

# 2009 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
Frank Pleva	Government
Sherrin Alsop	Government
Ray Doggett	Consumer Relative
David Rowe	Consumer Relative
David Whitlow	Government
Vacant	Consumer
Georgette Hurley	Government
Doreen Banks	Consumer
David Hansen	Consumer/Business
Sherry Ashe	Government
Robert Crump	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 Needs Assessment survey conveyed to DSB members and local disability service providers to distribute to consumers, which included questions on consumers satisfaction with current services and reasons for not utilizing other services

- The Virginia Disability Survey of 1999;
- U.S. Census Bureau statistics from the 2000 census;
- A public MPDSB Needs Assessment Forum
- Input from a meeting of local disability service providers

### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY FINDINGS:**

The Middle Peninsula Needs Assessment survey, which was distributed to disability services providers and MPDSB members, was designed to capture information on the unmet or underserved needs of the physical and/or sensory disabled population of the Middle Peninsula. In addition to identifying the three highest priority Core Need Areas, the survey requested information on the consumer's satisfaction with services currently being utilized (satisfactory or unsatisfactory). The survey also requested information on reasons for other services not being utilized (not available, too expensive or other).

### **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.

During the Needs Assessment data collection for 2009, however, approximately 25% were received regarding the needs of children in the Middle Peninsula. After discussion by the MPDSB, it was decided that the final 2009 Middle Peninsula Needs Assessment would identify and address the needs of this population separately from the responses from the adult population. The data obtained for the updated Needs Assessment identified one primary and three secondary issues as most crucial to the needs of children with physical and sensory disabilities in the Middle Peninsula region: Primary: Education; Secondary: Assistive Technology, Case Management and Employment Services.

The data obtained for the updated Needs Assessment identified two primary and three secondary issues as most crucial to the needs of adults with physical and sensory disabilities in the Middle Peninsula region: Primary: Accessible Housing and Transportation; Secondary: Emergency Preparedness, Independent Living Services, and Family Support Services. Below are the findings of the Middle Peninsula Disability Services Board's 2009 Needs Assessment.

## **Middle Peninsula Needs Assessment Findings for Adults**

### **PRIMARY NEEDS**

#### **Accessible 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 overall unavailability and cost of accessible housing is supported by the Needs Assessment Survey findings. The DSB feels that it may assist disabled individuals in overcoming barriers that prevent them from finding adequate and accessible housing by better coordination with local housing providers. The DSB will continue aid 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.

#### **Transportation:**

According to Survey results, accessible and affordable transportation for disabled individuals is one of the most significant needs 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.

## **SECONDARY NEEDS**

### **Emergency Preparedness:**

Emergency Preparedness is a community's emergency services ability to handle, plan for, and provide education/training for those with physical/sensory disabilities before, during and after an emergency or natural disaster (hurricane, ice/snow storm, tornado, flood, etc). Findings from the Needs Assessment Survey indicate that there is a perception that these services are currently unavailable and that there is a high cost associated with accessing these services.

The DSB will continue to provide input to the Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency Coordinator with the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission to ensure that the physical and sensory disabled population is adequately considered in any regional emergency planning efforts.

### **Independent Living Services and Family Support Services (Formerly Information and Referral)**

Independent living services include information & referral, independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy, community education, and a variety of other services designed to assist persons with disabilities to lead independent lifestyles and access their communities. Family support services

are a flexible and varied network of solutions and information useful for maintaining a family when one of its members has a disability.

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 best 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 feedback 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. To support this effort, the DSB anticipates providing forums for disability service providers to communicate and coordinate. Additionally, DSB staff will continue to work with the “No Wrong Doors” program, which aims to streamline and facilitate the information and referral process.

The MPDSB 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 Findings:**

While not among the highest ranked priorities, there were two other Core Need Areas individuals and organizations overwhelmingly identified as unavailable or too expensive. These included Recreation and Personal Assistance. Recreation is defined in the survey as the opportunity for a disabled individual to participate in activities in their community to improve their general

quality of life through social and athletic experiences. These are essentially quality of life services. The MPDSB recognizes the value of recreation to the physical and sensory disabled population. It has provided past local funding to organizations such as the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority and Gloucester County Parks, Recreation and Tourism to help fulfill these needs.

