

Family Support

Family-focused, community-based programs designed to support families with mentally or developmentally disabled family members living at home

Summary

Often it is the family of a mentally or developmentally disabled person that ends up being the primary care provider for that individual. This program is designed to relieve the pressures that these families face every day.

Description of Programs

The primary goal of Family Support is to provide a wide array of support options to families of people with disabilities. The goal is to enable families to stay together and to be welcomed, contributing members in their home communities by:

- developing the family's capacity to meet the needs of its members,
- enhancing the capacity of the communities to value and support people with disabilities as well as their families, and
- offering additional supports such as staff, goods and services, and financial resources.

Clients

To qualify for admission to this program, families must have a family member who is mentally or developmentally disabled.

Referrals to this program are typically made by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR). Services are also provided to the families of disabled individuals who do not qualify for DMR funding on a self-pay fee basis.

The program currently serves approximately five hundred families in the Metro Boston area.

Some Typical Forms of Family Support

Upon referral, DMR assigns a financial allotment to each mentally disabled person for



To the surprise of almost everybody, two very strange guests suddenly appeared at last year's Family Support Halloween party.

the purchase of support in the form of goods and services.

Family Support is based upon the belief that the family of a person with disabilities knows better than anyone else its own needs and those of the disabled family member. For this reason, and because of the uniqueness of each family, available "goods and services" are very broadly defined, leaving considerable leeway for the family to identify what will help to maintain the family member in his or her home. Supports in the following areas are typically offered:

1. *Family Leadership and Development:* Staff members support events where families can get information about services in the community.
2. *Family Education and Training:* Family Support routinely circulates training information to families. Program staff members often offer or arrange training opportunities that enhance a family's ability to care for its disabled family member or to advocate for needed supports.
3. *Family Networking and Support Groups:* Family Support facilitates meetings and other events which enable families to network with each other both formally and informally.
4. *Brokerage:* Staff members act as consultants to families regarding the expenditure of money allocated to them by the DMR.
5. *Social Activities and Community Participation:* Family Support provides a community-based social and recreational activities program that has several facets to it. **Social Groups** are organized that accommodate

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six to eight individuals at a time. Transportation is provided for the disabled person via two vans, including door-to-door pick-up and delivery.

One-to-One Services provide companionship for a single person and **Two-to-One Services** provide companionship for two people by a single worker. All of these services are done out in the community, and it is the disabled individuals themselves who plan their activities, such as a zoo trip, a harbor cruise, dinner out at a restaurant, a movie, or a sports event.

Family Support also provides **In-Home Respite Care**, which frees the family caregivers to engage in shopping or social activities by themselves.

6. Stipend/Flexible Financial Assistance: Sometimes families are given cash payments (or vouchers) to buy the services they need. In such cases, a staff member works closely with the members of a family to identify what the money can buy, shows them how the procedures work, and helps them set up a purchasing plan. The plan states how the family will use the money. Some examples of how the cash may be used include specialized home care, child care, modifications to a home, car, or van, utility bill payments, transportation, homemaker services, counseling and therapy, clothes, special food or equipment, and recreational or social activities.

7. Intensive Case Management Training: Family Support will train interested family members to be effective case managers.

8. Intensive Case Management: At the request of DMR, a Family Support staff member may take on the role of doing any necessary assessments and coordination of services for a particular client.

Staffing

The program has eight regular central office staff members. In addition, approximately fifty respite and group leaders (thirty are active at any given time) are employed who work out in the community. All workers are trained and supervised for their particular assignments.

Guiding Principles

1. Service decisions must be based on a family's preferences, choices, and values and not on administrative expediencies.
2. A family must be recognized as the primary resource and decision-maker for the disabled person.
3. A family must have access to a flexible, affordable, individualized array of supports, services, and material items that provide "whatever it takes" to maintain itself as a family.
4. Support services must be culturally and geographically sensitive and able to meet the diverse needs of families.
5. Family supports must be affordable, accessible, well-coordinated, and available to all families who need them, when they need them, and how they need them.

Weekday and Weekend Schedule

Normal office hours are 9:00am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. Social groups are scheduled for outings in the community seven days a week. Each family, according to its needs, chooses the hours for Family Support Services.

Location

Administrative offices are at 66 Canal Street, Boston. The building is close to both the Haymarket and North Station T stops, with direct access to the Orange and Green lines and local busses, and is three blocks from the Commuter Rail at North Station. It is also conveniently located just off Route 93 and the Central Artery for people who wish to drive.

For more information about Family Support, please contact Margaret Glennon, Family Support Program Director at (617) 371-3155



**Bay Cove Human Services
Child & Family Division**
66 Canal Street
Boston, MA 02114