

GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES & EMPLOYMENT

BREMERTON TOWN HALL MEETING & LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

INTRODUCTION:

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) met in Bremerton on March 12th & 13th, 2009. The Town Hall Meeting was held at the Norm Dicks Government Center and the Leadership Breakfast was held at the Gateway Center Conference Room. Over forty people participated in the local meetings. We were warmly welcomed by persons of disabilities, family members and service providers. We appreciate and value the 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. Your feedback is valuable to us in planning for our subsequent Outreaches. We look forward to further communications on these issues and hearing about your local success stories

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

Participant Comments:

- There is not enough affordable housing for extremely low and low income individuals meaning individuals who have income that is less than \$400.00 per month.
- Section 8 Housing has a 4-year waitlist. Project based housing is currently closed and not accepting applications at this time.
- The difference between project and tenant based housing is personal choice and portability. Project based housing is public housing that receives subsidies. Specific rental properties have been approved for public housing. Tenant based housing is awarded to the individual. The individual receives a voucher and can choose where they want to live providing the landlord will accept the Section 8 voucher. The voucher is portable meaning it stays with the individual as long as they meet the eligibility requirements.
- West Park public housing is becoming Bay Vista through a 52 month redevelopment grant. It is a multi-income project with many community partners. Currently 1/3 of the residents are persons with disabilities. Sixty percent of the property is vacant and 100% will be unoccupied by the end of the year 2009.
- Late fall in 2009, the housing authority expects to create 83 multi-family units using funding from the economic stimulus plan. These units will be

1-2 bedroom assisted living units with a focus on affordability. This redevelopment is part of a 5- year plan for Bremerton.

- “Ready to Rent” is a program offered to public housing tenants which provides training on how to be a good renter, how to manage a checking account, offers GED classes and looks at work options and other services needed through the community partners. This program takes about a month to complete and about 900 individuals are expected to participate.
- There is a large disparity in the supply and demand for affordable housing.
- Ageing citizens are afraid to discuss changes in their housing needs because they are concerned they will lose their current unit and required to find a new location.
- Housing is a huge issue for people with Traumatic Brain Injuries; many of these individuals need additional support services to be good tenants. In general these support services are not funded.
- Young adults leaving the school setting and moving into housing is a concern. Most young adults have had no training on the responsibilities of a renter and what it takes to be a good tenant.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

1. To improve housing accessibility throughout the community, a property tax incentive needs to be developed so homebuyers who purchase homes with accessible features get a tax break. Also homeowners who add accessible features to their homes should also qualify for tax incentives.
2. High Schools should develop curriculum similar to the “Ready to Rent” program.
3. Tax incentives are available to companies who create or improve units that are accessible.
4. New construction for single family dwellings should include accessible features making all homes visitable. This is a national effort where the most essential access features are being included in new construction such as:
 - a. One zero-step entrance, at the front, back or side of the house
 - b. All main floor doors, including bathrooms with at least 32 inches of clear passage space
 - c. At least a half bath, preferably a full bath on the main floor.

This change is already beginning to happen in parts of Arizona, Texas, Illinois, Georgia and many other locales. For more information go to www.concretechange.org.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

1. Washington State Legislature is working on a bill to prevent income source discrimination in housing. Some counties already have laws that prevent landlords from using income source to negate rental agreements. This bill would require all landlords to stop income source discrimination.
2. HB 2088 would create a work group led by Office of Financial Management to include stake holders and state agencies to develop criteria and guidelines

for sitting state facilities and access to public transportation. The bill appears to be dead for this session.

EMERGENCY SERVICES:

Participant Comments:

- Department of Social and Health Services should provide Emergency Preparedness training to staff who provide services to persons with disabilities to help prepare their customers for emergency situations.
- Red Cross is interested in knowing how they can better serve the community. They encourage volunteer involvement and would welcome participation from individuals with disabilities.
- Bremerton School District has an emergency response team and the High School has trained their entire staff.
- An emergency messaging system has been developed which is one way for citizens with disabilities to be checked on during a local emergency.
- Phyllis Mann with the Kitsap County's Department of Emergency Management is working with local partners to develop a comprehensive plan.

EMPLOYMENT:

Participant Comments:

- The Disability Navigator Program located at the Bremerton WorkSource provides training and education to staff to improve services to persons with disabilities.
- WorkSource provides free access to computers with internet capability for job search, helps job seekers write resumes, and can match workers to jobs.
- With the high rate of unemployment higher educated and more experienced citizens are looking for work. Businesses have a variety of choice in who they select for their job openings.
- Currently over 150 applicants are applying for a single job opening.
- Positive Solutions assists customers who receive social security benefits such as Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income to explore the impact of work on their benefits. A success story was shared about a man who had a heart attack who no longer could return to his current job. Positive Solutions was able to assist him in obtaining healthcare benefits and job training allowing him to enter the medical profession. The new job also allowed him to pay off bills and begin a savings plan.
- A self advocate who used the services of the Client Assistance Program was able to obtain a job she chose and is working successfully in the healthcare system.

MEDICAL ISSUES

Participant Comments:

- We need medical specialists who will see Medicaid patients. This is a crisis situation in Bremerton but it is experienced in all communities. Doctors can not afford the overhead costs and make a living with the low reimbursement rates.
- Harborview will not take Medicaid referrals for patients needing specialized care.
- University of Washington is still accepting Medicaid referrals.

