

Policy Flash

The latest news, views & information on policy issues for Virginia's DD Council members
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In Virginia. . .

The Federal Administration on Developmental Disabilities'....

... Monitoring and Technical Assistance Review Systems (MTARS) week- long visit to Virginia's DD Partners has been scheduled for the week of June 21-25, 2004. ADD staff and peer reviewers from other DD Network partner agencies are coordinating agendas for the week's activities with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, The Partnership for People with Disabilities, and the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy (Virginia's DD network agencies). All DD Councils in the U.S. routinely undergo MTARS site visits which involve interviews with agencies' staff and board or council members, review of agencies' by-laws, minutes, and other governing documents, and a systematic review of fiscal and HR practices. An important component of the MTARS visit will be a public hearing, to be scheduled during the week, in which affected constituents are invited to provide input on the work of the DD Network partners in the state.

Governor Warner Announces Grant...

... to help create Virginia's Medicaid Buy-In Program. In a press release issued April 7, Governor Warner announced that Virginia received an additional \$500,000 from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services to further enhance employment options for workers with disabilities by targeting improvements in the state's health care system. This is the third year that Virginia has received a grant award under the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant program which was authorized by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, 1999. The current focus of Virginia's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, which 28 other states also have, is to establish a Medicaid Buy-In program in the Commonwealth in which workers with disabilities will be allowed to pay a premium ("buy in") to the State's Medicaid program as though they were purchasing private health care coverage so that, while they are employed, crucial health care coverage will continue while they are gainfully employed. Funding to provide a Medicaid Buy-In program as a CMS waiver service (limited to 200 recipients in the first year) was included in the Governor's budget and presented to the legislature in December, 2003

The Virginia ADA Coalition...

... is participating in a state-wide effort to survey polling places. Training on voting access issues is also being offered to people with disabilities, family members, and advocates. For more information regarding the work and activities of the Virginia ADA Coalition call 757-461-8007 (v); 757-461-7527 (TTY); or email: kgonzalez@endependence.org. (Source: ADA & IT In Focus, Summer, 2004)



Commonwealth Institute for Child and Family Studies....

... recently presented findings to Virginia's State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) of a study entitled "Assessing Parent/Family Satisfaction With Their Involvement in Their Child's Special Education Programs." The study was designed to develop an assessment tool to obtain input from parents at local, division and state levels and to compare the data across these entities. Study goals also included "increasing parent and student participation in special education process decisions and to provide recommendations for improving special education services." Key special education processes that were studied included: Participation in school meetings and on local advisory committees; Involvement in the eligibility/evaluation of students; Participation in IEP development; and Involvement in Transition Planning for post-secondary environments. Parent education groups were involved in developing the assessment. The survey was sent to 4700 families and of the 714 that returned the survey, 56% were from elementary school parents; 24% were from middle school parents; and 20% were from high school parents. On the positive side the study found, among other results, strong attendance of families at IEP meetings; more than half of the families knew about peers serving on advisory boards and councils related to special education; and general satisfaction with school efforts to involve them in decision-making, including answering their questions. Negative findings, among others, included the finding that the quality and quantity of transition process involvement does not meet high satisfaction levels, and that one third of families did not know what type of diploma their child would receive at graduation. Based on the findings, VDOE will be consulting with other national education entities, including the federal government and other states, to improve their performance on all the study results. Julie Linker, Ph.D. at Virginia Commonwealth University was lead on the study.

In the Nation. . .



"LIFE Accounts" Details Still to be Worked Out....

... but the program would do much to enhance the independence of people with disabilities. "LIFE Accounts" (LIFE standing for "Living with Independence, Freedom and Equality") are aimed at providing individuals with disabilities greater freedom to accumulate personal assets without fear of losing Medicaid or SSI eligibility. Details have yet to be worked out, however, under consideration by CMS is allowing individuals to carry-over as much as 50 percent of their unspent account savings into the next year. Monies carried-over could be used for health treatments not otherwise covered, job training, education, transportation, assistive technology, housing – at the option of the service recipient. "LIFE Accounts" are viewed by agency staff as a way to respond to consumer requests calling for regulatory changes that lessen disincentives for work and increase personal choice in obtaining services that meet their self-determined needs. The program is in a conceptual stage and has a long way to go before taking shape as a legislative proposal. The idea fits initiatives many states are implementing to improve and expand community-based, consumer-directed services. (Source RDP, 3/18/04)



Rural Housing Service Offers Loans and Grants...

... of up to \$7,500 to make dwellings accessible for household members with a disability in rural areas. The Rural Housing Service is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the monies are being made available under the "Rural Housing Repair and Rehabilitation Loans and Grants" program. More information can be found on the internet at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/sfh/brief_repairgrant.htm or by calling 202-720-4323. (Source: ODEP Newsletter, April, 2004)



Marketing Strategy for "Ticket to Work" Deficient....

... in reaching people who could benefit by the program, according to consumers. Many people have expressed disappointment to legislators concerning low consumer participation rates in this SSA program, and low consumer participation rates are killing provider interest in administering the "Ticket to Work" program. Many advocacy groups have criticized poor marketing strategies and lack of good PR on the sluggish response to what was hoped to be the key to employment for many people with disabilities. For the past six months SSA has contracted with a communications firm to develop a marketing strategy for the program. Several ticket holders at a recent legislative hearing testified that they put their "tickets" aside after receiving them in the mail because they did not realize what they were. (Source: RPD, 3/18/04)

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