

GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES & EMPLOYMENT

ELLENSBURG TOWN HALL MEETING AND LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

Introduction:

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) met in Ellensburg on May 8th & 9th, 2008. The meetings were held at the Hal Holmes Center which is located at 201 North Ruby Street in Ellensburg. Thirty-seven individuals attended the Town Hall meeting and thirty-five individuals attended the Leadership Breakfast. We were warmly welcomed, by persons of disabilities, family members, service providers and city and county officials. We appreciate the valued input and candor of all of the participants.

The following report represents a summary of issues discussed at both meetings. Suggested actions, both legislative and local are presented. We have included the results of the evaluation forms that were returned. The feedback was valuable to us in planning for our subsequent Outreaches. We look forward to further communications on these issues and local successes.

We were pleased to have Representative Judith Warnick, District 13, attend the Town Hall Meeting and address the attendees. She encouraged the Community Outreach subcommittee to continue its efforts and spoke briefly of her work regarding accessibility for recreational activities.

Ellensburg is a vital, well connected community and has a strong commitment to the potential growth in services for persons of disability. We are particularly impressed with the local networking and problem solving that was very apparent during our meetings.

Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Independent Living Centers, located in Spokane, Vancouver, Seattle, Lakewood, Redmond, Everett and Ellensburg, offer a wide range of services. Their core services are information and referral, peer support, skills training and advocacy.
- Central Washington Disability Resources (CWDR) in Ellensburg offers advocacy when one becomes disabled. They also assist individuals with disabilities find employment and they work with local service providers to ensure individuals with disabilities have full access to all programs and services offered to the general public.

ACCESSIBILITY IN LOCAL COMMUNITY

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- There is an ongoing local effort to improve the community access.
- The visitor commission is creating a brochure to identify and other establishments that are accessible to local citizens and tourists with disabilities; for example, a restaurant's entrance may be accessible, but the restrooms' door, soap dispensers, towels, toilet paper, mirrors and door latches for the facility are not.

EDUCATION:

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Ellensburg High School is creating work site opportunities at Suncadia, Ellensburg Chevrolet, and in local hotels.
- K – 12 programs are concerned about the lack of training dollars and a high turn over rate for staff that provides support for students with disabilities. Increase educational opportunities for youth in jail settings.
- Changes in IDEA which allows school district to develop interventions for students with disabilities without also establishing diagnosis documentation has a negative impact on the ability of institutions of higher education to provide continued support services to these same students
- School staff in general needs better education around serving and identifying needed supports for students with disabilities.
- Schools need to be held accountable for finding paid work experience for students with disabilities.
- Successful high school graduation for students with disabilities should equate to paid jobs.

Legislative Action: (1) Develop legislation that directs higher education entities to track employment rates of graduating students with disabilities. (Note: students are already coded so this should be a simple process to implement.). (2) Develop legislation that ensures a continuum of educational services at institutions of higher education. (3) Students with disabilities need to include diagnostic testing as part of their exit services.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Sherriff Gene Dana stated that they need to recruit individuals with disabilities to serve on their emergency preparedness committee.
- Encourage people to know their neighbors and map their neighborhoods to identify persons needing evacuation assistance.
- Develop agreements with HopeSource and local school districts to transport persons needing evacuation assistance.
- Establish a volunteer registry through collaboration with local service networks

EMPLOYMENT

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Ellensburg is anticipating future employment opportunities with the growth of the Industrial Park and a new resort (Suncadia) being built.
- Some employers are resistant to hire persons with disabilities because:
 - 1) Fear of additional costs for training, accommodation etc
 - 2) Lack of awareness of the value workers with disabilities bring to the labor pool
 - 3) Do not understand the tax incentives for hiring workers with disabilities.
- More work opportunities need to be developed for high school students who are transitioning from school to work.

FUNDING NEEDS

Legislative Action: (1) Promote legislative changes permitting Independent Living Centers to become line-item funded in the Governor's budget in 2009. (2) Restore recently reduced funding for PAVE (Parents are Vital to Education). (3) Fully fund the statewide Parent to Parent program. (4) Increase state funding for Veterans with disabilities. (5) Increase funding for the family support programs to expand eligibility criteria and improve program flexibility.

