

MINUTES**March 4, 2010 – Marlboro, Massachusetts**

Members Present: Zulmira Allcock, Liz Fancher for Kristin Britton, Kelly Ann Coyne, John Garcia, Jen Greco, Crystal Hebert, Karin Lifter, Peggy Lee, Karin Lifter, Margaret Mahoney, Anne Marsh, Neal Michaels, Rich Robison for Sara Miranda, Kimber O'Connell, Jennifer O'Leary, Nancy Phillips, Kathie Rose, Arlene Tannenbaum, Joanne Williams.

Members Absent: Jennifer Amaya Thompson, Richard Breault, Maria Burke, Sandra Daly, Jen DerBegosian, Pam Kuechler, Anne Marsh, Miriam Martinez, Sara Miranda, Therese Murphy-Miller, Ronna Schaffer, Nancy Schwartz, Pam Wildnauer, Peggy Winsman.

Non-Voting Committee Chairs in Attendance: Rena Ginsberg, Jack Harris, Tom Miller, Peter Woodbury.

1. Welcome: Margaret Mahoney opened the meeting and introduced Tri-Chairs Kimber O'Connell and Joanne Williams.

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the meeting held January 14, 2010, were approved as written.

2. Director's Report – Ron Benham: Ron began by acknowledging the tremendous work of the advocacy community, and especially that of Mary Ann Mulligan, the Legislative Advocate of the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium. **Patti Fougere** introduced Barbara Joyner, the newly-appointed EI Northeast Regional Specialist. She also introduced two students from the nursing program at UMass Dartmouth.

Ron summarized these funding and program items: Conversations with Mass Health are underway, and Mary Ann Mulligan is meeting with the Governor's staff regarding the EI budget for 2010 and 2011. It appears that changes in eligibility and parent fees will not be implemented on April first as previously announced. Ron is on a board that advises federally funded regional resource centers. When the board meets in Washington, DC, next week, he will take the opportunity to discuss our state's budget shortfall for EI, which is partly due to our use of ARRA funds a year earlier than most states. In recent advocacy efforts, about 1,600 letters were received as a result of the Public Hearings and the Stroller-In. The letters, with pictures and personal stories, are very effective. A Face Book page in association with the Stroller-In had 1,700 hits. Margaret Mahoney commented further on how powerful the testimony at the Northampton Public Hearing was: Parents clearly understood the financial challenge and did a convincing job, and the Hearing Officers held onto their role while being compassionate listeners. Copies of the testimonial letters went to the Governor and to the appropriate legislators. There were numerous news releases; a WBZ news reporter even went on a home visit.

3. Program Updates – Patti Fougere: Patti announced that providers are receiving instructions from Jean Shimer about distribution of this year's Family Survey in March and October. Program staff can help by encouraging families to fill out and return the surveys. Instructions about how to report the number of surveys distributed – and returned – will be sent soon. A group has been meeting since September to plan changes in certification for EI Specialists, which are designed to engage supervisors and to highlight the professionalism of each individual applicant.

4. Intensive Services Group – Tracy Osbahr: This group has been meeting to discuss policies and procedures for the provision of specialty services through existing certified EI programs. This is a complex process that will include having specialty providers submit their credentials for review.

5. Shishmanian Awards – Holly Newman: The Shishmanian Awards were developed to honor Eunice Shishmanian, a maternal child health nurse who worked on behalf of young children and was the first Chair of this ICC. Since its inception, 85 Shishmanian awards have been given, evenly split between Student Fellows and Senior Practitioners. This year there were two Fellows and Four Senior Practitioners. The practitioner projects include two on infant massage, one on assistive communication devices, and one on swallowing in infants and toddlers. Lauren Staniford, masters' degree candidate in School Psychology at Northeastern University, spoke about her placement at the Criterion EI program in Stoneham. She described how her site supervisor carefully tailored each learning experience, while sharing her tremendous knowledge. Lauren felt that her direct experiences with parents, and the glimpses of family life they provided, were especially meaningful. Karin Lifter, ICC member and professor at Northeastern, commented on the value of embedding EI coursework and practicum experience into the preparation of school psychologists.

