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State report examines barriers to hiring people with disabilities

New set of 11 recommendations include expanded transit options, regional collaborations

A new in-depth state report has found that despite a strong business case to hire candidates with disabilities, there are significant barriers — including employer attitudes of fear and discomfort — that contribute to unemployment and underemployment for individuals with disabilities.

The Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons With Disabilities spent two years studying workforce development for people with disabilities in Massachusetts. At the time the study began in 2019, the state's economy was considered relatively strong with approximately 80 percent of people without disabilities employed, but just 38.2 percent of people with disabilities holding jobs.

The comprehensive survey drew in nearly a dozen state offices, more than 30 stakeholder groups, 100 advocates and a dozen service providers across the state, including Council members WORK Inc., Viability, The Arc of Massachusetts, Road to Responsibility,



Left: Two Triangle, Inc. clients assist in cleaning up Constitution Beach in East Boston as part of Triangle's residential program. Right: A Triangle, Inc. client works bagging groceries at Stop and Shop in Lynn, as part of a community-based day services and supported employment program.

Riverside Community Care, New England Village and Triangle, Inc.

The committee found that companies making deliberate efforts to include people with disabilities in their hiring practices view it as "a business imperative" that "yields a competitive advantage over companies that do not

hire from this talent pool" in the form of higher retention rates, reduced personnel costs and stronger customer loyalty.

"A recurring, and encouraging, theme in our conversations with Bay State business leaders is the extent to which many have embraced disability

inclusive hiring practices into their business models, not just for altruistic or public relations purposes, but as a tangible boost to their bottom line," Rep. Josh Cutler, who led the WorkAbility subcommittee that conducted the study, wrote of the findings.

But despite hearing from some businesses about why hiring people with disabilities is a smart practice, the WorkAbility subcommittee said it also heard frequently "that employers are often uncomfortable or do not know how to approach employing individuals with disabilities."

Most of those concerns focused on fear of higher costs, liability, concerns about transportation access, or unfamiliarity regarding people with disabilities.

Some of the most moving parts of the report were the comments and testimony of workers with disabilities who had been marginalized, and in some cases, discriminated against.

HIRING, see page 7

Essential Workers campaign kicks into high gear

Campaign PSAs hit the airwaves, along with emails to lawmakers

With more than 3,000 blue yard signs proudly erected around Massachusetts, The Caring Force recently began the second phase of its "Essential Workers" campaign.

TCF is asking its 28,000 members, along with anyone else interested in seeing loan repayment and pay equity become a reality, to join in their e-advocacy campaign, an initiative to pass much needed reform to the human service sector.

The step in the grassroots effort, is contacting legislators to secure co-sponsors for the Council's proposed legislation, (see details in *Council files pro-workforce agenda* at right)

At TCF's Action Center, anyone can send a pre-written, editable message to their legislators urging support for the bills to establish a loan repayment program for direct care workers and provide pay equity for human service workers that are doing the same work as state employees without equal compensation. There are also social media posts and a Facebook profile picture filter to help share the e-advocacy campaign.

TCF believes these reforms will improve the sector's ability to recruit and retain qualified employees. Because workers in more than 180,000 jobs in the sector are disproportionately women and people of color, under-compensation for human service workers is clearly an issue of equity and social justice as well.

Along with the thousands of lawn signs, the message is visible on billboards in Framingham, Worcester, Billerica, Boston and Springfield.

Also, Gov. Baker recently made an appearance in a special public service announcement for TCF, in which he asked Massachusetts to join him in thanking those who care for "one-in-ten state residents, including people with disabilities, people needing mental health supports, and those experiencing homelessness, just to name a few."

More information on the Essential Workers Campaign can be found on the Council's website at www.providers.org.

Would you like to purchase signs for your organization? Please reach out to Ravi Simon at rsimon@providers.org.



Gov. Baker delivers a 30-second public service message to thank the state's human services workers.

Council files four pro-workforce bills

The Council introduced two bills in mid-February that would create a student loan repayment program for human services workers and eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those employed by private, community-based human services nonprofits who do similar work.

An act establishing a loan repayment program for direct care human service workers, filed by Sen. Eric Lesser and Rep. Jeffrey Roy would create an education loan repayment program for human service workers. To be eligible, workers must work a minimum of 35 hours per week, earn less than \$50,000 per year and maintain 12 consecutive months of employment in the sector. Workers to receive up to \$150/month - or up to \$1,800 per year - for a period not to exceed four years - to repay a qualified education loan.

An act relative to fair pay for comparable work, filed by Sen. Cindy Friedman and Rep. Kay Khan would

BILLS, see page 7

PROVIDERS' NEWS AND NOTES

Old Colony YMCA and The Key Program, Inc. enter into partnership

Old Colony YMCA and The Key Program, Inc. have entered into a strategic partnership to enhance the quality of community-based and residential programs for thousands of children and families, the organizations announced in February.

"We are excited to formalize our relationship with The Key Program," said Vincent Marturano, president and CEO of Old Colony Y. "They have been a trusted, high quality provider in communities throughout the region for many years. Together, we will deepen our commitment to vulnerable kids and families."

The two organizations will work in concert to respond to the ever-changing landscape of human services and share training experiences, strategic planning and other administrative functions.

"This is a natural fit," said Bill Lytle, President of The Key Program, Inc. "The Key Program, Inc. and Old Colony Y share core values across the board, and most importantly, we share a common goal of helping children and families thrive."

