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# Maine PASA Newsletter

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## Update from the Executive Director

I am afraid that this Director's update will also be serving as my goodbye to Maine PASA as well. Most of you reading this newsletter are not aware of the fact that on November 26<sup>th</sup>, as I was driving to the Leadership Council meeting in Augusta, I was involved in an auto accident which left me with two severely broken ankles. After 2 months of being bedridden I was given the okay to begin the road to recovery which meant learning to walk again. With the fantastic support of Maine PASA's Board, the Leadership Council, and the amazing Joyce Gagnon, I have been working part time while trying to keep up with physical therapy and other efforts. It is with sadness that I have come to the decision that Maine PASA needs a director who is able to fulfill the responsibilities of the Director's job more thoroughly than I can.

In making this decision I want to let all of you know that the process of recovering from my accident has been an incredible learning experience. While I worked as a direct support worker with elderly and disabled individuals at different points in my career, my recovery involved an intensely personal experience of direct care. After spending 5 days at Maine Medical Center and 2 weeks at New England Rehab, I then came home with the support of daily home health aide visits, nurses, OT and PT. I can without a doubt tell all of you reading this that the care and kindness of the direct care worker is one of the most, if not THE most, important source of a patient feeling like he or she will succeed in getting well. There were days and nights when I heard someone's voice and I felt uplifted; I knew I was safe, I would be treated with dignity and respect, there would be humor, and there would always be kindness and caring. I must say though that there were other days or nights I would hear certain voices and, to be honest, my sense of safety and security was not as strong. My increased abilities are due in large part to the care I received from the direct support workers who were there for me for the first 4 months after the accident.

The other people who have been there for me without fail have been the members of Maine PASA. There is no way I could have done what I have done- the newsletter, attending meetings in person and by phone, and just trying to keep up with the needs of Maine PASA- without the help of the Board, the Leadership Council, and the many people who kept in touch with me by phone and email. I have truly felt supported during this time and words can't tell you how much it has been appreciated.

All my best wishes to all of you- I know that our paths will continue to cross. Barbara



**In May four members** of Maine PASA will be attending The Voices Institute, a 5 day National Leadership Training sponsored by the Direct Care Alliance. The goal of the Institute is to provide intensive leadership development experience to a select group of direct care workers from around the country. Workers will be provided with the skills, experience and support they need to become effective public leaders in their states. Maine PASA's attendees will work with our partner organizations to advance our efforts on health care, improved benefits, and other issues of importance to the world of Direct Care.

During the 5 days more than 40 attendees from across the country will focus on the following:

1. Personal Empowerment
2. Core Concepts in Leadership for Advocacy
3. Winning an Issue Campaign
4. Fundraising and Sustainability
5. Coalitions and Board Development

Maine PASA looks forward to sharing their knowledge and ideas with our members and partners as we move ahead.



## WINTER AND SPRING UPDATES

Maine PASA and its partners, the Kennebec Valley Organization (KVO), the Direct Care Workers Coalition (DCWC), and Consumers for Affordable Healthcare (CAHC) worked together during this past legislative session on the continuing push to provide health care for Maine's uninsured. During hearings on LD1687, a bill designed to expand Dirigo Health Insurance, PASA, KVO, CAHC and DCWC were all present and gave testimony supporting the bill's passage. While budget cuts prevented expansion of Dirigo, on the positive side Insurance and Finance Committee chair Senator Sullivan recommended that Maine's Superintendent of Insurance convene a panel to look into pooling Direct Care Workers for group health insurance. PASA member Helen Hanson has been asked to serve on that panel. Also on the positive side was the realization of how many senators and representatives outside the insurance and finance committee were concerned about the health care situation. PASA's efforts with Walk a Mile in Our Shoes certainly contributed to helping legislators understand what this issue means to direct care workers. Thanks to all of you who contacted your senators and representatives; **we urge you to keep it up because every effort helps. Please see page 3 for the 2008 legislative update.**



On February 13<sup>th</sup> Maine PASA joined a number of organizations and agencies as we showed our support for continued funding of Home Based and Community Services. In the face of suggested cuts, representatives staffed informational tables and answered questions from legislators and other interested people. Many thanks to Roy Gedat from the Direct Care Alliance and Joyce Gagnon, PASA staff assistant for staffing the table. Several Senators and Representatives stopped by to look at the storyboards and talk with us; it was a great opportunity to talk about the needs of assistance workers.

