MassMATCH Advisory Council

Wednesday, June 18, 2014

Meeting Minutes

Members in Attendance: Lisa Chiango, Tory Dixon, Owen Doonan, Susan Hargrave, Kevin Hatch, Karen Janowski, Susan LaSante, Tom Mercier, Lee Nettles, Diane Nettles, Jonathan O’Dell, Alexander Pooler, Randi Sargent, Melodee Whitman

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

Representatives from Provider Agencies: Cindy Aiken, Josh Arico, Cathy Bly, Kristi-Peak Oliviera, Jeff Harrington, Cash McConnell, Christine Singer, Leo Tonevski

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 School Share Update-*** This is a website/database that members from schools and other educational entities use to keep inventory of assistive technology devices online.

There was a meeting of members from many school districts on April 4th to discuss and brainstorm about experiences thus far from users of the site. The group came up with a list of possible enhancements and these changes are now in the process of review and cost estimates for implementation are being assessed.

One significant enhancement that many agreed upon is a more useful way for staff to keep track of information on the users of the devices. This would be helpful to get a sense of usage patterns and how successful specific devices have been with different individuals.

A partnership has recently been formed between AT School Share of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The additional infusion of resources will be very helpful in implementing suggested enhancements.

***GetATstuff Update-***This is an online database similar to Craigslist but for assistive technology only. This has been a partnership of New England states for 6+ years. Most recently New York has expressed an interest in joining this partnership. It has been agreed that it would be beneficial to have NY join and with this merger, NY will bear the costs incurred to make the necessary changes.

This will increase choices for participants and will be a useful financial resource for upgrades.

Alexander Pooler suggests changing the name to AT Northeast Exchange to accommodate the addition of NY and any other states that may want to join. It is decided that for now the name will stay the same with NY added but, in the future a name change may be in order.

***MassMATCH Website Update***: In hopes of getting some ideas, the Committee has reached out to other state’s AT Act Programs to see if they have put out any surveys for feedback on the websites that they are using. There were no responses so the next step will be to create a survey to get ideas and useful feedback on the overall design of the website.

***\*\*(missed some?) REquipment Update***: Randi Sargent

The REquipment program was 1 of 6 finalists for the Boston Innovation Award. It is becoming quite successful and a high volume network for refurbishing and redistributing used AT equipment. Although no legislative support was received for funding going forward, MRC, DDS and hopefully the Boston Foundation is providing funding for the 2nd year.

REquipment is in the process of hiring a PT office coordinator to work opposite Randi at MRC.

DDS & MRC have hired a Tech II out of the Worcester ATRC, who will be driver of the van, making the deliveries and doing repairs, as needed.

The REquipment program can be found on facebook at: [www.facebook.com/DMErequipment](http://www.facebook.com/DMErequipment)

Additionally, Randi wants all to be aware and to spread the word that she has dozens of Intelikeys keyboards available for anyone who needs them. This is a keyboard that provides great alternative access. The face of the keyboard is variable so it can be customized with overlay options, fully accessible with usb plug-in.

***Review/Discussion of Role of Advisory Council***: Ann Shor

All federal AT Act Programs are required to have an Advisory Council whose main areas of focus should be:

* Provide guidance and advice on how all grant funds are to be used
* Provide access to assistive technology through such programs as the Reuse Program, Long-Term Device Loan Program, GetATstuff, Home Modification Program, AT School Share, AT Regional Centers
* Provide Advice and Input in developing policies and procedures
* Provide Training in use of AT (which AT Regional Centers do)
* Provide Public Awareness and Information and Assistance through outreach visits, phone calls, emails, and distribution of literature
* Provide a Forum to get involved, share ideas and collaborate on addressing significant AT issues of interest

It should be understood that the Advisory Council as a whole, is NOT set-up to provide Advocacy. It is fine to share information or to discuss topics of interest that might be in need of advocacy but as a body, the group’s role should not be to provide such advocacy.