Philanthropy Massachusetts names Neff to the Nonprofit Learning Institute

In partnership with Bank of America, Philanthropy Massachusetts has announced the 2021 cohort of 21 nonprofit leaders participating in the Nonprofit Learning Institute.

One of the honorees is Council member France Neff of Family Independence, Inc.



France Neff

Now in its 10th year, the Institute is comprised of a series of technical assistance and capacity building sessions with the goal

of fostering and empowering leaders in the Massachusetts nonprofit sector. For the first time, it will be held virtually this year.

Advocates to administer grant for Metrowest COVID-19 grief support

Advocates is partnering with Jeff's Place in Framingham and The Parmenter Foundation in Wayland on a new virtual grief support group for adults coping with loss in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parmenter provided a \$13,000 grant to support the initiative, which will be administered by Advocates. The grief curriculum will be developed by bereavement experts from Jeff's Place.

"The COVID pandemic and subsequent isolation has presented a unique set of issues for people who have experienced the loss of a loved one. It's our hope that our virtual support group will help people who are grieving feel less alone in their grief journey," organizers said.

Community Foundation of Western Mass. makes COVID grants

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, based in Springfield, recently awarded \$1.3 million to 55 nonprofit and related social service organizations that are providing programs related to eviction prevention, mental health, and food insecurity assistance to those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the Council members receiving grants were: **Center for Human Development, Gandara Mental Health Center, Mental Health Association, Rachel's Table/Jewish Federation of W. Mass., River Valley Counseling Center, Safe Passage, ServiceNet and Western Massachusetts Training Consortium.**

ROX Talks hosts U.S. Rep Ayanna Pressley



Sandra M. McCroom, president and chief executive officer of Children's Services of Roxbury, recently hosted Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley on ROX Talks, leading a community conversation titled: Racial Injustice & National Policy: Where Do We Go from Here?

AG Grants \$1.2M to Mass. nonprofits for opioid treatment

Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey's office gave \$1.2 million to 12 nonprofits for opioid treatment. Council members among the grantees were **Gandara Mental Health Center, Jewish Family & Children's Service and Victory Programs.**

According to Healey's office, systemic issues, including health care provider biases, limited public health research, and inadequate news coverage have mischaracterized the opioid epidemic as chiefly impacting white suburban and rural communities, noting that "communities of color are increasingly affected by opioid use disorder."

Eastern Bank Foundation Gives \$3M to 83 Bay State Nonprofits

The Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation has granted \$3 million to 83 Massachusetts nonprofits to help them mitigate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing support focused on housing stability, homelessness, food

security, and essential services and utilities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

Receiving the grants, which ranged from \$25,000 to \$100,000, were the following Council members: **ABCD, Citizens Inn, City Life/Vida Urbana, City Mission, Hildebrand Family Self-Help Center, Pine Street Inn and Victory Programs.**

Blue Cross Blue Shield grants \$3M to 48 Mass. nonprofits

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation recently granted more than \$3 million to 48 Massachusetts nonprofit organizations to support efforts that promote sustainable improvements in health care access for low-income and uninsured residents across the state.

Council members **Bay Cove Human Services, Boston Center for Independent Living, Casa Esperanza and The Dimock Center** were granted funds in this round, BCBS said.



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About the Agency

Amirah is a New England-based nonprofit that provides refuge for those seeking to break free from exploitation and heal in community on their journey toward lasting hope.

Amirah does this work through a three-pronged approach. First, by providing safe homes for women that want to break free from sexual exploitation, mobilizing the greater community to create opportunities for healing, restoration and reintegration. They use individualized approaches to address the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and vocational needs of each survivor in their care and allow for survivors to engage with their community in a mutually meaningful manner.

Second, they offer services in the community to women currently being exploited or at risk for exploitation with the goal of providing the resources they need to exit exploitation and find healing in independence. Amirah facilitates survivor-led groups in various community locations helping victims to identify the exploitation in their lives and begin journeys of liberation and offers clinical services in their new Community Resource Center at no cost to the women served.

Finally, Amirah's public education program equips communities and providers to understand and respond to the unique aspects of exploitation and trafficking in the region. Their staff offer general awareness trainings and advanced trainings in the hopes that their knowledge and experience of walking with survivors through recovery can be shared with those who are working to do the same.

Helping trafficking victims rebuild lives



A room in Amirah's new Community Resource Center (right) and a photo of the dining room table set for community dinner in a recovery safe home.



Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against victims of commercial sexual exploitation has increased and many survivors of exploitation have returned to the sex trade after losing hard-earned jobs or housing.

In response, Amirah opened a Community Resource Center in Lynn in January 2021. In partnership with East Coast International Church in Lynn, the Center offers case management, peer mentorship, clinical therapy, group programs and healing activities for women who are at risk of being exploited or are currently being exploited. Designed to minimize common barriers to access, the Center is located in a walkable communal location and offers on-site childcare—all at no cost to the women Amirah serves.

"An unfortunate truth about exploitation is that individuals are exploited and trafficked out of their lack of resources or vulnerable circumstances—perhaps it is lack of housing, lack of income, lack of mental healthcare, or lack of a safe space for their children," said Amirah CEO Stephanie Clark. All of those vulnerabilities have been exponentially compounded over the past 11 months of the pandemic.

