DISABILITY TASK FORCE MEETING—March 10, 2022

SUMMARY

On March 10th the DTF met and focused on organizational updates provided by members, highlighting successful strategies developed during the pandemic to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Members were asked to answer the following questions as part of their update:

* Have any COVID-related changes become a part of your ongoing operations? How have these changes improved your service to the community?
* What are some of the most successful new practices/ “lessons learned” that your organization wants to retain (post-pandemic)?
* What is your biggest worry regarding the population of individuals with disabilities that your organization works with during this stage of the pandemic?

A recording of this meeting can be viewed at [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBWK8dH-Law). DTF members shared a broad range of new practices and addressed concerns going forward in this stage of the pandemic and recovery. General feedback from DTF members is summarized below.

* Pivoting to provision of online services was smoother than most organizations anticipated, with a broad range of services provided (telemedicine, trainings, workshops, advocacy, instructional opportunities, etc.). Some providers (i.e. residential programs) continued to provide in-person services.
* Provision of online services expanded opportunities for some individuals with disabilties and family members. For example, family members could participate without arranging childcare, some individuals with disabilities preferred virtual participation, and interpretation services could be provided more easily remotely. On the other hand, all members shared concerns about many individuals with disabilities and family members who have been left behind. Some individuals are unable to effectively participate remotely due to their disabilities, lack of required technology, or language access barriers. Some individuals experience isolation and require in-person services and supports. Concerns were also expressed about potential exploitation of people with disabilties participating in online activities, and the need for safety training and supports.
* The majority of DTF members believe that going forward it will be necessary to establish a balance of in-person and remote services in order to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families---providing some remote, hybrid, and in-person options. Members believe it will be challenging to create an effective balance.
* DTF members expressed serious concerns about the increased mental and behavioral health needs of individuals with disabilities, as demonstrated by emergency department “boarding”, school district punitive responses to behavioral challenges, and the overall acute staffing shortages directly impacting children and adults with disabilties in all sectors.

Members shared resources from their programs, [click here for resources](https://www.massadvocates.org/s/DTF-Resources-to-address-needs-of-individuals-with-disabilities-during-pandemic-and-recovery-from-3.docx).