***Update/Discussion of Partnership with DESE:***

This partnership has been developed to improve access and use of AT by students. The most recent areas of focus are: 1) guidance about policy relative to use of AT in use of standardized testing 2) policy around technology that students are allowed to bring home. It is a good idea to start with knowing what policies exist in these areas now.

Currently, there is much confusion in MA about the way AT is written into IEP’s. There is a survey available around this issue but it is only helpful to complete this survey if you have specific knowledge in this area. A sub-committee will form after results of survey have been processed. Such a committee will be useful in getting perspective.

Jonathan O’Dell adds that AT training is critical in the schools. Alexander Pooler agrees that understanding the technology is important but also being able to adapt it to student’s individual needs is crucial. Owen Doonan and Alexander both suggest finding ways, perhaps through video to streamline customized learning. Lisa Chiango adds that in her experience she finds that some people have a problem with an AT device or program and they think that it is broken or not working properly when really it is a lack of training. In her opinion there is just not enough resources in the community for such training and she believes the most effective forum for training is face-to face group trainings. Ann Shor suggests that the Advisory Council group could be very useful and could make a wonderful contribution in collaboration with DESE to help to train professional in the use of AT.

According to Susan Hargrave there are teacher trainings (20 teachers each) being set-up in Eastern and Western MA. Alexander Pooler suggests that agency perspective trainings should be incorporated into these trainings.

Ann suggest that the sub-committee looks at overall training needs in all areas and then try to identify resources. Furthermore, for first meeting it might be a good idea to meet in person to best identify needs and direction.

***Demonstration of NAO Robot:*** Mandy Dwight, Aldebaran Robotics

Company’s Headquarters is in Paris, with an office on Federal Street, Boston

[www.asknao.com](http://www.asknao.com)

Mission: “shape a better path for special education”

Asknao uses Advanced Technology which includes:

* Tactile sensors
* Camera
* Sonar
* Voice recognition

The Asknao Solution consists of:

* Robotics Platform
* 50+ Apps
* Online Interface(which collects progress data)

There is a usb port on back of head; not Bluetooth compatible

The products have a Full Warranty; Exceptions: water, or physically opening the device.

***Agency AT Updates***:

Meeting dates for the rest of this year and next year’s Advisory Council meetings are:

Wed., Sept. 17, 2014

Tues., December 16th, 2014

For 2015, the meetings will all be held on the 3rd Wed of Mar., Jun., Sept., Dec.

Kobena reminds all that it is most helpful that everyone respond yes/no to each meeting, so arrangements such as lunch and seating can be accommodated. It is also most important, to respond early if you will require any special accommodations, such as ASL/CART, as this process often takes about 4 weeks to arrange.

AT Expo

Holyoke Community College

August 6th

Details posted on the MassMATCH website. There are currently 8 exhibitors signed up but hopefully many more to come.

***Other Matters and Announcements:***

Project Starfish- Owen Doonan

[www.pstarfish.org](http://www.pstarfish.org)

This organization is creating employment opportunities through training programs for the blind and vision impaired and veterans with disabilities.

This organization is working toward: “bridging the unemployment gap among the blind”.

Susan LaSante announced a special reuse project in Worcester, where a school (with significant population of children with disabilities) was closing, and the materials, supplies and devices were donated to children in Africa. This announcement is in hopes of a continued effort to send and share school supplies to children in need with disabilities.

[Northeast Passages](http://nepassage.org/)- Alexander Pooler recommended this re-use program, which runs out of UNH, and specializes in recreational equipment rentals at nominal fees. It is advised, however, that any reservations are made a year in advance.

Ann Shor discussed TACLE which stands for Transition Assistance to the Community Living Environment. This organization helps identify types of AT that might be useful to people with varying disabilities.

(\*\* There is likely missing information, here and there because I was not taking notes at times when I was trying to reconnect Jeannette.)