Since 2015, Amirah's residential program has created safe spaces in Massa-

chusetts and Connecticut that offer women the time and resources to exit exploitation and move toward independence, healing and wholeness. "This program works for some women, but we acknowledge that a residential setting is not ideal for every woman's needs and recovery," says Chief Impact Officer Mary Speta, whose lived experience along with other survivor members of Amirah's team shaped the vision for the Center.

The goal of the Center is to reach women living in exploitation, and particularly women with children as they face heightened challenges in exiting exploitation.

"Traffickers commonly use children as leverage to control the women they are trafficking," explained Speta. "Childcare and access to services could be the difference between a woman exiting exploitation and not."

The Center gives women the opportunity to self-identify as being trafficked, exploited or prostituted, and then to access services designed to help them meet their goals for safety, exit, independence and recovery.

"We are grateful to the survivor voices out in the community who continue to share and speak up about ways to tangibly support them," said Clark.

Executive Leadership

Stephanie Clark is an author, speaker, activist and CEO of Amirah.

She is a passionate advocate for victims and survivors of sex trafficking, working not only to provide a place for aftercare for these individuals, but also to develop a greater system of aftercare within our communities.



Stephanie Clark

Knowing of the evil of sex trafficking since she was a child, Clark has pursued a calling of compassion and liberation for survivors of sexual exploitation. She has a desire to see both global and domestic changes in the view of women.

She came to Amirah after serving for four years as an associate pastor working north of Boston. Prior to that, she was a small business owner. Clark has represented the field of survivor aftercare at the United Nations and presented at the Tri-County Human Trafficking Conference in Killington, Vt. She holds an undergraduate degree from Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and her master's degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary of Massachusetts.

Her first book, *Letters to an Activist: Discovering Hope in the Pursuit of Social Change*, is now available.

Clark lives in New Hampshire with her husband, Dave, and two daughters.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Cardinal Cushing staff applauded

Cardinal Cushing Centers would like to applaud its frontline staff who have been working tirelessly since March 2020 to keep the individuals with intellectual disabilities that they support healthy, safe and engaged.

The direct support staff worked in the student and adult residences, assisting with everything from meal prep to daily hygiene tasks, while the teachers and the day program staff negotiated new technology to balance in-person learning with those who connected remotely.

The message to them, and to all those staff who also worked directly with students or adults in quarantine or provided care to those who were sick with COVID: You are appreciated.

"I will never be able to express enough gratitude to our incredibly dedicated staff at Cushing," said President and CEO Michelle Markowitz.

"Our art director, Randy Wiskow, made a sign for our community that said, 'Heroes Work Here' and that perfectly describes this team," said Markowitz.

"Our Cushing heroes are here every single day to support and care for our

community during this crisis. I have heard from many families that staff members went above and beyond to keep their loved ones safe and engaged, not only with daily programming initiatives, but by going that extra mile—whether it was a drive-by birthday parade for someone home with family or an extra evening Zoom session for a person who needed it."

When Lisa Siegel found out her son, Jack, a residential student at Cushing, tested positive for COVID-19,

she felt helpless.

"We talked it through with Cushing staff and we decided Jack would be best served by remaining there," said Siegel. "The staff did a fantastic job. They consistently showed up to take care of the kids, and having those familiar faces was so important."

Jack recovered well from COVID and he continues to thrive at Cushing.

"We salute you, said Markowitz. "Cushing is strong because of you and your commitment, and your willingness to make sacrifices during these challenging times."

"It's more than a job"

For the past eight years, four men with developmental disabilities have lived in a group home together, with care and support from **Mental Health Association** staff, including program supervisor Charlene Champagne.

"They are just like a family, and Charlene is as much a part of the house as they are," according to Fred Destromp, Integration and Community Living program director for MHA.

"She started as a direct care staff and worked her way up to supervisor. Charlene has been the constant for these men ever since they moved in together. She is very dedicated to them."

"Recently, two of the four gentlemen developed COVID symptoms, and all four tested positive," Destromp explained. "Charlene, who tested negative, volunteered to shelter in place throughout the recommended 14-day isolation period on her own."

"The guys have some understanding of the virus and they're scared of it. Charlene put her own life on hold to help them get through it," he said.

"Yes, of course I volunteered," Champagne said. "It's more than a job. I've been with them going back 14

years, and I truly care for their health and well-being. I couldn't imagine anyone else doing this."

Champagne volunteered to work 42 consecutive 8-hour shifts with no time off. "The first few days were a bit stressful," she recalled. "I had to check their oxygen levels four times a day. There was cooking and cleaning to do, and sanitation was obviously a big thing."

"I got up in the night to make sure they were all doing all right. I didn't get my best sleep over those two weeks! Everybody is fully recovered, up and about, and back to their usual routine."

Champagne did all this over the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

"I don't think of it as going above and beyond, either. It's just what it takes. I knew I would have to be away from my own family for those two weeks. They supported me, no hesitation, no question."

"It was Christmas Day, and one of the guys just randomly said to me, 'Hey Charlene, you do a really good job taking care of me!' It was absolutely heartwarming! Who could want more for a Christmas present?"



Cardinal Cushing staffers



Charlene Champagne

EDITORIAL



Michael Weekes
President / Publisher

Learn the Facts, Get the Vax

I don't know how it can be said more plainly and emphatically: We all need to get vaccinated. Please get any of the FDA-approved vaccinations for COVID-19 as soon as you can. The death toll of this pandemic has reached historic numbers and climbs upward every minute.

