

Maine Personal Assistance Services Association News

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February 2003

WORK GROUP FORMS THE PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES ASSOCIATION

After a very successful gathering in October 2002, Maine direct care workers decided that they needed an Association to support their profession. The first work meeting was held on Saturday, December 14, 2002 at the University of Southern Maine – Lewiston Auburn College Campus. A heavy rain and busy holiday season did not keep the group from meeting to discuss why the Association is needed in Maine.



The work group, representing over 80 years of combined direct care experience, discussed the goals of the Association. The seven direct care and personal assistance

workers who have taken leadership positions to form the Association discussed its potential, and agreed that improving jobs and working conditions for direct care

workers are top priorities. Other topics on the agenda included discussion of the structure of the association, meeting plans, and the statewide newsletter.

WORK GROUP MEETINGS EVERY MONTH

The Association met for the third time Saturday January 25, 2003. We had a guest speaker, Gail Benvenuta. Gail guided the group through several activities to enhance our communication skills to enable us to build a strong worker association. The group discussed the importance of communicating our needs effectively.

Julie M. reported on the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals and volunteered to investigate possible membership.

The group discussed this newsletter and suggested including regular features, such as interviews with consumers and a worker advice column. All the members were encouraged to participate in spreading information about the Association through our employers newsletters, where appropriate.

The design of the Association brochure was temporarily tabled until the mission statement is finalized. We have a working draft to be finalized at the next meeting February 22nd. Stay tuned.

(Trish Richard, reporting)

What is the value of services?

“I love having the company so that I am not alone. And having a PCA in the home meets my individual needs.”
(Pam H.)

Interview with Norma Rice-Gould, RN. Page 3

Special Report on the Direct Care Worker Shortage in Maine. Page 4.

You are invited to join us.

Are you a CNA, PCA, HHA, or BS? Do you provide direct care to assist a person with a disability? Call for information about this association, MePASA 1-800-268-6612, TTY 228-8440. Project Coordinator, Elise Scala (scala@usm.maine.edu)



News Update: Projects of Interest to Workers of Maine

- ◆ “Better Jobs, Better Care”, a nationwide funding opportunity to improve the recruitment, retention, and quality of direct care workers has been announced by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Groups in Maine are getting organized to prepare a proposal for workers, consumers and employers in Maine. (see report below)
- ◆ Pathways to Retention, a grant funded demonstration project being conducted by Coastal Enterprises, Inc. is examining workplace culture and how to implement peer-mentoring programs.
- ◆ A study of direct care worker wages is being conducted by the Maine Center for Economic Policy. The report “Without Care: Maine’s Direct Care Worker Shortage” was released February 4th. For a copy, please contact MECEP at info@mecep.org or call 622-7381 (see report highlights on page 4).
- ◆ Direct Care Worker Coalition, a group of long term care providers, labor organizations, and advocacy groups is meeting to address wage, benefit and other issues for direct care workers in Maine. (see report below)

Association Members at the Table:

Patricia (Trish) Richard, Direct Care Worker and Me PASA Member Reporting

“BETTER JOBS, BETTER CARE” Grant Application for Maine

The meetings hosted by Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) at the Augusta office of the Dept. of Human Services on Jan. 9th and 31st 2003 were well attended by supporters to improve the quality of Maine's long-term care services. The focus of the sessions was to strengthen the collaboration between the stakeholders to present a strong united front to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. RWJ is offering a grant to support the

recruitment and retention of us, the direct care workers.

Many groups agreed to work together on a proposal to present to the Foundation. CEI submitted the pre-proposal application in December, and has been invited to submit the full proposal by February 14th.

This grant is an opportunity for our Association to have a role in planning programs to support direct care workers and to be involved in the implementation of programs like Emergency

Assistance, resource information centers, training and education for workers. Our Association would help keep the project leaders informed of the what services are needed by workers and inform workers of these benefits.

In return we are asking for funds from the grant to hire a coordinator, provide development opportunities for members and pay for materials needed to accomplish our role to support workers in Maine.

Maine Direct Care Worker Coalition: Coordinates State Efforts to Address Worker Shortages

A subcommittee of the Coalition has initiated a bill to the Maine Legislature to increase wages for Direct Healthcare Workers in Maine. While we all know the state budget picture is bleak, we also know that worker shortages and low wage jobs with no benefits will not support the quality of care Mainers deserve. The Maine Center for Economic Policy has compiled research highlighting the care gap and the direct correlation between low

pay/benefits and this increasing worker shortage.

They are saying what we as direct care workers have known for years. Now it's at a critical level and without drastic changes will only get worse. **This is our chance to be heard.** Direct care workers and concerned employer and consumer advocacy groups had a chance to speak at the State House on February 4th. to tell Maine legislators about what direct care and personal assistance work is and the

problem of low wages, limited benefits and long hours. A bill will be introduced to ask the legislature to increase wages and benefits. Hopefully the legislators will want to work as hard for us as we do for our communities. This legislation is also to provide funds to promote peer mentoring, training, real career pathways, and workplace culture change. Well, this is my take on what's going on for our Association at this time, we're just starting but we have started.

