

# 2006 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 86,900, 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 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/Business
R. Gary Allen	Government
Ron Hachey	Government
Douglas Northstein	Consumer
Betty Hudgins	Consumer/Business
Frank Pleva	Government
"Skitch" Colaw	Consumer
Georgette Hurley	Government
Reverend Keith Parham	Consumer
Crystal Smith	Consumer Relative
Sherry Ashe	Government
Jack Miller	Consumer/Government

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## **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 and email contacts with local service providers, local government administrators, and state agency representatives. 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 included:

- A statewide survey of future service needs of students with disabilities exiting public schools;
- A statewide survey of consumer satisfaction with services and supports for individuals with physical and sensory disabilities;
- The Virginia Disability Survey of 1999;
- The Disability Services Board (DSB) Needs Assessment Survey distributed to DSB members, disability service providers, and local government administrators; and
- U.S. Census Bureau statistics from the 2000 census.
- A poll conducted and feedback from a MPDSB Needs Assessment Forum

## **SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

Data from the 2000 census and Virginia Disability Survey of 1999 reveal that the number of Virginians with a work/housework disability has increased since 1990. Although the rate of change on the Middle Peninsula is unknown, the needs of the disabled community have remained relatively consistent with the needs identified in most rural areas and those historically found in the region. The data obtained for the updated needs assessment identified four primary issues as most crucial to the needs of persons with physical and sensory disabilities in the Middle Peninsula region: Transportation, Accessible Housing, Accessibility, Personal Assistance and Information and Referral. Below are the findings of the Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board's 2006 Needs Assessment.

### **Transportation:**

According to survey and forum polling results, accessible and affordable transportation for disabled individuals remains the most significant need on the Middle Peninsula. The Virginia Disability Survey of 1999 identified transportation as a significant impediment for disabled persons seeking additional or improved employment, including disabled individuals currently employed 35 or more hours per week. 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. Although each of the localities provides emergency vehicles to people with disabilities, these services are, in general, expensive and not equipped to meet the day-to-day transportation needs of disabled people living on the Middle Peninsula.

The largest provider of transportation services in the region, Bay Transit, Inc., offers transportation and para-transit style services to residents of each locality in the region. The Bay Transit system provides curbside services to anyone in the area for one dollar each way within each county. Although most Bay Transit vehicles are equipped with wheelchair lifts, Bay Transit has indicated that additional vehicles and the construction of bus shelters would reduce the number of individuals whose requested pick up times could not be accommodated and enhance service delivery. While the current system allows for travel within each county, cross jurisdictional travel is limited and bus transfers between counties are required. Recently, Bay Transit has decided to expand its services to include transportation from the Middle Peninsula to surrounding areas, such as the Richmond Metropolitan Area. There, the transportation system connects with Richmond transportation hubs, increasing the ability of disabled individuals to access additional services. The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board intends to use its resources to strengthen the current regional transportation system operated by Bay Transit and address these gaps in service.

Disabled individuals able to operate a privately owned 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 conduct other life functions such as finding employment, shopping for food and clothing, and participating in cultural and recreational activities.

### **Housing:**

Findings from the Needs Assessment Survey indicate that there is a significant need for affordable and accessible housing that meets quality standards. Disabled people require homes with wheelchair ramps, accessible bathrooms, wide doorways, and other modifications that are often expensive. Local nonprofits groups such as Gloucester Housing Partnership, Hands Across Mathews and Hands Across Middlesex will continue to make these and other improvements to the homes of disabled and elderly people in the community to assist them in becoming more mobile and independent.

Several providers identified a lack of low-rent housing or special housing such as group homes for the elderly and individuals with mobility impairments. Others indicated that the region suffers from a lack of suppliers, contractors, and funds to make much needed modifications to private residences.

The DSB feels that it help disabled individuals overcome barriers that prevent them from finding adequate and accessible housing by better coordination with local housing providers. The DSB will continue assist these local nonprofits in locating and obtaining sources of funding. In addition, the DSB

will maintain a website that contains a directory of service providers to help disabled individuals locate sources of housing assistance.