The Johns Hopkins University COVID Resource Center has, as of this writing, announced that more than half a million Americans have died. "It's something that is historic. It's nothing like we've ever been through in the last 102 years since the 1918 influenza pandemic," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

A frequent contextual frame is more lives have been lost in this pandemic in roughly a year than all the battlefield losses of American lives on foreign soils in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined. The overwhelming weight of sorrow and despair is literally incalculable. And yet we are struck that our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, children and neighbors are being lost at a pace, according to Johns Hopkins, more than twice of that of any other nation in the world. It is utterly unacceptable.

Many of us have followed the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and the Mass. Department of Public Health to: wear a mask; maintain a safe distance; avoid large crowds; wash our hands; and the measure of increasingly significant consequence, when the vaccine becomes available for you, take it.

But we know that far too many people don't just trust the facts. According to an Associated Press story on survey results released in February: "About 1 in 3 Americans say they definitely or probably won't get the COVID-19 vaccine, according to a new poll that some experts say is discouraging news if the U.S. hopes to achieve herd immunity and vanquish the outbreak."

Here are the top five queries we received from the human service sector and what we know:

Are they effective? Pfizer and Moderna are both approved by the Food and Drug Administration for Emergency Use Authorization. Based on the extensive trials, their efficacy is 95 percent and 94.1 percent respectively after two doses.

Does the vaccine contain a live virus? No, the vaccine does not contain a live virus, and you cannot "catch" COVID from the vaccine.

Wasn't the vaccine developed at "warp" speed and done too fast? Dr. Fauci said: "There was no cutting corners, safety was not compromised, scientific integrity was not compromised, and I think people need to understand that the speed was related completely to the breathtaking scientific advances that had been made over the previous 10 or more years."

Will the vaccine alter or modify my DNA?

No, COVID-19 mRNA vaccines do

not change or interact with your DNA in any way, according to the CDC. This means the mRNA cannot affect or interact with our DNA in any way. Instead, COVID-19 mRNA vaccines work with the body's natural defenses to safely develop immunity to disease.

Does the vaccine affect the fertility of women? Based on current knowledge, experts believe that COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to pose a risk to a person trying to become pregnant in the short or long term. Scientists study every vaccine carefully for side effects immediately and for years afterward. The COVID-19 vaccines are being studied carefully now and will continue to be studied for many years, similar to other vaccines, the CDC said.

While the facts provide clarity, we cannot ignore that this vaccine is being resisted by people who far too often have been harmed by disparate and harmful treatment based primarily on their race. A Pew Research study said that 32 percent of Blacks won't take the vaccine and don't trust government's assertions.

Some have frequently reflected on the Tuskegee experiment that ended nearly 50 years ago when Black men were misled and denied treatment suffering for syphilis for 40 years. However, the COVID vaccine situation is very different according to James Hildreth, MD, president and CEO of Meharry Medical College, a historically black medical school in Nashville.

"Tuskegee was horrible," said Dr. Hildreth. "This is nothing like Tuskegee because we have been involved at every level of developing the vaccine from the beginning. The scientists who were involved in creating it to the ones involved in approving it, we've been involved at every level, at all phases."

We do need to understand and recognize that systematically Black people continue to be undiagnosed, misdiagnosed and receive disparate medical treatment today. Look at any credible health indicator and its disproportionality negative for people of color.

Our governments and health providers will need to lead in building trust and it is important to start now. So as the campaigns are well underway, encouraging people to "Trust the Facts and Get the Vax," its equally important for those of power and influence to recognize *all* facts and perceptions that dissuade vaccinations.

Let's not hesitate on building trust, numbers are climbing every day.



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Have a topic that would make a good subject for
***Viewpoints from across the State*?**

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This March, let's celebrate the essential work of social workers

By Sarah Coughlin

Each day more than 700,000 social workers nationwide, 27,000 of whom are in Massachusetts, enhance the well-being of others. Social workers see people within the context of their environments, help clients build skills to overcome life's challenges, and advocate to improve the conditions that lead to healthier and more fulfilled lives for those they work with and the communities they serve.

Social workers are everywhere. We work in schools, helping children get the services they need to get the best possible education. We are in mental health centers and private practices, helping people overcome mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety and substance use disorders.

Social workers are in hospitals, helping patients get the best possible care not only while in treatment but when they return to their families and communities. Social workers also play a vital role in community organizations and local, state, and federal governments, helping create programs and policies that make our society a better and more equitable place for all.

Each March we celebrate Social Work Month. This year's theme for Social Work Month is "Social Workers are Essential." Social workers are woven into the fabric of our society, although my colleagues often go unrecognized. As our nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, and racial unrest, social workers are needed more than ever.

Here in Massachusetts, there are countless social workers making the Commonwealth a more equitable and just place for all. These unsung heroes include Representative Dr. Tami Gouveia, bringing social work values to the state legislature.

They include Carla Monteiro who was recently recognized by the Boston Celtics for her dedication to criminal justice reform and mental health, Erin McAleer Crowley who is leading the fight to end hunger as President & CEO of Project Bread, and Dr. Phillippe Copeland, a tireless advocate for racial justice, who recently joined Dr. Ibram

X. Kendi at the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research.

The fact that social workers are essential is reflected in data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, which lists social work as one of the fastest growing professions in the United States. Due to increased demand for the services social workers provide—our nation's population is aging and more social workers will be needed to care for them—the number of U.S. social workers is expected to rise to more than 800,000 in 2029, up 13 percent from 2019.

