

1999 Needs Assessment

BACKGROUND:

The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission jurisdiction consists of six counties; Essex, Gloucester, Middlesex, King William, King and Queen, and Mathews Counties. The Middle Peninsula has an estimated population of 85,400, and encompasses 1,304 square miles. The counties are rural and the area's primary industry is agriculture. The Counties are governed by an elected board of supervisors and appointed County Administrators. A Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement creating the Middle Peninsula Disability Services board was drafted utilizing the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, according to the provisions of Section 51.5-47 of the Code of Virginia. The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board appointees began serving May 6, 1993, to identify the local needs, gaps in service, and services for persons with physical and sensory disabilities. The 1999 General Assembly has appropriated funds for the DSB's across the state to hire a part-time staff person. In October, 1999 the MPDSB hired the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission to provide staff support to the MPDSB.

MIDDLE PENINSULA DISABILITY SERVICES BOARD MEMBERS:

Franklin Brizendine (Chairman) Consumer R. Gary Allen Government Sharon Alsop Government Gwendolyn C. Roy Consumer Bill Cook Consumer Douglas Northstein Consumer Leroy McAllister Government Randall Perkins Business Betty Hudgins Consumer Frank Pleva Government Lenora Weber Business Skitch Colaw Consumer Rodney Hathaway, Staff Support

PURPOSE:

Under the "Duties of DSBs", Code of Virginia, Chapter 10, 51.5-48 the Board is required to Develop and make available for public comment a report with a six-year projection of local service needs and priorities for persons with physical and sensory disabilities in accordance with state guidelines. The report and updates to the report shall be submitted to the Disability Services Council. The first report was to be submitted by June 1, 1993. The reports are reviewed by the Council and distributed to the appropriate state agencies to be incorporated into the agencies' programmatic and fiscal planning for services to persons with physical and sensory disabilities. The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board will use this needs assessment:

- to inform state agencies of the needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities for their programmatic and fiscal planning;
- to enhance awareness of the service needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities at the state and local level;
- as a framework for identifying program coordination and innovative programs which can potentially be supported by rehabilitative incentive funds;
- to facilitate communication among the board regarding services and best practices in service delivery; and
- to facilitate communication among consumers and public and

private entities regarding development of the consumer centered service system and continuum of options envisioned in the Disability Commission Report.

DATA COLLECTION:

The Middle Peninsula DSB made telephone contacts with multiple local service providers, and state agencies. DSB members were also able to offer valuable information regarding the needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities. Other sources that were used for this needs assessment were: · Disability Commission's Town Meeting Rappahannock Community College- Glens Campus March 29, 1999 · Current Service Needs of Individuals with Physical and Sensory Disabilities Survey · Statewide survey of future service needs of students with disabilities exiting public schools · Statewide survey of consumer satisfaction with services and supports for individuals with physical and sensory disabilities · Disability Services Board (DSB) Needs Assessment Survey of Individuals with Physical and Sensory Disabilities.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

The data that was obtain for the needs assessment identified four primary issues as most crucial to the needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities in the Middle Peninsula region: Accessibility, Transportation, Housing, and Information and referral. Below are the findings of the Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board's 1999 Needs Assessment.

Accessibility: Findings from the Disability Commission's Town Meeting held on March 29, 1999 indicates that enforcement of ADA regulations, and more consultation with the private sector to comply with ADA regulations is a very significant need. Many public buildings in the six county area are old, historical structures. The cost of providing physical accessibility to these structures is very expensive. This is a very small piece of the accessibility problem echoed in all six counties. Shopping, employment, and recreational facilities must also conform to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The DSB has identified some specific barriers and is in the process of making their findings known to local officials and businessmen. The short-term goal is to provide, at the least, ramps and handrails for entrance to persons with mobility impairments and "first floor" accessibility to needed services. Accomplishing this will go a long way toward easing the accessibility problem in the community. Some buildings that are considered at least basically accessible through the door will not accommodate electric wheelchairs, and this feedback needs to be provided to appropriate sources. Although some of the short term goals can be accomplished relatively inexpensively, and perhaps with some volunteer assistance from service groups, the long-range, major construction requirements for elevators, widening restroom doors, providing hand grips and direction in braille will require considerable outlay of funds. An on-going evaluation of public buildings in the six-county area is required. The DSB anticipates, however, that assistance with funding the long-range accessibility of public buildings will be needed. The DSB intends to monitor private businesses and assist them to become ADA compliant. The DSB has created a "Middle Peninsula Accessibility Issues handbook",

that includes construction drawings for accessibility ramps, barrier free residential baths, and ADA compliant restrooms. The handbook also includes an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the listing of accessibility issues resources. This handbook is available to the public and private sector.