Personal Assistance Services are those services which make it possible for individuals with severe physical functional limitations to more fully participate in all aspects of daily living and to access other services and opportunities. Examples include help with daily living such as bathing, communicating, cooking, dressing, eating, housekeeping, and transportation. The DSB will continue to encourage and promote programs, such as Bay Aging's SOS+ program to help provide these services.

## **Middle Peninsula Needs Assessment Findings for Children**

### **PRIMARY NEEDS**

#### **Education:**

All children with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education. Services may include special education, speech and language services, occupational and physical therapy, transportation, provision of assistive technology, and transition services. Survey respondents recognized that a quality education is the highest priority for disabled children in the Middle Peninsula. Although many reported satisfaction with the current education services, approximately one-fourth of those responding for children indicated that they were unsatisfied.

The DSB will work with local governments and school boards to encourage specialized opportunities to meet the educational needs of the physical and sensory disabled youth population. The Board will also continue to partner with organizations like the Brain Injury Association of Virginia to provide outreach and awareness of disabilities to other children.

### **SECONDARY NEEDS**

#### **Assistive Technology:**

Assistive Technology is any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capacities of individuals with disabilities. Some key areas for considering assistive technology include: augmentative communication, mobility/seating, leisure and recreation, computers, and job site modifications.

Survey respondents indicated that Assistive Technology is a significant need among disabled youths. However, the Survey also indicates that there is a perception that the costs of Assistive Technology are too expensive. The DSB wants to continue to educate individuals in the community about services, such as the Virginia Assistive Technology System, that may aid them in meeting their need. The mission of the Virginia Assistive Technology System is to ensure that those who need assistive technology get the appropriate and affordable piece of equipment or device. This system also offers funding options, equipment recycling, donation services and exchanges.

#### **Case Management:**

Case Management is a dynamic collaborative process which utilizes and builds on the strengths and resources of consumers to assist them in identifying their needs, accessing and coordinating services, and achieving their goals. It

includes major collaborative components of case advocacy, assessment, planning, facilitation and monitoring.

While Case Management was identified amongst the Secondary Needs, it is important to note that over 80% of respondents reported that they are satisfied with the Case Management services they are receiving. The DSB recognizes this important piece of the disability services puzzle. Having a case manager helps a disabled individual successfully navigate the services that are available that best meet his or her needs.

### **Employment Service:**

Employment Services encompasses an array of prevocational and vocational preparation activities, new technologies which allow individuals with severe disabilities to compete in the work place, and work site adaptations. Also included in this category of services are job development, placement, supported and sheltered employment and employer support services to promote hiring and adjustment of persons with disabilities.

Survey results indicate that respondents recognize the importance of preparation for the transition from the academic environment to the work environment. The DSB is aware of the fact that without adequate Employment Services for physical and sensory disabled individuals, there is a higher likelihood for members of this population being forced to leave the Middle Peninsula in search of better employment preparation and placement opportunities. The DSB will continue to work with organizations such as the Bay Consortium Workforce Investment Board, Inc. to encourage additional opportunities for employment services for the physical and/or sensory disabled population in the Middle Peninsula.

### **Other Findings:**

While not among the primary or secondary ranked priorities, there was one other Core Need Area individuals and organizations overwhelmingly identified as unavailable for the disabled population in the Middle Peninsula – Recreation. Recreation is defined in the survey as the opportunity for a disabled individual to participate in activities in their community to improve their general quality of life through social and athletic experiences. These are essentially quality of life services. The MPDSB recognizes the value of recreation to the physical and sensory disabled population. The Board has provided past local funding to organizations such as the Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority and Gloucester County Parks, Recreation and Tourism to help fulfill these needs and will continue to encourage the expansion of recreation services for the disabled population of the Middle Peninsula.

## **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 possess fewer resources than 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 housing, transportation, education, 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.