### **Accessibility:**

Survey results indicate that although accessibility to public and private buildings has improved, better enforcement of ADA regulations and increased private sector compliance with ADA regulations remains a significant need in the region. Many public buildings in the six-county area are old, historical structures. The cost of providing physical accessibility to these structures is expensive. Shopping, employment, and recreational facilities must also conform to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The short-term goal is to provide ramps and handrails 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. Additionally, some buildings with doorways that are considered accessible 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, and 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 in becoming 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 a listing of accessibility-related resources. This handbook is available to the public.

### **Information and Referral:**

The needs of people with disabilities on the Middle Peninsula are being served by a variety of providers including volunteer agencies, service groups, church congregations, and local and state agencies. A number of “grassroots” organizations address needs that cannot be met by local or state government agencies. Also, agencies located outside the region may be able to provide assistance. Nevertheless, individuals with disabilities report frustration when initially attempting to match their needs with service providers. A window of opportunity is lost as time goes by and the needed resource is not found.

Surveys of disability service providers yielded some reasons for present deficiencies in information exchange and dissemination. In many cases, providers have caseloads that are too large and inadequate funding that limits

the number of personnel available to handle cases. When case managers are forced to scramble for funding and resources, less time is available to manage resources efficiently. In addition, more communication and coordination between service providers is needed to match applicants to available programs. Funding also remains an impediment to providing adequate information and referral resources.

The DSB envisions an information and referral service as a living process, changing as new providers come into being and others die out. Consumer feed back to the information and referral service as well as 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 feels that the recent addition of a Center for Independent Living (CIL) branch in Hartfield will further enhance the development of a communication network in the region. MPDSB staff will assist the CIL as it establishes in networking and communicating with many of the local services providers to better facilitate the information and referral needs of disabled individuals. The MPDSB also feels that a large number of residents in the six-county jurisdiction are not familiar with the DSB and the services and opportunities they provide. The DSB has and will continue to implement a number of activities to enhance awareness of the DSB and service providers on the Middle Peninsula. These activities include the maintenance of the MPDSB website with an updated directory of area disability-related resources.

**Other:**

The individuals and organizations identified several other needs in the region. Personal Assistance, Medical/Therapeutic Services and Recreation were all identified as other services that are currently underserved in the Middle Peninsula region with regard to the disabled population. Help with daily living activities like cooking or household management appeared on both the Needs Assessment Survey and the Needs Assessment Forum poll. Furthermore, the rising cost of health care has severely impacted disabled people such that even people with Medicare or health insurance have difficulty affording basic medical services. Funding remains a significant obstacle to improving access to these services, and the DSB and disability service providers will encounter difficulties offering these programs and services in the absence of a major state or federal commitment of financial resources.

**CONCLUSION:**

Addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities living in the region remains a considerable challenge. Although numerous organizations and providers offer services to disabled people on the Middle Peninsula, localities in the region possesses fewer resources that many of the larger urban and suburban counties, cities, and towns in Virginia. However, the barriers to

overcoming many of the needs described in this document are similar to those experienced elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Reductions in state funding for programs that assist people with disabilities will likely have a detrimental impact on the provision of transportation, housing, information and referral, and other services. Nevertheless, the Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board will continue to fulfill several roles for disabled area residents. First, the MPDSB website will serve as a primary point of contact for individuals seeking general information on programs and services available in the region to assist people with disabilities. Second, the MPDSB intends to use its resources to provide financial assistance to projects and programs that seek to better the lives of disabled people in the six-county area through the Assistance Grants Program. Third, the MPDSB will continue to conduct quarterly meetings the purpose of which is to facilitate communication and interaction among government officials and administrators, consumers of disability services, and disability service providers. Finally, the MPDSB will continue to assess the needs of persons with disabilities in the region and make its findings available to the public by revising the Needs Assessment document every three years and posting it on the MPDSB website. The Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board intends to communicate with government and community leaders, local and state agencies, and other DSB's to find solutions to and educate the public about the needs of persons with disabilities.