**MassMATCH Advisory Council Meeting**

**March 18, 2015**

**Minutes**

Members in Attendance: Kevin Hatch, Karen Janowski, Jeanette Beal(by phone), Ann Shor, Peter Gefteas(by phone), Les Cory, Lisa Chiango, Randi Sargent

Members Not in Attendance: Julian Banerji, Tory Dixon, Jeff Dougan, Susan Hargrave, Lee Nettles, Jonathan O’Dell, Alexander Pooler, Paul Remy, Susan Ventura, Stacey Selfridge, Tom Mercier, Owen Doonan, Susan LaSante, Melodee Whitman, Linda Landry

Program Staff in Attendance: Kobena Bonney, Kim Shaw, Karen Langley

Representatives from Provider Agencies: Cindy Aiken, Leo Tonevski, Cash McConnell (phone), Josh Arico, Jeff Harrington(phone), Cathy Bly, Flemings Beaubrun

Introduction and Communication Protocol: Karen Janowski was chair for today’s meeting. She began by requesting that everyone use the microphone to speak, starting with who they are.

Discussion and Approval of Minutes: Minutes were approved with no changes.

Program and Committee Updates:

***Annual Report Update:*** Kobena Bonney

The deadline for the annual report was December 31, 2014 which represents the year October 1, 2013-September 30, 2014. This deadline was met and since then a more user/reader friendly version was produced and sent out electronically on March 17, 2015 to all advisory council members and friends. In addition, for the larger audience, a much more compact (12pg) marketing version of this report was produced in accessible format which was also sent out electronically to the group for review.

***Annual Report Update (continued):*** Ann Shor

In regards to the compact version of the annual report titled “Success with Technology”, any and all comments and suggestions for improvement will be accepted through the end of next week.

Regarding the internal reader-friendly annual report, feedback would be appreciated once everyone has had a chance to read through this longer more detailed version.

Upon initial review, it should be pointed out that for the AT Loan Program the total number of applications, as well as the total number of approved applications has gone down significantly. We will have further discussion to address what may have contributed to this decrease and what if anything can be done, such as more outreach, to help to bring these numbers back up.

***Annual Report Update -AT Loan Program*:** Leo Tonevski

The main issue with the decrease in approved applications was the bank not approving as many loans as in the past. Sovereign Bank became Santander and a lot of the protocols changed, mainly due to the economy. Also, this year, the AT Loan review committee only guaranteed 11 loans which compared to last year’s 44, reflects quite a difference in overall loans. When the average loan amount is $18000+, that’s over $600,000 in loans that are not being approved. Some of the applications were tough to approve so the review committee cannot be blamed. Other vendors such as RideAway and Mass Mobility had down years’ this year, as well. In addition lower cost devices and not as many modified vehicles loans were approved which accounts for part of the overall value in loan decrease. This year, so far things are looking up.

Q: Karen Langley’s asks whether or not Easter Seals or anyone from the AT Loan Program has had an opportunity to sit down with Santander Bank to discuss the positive historical data and the overall very low default rate of this program.

A: In response, Leo says that there has not been a meeting with the bank in over 3 years. Many of the applications that were received this year were just not that good. This may be due to a misunderstanding about how the program works, as well as, the fact that for many this program is one of last resort. Miscommunications about the program may be part of the problem, for instance many people believe that 99% of the applications are approved, others think that we offer 12 year loans on vehicles.

Q: Kevin Hatch asks if each loan is seen by the committee before it goes to the bank.

A: No, the application is processed through AT Loan program and it is submitted to the bank. If the bank denies the loan, then the committee reviews it.

Q: Kevin asks whether this problem may be a product of the consumer filling out the loan application incorrectly.

A: Some people might fill out the application without assistance of vendors but the loan program does make calls to consumers whose applications are incomplete or incorrect.

Q: Karen Janowski says that this decrease seems to be described as an anomaly. She says that it would be interesting to hear why the applications this year as opposed to other years seem to be so very different.

A: Many applicants this year had high debt levels and/or had incorrect information about the program.

Q: Kobena questions why the AT Loan program staff is not part of the application process right from the start.

A: All applications are submitted to the program at the start and the program submits only the financials to the bank.

Q: Randi asks if there has been a major change in the items that are being acquired through the loan program.

A: For the first 6-7 years about 80% of the loans were for modified vehicles; this past year it was about 69% modified vehicles.

A: Ann adds that this year, a higher proportion of the applicants have had lower incomes which is partly good because at least the program is reaching more groups.

***Annual Report Update- Long Term Device Loan****:*  Ann Shor

There was a drop in the number of devices loaned out but there were less funds available in 2014 for this purpose so this decrease was not due to program operations.