*On March 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Maine PASA staffed an information table at the DSP conference in Augusta. Along with letting people know about Maine PASA, the work it does and the benefits of membership, we informed people about the Maine Can Do Better campaign and efforts to fight the suggested budget cuts. AND 52 people signed up to become new members of Maine PASA!*

### **Membership Dues and Maine PASA**

As we noted in the last newsletter, Maine PASA is asking our members to pay dues of \$15.00 per year for direct care staff, and \$30.00 per year for supporting members. All new brochures and applications will include information on our dues requirement. While we will continue sending our newsletter to everyone, and will definitely continue advocating on behalf of Maine's entire direct care workforce, we hope you will all realize that support for Maine PASA really does translate into support for you. Just this past year we have done the following:

1. Written grants designed to improve retention and recruitment of the direct care workforce
2. Spoken out at legislative hearings on behalf of increases in Maine's minimum wage law and expansion of Dirigo Insurance
3. Staffed informational tables at 3 conferences and legislative informational sessions
4. Attended regular meetings with multiple partner groups to make sure that the voice of the direct care worker is heard.
5. Sent out 3 newsletters
6. Provided stipends for individuals attending Best Friends Training and Leadership Council, and supported members attending conferences on our behalf in Iowa, Maryland, and Wisconsin

These efforts aren't free- they cost staff time and money. Dues from our members lets us know that you support our work, and allows us to spend more time finding ways to support our members rather than spending more time finding funding. We hope you will support us with your payment of dues! Many thanks.

**2008 Legislative Updates-** The message we all can take from this year's session is to **GET READY FOR 2009!** Thanks to the Maine Women's Lobby, AARP, and DHHS for these updates.

**L.D. 2132- An Act to Amend the Family Medical Leave Laws to Include Siblings**

This bill passed unanimously in both chambers after being amended in committee. It expands Maine's family medical leave (FMLA) to include siblings when financial and living arrangements are shared. This bill allows an employee to take FMLA to care for a sibling with a serious health condition or in the case of the United States Armed Forces, when a sibling dies while on active duty.

**L.D. 1454 An Act to Care for Working Families**

After over a year of lobbying and grassroots action, the first legislative chapter of the campaign for Paid Sick Days ended on April 7. L.D. 1454 was defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 72 to 63, with 16 legislators absent. However, this campaign is far from over! For info on how your legislator voted, look here <http://janus.state.me.us/legis/LawMakerWeb/rollcall.asp?ID=280024240&chamber=House&serialnumber=340> This bill lost by only 9 VOTES...and 16 legislators were absent! Find out how your legislator voted and if s/he voted no, let him or her know what it is like to work without any sick leave. And if you have computer access, but a friend or coworker doesn't, find out how their legislators voted and let them know!

**LD 1697 An Act to Ensure Fair Wages**

This bill increases the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour in 2008 and to \$7.50 per hour in 2009. Working toward a livable wage for all Maine people continues to be a priority.

**Budget Cuts and Maine Care Cuts affecting Elder Services**

- \$1.3 million by eliminating the Elder Services Health Housing Communities program.
- \$500,000 cuts to Area Agencies on Aging which was used for administration, support & training.
- \$381,000 for home-based care for elderly.
- \$312,000 by eliminating assessments for determining need in the homemaker program.
- \$171,364 cut to training programs for family caregivers in the Alzheimer's program.
- \$3.5 million cut from childless adults program by requiring greater use of generic drugs with prior authority for medically necessary drugs.
- \$825,000 cut from the durable medical goods and supplies
- \$232,000 cut from podiatric services

**Budget Cuts and Maine Care Cuts affecting other areas of Direct Care Worker employment**

**Mental Health**

- \$1.2 million by eliminating Intensive Community Integration; keeps med. management and case mgmt.
- \$625,000 in eliminating day treatment by only two agencies in the state.

**Child Welfare**

- \$2.6 million (12.5 percent) in subsidies for foster and adoptive families.
- \$1.7 million saved in the foster care program by breaking out services (unbundling) and not paying for all services. (Example: No longer paying for child care if a parent is home with the child and need has not been determined; recreational programs; and respite care).
- \$291,000 to agencies that serve unwed mothers and mothers with young children.

**Cognitive and Physical Disabilities Services**

- \$338,000 in grant-funded services that mostly impact information and support to parents, Pine Tree Legal, educational programs and Day Hab Services.
- \$200,000 in sheltered workshop (employment) programs.
- \$3.5 million by reviewing community support and residential services used for persons with developmental disabilities.
- \$332,000 by converting ICFMR facilities to group homes

**Other Cuts**

- \$1.1 million in funding for refugee services; Child Abuse and Neglect Councils; and supervised visitation in child welfare.
- \$525,000 in General Assistance.
- \$325,000 in Food Stamps benefits to legally admitted aliens.
- \$68,000 in family planning.
- Elizabeth Levinson Center will be privatized in October 2008.

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