Yet, social workers need support from our nation. We deserve higher salaries and more programs that would make it easier for people to enter and work in the field, such as student loan debt forgiveness programs.

There is legislation in Congress—the Improving Access for Mental Health Act—that would help raise Medicare reimbursement rates for social workers who account for one of the largest groups of mental health service providers in our nation. Another bill, the Social Work Reinvestment Act, would tackle high caseloads, low salaries, student loan debt, and other challenges the social work profession is facing.

Locally, the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers is leading on a bill that would define clinical social work in state law, ensuring that the breadth of what masters-level clinical social work entails is never misconstrued or misinterpreted again.

During Social Work Month in March, I encourage social workers to look inward while acknowledging the contributions of and opportunities for the profession. I urge others to learn more about social work and what you can do to lift up the essential, life-changing work social workers do every day.

Sarah Coughlin, LICSW, LADC-I, is president of the Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

Six lessons learned in my transition to CEO

By Eric D. Mitchell

With a flood of leaders retiring in Massachusetts, nonprofit agencies have been discussing—and expecting—a wave of leadership transitions for many years.

In that sense, my transition to president and CEO at Pathways for Children was no exception; I succeeded Sue Todd after her retirement in December.

But what made the leadership change unique was that the organization was transitioning from a 34-year leader (and de facto founder) to an internal candidate with three years at the agency. In the middle of a worldwide pandemic.

Many people have pointed out that the conditions for the start of my tenure were less than ideal. I like to point out that while that is true, there were still many universal lessons learned.

Define agency-wide success. A successful transition transcends the leaders themselves and sets the entire agency stage. Our goal at Pathways for Children was to have a smooth leadership transition that supported the agency as a whole, and we encouraged everyone to be involved. From addressing staff concerns (both verbalized and not), to creating co-led events, to agency-wide participation in transition celebrations, we wanted our staff to feel supported and valued during a time of change.

Take it outside. If there is time for the incoming and retiring leaders to overlap, take some of the meetings outside of the office. The transfer of knowledge that needs to occur transcends reports and historical trends. The many years of accumulated experiences cannot be completely transferred, but the change of scenery allows leaders to speak more comfortably about difficult topics, and more fluidly share knowledge.

Get help. I met regularly with a recently retired CEO who shared some thoughts on his transition. In weekly meetings and conversations,

we discussed topics like work-life balance, the transition of responsibility and staff management. He became a sounding board to help ground my process in reality. I also enrolled in the Next Generation Executives Program with The Partnership, Inc., which added to my preparation for the role. The additional resources and mental preparation were invaluable in preparing for the CEO role. I cannot emphasize it enough – get help.

Give yourself time. Building in additional time and consideration was necessary to devote the time and energy needed to focus on leadership and legacy. Despite our best planning, we had to delay several milestones more than once. And that was ok. I found that sometimes the best decision to aid the transition was to delay some aspects of it. Plan early. We had a lot of time – until we didn't.

Make technology work for you. Use the tools at your disposal. No one is in a hurry to schedule yet another Zoom meeting, but we were able to use virtual meetings to connect with community leaders, make introductions and hand off relationships. While we had planned to have lunch meetings, we found that virtual conversations were just as effective.

Lead with honesty. While planning is necessary, it should also be noted that the execution relies on the individuals involved. It can be challenging to succeed someone who has led an organization for a very long time. It is not easy to blend the past, present and future without stepping on toes. I found that honest conversations made these naturally difficult topics easier to manage.

Retiring leaders should consider being very open about handing off responsibility to the incoming leader. And the incoming leader would do well to acknowledge and support the retiring leader. This will make the eventual handoff healthy and respectful. It will never be easy.

Eric Mitchell is president and CEO of Pathways for Children.

The Hotel Rover: Personal reflections on homelessness

By Jim Cuddy

Note: Jim Cuddy will retire from the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in 2021, after 35 years of service. Here he reflects on some snapshots of his career and lessons he hopes future generations of leaders will take to heart. The full essay can be found at www.smoc.com.

**The Hotel Rover
Richmond, Va.
Fall 1977**

"Scuse me, Sir. Let me get out of your way."

Walking up the front steps, I encounter a scuffed suede boot and denim-clad leg extending from about six inches under the front door across the concrete floor of our front stoop.

"Hey Joe, take your time." Getting vertical appeared a 50-50 proposition for him. "I'm Jim, we met last night. Come on in, pretty cold, huh?"

Joe had shown up last night right before our community supper prepared daily with salvaged food.

"Oh ... I can't do this, how am I gonna get back to 'folk (Norfolk)?"

Joe's story, which I half-listened to until the background blaring of Duane

Allman's guitar drowned his words out. It seems he was in transit from Staunton to Hampton Roads when his journey stalled in Richmond.

"Joe, you can't sleep outside. No money, right?" Just a nod.

"Man, we've gotta get you back home."

I'd arrived here about 15 months ago in my 1965 Rover Mark III, complete with a cloth sunroof and cushy leather upholstery. Now it sat behind the building like a found art sculpture, victim of a seized engine.

"Hey, I've got an idea," I said. *Let's use the Rover as a crash pad.*

Through the winter we started taking reservations for the Hotel Rover: Capacity 2. Soon a waiting list appeared.

