**MassMATCH Advisory Council Meeting**

**September 17, 2014**

**Minutes**

Members in Attendance: Kevin Hatch, Randi Sargent, Owen Doonan, Karen Janowski, Jeannette Beal, Susan LaSante, Melodee Whitman, Susan Hargrave, Tom Mercier, Jonathan O’Dell

Program Staff in Attendance: Kobena Bonney, Kim Shaw

Representatives from Provider Agencies: Cindy Aiken, Leo Tonevski, Cash McConnell, Tammy Walger, Jeff Harrington, Josh Arico

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

Discussion and Approval of Minutes: Minutes were approved with minor attendance change- Jeanette Beal was in attendance at last meeting via phone.

Program and Committee Updates: Kobena Bonney

***GetATstuff Update –*** The official name of the website has changed and is now: The Assistive Technology Exchange in New England and New York. However, the web address remains www.getatstuff.com.

The following improvements have been made to the website:

* If an expired item on the site remains available and it is updated and/or reposted, the original posting date of the item is no longer in view, replaced instead by the date of the update.
* Expired (more than 120 days) listings are now automatically hidden from public view.

Devices that are discouraged on posting to the list are those items that are too personal or too customized, such as hearing aids. Jonathan O’Dell recommends that helpful links on GetATStuff website linking to who does accept devices such as hearing aids would be of great use to the end user. For instance, the Lions Club does accept/distribute hearing aids.

Kobena suggest that at the next meeting of the Website Update/Review Committee, perhaps they can have a conversation about how to add such links.

Jeannette Beal adds that navigation on this site is brilliant and the website is amazing. However, she does suggest that perhaps there should be some discussion and reconsideration of what should and should not be listed. She also adds that given that many end-users of this list have trouble just getting out of bed, navigating many different sites and/or at many different search levels can be just too difficult. That said, it would be great if there were one place to get it all.

Randi Sargent agrees that a one-stop shop to include GetATStuff, REquipment and ATRC loan stuff would be ideal. Some states do have all of these as one and it is much easier for consumers.

Everyone seems in agreement that a single website to serve all of these needs is a good idea and hopefully we can make some progress on this soon.

Jeannette follows up with the problem of funding AT items, when a purchase becomes necessary since most assistive technology is very expensive. She asks for direction on funding resources.

Kobena agrees that the way the system is set-up, unfortunately when you fall in the middle of not being poor enough to be eligible for funding and not rich enough to afford the item on your own, you are in a tough situation. Two possible options are: 1) Long-Term Device Loan Program 2) Possible funding from Title VII.

***MassMATCH Website Committee-*** A few attempts have been made to meet but due to conflicts and unavailability the meetings had to be cancelled. Kobena requests that members try to make this a priority so issues at hand can be addressed once and for all.

***AT School Share Update-*** At the last meeting there was agreement with Rhode Island that Tech Access of Rhode Island will now be included as part of the AT SchoolShare network. RI has applied for funding from their state’s Dept. of Education to help them to enter the partnership.

This means that the existing platform will be modified slightly. One will be offered schools only in MA by default, but there will be an option to expand the search to include Rhode Island.

Estimates for enhancements to the website that were suggested at last meeting are in the works and when approved the changes will be made.

***Easter Seals-Update-*** Cindy Aiken

Kristi Peak-Oliveira is no longer working at the ATRC’s. She will continue to work for Easter Seals but she will be getting back to Augmentative Communication providing direct service in schools as well as providing clinical consultations.

New hire, intern Flemings Beaufrun will take over Kristi’s work at the ATRC in Boston.

***UCP Update-*** Tammy Walger

Tammy Walger is currently overseeing the rearrangement of the AT Dept. She has been with the agency for 11 years so she is very familiar with how it all works. Over this time, she has done much of the ordering, MRCIL contracts, At Loan Center contracts and other workings. It seemed logical that the next step would be to oversee the AT department as Director. There is an ongoing plan to do much more outreach. They have hired a tech assistant for the ATRC and they are always seeking out training opportunities for all employees. Josh Arico, Jeff Harrington and Cash McConnell recently attended the NE AT Conference in Rhode Island and found it very informative.

Randi Sargent asks if the ATRC’s provide any type of evaluations. The short answer is no. Though there are trained and certified ATP’s on-site as well as PT and OT’s on staff, it is not the role of the ATRC’s to do the evaluations. They do demos and loaning and can provide some ideas and guidance but that is the scope of their job.

ES and UCP do contract with MRC for such assessments in another dept. of these organizations.

***Abilities Expo-Follow-up and Feedback***

Kobena stated that though day one of the Abilities Expo seemed slower, reports back from those who ran it show that overall attendance for the 3-day event was higher than last year. He asks for feedback from those who were able to attend.