- The lack of referral sources forces the primary physician to decide to provide some level of care or leave the patient with no alternative.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

1. Develop an educational program addressing patient responsibilities and what constitutes a being good patient. It would be a good program for all people accessing medical services. Some individuals on Medicaid miss their medical appointments which add justification to physicians not to provide services.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

1. Develop legislation to raise the state reimbursement rates for medical services provided through Medicaid and Medicare.

MENTAL HEALTH

Participant Comments:

- Individual mental health service providers on average have 60 people on their caseloads.
- Mental health professionals who serve large geographic service areas travel several days a week using many of their work hours in their cars.
- Across the state 90 crisis beds were eliminated in 2008 and they anticipate 60 more crisis beds will be eliminated by fall of 2009.
- Last month there were 100 mental health consumers on the waiting list for hospitalization while 40 crisis beds were left unused.
- Individuals who are dually diagnosed struggle to find services throughout the state. Often they are referred to one agency that passes them to another agency with neither agency willing to take responsibility for providing services.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

1. A participant suggested that Disability Rights Washington be contacted about the lack of services for individuals with dual diagnosis for guidance.
2. The Department of Social and Health Services needs to develop clear guidelines to improve services for individuals who are dually diagnosed. Clear guidance needs to be developed on how to access services and which agency is responsible.

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION

Participant Comments:

- One in seven students in Bremerton High School is a student with a disability.
- School personnel indicated that School to Work program is always a work in progress. They are making improvements and creating more work opportunities.
- The school has experienced a greater success in getting jobs for their students but needs more business partners to get involved.
- Transportation to employment sites for the School to Work participants does not present a hindrance for successful participation.
- Many students are leaving school with community jobs.

- Some students need significant supports for job retention. Funding streams are being reduced or eliminated in the current proposed budget projections and with little hope that full funding will be restored.
- Staff training has been completed in the Bremerton School District for the Safe and Sound Program. County schools have adopted this curriculum for addressing personal safety as students transition from school to work and independent living.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

1. School personnel need to secure community resources to support the jobs program either through local taxation or employers offering more jobs to students.

TRANSPORTATION

Participant Comments:

- Kitsap Transit eliminated Sunday Services on both the Access and regular route bus service. Eliminating Sunday Services has the least impact on bus ridership and meets the largest service requirements of all riders.
- Kitsap Transit held public forums to get feed back regarding the upcoming route changes and reduction in services. Riders felt they were not well informed about the impact these changes were going to make and recommended that more information be made available prior to any further changes.
- The ACCESS bus provides service within a ¾ mile radius of the fixed route corridor.
- Bus stops on the eastside of Bremerton are not accessible because there are no curbs cuts or side walks.
- Transportation planning is essential in locating job opportunities. Current changes have impacted riders and their ability to maintain employment. Employment opportunities have also been impacted since many businesses are open on Sunday.
- Reduction in the ACCESS schedule is forcing families to provide transportation to connection points. Missed and late connections may cause job losses for persons with disabilities.
- Eligibility for Access Transportation is based on a statewide formula and riders are qualified based on the Easter Seal Access Evaluation tool. There are five levels of eligibility, the lowest being rides to grocery stores and medical appointments and the highest being full ridership within the transportation boundaries.
- People need to be more specific on their application for paratransit services, often the information is too vague and consequently they do not meet eligibility criteria.
- There is an appeal process if you are denied paratransit services and applicants should request a hearing. During the appeal process more qualifying information can be obtained improving the riders' eligibility status. Most appeals are completed within 60 days.
- The Medicaid Broker works closely with ferry personnel ensuring smooth transition of transportation once the rider has arrived. Medical coupons are accepted for the ferry fees.
- Medical transportation bus riders who need to access medical services in the Seattle area may use a combination of services and reimbursements such as:

- volunteers, taxis, fuel reimbursements and coordination with other transportation providers.
- ACCESS staff works with customers who do need to coordinate cross county transportation services.
 - Kitsap Transit offers travel training to anyone who wants to move from the ACCESS system to the fixed route system. Customers are evaluated and assigned a travel aide to train them on their requested routes.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS:

- 1 A possible solution for increased access to transportation for employment may come through a grant application. A group of local partners could develop a grant proposal and submit it for funding through the Washington State Department of Transportation.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Bremerton community has shown great interest in services and accessibility for persons of disability. Many valuable comments were made and some suggestions for improvements were heard. In order to advance these suggestions it would be important to consider developing a local advisory board of persons with disabilities that could consult on policy development, community improvements with the city council, county commissioners and legislators.

The GCDE Community Outreach members can provide information to assist in the development of a community disability advisory group. For further information please contact Gloria Tolaro, Community Outreach Chairperson at 19gloria@sprintmail.com or 360 273 6553 or Melinda Johnson at 509 532 3148 or msjohnson@esd.wa.gov
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MEETING EVALUATIONS

Evaluation questionnaires were distributed to all participants. The responses were reviewed and recorded. The responders predominately marked in the “strongly agree” and “agree” to the thirteen (13) survey questions giving the events a high satisfaction level. Most of the responders indicated they would be willing to work on local projects

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 Bremerton.