**The Winthrop Hotel
Framingham, Mass.
Spring 1987**

I'm standing in front of the glass windows where the Framingham Fruit Store just vacated, thinking about how we can fit a single adult shelter in a space where people used to shop for bananas and mangoes.

The second and third floor of the aging, somewhat unkempt facility con-

tained 50 or so SRO units. This will work great. People will come into shelter, get their act together and be able to move upstairs to their own room.

**SMOC 96 properties in 22 communities, with 1400+ housing units for those in need.
Winter 2021**

We do have the way. We seem to lack the will.

There's only one industrialized country, Finland, that has gotten to functional zero in its approach to unaccompanied adult homelessness. If you check out the Y Foundation's reports, it's like they borrowed the strategies developed here in Massachusetts.

Today I'm staring at the door of my office, trying to figure out if I can hop, skip or dance through it. Unfortunately, I think it might be a crawl.

Before I go, I have a wish list to share:

- Let's restore the development pipeline created by former Lt. Governor Kerry Healey from the Housing Bond Bill with a goal of 1,000 new units for homeless folks.
- Let's create a new Housing Ops or subsidy program modeled along the old

707 or ISSI program.

- Let's celebrate the achievements of the CSPECH Program created by the Mass. Housing & Shelter Alliance, which links the Medicaid system to provide case managers.

- And while we're at it, let's take the best ideas from the Community Health Worker Movement and selectively embed them with the shelter/housing continuum.

I'm fortunate to carry with me the images of the people who we have brought in from the cold and those dedicated people devoted to guiding them on a new journey. Their images burn in my head like the profiles in a Warhol pop art presentation.

Those images include Joe, the Korean War vet, who only had to endure a two-night stay in the Hotel Rover before getting back to Tidewater, Nestor the artist, Cheryl the Unicorn, and countless others.

Here's one final thought: We have to find the boat that allows us to cross the Rubicon before those vibrant images take on the sepia tones of old Daguerreotypes.

Jim Cuddy is the Executive Director of South Middlesex Opportunity Council.

Human services workers take advantage of on-site COVID-19 vaccine clinics



Osco Pharmacy visited the offices of Cambridge Family & Children's Service to administer the first round of COVID-19 vaccinations to social workers and congregate care staff there on Feb. 5. At left, Family Support & Stabilization Program Director Nanci Lytes gets her vaccine. At right, Executive Director Bob Gittens gets his first vaccine shot.

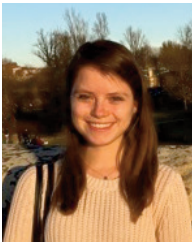
Council experts offer top 10 tips for organizing a great online event

Last month, the Providers' Council Education and Academic Partnerships Coordinator Eliza Adams teamed up with Lisa Rizzo, program manager at the Human Service Forum, to present a free webinar for Council members: Best Practices for Organizing Engaging Online Events.

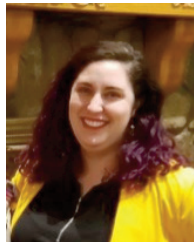
With so many agencies shifting their galas and fundraisers to the virtual space this spring—and possibly beyond—Adams and Rizzo provided a road map for pulling off a successful Zoom event from start to finish.

Here are their top 10 tips for any Zoom event:

1. Don't forget the Zoom basics! Check your back-end settings and make sure all relevant features—like waiting room, screen-sharing, and chat—are enabled.
2. Use the "Security" button in the Zoom meeting to control participant permissions. For large events, we recommend allowing chat but disabling screen sharing and un-muting.
3. If your event features multiple presenters, use the recently released multi-spotlight tool to make sure they can all be seen at one time.
4. Consult with Zoom in advance to determine if you'll need to upgrade your plan or make any additional pur-



Eliza Adams



Lisa Rizzo

chases for your event, like the webinar extension or large meeting add-on.

5. In the virtual setting, get creative with sponsor engagement! Create a virtual sponsor game, include logos on event communications and show a sponsor slide prior to each workshop.

6. Schedule short 'tech checks' with everyone who will be speaking live prior to the event to make sure their audio and webcam are working.

7. Organize ASL interpreters and captioning services at least 3-4 weeks prior to your event.

8. Have a plan in place for handling Q&A—especially for larger sessions. We recommend having participants use the 'raise hand' tool so the facilitator can call on them.

9. Divvy up in-presentation responsibilities (managing breakout rooms, facilitating Q&A, coordinating captions, etc.) among your internal staff.

10. Follow-up with attendees after the event with a thank you e-mail, any helpful handouts, links to recorded content and an event evaluation form.

Questions? Planning a virtual event and don't know where to start?

Feel free to reach out to Eliza Adams at eadams@providers.org or 508.598.9700.

After nonprofit pressure, Biden revokes Trump's executive order on racial bias

Thanks to the more than 100 Council members who got behind the Council's efforts a few months ago to urge the Trump administration to withdraw Executive Order 13950, Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping.

It has been revoked by President Biden, several weeks after a federal judge blocked it from being enacted by the Trump administration.

Last November, the Council, along with the Association for Behavioral Healthcare, Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, the Children's League of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Association of 766 Approved Private Schools

(maaps), co-authored a letter noting that the community-based human services sector in Massachusetts includes many federal subcontractors covered under this executive order.

The Trump administration did not appeal the judge's ruling, and shortly after taking office President Biden revoked the order permanently.

Biden then called for an equity assessment to be conducted by federal agencies, including, but not limited to, findings regarding potential barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face in taking advantage of agency procurement and contracting opportunities within the next 200 days.

