

"Focus"

Transition from School to Adult Life: Orientation & Mobility /Vision Loss Services

Transition from school for young adults eligible for services from the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) adult services is a very important time of life. For students who also have vision impairment, legal blindness, or deafblindness, and who may have been followed by a children's worker from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), there are additional vision loss related details to plan for and consider.

The MCB/DDS Partnership Project is here to help. We provide direct and consultative Orientation and Mobility/Low Vision services, as well as offer resource information, training materials and events. Services are provided by Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) and Vision Rehabilitation Assistants (VRA). Our work is focused on each adult's unique vision loss needs.

What Is the Cost?

There is no cost to adults receiving O&M/Low Vision Services through the MCB/DDS Partnership Project. Services are funded by MCB and DDS.

Please Share This Information

- Students

- Parents/Guardians/ Caregivers
- School and DDS and/or MCB Transition Coordinator
- School Team Chair
- School Administration
- Special Education Director
- Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)
- Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI)

It all starts with a referral...

How to Refer

Referral is initiated by the DDS or MCB Transition Coordinator using the Referral Form available for each DDS Region (Central West, Metro, Northeast, and Southeast) on the "Focus" website: www.mass.gov/dds/visionloss

When to Refer

Referral should be made during the year of, and preferably at least 6 months prior to, the student's planned transition. Transition to DDS adult services typically occurs between the ages of 18 and 22.

Referral can be also made at any time an adult experiences a change in vision, mobility, and/or environment.

Why So Early

Early referral allows a COMS from our Partnership Project to meet the student, his/her Classroom Teacher, COMS and/or TVI both at

school and in familiar locations where the student is confident and comfortable. By observing the student's current O&M skills and visual/nonvisual strategies in familiar environments the COMS (from our Partnership Project) is better able to support continued skill development and environmental needs during and after transition.

What to Expect

Soon after the initial referral is received the COMS will schedule a visit at school to meet with the student, current COMS, TVI, and classroom teacher. The COMS from our Partnership Project will work together with the current COMS/TVI to familiarize the student to new locations where he/she will spend time (home, work, day program, or community).

As needed, suggestions for safety, or environmental modifications at the new locations will be made, and an O&M Assessment or Progress note written. The COMS will train new staff in use of orientation and mobility techniques, sensitivity to working with a person with vision loss, and on other visual/nonvisual considerations important to consider for the student.

What to Include with a Referral

Sharing of information truly helps. Along with the referral form, please provide the student's:

1. Most recent 3-year re-evaluation
2. Current IEP O&M goals with progress notes and grid times

3. Transition Planning Form (TPF)
4. O&M Transition Report
5. Recent reports from:
 - Specialists: COMS, TVI, PT, OT, SLP, Behaviorist
 - Eye Care Providers: Ophthalmologist (MD) and/or Optometrist (OD)

Transition and Beyond

Adults are on the move and so are we! Throughout an adult's life there may be changes in employment, day program, residence, new staff to work with, and/or new or progressive vision loss concerns. MCB/DDS Partnership staff assists adults with vision loss during all of these life changes and transitions. We work with adults where they spend time and meet them at home, neighborhood, community, work, day program, and leisure activities.

How can Specialized O&M/Low Vision Services help?

Vision Loss Training & Support

Working with adults, families, caregivers, support staff and clinical teams, we provide:

- Sensitivity training, including use of Human Guide and all O&M techniques.
- Consultation re: impact on daily life, work and leisure.
- Information on resources, materials, and events.

Accessibility

Accessibility increases safety, independence, and visual function. We provide:

- Recommendations for use of color, contrast, lighting, furniture placement, handrails, and more.
- Identification of indoor/outdoor hazards and solutions.

Mobility & Safety

Confident, safe mobility promotes independence, and prevents falls/injury. We offer:

- Instruction and plans for use of Human and/or Voice Guide, Trailing, Protective Techniques, Long or Adaptive Cane.
- Transportation and safety assessments.
- Orientation skills training at home, neighborhood, work, and day program.

Strategies

Living with vision loss presents unique challenges. We can help:

- Safety, organization, and skill resources for independence and inclusion.
- Recommendations for maximizing use of functional vision and increasing participation.
- Strategies for daily living, work tasks, leisure activities and risk management.
- Consultation with providers during DDS Supportive Technology Assessments.

Free Resources

Opportunities await! We offer registration assistance:

- APH Federal Quota Account
- Talking Book and Braille Library
- U.S. Currency Reader Program
- iCan Connect

Eye Care

Promoting eye care is important. We provide:

- Advocacy for high quality eye exams.
- Information at eye exams regarding use of vision in everyday situations.
- Assistance with eyeglass tolerance.
- Sunglass evaluation.

APH Federal Quota

Eligible adults can receive free products from the MCB American Printing House for the Blind Federal Quota Account (APH).

Information regarding eligibility, registration, and a link to the APH Products Catalog can be found on the "FOCUS" website. Please review and ask your MCB or DDS Transition Coordinator to complete and send along the Pre-Registration form.

Students previously registered on the DESE APH account during school years, must also complete a new registration form for the MCB/APH Quota Account.

Prior account eligibility on the DESE APH Account is not needed for a young adult to be found eligible for the MCB APH Quota Account.

DDS Supportive Technology for Vision Loss/Combined Vision-Hearing Loss

An evaluation produces recommendations for devices and products to meet unique needs and goals. More information can be found on the “Focus” website.

Additional Resources

focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

- “Focus” Talks
- Eye Care Provider Resources
- Let’s Walk Together Video
- Caregiver Support Group

Collaboration and Oversight Details

MCB and DDS collaborate with and provide funding to private not-for-profit organizations for administrative support and specialized service by COMS and VRAs. Current partners include the Carroll Center for the Blind, MAB Community Services, and Shriver Clinical Services Corporation

At this time VRA services are currently available only in the DDS Metro and Southeast Regions.

Oversight for services is provided by the Statewide Director for Vision and Vision Loss Services at DDS in collaboration with MCB.

Getting to Know COMS and VRAs

COMS on our Partnership Teams are University trained and certified through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) to provide the specialized services that include mobility skill instruction (human guide, protective techniques, voice guide, trailing, long cane, adapted cane), orientation instruction to new routes and locations, functional vision and environmental evaluations, and blindness/vision impairment sensitivity training to staff and caregivers.

VRAs work directly with individuals to practice the skills and programs developed by COMS including trailing, cane travel and human guide, braille reading/writing, set up of work space with proper lighting, contrast, and/or tactile information. The VRA does not conduct functional vision evaluations, mobility assessments or teach street crossings.

For More Information

Please visit our "Focus" website:

www.focusonvisionandvisionloss.org

Contact: Lisa DiBonaventura, MA, COMS
Statewide Director Vision & Vision Loss Services

Department of Developmental Services

Lisa.DiBonaventura@mass.gov

Office: 508 384 5539

Fax: 508 384 6771