

# Maine Personal Assistance Services Association News

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## An Association for Personal Assistance and Direct Care Workers is Launched

*Successful gathering provides helpful information*

The breakfast for direct care and personal assistance workers held on October 26<sup>th</sup> in Lewiston was a success. Fifty people came out in the rain on a Saturday to hear about the importance of direct care and personal assistant work and to talk about how an association could support workers and their profession.

Chris Gianopoulos, Director of Maine's Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services, opened the program by recognizing the hard work and dedication of direct care workers. Linda Mills, an independent living specialist who employs her own assistants, gave a personal perspective on personal assistance work and the experience of being the receiver of assistance. Linda captured the audience with her message about respect, dignity and the importance of self-determination. Linda's long-time assistant, Betty Hill, spoke of her own first-hand experience working in the profession of direct care.

Keynote speaker, Di Findley, founder and director of the Iowa CareGivers Association, described her experience as a caregiver and how she started an association that recognizes the professional status and support needs of CNAs, PCAs, Home Health Aides and the many other employees in long term care and home care work. Di's survey work in Iowa and

her talk with the audience identified the major challenges to people working in these jobs: Stigma, burnout, low pay and benefits, heavy workloads, isolation, lack of career opportunities and advancement, and difficulties balancing client and employer expectations.

Conversations with workers about what they do provided stories of hard work, dedication and a personal message about the importance of this work to the giver and the receiver of care and support.

*"My consumer has told me, 'I don't feel like I have a disability when I'm with you.'"*

*"It's very emotional work that we do. It's so personal, it's almost like part of your family. The hardest part of my job is the emotional part. When I see my [consumer] getting sick or weaker, it hits me right here, and my friends and family don't understand that."*

*"The work is a constant challenge. Every day is different and you're never bored."* (Continue Breakfast side 2)



Workers attending the Association Breakfast  
Lewiston Auburn College, October 26, 2002

### **What could an Association do for workers in Maine?**

What the workers said.

An association will.....

- Empower us to preserve human dignity.
- Help us address issues like continuity of care and short staffing.
- Give affirmation.
- Help us make changes.
- Provide camaraderie.
- Other people would view us as professionals.
- Other people would see us as valuable.
- Other people would see the people we serve as valuable, including older people, people with disabilities, both children and adults.
- Our voices could be solidified (and unified) and people would listen.
- What would we tell people? Pay us what we're worth. Treat us better in other ways also – give us more positive feedback.

(Continued "why" Side 2)

(Breakfast, continued from side 1)

The results from the large group discussion, a questionnaire and the program evaluation support the development of an association for workers in Maine. (see remarks "Why" in the next column)

### **What's Next**

Elise Scala, Project Coordinator listed the following next steps:

- Workers and members to be recruited. (Funds are available for workers to serve on the committee).
- The toll free number, 800-268-6612 will remain open to take calls from people who want to join.
- Continuing support: Over the next 2 years grant funds will support a part time staff and worker group to form the association and to identify new sources of funds and supports.

### **Conclusion of the Breakfast**

The program ended with an atmosphere of celebration. Names were drawn to award worker recognition prizes and Di Findley organized the attendees for the first Association group picture. Special thanks to Lewiston Auburn College, the Grateful Deli, Mary Eileen Kiniry, Stuart Bratesman, Danny Westcott and Elise Scala (USM Muskie School project staff), Di Findley (Iowa CareGivers Association), and all who participated to make the event a success.

### **Why an Association** (continued from side 1)

≡≡≡ Quotes from workers at the first meeting ≡≡≡

*"An association would help us to preserve human dignity. Our work matters. The people we serve have value and belong in the community. These older people deserve respect from the community."*

*"There's an association for just about every level of health care provider. Family caregivers have their own national association. Consumers, farmers and governors have their own national associations, and yet the largest group of health care providers don't have one."*

*"An association is where you can have your voices heard and where people will listen."*

*"I think the association is a great idea. I don't want it to be just a gripe session. I want the groups to look for answers and the resources to find real solutions."*

*"I really think it (an association) is a going to be good thing. We all need that support. The association will make a difference if you, as a caregiver, get involved."* (Susan Tucker, PCA)

### **News Update: Projects of interest to Workers in 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 proposals.
- Pathways to Retention, a grant funded demonstration project being conducted by Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
- A study of direct care worker wages is being conducted by the Maine Center for Economic Policy. (see enclosed request for participation).
- Direct Health Care Worker Coalition, a group of long term care providers, labor organizations and advocacy groups meeting to address wage, benefit and other issues for direct care workers in Maine's long term care system.

**News for Newcomers:** This project, to develop an association for personal assistance and direct care workers, is funded through a grant from the federal Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services. The grant partners are the Maine Bureau of Medical Services, Maine's Plan Development Work Group for Community Based Living and the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service.

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