

MAPS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) is a private, non-profit, community-based organization that has provided a wide range of health and social services to Portuguese speakers and other residents of eastern Massachusetts since 1970. The agency offers a variety of programs that break down language and cultural barriers to health and social services, education and economic opportunity. MAPS in its present form was created in 1993 by the merger of the former Somerville Portuguese American League (SPAL) and Cambridge Organization of Portuguese Americans (COPA). COPA and SPAL had served area Portuguese speakers separately for many years prior to the merger.

Both COPA and SPAL began as storefront operations working on shoestring budgets with very small staffs and a cadre of dedicated volunteers. COPA focused on social services such as English as a Second Language and citizenship classes, information and referral services, immigration assistance, family life counseling and programs for youth and the elderly. SPAL began in the same fashion but branched out during the 1980s to include a variety of health services. Efforts initially focused on substance abuse and AIDS prevention, and the agency won a state Department of Public Health award for its AIDS Program in 1989. In 1991, SPAL and COPA formally affiliated and hired an Executive Director, Victor Do Couto, to run them jointly. The agencies merged in July 1993 to become MAPS. Goals included improving service provision, ending program duplication, and unifying the many segments of the Portuguese-speaking community in eastern Massachusetts.

The MAPS service population includes immigrants from eight Portuguese-speaking countries around the world. Most of the agency's clients in the Boston area and northeastern Massachusetts are from Brazil, Cape Verde or Portugal. MAPS also serves some English speakers in some of its programs.

The MAPS staff of more than 30 and its 15-person Board of Directors come from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that reflect the diversity of the agency's clientele. Agency offices are located in the heart of the Portuguese-speaking communities of Cambridge, Somerville, Boston, Lowell and Framingham. The Somerville and Cambridge offices are located at the former sites of COPA in East Cambridge and SPAL in Union Square, Somerville. The agency opened its first Boston office in Allston in 1995 to serve the large and growing Brazilian population in that neighborhood. The agency also expanded its service area northward in 1997, opening its new Lowell office at the urgent request of the city's Portuguese-speaking community.

The MAPS Website was launched in August 1999 at www.maps-inc.org. In the same year, the Lowell and Allston offices moved to new, larger locations to accommodate program expansion.

MAPS began a new era on August 23, 2000, when the Board of Directors appointed former Deputy Executive Director Paulo Pinto as Executive Director. Victor Do Couto, Executive Director for more than eight years, left on March 31, 2000 to head the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition.

MAPS entered the 21st Century having achieved most of the goals set forth by its leaders in a 1995 five-year Strategic Plan. The agency's "Vision 2000" called for the agency to be a "strong, financially healthy, multi-sited organization, leading empowerment efforts among our constituencies statewide, by offering comprehensive services within an active community capacity-building framework."

In 2001, MAPS opened a fifth office in Upham's Corner, Dorchester to better serve the Cape Verdean community of Boston. The Cape Verdean Youth Program, serving teens and pre-teens, is the cornerstone of

that office.

A new five-year Strategic Plan was completed in the fall of 2001, calling for increased services to youth and elders, expanded advocacy and community development, and continuing to strengthen the agency's finances in response to the nationwide economic difficulties. Following that plan, and with the support of several major donors as well as Merrimack Valley Elder Services, MAPS opened a new Senior Drop-in Center at the Portuguese American Center in Lowell in 2003 to begin serving the many Portuguese-speaking elders of the Lowell area. It was the first step toward building a comprehensive Lowell Elder Services Program similar to the one offered by MAPS in Cambridge. Later, in 2005, the highly successful center was turned over to its funding group to be run by volunteers from within the community.

Also in 2005, MAPS obtained a new contract with the state Dept. of Public Health to begin providing HIV Prevention to high-risk men in the Framingham/Marlborough area, especially targeting Brazilians and Latinos. That led to opening the new MAPS Framingham office on a part-time basis in early 2006. A Hyams Foundation grant also allowed for expansion of ESOL classes in Boston during 2005.

In 2006 MAPS was honored to be included in the Massachusetts Catalogue for Philanthropy as an example of excellent in Human Service provision!

MAPS is supported by government sources and the United Way, as well as individual donors, corporations, foundations, special event fund-raisers and third-party billings. In October of 2002, the agency started a new Endowment with an initial major gift from former Board member Robert J. Perry. The Endowment has continued to grow, and offers a variety of different funds in which community members can invest. They can start new funds with a minimum contribution of \$1,000.

MAPS services are organized into three sections: Disease Prevention & Education Services; Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services; and Clinical & Support Services. The constellation of services has grown and changed over the years to reflect the community's shifting needs and assets. Ours was the first organization in the state to provide a full range of outpatient substance abuse services for Portuguese speakers, including the first program licensed by the state of Massachusetts to provide acupuncture detoxification services. The MAPS AIDS programs remain the only source for comprehensive HIV/AIDS education and services in Portuguese and Cape Verdean Creole within the region.

The agency's health services have also grown over the years to include chronic disease and cancer prevention, currently targeting Cape Verdean youth in the Dorchester/Roxbury area. Funding cutbacks forced MAPS to discontinue many of its clinical services including substance abuse treatment between 2003 and 2005, and to stop providing a highly successful Healthy Mind/Healthy Body program for adult community members at risk for diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other chronic conditions. The agency also provided mental health services briefly but closed that program in 2004 when its service partner agency in Boston was no longer able to provide the required supervision. MAPS also scaled back its Somerville office hours to night-time, by appointment only, beginning in 2004.