Transportation: Accessible and affordable transportation is greatly needed. The SJR 170-work group that consisted of DSB members, staff from the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and representatives from advocacy organizations developed a written survey to obtain input from consumers concerning their current unmet needs. The results of this survey indicated that the greatest transportation need in this region is more vehicles and longer hours of specialized "curb service". Findings from the Disability Commission's Town meeting held on March 29, 1999 indicates that accessible transportation across county lines and jurisdictions are needed. Also Rate increases for ambulatory and wheelchair transportation through the Department of medical Assistance Services (DMAS) are needed so that qualified professional drivers can be recruited and retained. There is no public transportation in the Middle Peninsula six-county area. This is a particularly urgent problem for persons who have serious loss of vision or other severe physical impairments that cannot be overcome by purchasing a properly outfitted privately owned vehicle. Each county provides emergency vehicles and there are three private transportation services with wheelchair capability, located in Williamsburg, Gloucester, and a regional service that serves areas in the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck regions. These services are expensive and limit transportation distances. Those persons who are able to operate a vehicle report that outfitting specialized private vehicles is expensive. Low cost loans and financial assistance is needed. The DSB recognizes that having affordable transportation allows persons with disabilities to live independently and/or conduct other life functions such as shopping for food and clothing, and attending cultural and recreational activities. The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board recommends that it use some of its resources to strengthen the current regional transportation services that are currently being provided by Bay Transit, Inc.

Housing: Findings from the Disability Commission's town meeting held on March 29, 1999 at the Rappahannock Community College-Glenns Campus indicates that there is a very significant need for affordable accessible housing that meets quality standards. In a Disability Services Board Needs Assessment Survey that was implemented by Virginia Commonwealth University, the respondents were asked to describe the barriers that they face which prevent them from living more independently. In the eastern region of the state, which includes the Middle Peninsula, 31% responded that there is a lack of houses, apartments, and rooms available that are handicap accessible. There were 23% that responded that waiting list are too long, and 15% responded that accessible living units in this area are too expensive. When asked what services and supports would enable them to overcome these barriers, most consumers responded assistive technology, personal assistant services, and living in a modified home or apartment. Participants also indicated a need for employment and reliable and affordable transportation. The DSB feels that it can play an important role in connecting people with the needed service providers to overcome the barriers that prevent disabled people from finding adequate and accessible housing. A DSB web site and a directory of service providers would be very helpful.

Information and Referral: During preliminary needs assessment contacts, it became apparent that the needs of people with disabilities and other county residents are being served by a multitude of providers including volunteer agencies, service groups, church congregations, and local and state agencies. The presence of "grass root" organizations to meet the needs that cannot be addressed by local/state government agencies prevail in this rural area. Unexpected needs are being met by agencies whose titles do not anticipate the service. For example- a Food Bank provides funds to purchase prescription drugs. Also, agencies far removed from the geographical area may be excellent sources for providing needed assistance. Individuals with disabilities report frustration when initially attempting to match their need(s) with service providers. A window of opportunity is lost as time goes by and the needed resource is not found. The DSB envisions an Information and Referral Service as a living process, changing as new providers come into being and others die out. Consumer feedback to the I & R service, plus identification of inquiries for which no resource is available are both excellent methods of continuing needs assessment, and provide a secondary support for this activity. The MPDSB also feels that a large number of residents in the six county jurisdiction are not familiar with the DSB and the services they offer. The DSB envisions that it will implement a number of other activities that will make residents more aware of the DSB and other service providers. Those activities may include the creation of a MPDSB Web Site, weekly news articles, an updated directory of area resources for persons with physical and sensory disabilities, and informative commercials on the area's local cable network.

CONCLUSION:

The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board continues to assess the growing needs of persons with disabilities, and to stress public awareness of those needs and the importance of meeting ADA requirements. The DSB is also collaborating with governmental, community, local and state agencies and other DSB's to find solutions, and educate the public concerning the needs of persons with disabilities.