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services



Budget year like no other spurred collaboration and compromise

By Rep. Aaron Michlewitz and Sen. Michael Rodrigues

Over the last year, we have gone through one of the most unpredictable state budget processes our Commonwealth has ever experienced.

In March of last year, as we geared up for the beginning of the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, the state's finances were in a strong position. We had finished the previous fiscal year with a record surplus, and brought our rainy day fund to an all-time high of \$3.5 billion. The first eight months of FY '20 were stable and the upcoming budget process was looking like it would bring few serious fiscal challenges for us to tackle.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus shattered those expectations. With large sectors of the economy shutdown and a public health crisis staring us in the face, we faced an unprecedented crisis. Predicting future revenue figures can be a challenge in normal times, but the havoc and uncertainty caused by the pandemic made that task even more daunting. Some early estimates put our deficit as high as \$6 billion, an overwhelming figure to say the least, as our economy was ravaged and our way of life upended.

We quickly made the decision to delay our budget, a difficult but necessary step from both a public health and a fiscal standpoint. There was no playbook for any of us to draft, debate or pass a budget in the midst of a global pandemic and economic shutdown. While confronting public health and economic crises simultaneously, we had to weigh the fiscal implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on our Commonwealth. During this time, we were in constant communication with each other, our legislative colleagues, and our partners in the Baker administration, especially Administration and Finance Secretary Michael Hefferman. We kept a close eye on the Commonwealth's fiscal health and worked creatively to meet the moment. We convened several economic roundtables where we brought together a broad range of experts to weigh in on where we stood and what some potential paths forward could be.

While the virus continued to run its course and the state operated on a series of temporary budgets, our patience started to pay off.

In the fall, the fiscal picture, while still somewhat fluid, was more positive than anyone thought possible back in the spring. Relying on improved tax returns, federal aid, and our rainy day fund, we were able to present a final Fiscal Year 2021 budget that made no drastic spending cuts, while protecting essential safety net services for our most vulnerable populations.

In addition, we made a number strategic investments to address our Commonwealth's most urgent needs, including housing stability, education, food security, public health, mental health, and combating domestic vio-

lence and substance addiction services; while beginning to build an equitable economic recovery.

As we look towards Fiscal Year 2022, the challenges we faced in 2020 have only grown. We are still in the middle of a global pandemic, and while we are hopeful that the ongoing vaccine rollout will improve, we are fully cognizant that we have a long way to go as a Commonwealth before the current crisis is behind us.

Last month, we agreed to a consensus revenue number for FY '22 of \$30.12 billion between the Baker administration and ourselves. This modest increase, which represents a 3.5 percent growth over FY '21, comes with escalated spending pressures in areas such as healthcare, housing, and education costs as we begin to think through what a "new" normal will look like in the pandemic's wake. This will be one of our most difficult tasks going into this year's budget process, and throughout this legislative session.

The good news is that in the first seven months of fiscal year 2021, our tax numbers continue to outperform.

Through January, we are up \$152 million over our benchmarks for the fiscal year. While encouraging, we are fully conscious that this favorable news can change rather quickly, so we will continue to remain vigilant, monitor our fiscal health and hope the trends continue in the right direction.

One of the big unknowns going into this new budget cycle is whether state and local governments will receive more financial assistance from the federal government. The CARES Act that passed in April 2020 was invaluable and offered us tremendous flexibility to respond to the constant twists and turns of this crisis.

However, this insidious virus is still with us and so are its many challenges. We will continue to do all we can to help confront these problems, but as uniquely positioned as the Commonwealth is, our resources pale in comparison to those of the federal government.

Encouraged by the most recent developments in Washington, thanks to the leadership of President Biden and his American Rescue Plan, we will continue to advocate to our federal partners on the need for more federal assistance to help us address the budgetary impacts of this ongoing public health crisis.

Despite all of the disruptions that the pandemic has brought, the Legislature has found a way to operate remotely, so we remain very hopeful that the FY '22 budget process will return to a normal timeframe. In the weeks and months ahead, we look forward to continuing the collaborative relationship between ourselves, the other members of the Legislature, and the public at large, including our friends in the human service sector, to construct a budget that works for all residents of the Commonwealth.

Rep. Aaron Michlewitz and Sen. Michael Rodrigues are the chairs of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

The opinions expressed in A View from the Hill and Viewpoints from Across the State are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Providers' Council or its members.

HIRING: Provider community applauds report recommendations, urges more infrastructure for ‘underutilized but highly capable’ workers

Continued from Page 1

“I know as a person with a disability at work I have to constantly prove myself. The bar is higher for me. In other words, we are resilient, we have to be more resourceful and more creative and persevere,” said one worker.

“Employers will interview you because they have to and regardless of how well that interview goes you will not be called back,” another told the committee.

“It’s important for people like me to have jobs. Please do everything possible to help more people like me get employment,” a third worker told interviewers. “Down Syndrome means that it may take us longer time to learn, but we are both very capable and hard-working people,” reported another.

“The report substantiated the chronic unemployment rate experienced by individuals with disabilities and among its recommendations were to increase resources to support these individuals attain a competitive integrated job that they choose, want to do, and have the ability to do,” said Jim Cassetta, the company’s president and CEO of WORK, Inc.