What is the Value of Services?

Dear Readers,

The MePASA members working on this newsletter decided to add a real-life story page to remind all of us how important our work is. On this page we will publish interviews with our clients, letters from consumers and consumer groups. Do you want to tell us about your work? – give us a call or send a letter (for contact information see page 1).

When Work Meets Life...

Diane N., PCA MePASA member, suggested this interview with Norma Rice-Gould, RN

Seven years ago Norma Rice-Gould and her husband made the choice to have her parents reside with them at home. Despite having an already full and hectic professional and private life, the commitment to care for Norma's parents was important to them. So the

– home health workers of all kinds and later last fall, hospice home health care to the end. It has been a very long, but rewarding, seven years; we have learned much concerning the home health process. Nearly every PCA, CNA, RN, social worker, or

week for my mother! It was a slow process - PCA and CNA care made all the difference in the world to me, to my husband, to my parents, and to my family. Without their assistance, I would not have been able to continue to work as I would have had to do all of her care. With your help, I was able to continue to have a life - it has been a lot different - but without home health, it would have been impossible. There are, of course, flaws in the system BUT we will be forever grateful for the system and thankful to all of you."

"With your help, I was able to continue to have a life..."

process of scheduling health care providers, dealing with insurance companies and various agencies with many regulations, frequent phone calls, and having a parade of health care people come into their home were added to their daily routine. Her father's Alzheimer's Disease continued to progress until he died three years ago and her mother's health continued to decline until this January, when Norma's 94-year-old mother passed away quietly, while sleeping in the comfort of her home and her own surroundings. When asked what kind of a change home health care providers brought in her life, the lives of her family and that of her parents, Norma confided, "We could not have done it without them

volunteer has been exceptional in their tasks and very caring. My folks came to live with us because of my Dad's deteriorating illness and my Mom's impaired hearing and inability to get around. For these reasons they were unsafe in their own home without care. Although my mother's mind was sharp until her death, her body slowly failed her and she gradually regressed from using a cane to a walker, to a wheelchair, to a bed. We had only one hour of PCA or CNA care for my Dad in the beginning; Mom was self-sufficient for her daily care at that time. Over two-year period the support increased to 28 hours of PCA care per



SPECIAL REPORT

Without Care: Maine's Direct Care Worker Shortage

Maine Center for Economic Policy, Author Lisa Pohlmann

Report Highlights: (full report available at <http://www.mecep.org>)

Who are direct care workers and what do they provide?

- These paraprofessional workers in Maine's long term care system include certified nursing assistants (CNAs), personal care attendant (PCAs), and home health aides who work in nursing facilities, residential and assisted living facilities and home care.
- Together they provide eight out of ten hours of paid care received by elders and people with disabilities needing long term care.
- Their services range from feeding, bathing, dressing, administering medications, and rehabilitation, to helping people with in-home dialing living tasks. They provide emotional support, companionship, and a lifeline to the outside world for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Workers struggle because of low wages, difficult working conditions, and staff shortages.

- Over one-third of direct care workers are single parents.
- Over half of CNAs and two thirds of PCAs have household incomes less than \$20,000. The average annual income for a PCA in 2001 (\$17,480) was 133% of the federal poverty level for a family of three (\$14,630), and was only 60% of a basic needs budget in Maine for a family of three in 2001 (\$29,018).
- Many are not offered health insurance by their employer or are not able to afford the co-pays of the employer's health insurance plan. Most home care workers do not have guaranteed hours and thus do not receive health insurance or paid time off.
- Many rely on public assistance to get by because of low income. CNAs working in home health agencies and nursing homes are twice as likely to receive public benefits- specifically food stamps and Medicaid – than workers in other job categories.
- With an average hourly wage of \$8.69 for all direct care workers in 2001, many workers are leaving the field, able to find far safer, less physically and emotionally demanding, and potentially more stable work at similar or higher pay in other sectors.
- The 2000 occupational injury rate for these workers in Maine (at 6.9 incidences per 100 workers) is over twice as high as the rate for all occupations (at 3.0 incidences per hundred workers).
- While most direct care workers report liking their work with clients, they do not like the lack of career advancement opportunities, inadequate supervision and support, and the stress of staff shortages that compromise their ability to offer quality care. These important factors are also driving workers away from direct care.

Key recommendations of the report include:

- Coordinate state efforts to address the worker shortage through establishment of a Direct Care Workforce Committee.
- Increase public funding to enable employers to provide livable wages, and ensure benefits for all direct care workers.
- Develop a coordinated training system, career pathways and workplace culture changes.

Special thanks to Lisa Pohlmann for writing this important document and to the funders who supported it: Ford Foundation, Francis Hollis Brain Foundation and the Bingham Program.

The Maine Center for Economic Policy is an independent, nonpartisan research organization with the mission to advance public policy solutions to achieve a prosperous, fair and sustainable economy.