6. Committee Reports. Standards Committee – Zulmira Allcock: The committee welcomes additional feedback about revision of the standards, and also seeks new committee members. The various sections of the standards are available at www.eiplp.org as they are updated. **Personnel Preparation – Rena Ginsberg:** The committee continues work on the play brochure; the target date for completion is the end of June. **Program Planning – Joanne Williams:** Thirty-one programs completed the survey about how universal social-emotional screening is conducted in programs. Twenty programs are using a screening tool of some sort. Those that are not already using one will be expected to submit an implementation plan. Patti Fougere will circulate information about training opportunities. She requests input about the kind of assistance providers would like from the Early Intervention Training Center. This could include mentorships and the opportunity to work with a program that is already doing the screening. **Specialty Services – Tom Miller:** Tom distributed a committee report. The committee has two new members: Jessica Fox and Kevin Nolan.

Fiscal Committee – Peter Woodbury: FY 2010: The committee has requested additional data from the Department about the impact of lifting the insurance cap and the ability to bill developmental specialists to Medicaid. **FY 2011:** A small group has worked closely with Department staff to better understand the elements of the projected \$10.5 million deficit for FY 2011. Three elements were identified: Loss of retained revenue; the disappearance of ARRA funding that Massachusetts benefited from in FY 2009 and 2010; and growth in the EI system. The group concluded that the projection is accurate. Mary Ann Mulligan, the MEIC Legislative Advocate, has been discussing integration of high intensity services into EI programs, as well as the potential to achieve “first dollar” insurance coverage (e.g. elimination of co-pays or deductibles) for EI services, as now exists in Rhode Island; this could relieve the EI budget of a \$3-4 million annual expense. Other considerations: There is a marked increase in the number of self-funded or hybrid insurance plans that are not required to fund a mandated service such as EI; the true impact is as yet unknown. The system is exploring whether EI could become a standard benefit in health care plans, just like maternity care. Certain regulatory and rate changes have to take place before high intensity specialty services can be embedded in, and billed through, EI programs; the hoped-for implementation date is July 1, 2010.

Membership Committee – Jennifer O’Leary: The first meeting of the committee was held March 9. Kelly Ann Coyne is also a member. Unfilled seats on the ICC include a physician, a legislator, and the Department of Early Education and Care. The committee will also work on revising the ICC Member Handbook.

Family Leadership Team – Kimber O’Connell: Kimber reported that parents on the ICC have petitioned the ICC Steering Committee to create a Family Leadership Team. Margaret Mahoney explained that the group is very interested in advocacy on the federal level – something that is badly needed. The Massachusetts ICC will become a member of EIFA – the Early Intervention Family Alliance. This is the only national group of EI families, and would allow access to a greatly expanded flow of information. Programs are urged to let individual families know that they can join EIFA at no charge while their child is enrolled in EI; after that, membership is \$25.00. Interested people should go to www.eifamilyalliance.org. Anyone can join the Family Leadership Team; providers are welcome.

6. Member Updates: Neal Michaels announced that the Department of Children and Families received a small grant from the Noonan Foundation to create dialogue among families, foster families, EI and DCF. He also commented that 3,300 DCF staff are represented by a union that becomes involved whenever changes in practice affect the work flow of staff. Neal is hopeful that an integrated case coordination model involving EI can move forward in the near future. **Karin Lifter** announced that she attended a conference on integrating research into EI. Part C presents interesting opportunities for study. There is huge variation in clinical practice across the states. Possible topics include language learning issues, especially in 2-3 year-olds, social emotional development, and professional development. Some of the biggest issues are in measurement. Karin also announced that she and a group of colleagues at Northeastern have received a substantial four-year federal grant to focus on play assessment. A practitioner-friendly tool is being developed, and families and service providers are being recruited to participate. **Ron Benham** announced that Sharon Walsh has been active with a consortium of interested groups; they are working at the federal level to achieve better representation for the needs of children birth to three who are eligible for Part C services, as well as for “Baby B” (Section 619). Ron also commented on a series of learning sessions for very senior personnel in Massachusetts regarding autism spectrum disorders.

7. Adjournment: 12 Noon.