



Connection

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MI-AIRS prepares for new year

**By Doug Plant
MI-AIRS President**

I am very pleased to be writing my first President's column for the new MI-AIRS electronic newsletter. I know many of you don't know me and I intend to share something about what I bring to this position. I also want to begin framing out some of the issues that MI-AIRS will be tackling in the coming year. Let me start with the more interesting part.

This is an important time in the field of I & R as new challenges require us to look at ways of

making an even greater impact with fewer resources. Our state's economy notwithstanding, changes in how I & R is delivered are receiving significant attention nationally and locally. The movement of commercial call centers to other parts of the globe results in those outside of our field asking why we maintain such a local presence. I hear corporate reps asking how we in the I & R field can remain competitive in an environment where shrinking resources demand alternative approaches. They wonder about mergers and consolidations as a way of managing the

"inefficiencies" of various call centers where there is overlap or a redundancy in administrative costs. They question our limited use of Internet-based tools, i.e. Facebook, Craigslist, wikis, to more efficiently push information out.

I raise this not to promote any point of view but to be honest about some of the essential concerns staring us in the face. Our funders and supporters are requiring us to state a very clear case about our work and how we intend to use technology as a solution to our problems and to meet the needs of our grow-

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Michigan Alliance of Information & Referral Systems

www.mi-air.com

Established in 1977, the Michigan Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (MI-AIRS; formerly the Southeastern Michigan Information and Referral Alliance, or SEMIRA) is an alliance of agencies, community organizations, and individuals committed to providing quality information and referral services to all of Michigan. MI-AIRS is an affiliate of (international) Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

Contact MI-AIRS:
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The purpose of the MI-AIRS Connection is to keep MI-AIRS members updated on I&R news statewide.

Contact Newsletter Editor:
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ing consumer base.

As a leadership forum, MI-AIRS is uniquely qualified to evaluate and recommend ways of moving our field forward. Take a minute and look at who represents you as members of the MI-AIRS board (www.mi-air.com/aboutmiairs/miairs_board.html). You will see a very broad and comprehensive list of individuals with talents and experiences providing this leadership. Our willingness to collaborate and share solutions with each other is a quality not usually present in most industries.

This unique approach has been moving us forward for some time. Bob McKown, our departing President, has been a key influencer in this attitude. Many of you know Bob very well and know of the integrity, accountability, and innovation he has brought to his leadership, not only in MI-AIRS and AIRS, but to the Michigan 2-1-1 effort. Bob's insight to the many challenges of directing a call center, building a statewide system, measuring impact, and — the most important part — assisting residents with needs, has resulted in

Michigan being a leader in the field. So trying to fill Bob's shoes will be a tall order. Though we come from different paths to this field, I am confident my experience will carry forward the progress Bob and the board has made.

Currently, I am responsible for oversight of the volunteer and 2-1-1 services at United Way for Southeastern Michigan. I had the pleasure of learning much about the aging I & R field while working at The Information Center in Taylor, MI in the late nineties. Prior to that I gained knowledge of for-profit and non-profit call centers while developing and implementing employee assistance services within this region. I & R has been a passion of mine for many years and I am excited to serve all of you in this capacity.

As we move forward, please take a moment to thank Bob McKown for his many years of dedication. I am personally grateful for his leadership and the wisdom he has shared with me, as it has prepared me in taking on this new endeavor.

Despite mailing form letters to the 44 known MI-AIRS member agencies, we're still lacking e-mail addresses for 14 agencies. Please route this newsletter to your staff, since only a single issue is being sent to each MI-AIRS member agency. And if another MI-AIRS member agency tells you that they haven't received a copy, it's because MI-AIRS doesn't have an e-mail address for that agency. Have them send the desired address to newsletter@mi-air.com so they can be added to the mailing list.

MI-AIRS Member Profile: Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, Inc.

The protection and advocacy (P&A) system is a nationwide network of nonprofit corporations and state agencies providing information and advocacy to individuals with disabilities. Under federal law, each state and territory must designate a P&A program.

In Michigan, that program is Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, Inc. (MPAS). MPAS provides information and advocacy to promote, expand, and protect the human and legal rights of people with disabilities.

Congress mandated the protection and advocacy system in response to reports of serious mistreatment of individuals confined in state facilities. In the 1975 Developmental Disabilities Bill

of Rights and Assistance Act, Congress recognized that a federally-directed system of legal advocacy was necessary "to ensure the humane care, treatment, habilitation and protection" of individuals with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities.



Although MPAS was designated originally to address the advocacy needs of individuals with developmental disabilities, coverage was expanded to include individuals with mental illness

under the 1986 Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Act, and then to all individuals with disabilities under the 1994 Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) program. MPAS also provides

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Update from the MI-AIRS program committee

By Suzanne Eman-Jaehnig

As anyone who works in the field of I & R knows, there is always room to improve your skills in working with callers. When call centers experience turnover it is also critical that new staff members have access to quality training so they can provide callers with the best service possible. That is where the MI-AIRS Program Committee comes in!