Among the bright spots for hiring, the lawmakers found, were the state’s six regional employment collaboratives funded by the Department of Developmental Services, vocational rehabilitation services, Department of Mental Health Clubhouse programs and business-provider partnerships such as one developed in Chicopee between Viability and J. Polep Distribution Services which hires and trains a number of people with disabilities and instructs its management to help foster the development of the employees.

The results were increased morale across the board. “Employees have opened their hearts and minds,” the company said of the Viability initiative

Along with the major barriers of transportation access, building access and unfamiliarity regarding people with disabilities on the part of employers, the report also singled out the human services workforce crisis as a significant obstacle to employment.

The group also recommended that Massachusetts expand the reach of regional employment collaboratives that have been successful but right now do not cover large parts of western and central Massachusetts, the South Coast and Cape Cod. It also said partnerships with rideshare companies to alleviate some transportation barriers and new disability hiring goals in state contracting would be effective.

The provider community praised the report.

“Seeing the spotlight on inclusion of people with disabilities in the WorkAbility Task Force recommendations was a big step in the right direction. The more we recognize that Inclusion and equity aren’t just nice to do, but are right to do, and the more inten-

tional and creative we become in trading off “they can’t/we can’t” for “how might we...” the more individuals, communities, businesses and our world will thrive together,” said Colleen Holmes, CEO of Viability.

“We at Triangle, Inc. applaud the work of Rep Josh Cutler and the WorkAbility Subcommittee. This report and its recommendations will set a critical framework for business leaders and disability service agencies to work together to build more inclusive workplaces while maximizing the potential of a greatly underutilized but highly capable cadre of eager and talented workers,” said Coleman Nee, CEO of Triangle.

The subcommittee made eleven recommendations to encourage workforce opportunities for people with disabilities in Massachusetts. They included the establishment of a permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which was created as part of the policing reform law signed late last year.

WorkAbility subcommittee’s 11 recommendations to improve hiring of people with disabilities:

1. Establish a permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. (This was signed into law on December 31, 2020.)
2. Expand regional employment collaboratives.
3. Partnerships with ride share services.
4. Disability hiring benchmarks for smaller businesses.
5. Remove physical & technical barriers to employment.
6. Set new disability hiring goals in state contracting.
7. Mitigate ‘cliff effect’ with benefit management resources.
8. Enhanced support for individuals with significant disabilities.
9. Establish State House internship program and a pipeline to internship opportunities within the Legislature with the Mass. Rehabilitation Commission.
10. Plan self-identification PSA campaign.
11. Promote disability hiring tax incentives.

The full report and expanded recommendations can be found at www.joshcutler.com/workability.

BILLS: Council bills filed; federal UI update

Continued from Page 1

seek to eliminate the pay disparity that exists between the salaries of human services workers employed by community-based human service providers and state employees holding similar job titles who perform similar work at community-based human services nonprofits no later than July 1, 2027.

UI credit for self-insured employers debated on Capitol Hill

At press time, the U.S. House was debating a COVID-19 relief package that would include direct payment to citizens, funding for additional PPE and supplies to combat COVID, and an extension and enhancement of a credit for nonprofits that self-insure for unemployment.

Nonprofits had received a 50 percent credit on any UI charges since March 2020, a provision present in the CARES Act last year. That credit is due to expire on March 14, 2021, at which time employers would need to pay 100 percent of any UI charges.

The new proposed relief package, which had yet to receive final votes and could still be amended before passage, would extend that existing credit to March 31, 2021. It would also increase the amount of the credit to 75 percent from April 1, 2021 through August 29, 2021, meaning self-insured employers would only need to pay 25 percent of their UI claims during those five months.

The provision is expected to pass the House and Senate and be signed into law by President Biden sometime in March.

Additionally, Massachusetts nonprofits do not have to make any UI claim payments to DUA until June 30, 2021 due to legislation passed late last year that the Council advocated for.

For more information, contact Bill Yelenak at bill@providers.org.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS • WINTER 2021

What: Working with People Who Present Challenges for Us
When: Thursday, March 11
Time: 9 a.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Christine Singer, M.Ed, President, Your Personal Best: Workshops for Success
Cost: \$70 members; \$130 non-members

What: Attracting and Retaining Next Generation Leaders while WFH
When: Thursday, April 1
Time: 9 a.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting
Cost: \$70 members; \$130 non-members

What: Free, Members-Only Webinar: Explore Your Providers' Council Member Benefits
When: Wednesday, March 17
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Christina Broughton, Member Engagement Manager
Cost: Free for Council members

What: Spring 2021 Certificate in Supervision Series
When: Tuesday, April 20 to June 22
Time: 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting
Cost: \$600 members; \$900 non-members

What: Personal and Organizational Journey Towards Race Equity **SOLD OUT!**
When: Thursdays, March 18 and March 25
Time: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Barbara Holland, Chief Diversity Officer, Advocates Comma Williams, Comma Williams Enterprises
Cost: \$140 members; \$200 non-members
(To be placed on the waitlist for this program, please contact pdaily@providers.org.)

What: Introduction to Disability, Ableism & Creating Inclusive Spaces
When: Thursday, April 22
Time: 9 a.m.
Where: via Zoom
Trainers: Piper Slowinski, National Inclusion Manager, Partners for Youth with Disabilities
Cost: \$70 members; \$130 non-members

*Pre-registration for these events required unless otherwise noted.
Visit www.provider.org/events to learn more and register.*

Questions? Contact Eliza Adams at 508.598.9700 or eadams@providers.org



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