***Annual Report- Device Loan Program Update*:** Ann Shor

There was a good level of activity in this area but what has been an issue pretty much all along has been when it comes to performance measures. This is the number of people who respond to the consumer satisfaction and performance measures after borrowing a device. This is what the federal government uses to measure the success of each of the state programs. They measure how many people are able to make a decision after borrowing; the higher the percentage who are able to make a decision the higher the program rating. The standard is 70 or 75%. This year only 50% of the people responded which makes it hard to get good data. Going forward, the programs need to figure out effective ways of getting this feedback completed.

Ann suggests perhaps requiring people to respond to a survey before they can borrow another device. Peter Gefteas recommends accepting and making testimonials available on the MassMATCH website. Cathy Bly says that when a loan is to be returned a reminder is sent out by ES and at the same time survey questions are asked. Cindy Aiken says that they are working hard to get feedback in many different ways, sometimes in an open-ended type format. Response rates are improving.

***AT ACT Update:*** Kobena Bonney

The federal agency out of which the AT Act is run has changed from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education to the Administration for Community Living (ACL) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The amount of funding remains the same and there are no other significant changes at this time.

***MassMATCH Website Survey Update:*** Kobena Bonney

This survey which has been reviewed by most council members is close to being complete. The plan was to have it published as soon as one final change is made. This tool is about getting feedback on ease of use or “usability” of the MassMATCH website. Once all feedback is received, based on suggestions, changes will be made. The link to the survey will be available on the MassMATCH website, MassMATCH blog and MassMATCH Facebook page.

***MassMATCH State Plan Update***: Kobena Bonney

The official state plan has been submitted. As with the Annual Report, due to the nature of this report, a user-friendly version will be made available. One change compared to previous, is that the Requipment program was added to the plan. Other changes will be detailed in the more user- friendly version that will be sent out some time in near future.

***REquipment Update:*** Randi Sargent

The program continues to be busy and growing. For the first time, Requipment contributed its data to the annual reporting which required getting data in order. To highlight the volume of activity, 132 pieces of durable medical equipment has been reassigned and delivered, totaling almost $279,000 in savings. The goal was 20 items per month and this has been surpassed. New outreach efforts initiated this spring have contributed to an increase in call volume, as well. Enhancements to the behind the scenes database is helping to improve operations. A Community Drop-Off Swap is an idea for an upcoming means of collecting/distributing items. This would involve establishing a specific drop off spot on a specified date for the whole day.

In respect to funding, currently the program receives its funding from MRC, DDS, DEH, Boston Home and the Boston Foundation. Continued funding for the program however is year to year and it is essential to keep the program going. This year the strategy is to approach the legislature with Easter Seals for one lump sum for Reuse and customized AT for people with severe disabilities. With permission, Randi would like to send members and others the Easter Seals legislative alert to be used to send to one’s own legislator to request funding for this program.

***Requipment Update (continued):*** Karen Langley

Since the open house in October, the program has begun to develop an outreach coalition and as part of these efforts has begun to identify people that have been doing reuse locally; Surprisingly, some for a very long time, like a group in Scituate who has been doing this since the 1950’s. An email list has been started with these other groups to try to share information across the programs, to help each other and share resources.

***Requipment and Easter Seals (working together)****:* Cindy Aiken

Easter Seals is running 3rd Annual Capstone Event for girls and women with disabilities mentoring program. They have booked all the accessible rooms at Embassy Suites in Waltham and to support further accommodations, they have borrowed a great deal of accessibility related equipment from Requipment for the weekend event.

***Advisory Council Meetings and Membership:*** Kobena Bonney

* Election will be held next meeting so if anyone is interested in running, email Kobena.
* According to guidelines, terms are for 3 years, running for no more than 2 terms in a row.
* Recruiting ideas needed to gather a diverse population of members.
* Application Process is straightforward: name address, disability(if one) and availability
* Majority of members(or family members) must be people with disabilities
* Recent resignations: Susan Ventura, Linda Sakin and Susan Hargrave (retired).
* Susan Hargrave has agreed to rejoin as a family representative.
* Current structure of the meeting to be discussed: Keep same; Shorten length of meeting; time of day; Remote access options

In response to Jeanette’s question: What is the incentive to become an advisory council board member? An outreach subcommittee has been established to include: Jeanette Beal, Kevin Hatch, Les Cory and Karen Langley.

***Device Demo- site cues by AiSquared***

Marc Zablatsky-Vice President and GM Brad Sauln, Customer Integration Engineer, sitecues mzablatsky@aisquared.com bsauln@aisquared.com 617-875-0248

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***Other Matters and Announcements:*** Cindy Aiken

Easter Seals is sponsoring an Augmentative Communication: AAC Bootcamp coming up April School Vacation Week (Tuesday-Friday 21st-24th) at Ayer-Shirley Middle School.

For Young People: There are open applications posted for this year’s leadership forum at Bridgewater State University, to be held in July.

Eligibility: To be a Delegate students must be in last 2 years of HS. To be a Peer Leader candidate must be older than 21 in college or employed.

This year’s Consumer Conference will be held on June 18, 2015.

Next Advisory Council Meeting will be Wednesday June 17th.