The MI-AIRS Program Committee set the MI-AIRS training schedule back in January of 2007. The goal was to have at least two Basics of I & R workshops and one record management/taxonomy train-

ing as well as a few round-table/workshop opportunities throughout the year. The first Basics of I & R was held in May in the Detroit area and was well attended. The presenter was Paige Brunner from Detroit Public Library.

There was also a workshop held in May in Lansing on Quality Assurance. Bob McKown from Heart of West Michigan United Way and Kristin Bolds from United Way for Southeastern Michigan were the presenters. A record management/taxonomy training was held in July in Jackson. Dick Manikowski from Detroit Public Library and Heather Bridgewater from LifeWays were the presenters.

The Basics of I & R that was planned for October in Gaylord was cancelled due to lack of registrants. There was a plan to have a Call Reporting Statistics and Stress Management roundtables in the later part of 2007 but these have not been scheduled as of yet.

The MI-AIRS Program Committee is always looking for input from MI-AIRS members on what trainings they would find useful throughout the year. Call or e-mail Suzanne Eman-Jaehnig with any suggestions you might have. She can be reached at 517.203.5033 or s.eman@capitalareainitedway.org

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information and advocacy under a number of specialized federal, state and private grants addressing employment, voting, assistive technology, and issues affecting individuals with traumatic brain injuries.

MPAS provides free, confidential services, including:

- ❑ Information and referral to anyone who contacts the agency;
- ❑ Technical assistance, including written information and self-advocacy manuals;
- ❑ Selected legal representation and systemic advocacy in priority areas; and,
- ❑ Workshops and seminars on disability-related rights issues.

MPAS is a legal program and operates under legal rules of professional conduct. Federal mandates require that P&A programs have access to a full range of remedies for the individuals they serve. Although most matters are resolved without litigation, MPAS has independent standing to bring legal actions. In addition, Federal law gives MPAS access to individuals, their records, and programs when necessary to carry out its mission of investigating and redressing abuse and neglect of people with disabilities.

MPAS maintains a presence in facilities that care for people with mental illness, developmental disabilities and other disabilities, including selected juvenile facilities, where they monitor, investigate, and attempt to remedy adverse conditions.

MPAS is accountable to Federal funding partners and to community-based boards of directors and advisory committees. Under federal mandates, MPAS sets priorities for direct representation based on community input. MPAS served over 9,000 people in 2006-7. We currently are conducting selected casework and systemic advocacy in the following areas:

- ❑ Inclusion of children with disabilities in

- general education settings;
- ❑ Prevention of “push-out” of children from school and home through expulsion, juvenile justice referral, and other actions, for disability-related conduct;
- ❑ Adoption and application of consistent statewide standards to reduce or eliminate the use of seclusion and restraint in schools and facilities and regulate the use of administrative segregation as a substitute for program support;
- ❑ Provision of adequate education and mental health services in juvenile justice and youth correctional facilities;
- ❑ Prevention and redress of abuse and neglect of adults and children with disabilities in facilities;
- ❑ Reform of the state recipient rights system for people with developmental disabilities or mental illness;
- ❑ Provision of appropriate discharge planning for people who wish to move from facilities to their communities;
- ❑ Assurance of continued procedural safe guards and participation rights in the special education and early intervention planning process;
- ❑ Service assurances for people with traumatic brain injuries, including veterans;
- ❑ Access to assistive technology devices and services;
- ❑ Prevention of evictions or other housing actions for disability-related conduct;
- ❑ Prevention of abusive practices in the establishment and administration of guardianships;
- ❑ Assurance of access to voting for people with disabilities; and,
- ❑ Provision of employment supports and accommodations.

For more information about MPAS services, please contact our Lansing office at 800.288.5923 or 517.487.1755, or visit our Web site at www.mpas.org.

Help with prescription drug expenses

By Dick Manikowski

It's no secret that prescription drugs can be outrageously expensive. Even when uninsured individuals can get a doctor to diagnose their condition and prescribe a medication, they often can't afford to have the prescription filled.

Luckily, there are some resources to help these individuals.

Shop Around

Michigan's Attorney General's office has established a Web-based clearinghouse for prescription drug consumers. Browse to www.michigandrugprices.com and click on the "Save on your prescription drugs today!" link.

The Rx Price Finder link on the resulting page allows one to specify a Michigan location (city or ZIP) and then select drugs from an extensive list and view availability and pricing information from pharmacies within a user-specified radius. I found that the retail price for 30 tablets of one allergy medication I occasionally take (and which is covered by my workplace health insurance) varies from \$61.88 to \$154 within a 10-mile radius of my home.