HOUSING

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Ellensburg needs more safe, affordable and accessible housing for individuals and families with members who have disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities need increased housing options such as single and family units, group homes and adult family homes.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES NEED TO BE A STATEWIDE PRIORITY.

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Local law enforcement has earned respect in the mental health community and provides appropriate interactions with citizens with mental health issues.
- Access to mental health services while incarcerated needs to be improved.
- Individuals need prompt access to their prescribed medications when incarcerated.
- The process for incarceration needs to include a continuum of care for those with mental illness.

Legislative Action: (1) Advocates need to work with elected officials to build their awareness of the short falls and lack of funding for those who depend on mental health services. (2) The state needs to work with the federal government and our congressional delegation to reinstate the prior payment system for mental health services. The pervious payment process had more flexibility which incorporated a cost shifting process and a

sliding fee scale. Reestablishing this system will increase services to mental health consumers and reduce unnecessary admissions into hospitals and state institutions.

TRANSPORTATION:

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Central transit exemplifies collaboration between local, state, and private resources to provide community wide services.
- HopeSource continues to increase local awareness that it provides transportation services to everyone.
- HopeSource's rider ship is up 35%, and the cost per mile of service is down by 5%. They served 70 – 80,000 riders over the last year.
- Central Transit provided services to 40,000 riders over the last year.
- HopeSource is working to become self sustaining by increasing their local partnerships.
- HopeSource and Central Transit are excellent examples how a community can develop innovative programs to meet the transportation needs of students, seniors, youth, persons with disabilities and local employers.
- HopeSource needs to create a better marketing plan to increase awareness of their operating hours, route information and that the service is open to the public.

Legislative Action: (1) There is a need to simplify the process for a local community to qualify for a Public Transportation Benefit Area. (2) A bill needs to be developed which allows a percentage of the hotel taxes to be used for improved transportation systems across the state.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES THAT COULD BE ADDRESSED THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Develop legislation that directs high education entities to track employment rates of graduating students with disabilities.

Promote legislative changes permitting Independent Living Centers to become line-item funded in the Governor's budget in 2009.

Restore funding for PAVE (Parents are Vital to Education) which was recently cut.

Fully fund Parent to Parent statewide.

Increase state funding for Veterans with disabilities.

Build awareness with elected officials to the short falls and lack of funding for mental health services.

Encourage our Congressional Delegation to reinstate the prior payment system for mental health services which allows for more flexibility, cost shifting and sliding fee scales. Reestablishing this system increases services to mental health consumers and reduces unnecessary admissions into hospitals and state institutions.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES THAT CAN BE ADDRESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

HopeSource is interested in expanding its marketing efforts to increase local awareness regarding the open ridership, routes and hours of operation.

City and County Emergency Preparedness programs need to expand their recruitment efforts to identify and appoint volunteers with disabilities to serve on their committees.

The school district and job developers need to create a marketing plan or offer a training event for employers to increase their knowledge of the tax incentives available for hiring individuals with disabilities, how hiring employees with disabilities have a positive affect on their bottom line and how work place accommodation on average cost less than \$500.00.

MEETING EVALUATIONS

Evaluation questionnaires were distributed to all participants. The responses were reviewed and recorded. Only 30% of the meeting attendees returned the questionnaire. The average score for both meetings was a 98% satisfaction level. The majority of responses were marked in the “strongly agree” and “agree” sections. There were a couple of responders who felt that the chairs were uncomfortable and the meetings were too long. Another responder wanted to have more interaction between the audience and the Governor’s Committee Members.

REPORT RECIPIENTS

This report will be sent to all of the individuals who attended the meeting and provided contact information. It will also be sent to all of the Members of the GCDE and to the elected officials in the community.

Mayor Nancy Lillquist

Mayor Pro Tem – Jani Niner

Council Members: Stan Bassett, George Botcher, Fennelle Miller, Obie O’Brien and Bruce Tabb

City Manager – Ted Barkly

County Commissioners: Mark McClain, Chairman, Alan Crankovich, Vice Chairman and Linda K Johnson Huber, Commissioner

Senator Janea Holmquist

Representatives Bill Hinkle and Judi Warnick