turning-22-independent-living-program.html>.

<sup>6</sup> MRC, Turning 22 Independent Living Program (Apr. 2008), <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/living-supports/turning-22-independent-living-program.html>.

<sup>7</sup> MRC, Turning 22 Independent Living Program (Apr. 2008), <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/living-supports/turning-22-independent-living-program.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For details, see MRC, Turning 22 Independent Living Program (Apr. 2008), <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/living-supports/turning-22-independent-living-program.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See MRC, Annual Report 2007, <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/mrc/mrc-ar-2007.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> See DMH, Community Based Flexible Supports, <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dmh/community-based-flexible-supports.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Commonwealth Corporation, Bridging the Opportunity Gap Initiative, <http://www.commcorp.org/areas/program.cfm?ID=173&p=48>.