Youth services, which expanded in mid-decade to include Cambridge, Allston and Lowell at varying levels, have been curtailed as well due to changing priorities in the funding community. Youth programming is once again limited to the Dorchester office and currently focuses on HIV prevention and education as well as promoting active lifestyles and healthy nutrition. Staff and volunteers also provide limited education and support to Cape Verdean youth in other key areas.

Social services have expanded from their base of Immigrant Social Services, child protective services, English for Speakers of Other Languages, citizenship classes and senior programs, to incorporate batterer intervention, domestic violence prevention, family-based services for DCF (formerly DSS)-involved families, and a wider assortment of educational programs. In addition, MAPS continues to increase its community capacity-building and advocacy efforts in a variety of areas such as citizenship and immigration, HIV and substance abuse education and treatment, senior services and domestic violence prevention. In addition, MAPS provided home ownership education and assistance to the community for a number of years until discontinuing the program due to lack of available resources.

In a major effort to build community capacity, MAPS joined with Suffolk University during the first decade of the new millennium to initiate a new Certificate Program in Management of Health and Human Services. The program graduated 11 professionals in its first year alone and more in its second year. Other community-building efforts have included collaborations with the Brazilian American Chamber of Commerce, the Brazilian Women's Group, Brazilian Workers Center and Cape Verde Cares, with MAPS providing various types of expertise and assistance to help those nonprofit organizations.

The MAPS Citizenship for New Americans Program and its HIV Counseling & Testing Program resumed full service capacity in FY 2006, receiving new funding from the state after a hiatus of several years. In 2007, the agency increased efforts in the areas of Breast Cancer Prevention, Youth Wellness and Tobacco Prevention, and health insurance outreach and enrollment thanks to several new grants and contracts. MAPS also celebrated the 10th anniversary of its Lowell Office in 2007.

MAPS held its third major full-day conference, "Mulher-The Evolving World of Portuguese-Speaking Women" in April 2008, at Simmons College. MAPS also grew its Endowment to more than \$100,000 and raised a record amount in its FY 2008 Holiday Appeal.

In June 2008 the agency signed a lease for a new office space in Framingham, at 24 Union Ave., Suites 8 & 10, which is larger and more accessible for disabled clients than the old office. MAPS also expanded citizenship and voter registration/information in the months before the Presidential election. Board size was reduced to 15 from 18 by vote of the members at the Annual Meeting, and a new organizational MAPS membership category was added.

The year 2009 saw MAPS redouble its fundraising and program development efforts in the face of the growing national recession. The agency finished FY 2009 with an impressive \$150,000 surplus designed to protect operations and services against other potential cutbacks. Despite the difficult funding environment, MAPS was able to expand services in the areas of MassHealth and related insurance outreach and enrollment for low-income clients; domestic violence prevention and education; HIV/AIDS Education & Prevention in the MetroWest area; health education in Lowell; and Energy Efficiency Solutions for Small Businesses in partnership with NSTAR. We also held our most successful Gala ever in May 2009 in Boston, followed by *homem*, an informative June conference on Portuguese-speaking men's issues. The conference was planned and implemented in partnership with UMass Boston, the CPCU Credit Union, the Boston Portuguese Festival and our organizing committee led by Dr. Ana Nava.

MAPS also launched a newly renovated agency Website in 2009 along with freshly updated brochures and newsletters. The agency went on to establish a presence in the world of social media including Twitter, Facebook and Orkut.

For the 2010 US Census, MAPS partnered with many other community leaders and organizations to form a statewide Portuguese-Speaking Complete Count Committee (PSCCC) for Massachusetts. Our goal was to insure that every Portuguese speaker gets counted, and that no one needlessly fears filling out the Census form. The PSCCC launched a comprehensive outreach and education campaign across the state to inform community members about the importance of the Census and how to fill it out to best reveal the true size of the Portuguese-speaking population. This massive effort resulted in improved counts in many immigrant neighborhoods around the state.

Overcoming another round of budget cuts in 2010, the agency persevered, winning two new federal multi-year contracts that helped cover losses in state funding. MAPS collaborated with several other community partners including the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center to launch a new project—funded by the US Office on Violence Against Women of the Dept. of Justice—that will increase community response to domestic violence and sexual assault. In one of the first phases, MAPS' Domestic Violence Services Program staff were trained to assist women in our service populations who have been sexually assaulted.

The agency also began providing expanded HIV/AIDS Prevention, Screening and Referral Services for high-risk Portuguese- and Cape Verdean Creole-speaking men through a new grant from the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention in parts of greater Boston, Brockton and several communities in between.

In September 2011, MAPS marked the 10-year anniversary of its Dorchester Office with an Open House celebration at the office, in the heart of Upham's Corner. Among other 2011 accomplishments, the agency also launched a new Organizational Membership campaign, and completed a much-needed update of the MAPS Cambridge Office entrance and reception area to make it more accessible, energy efficient and safe for after-hours use. Renovations were funded by refinancing the building mortgage.

As we move further into our fifth decade of service, MAPS continues to seek new ways to reach, inform and assist the Portuguese-speaking communities of Massachusetts.