KJ- “not as much of a school focus”

KH- “would have liked to see more low-tech or aids for everyday use”; “Overall it was very informative and helpful, also easily accessible”

RS- “very hardware-oriented”

JB-“loved demo areas”

Cindy Aiken states that one difficulty is the cost trade-off. Event was free for attendees but very costly for exhibitors which may be the reason why smaller companies could not be there.

Randi Sargent suggests that allowing for innovation-type tracks may be attractive to the smaller companies. For instance, if Easter Seals pays for their usual space but then offer some smaller companies some time at the paid booth to do short presentations or demos for some exposure.

Kobena agrees that we as the audience need to help with ideas to broaden the scope and to somehow reduce the cost for smaller businesses.

Renewal of State Plan for Assistive Technology- Kobena Bonney

Under the AT Act, every state that gets money must file a state plan for AT. The next round is due around Feb 2015. It is time for the program staff to make decisions. Whatever is put in the plan must be reported on. The plan must include: public awareness, outreach, device loan and demo, reuse, and finance options. In terms of specifics, it is up to individual programs in each state to decide how this is done and to provide details to the feds on how requirements will be met.

Volunteers will be needed to work on this plan, to help with review of plan as it is and to help figure out what if any changes will be made going forward. It is hopeful that there will be a plan ready for discussion at the next meeting in December.

So far, the following members have offered to help:

Owen Doonan, Cindy Aiken, Randi Sargent, Jeannette Beal, Karen Janowski, Tammy Walger

Karen Janowski requests that if and when changes are decided upon that these changes be provided to all, prior to the next meeting.

RESNA- is the home of the Catalyst Project. This is the official agency contracted for providing technical assistance to AT Act Programs. It might be useful to review information provided on their website in order to help with providing constructive suggestions and feedback about the state plan.

atap.org is a membership organization of AT Act programs that may also be useful for research.

Follow-up on Partnership with DESE- Karen Janowski

The AT Act of 1998 was re-written in 2004 with added focus to improve access and acquisition to AT.

This is still an issue of concern in the schools.

A subcommittee is needed to work on how we can support the DESE and ensure the access and implementation of AT in schools.

Volunteers so far are:

Karen Janowski, Owen Doonan, Kevin Hatch, Susan LaSante, Cathy Bly, Kristi Peak-Oliveira (maybe), Jeannette Beal

The state of Maine changed their IEP format to include AT requirements section. The state of CT (adapted from FL and CA) lists AT related competencies online. Currently the state of MA has no AT competencies or AT certification requirements in schools related to AT.

AT Device Demonstration- New England Low Vision and Blindness

New England Low Vision and Blindness of Worcester offers low vision and blindness related technology products and trainings. They ship items throughout New England. They will do no- cost demonstrations and bring the store right to your home.

Demo equipment for this meeting:

DaVinci Magnification Device- $2995

* Large full screen magnification
* Screen shot capability

Acrobat mini HD with case - $2595

* Nice portable solution for students
* Battery life 12hrs
* Cannot be hooked up to iPad

Pebble HD- $595

* Handheld magnifier
* Small, portable, convenient
* Camera
* Voice-time & date

For details or more information, see website:

[New England Low Vision and Blindness](http://www.nelowvision.com/)

REquipment Program Update- Randi Sargent

Although there is no legislative support for the upcoming year there is enough funding for the year thanks to MRC, DDS and $25000 from the Boston Foundation. Operations continue to be east of Worcester only due to lack of additional funding. The three partnering agencies with MRC are Boston Home, Mass Hospital Schools and DDS.

Laura Spaulding is our new staff person and her primary role will be customer service support and coordinating pickup and delivery. There is also a new PT tech, Jim Smith out of DDS in Worcester. The official grand opening of the new facility to be announced!

Outreach:

* Upcoming events at Mass Council on Aging, ADRC’s, ASAP North Shore
* New Flyers and Postcards being distributed
* “Give It, Get It” Presentations-Low Cost Options for Assistive Devices in MA

Transfer of AT Act Program- Kobena Bonney

WIOA- new law signed in July by the President which calls for the transfer of the AT Act Program from RSA (Rehabilitation Service Administration of Federal Department of Education) to ACL (Administration of Community Living of the Department of Health and Human Services)

This will eventually have potential for more flexibility in things MassMATCH does. Right now RSA has its own database (MIS) which is handled in house and has stringent administrative policies. Dept. HHS opts usually for outside agencies to manage the data. There is no date yet for when actual change will happen but perhaps by next summer of end of 2015.

Negotiations between RSA and ACL regarding funding is currently going on. The processes to be changed are also part of these negotiations.

AT Agency Updates-

Upcoming:

Deaf Nation Expo- September 27th at the Reggie Lewis Center 9-5

Past:

Assistive Technology Expo-August 6th, Holyoke

78 people in attendance+ 30 exhibitors

 Out of the 30 possible slots made available, only 9 MRC counselors took advantage and were in attendance, which was low.

VOTE for new officers coming soon!