**MassMATCH Advisory Council Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 19, 2014**

**Minutes**

Members in Attendance: Les Cory, Susan LaSante, Kevin Hatch, Alexander Pooler , Linda Sakin, Lisa Chiango, Randi Sargent, Owen Doonan, Paul Remy, Jeff Dougan, Karen Janowski

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

Representatives from Provider Agencies: Cindy Aiken, Cathy Bly, Leo Tonevski, Christine Singer, Cash McConnell

Introduction and Communication Protocol: Karen Janowski was chair for today’s meeting. She began by requesting that everyone use the microphone to speak and to start by using the microphone for introductions.

Discussion and Approval of Minutes: Minutes were approved without discussion.

Program and Committee Updates: Kobena Bonney

***AT Outreach Update -*** This month is one of the busiest outreach months. AT outreach is interesting because you meet so many people and sometimes someone visits our table and they have a question that we don’t have the answer to. Thanks to all of our members who help Kobena to get these answers.

***Technical Assistance (TA) Update -*** Kobena has recently been providing Technical Assistance regarding accessibility testing of software in its development stage to help find issues that may need to be addressed.

***DESE Committee -*** This subcommittee was set up to explore how the Advisory Council can be of the most help to DESE.

The subcommittee is presently learning more about what policies and practices exist regarding AT within DESE, and how the subcommittee can best advise DESE regarding their policy on transitioning with AT.

The subcommittee has received information about the difficulties around transition from one level to the next for student users of AT equipment. It would be beneficial to the student if AT could move with the student through the system.

***Website Committee Update -*** The website Committee has begun discussing how to approach the review and update of the MassMATCH website. This will require input from other AT Act Partners. The committee plans to develop a survey to solicit input from users of the website as well.

There are two approaches being considered. The first option would be to redesign the whole website. The second option is re-organization of information to make it easier to find.

MRC would like to make the website as useful and accessible as possible, but balancing this against the availability of funds. No set amount of funds have been budgeted for the website revisions. Once the desired changes have been identified and cost estimates obtained, MRC will decide which revisions to proceed with. Depending on costs it may be necessary to spread the revisions over more than 1 fiscal year.

Les Cory proposed reaching out and using any possible connections to get volunteers to work on the website. Northeastern University is a possible resource.

***AT School Share Update -*** We have made some changes to allow Tech Access of RI (An AT Act program) to be part of School Share. They work with a number of schools in Massachusetts, and are also interested in making some improvements that MassMATCH could also benefit from.

Cindy Aiken suggests discussing with them how they get funding from the RI Dept. of Education for training because they do quite a bit of training and there is a lot of money being channeled into this program. They have gotten a five year grant so the question is how we can make the most of this new connection given their resources.

Karen Langley asks, in addition to Tech Access, how are we getting other school systems signed up in MA.

Kobena described a recent AT School Share meeting in Concord with six representatives from different ATSS member institutions that all have their inventories uploaded. The meeting was to discuss the status and possible next developments in AT School. MassMATCH’s focus right now is to help current members make the best use of the system and get their input on next-stage improvements.

Kobena will be attending an event hosted by the Boston Public Schools (BPS) next week. BPS is currently not a member of AT School Share. They have shared that one of their biggest issues is tracking student information. Kobena has heard this from other schools, and recommends this be considered in next step developments.

MassMATCH also has a meeting scheduled for April 4th in Lexington with the AT Professionals Network (MATPN). This will be a great opportunity to get more of the feedback on ATSS.

Karen Janowski says that a common problem throughout the system is often the absence of an AT professional in the districts.

***Update: Accessible Prescriptions -*** Kobena announced that there will be a presentation on the above topic on Monday, April 7th, 2014 at the Non-Profit Center, at 89 South Street, Boston. Blind, low vision, elderly, disability advocates and pharmacists are encouraged to attend.

***Update: AT in the Community -*** Paul Remy, Advisory Council Member and Chair of the Sharon Commission on Disabilities discussed the successes in Sharon in raising awareness about disabilities and the great interest on how AT works amongst much of their younger population. Please see link below for his inspirational letter:

[Letter from Paul](file:///C%3A%5CDocuments%20and%20Settings%5Ckbonney%5CLocal%20Settings%5CTemporary%20Internet%20Files%5CContent.Outlook%5C125W20CJ%5CBina.docx)

In addition, in order to follow the students of Sharon’s endeavors to help raise awareness on disabilities, Paul will be starting a blog. The students have expressed an interest in field trips to different agencies to learn more about disability issues and AT.

In line with this mission to educate students on disability related topics, Karen Langley suggests getting a copy of The Great Fight for Disabilities which is a DVD of a curriculum created for the purpose of teaching children about disabilities. It would be great to get this mainstreamed into schools. The precursor to this DVD is Lives Worth Living which is also an excellent resource.

REquipment Update: Randi Sargent

Randi reports that the REquipment pilot program is always looking for donations but a specific need right now is portable ramps. NO BEDS are accepted. One of the biggest challenges right now is distribution of equipment. There is still difficulty in getting equipment to an individual’s home at time of transition.

GOOD NEWS:

* MRC has purchased a van which will help facilitate pick-up and distribution. It is presently being adapted, and should be available in early May.
* The Shapiro Foundation is allowing the program to roll over unused funds until June. MRC has added to the available funds.
* There is a new Facebook page at dmerequipment

Advocates supportive of the program have been reaching out to state Representatives to support funding for the DME Reuse Program in the state budget. Randi said interested people can send letters to ask their legislators to prioritize DME Reuse as an important issue in our community. The advocates are pushing for $500,000 from the State.

Other funding possibilities are Boston Foundation, MRC, and the Dept. of Developmental Services.

Hiring an operations administrator is a goal, since currently Randi is the only person staffing the program, for 20 hours a week. Randi can be reached at: Randi.sargent@dmerequipment.org.

Agency AT Update: Christine Singer, UCP Berkshire

UCP has been involved in DME reuse since 1992. There are 452 reported users of their services.

There are currently 3 radio shows in the western MA area through which UCP channels AT outreach efforts; in Pittsfield, Great Barrington and North Adams; another in Springfield is coming soon. At the end of each show, there is a taped spot about Assistive Technology.

[UCP AT Regional Center Upcoming Forums](file:///C%3A%5CDocuments%20and%20Settings%5Ckbonney%5CLocal%20Settings%5CTemporary%20Internet%20Files%5CContent.Outlook%5C125W20CJ%5CUCP%20Assistive%20Technology%20Regional%20Center.docx): Cash McConnell, Assistant Manager of AT Regional Center

Device Demo, Comfort Duet Hearing Amplifier, Cathy Bly, Easter Seals – Boston ATRC

This is a personal listening device, taking the Pocket Talker a step further. It has a neck loop and adjustable headset. The cost of this device is approximately $160.

Harris Communications is one of the best resources for listening devices.

Update/Discussion of Annual Federal Report: Ann Shor

Fiscal year ’13 was a very good year in MassMATCH. All the federal benchmark goals were met with the exception of Information Technology but only 2-3 devices were loaned out in this category.

At this time of year, we get annual reports from other states which are mostly brief and to the point. Ours is currently 30+ pages, so it might be helpful to take a look at these samples of short versions and in addition to our long version, try to develop a short version of our own, for quick and easy viewing. Alexander suggests using 1 template and changing it based on the audience would probably be most beneficial.

Other Matters and Announcements

Deafblind Awareness Day will be held at the State House on April 3, 2014 9:30-12:30

AAC Conference will be held at Merrimack College on April 26th, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:00 pm.

Minutes prepared by Kobena Bonney and Kim Shaw