(Webless users can call 866.755.6479 to access the Rx Price Finder information.)

Pharmacies associated with major retailers sometimes offer special \$4.00 fees for really popular prescription drugs. The Discount Drugs link lists availability for various dosages of over 100 medications at Meijer, Sam's, Target, and Walmart. (Note-Some of the information may be old. Users are advised to call ahead before asking to have a script filled.)

The Drug Information link on the site can bring up information about side effects, contraindications, and interactions of popular prescription drugs.

There's also a link for filing Pricing Complaints.

Low-Income Residents Can Get a Discount Card

The MiRx (My Prescription) card allows Michigan families whose income is below the state median to obtain medications at prices averaging about 20% below the retail price. There's no fee for the card, and the application form and a list of participating pharmacies can be found at

www.mihealth.org/mirx/index.html#.

(Callers without Web access can call 866.755.6479 to have an application mailed to them.)

Pharmaceutical Industry Assistance Programs

Most drug manufacturers have established assistance programs to help uninsured consumers obtain the medications they need but cannot afford. Because the terms of these programs vary between manufacturers and even between individual medications produced by a single manufacturer, tracking down information on them used to pose a major challenge.

All that changed when the pharmaceutical companies and other players in the health care industry came together to form the Partnership for Prescription Assistance. Their Web site (www.pparx.org) allows visitors to easily search for programs for which they qualify by filling out an interactive form. Once a program has been selected, the site even permits the visitor to print out application forms (which almost always need to be signed by the physician) to be mailed in. A sidebar link to the home page also provides information on programs which can help with insurance premium and co-pay costs.

(Individuals without Web access can dial 888.4PPA.NOW to speak to PPA staff in English or Spanish.)

Deaf culture explained at MI-AIRS business meeting

Kenya Lowe from AT&T gave an insightful presentation the morning of the October 10 MI-AIRS Annual Business Meeting at United Way for Southeastern Michigan in downtown Detroit. Ms Lowe is both deaf and Deaf, and she was ably assisted by ASL interpreter Tony Laperna from Deaf Community Action Network in explaining the distinction between those terms. The term deaf refers to persons who are unable to hear, while Deaf refers to deaf persons who identify with the Deaf community and its culture.

Deaf people in America (and in English speaking portions of Canada) communicate using ASL (American Sign Language), a complex, visual-spatial linguistically complete language with its own slang and whose grammar is largely dependent on facial expressions. Deaf communities in other nations have developed their own signing languages, and an ASL signer would have as many problems communicating with a British Sign Language signer as an American English speaker would have communicating with a Parisian if neither was bilingual.

For all practical purposes, written English is a second lan-

guage for Americans who were born deaf. The average deaf adult reads at about a third grade level, largely because he's been taught by teachers who aren't fluent in ASL. The poor reading and writing skills, coupled with the scarcity of positive role models they can identify with, often lead to deaf children growing up with no career plan.

Ms. Lowe spent some time discussing audism, which Wikipedia defines as "a term used to describe discrimination or stereotypes against deaf or hard of hearing people, for example by assuming that the cultural ways of hearing people are preferable or superior to those of deaf or signing culture, or that deaf people are somehow less capable than hearing people." Both deaf and hearing persons can buy into audism. A deaf child who only sees deaf people working as janitors or dishwashers isn't likely to have very high career ambitions.

She also pointed out that, while well intended, the term hearing impaired is offensive. The only acceptable terms to the Deaf community are deaf and hard of hearing. (The latter term refers to people who have some hearing but not enough to function

in the hearing community without hearing aids or other assistive devices.)

Ms Lowe briefly described video phones, which allow ASL speakers to sign directly with each other from a distance. The devices require a DSL line. Human service agencies with in-house ASL signers are beginning to install video phone equipment and lines to better serve the ASL community.

Personally, Ms Lowe said she and many deaf persons live and die by their T-Mobile Sidekicks. Besides being able to text messages to other users of Sidekicks and other mobile phones, the Sidekicks incorporate TTY software to allow users to communicate with relay centers.

Her chief complaint? "T-Mobile won't let me subscribe to their data service without also subscribing to voice phone service. HELLO T-Mobile? I'm DEAF. I can't use the voice service."

Kenya Lowe can be reached at [kl1659 \[at sign\] yahoo \[dot\] com](mailto:kl1659[at sign] yahoo [dot] com). Deaf Community Action Network can be reached at 248.332.3331 (voice) or 248.332.3323 (TTY).

Do you have an idea for a newsletter article? Want your agency to be profiled in an upcoming edition? We would love to hear from you. E-mail the newsletter staff at newsletter@mi-air.com