

GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES & EMPLOYMENT

LYNDEN TOWN HALL MEETING AND LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST SEPTEMBER 17TH AND 18TH, 2009

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

INTRODUCTION:

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) met in Lynden Washington on September 17th and 18th, 2009. Lynden is a vital, well connected community and has great commitment to the potential growth in services for persons with disability. We are particularly impressed with the participation of the local elected officials and the networking and problem solving that was very apparent during our meetings.

The meetings were held at the Lynden Library and over 50 individuals attended the Town Hall meeting and 40 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 valuable 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 look forward to further communications on these issues. We have also included the results of the evaluation forms that were returned. Your feedback will be used to improve our outreach planning process and future meeting structure.

BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- An architect shared his experience in building a school specifically for students with disabilities using universal design features. Participants were encouraged to promote universal design when building in their communities allowing all citizens to have full use of public and private buildings.

COMMUNITY ACCESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- The beepers that have been installed at crosswalks do not help individuals who are hard of hearing. I would like to see some kind of vibrator at the crosswalks. The Helen Keller District in Seattle has installed vibrators along with the beepers, making it safer for hearing loss and visually impaired persons.
- Sidewalks crossing in many areas in Lynden are unsafe. The slopes do not line up with the opposite crosswalk. Liberty Street crosswalks are done correctly but many on Main Street are not. Individuals who are visually impaired crossing on

Front Street are pointed into traffic. City officials in Lynden are very open to suggestions for improvement and welcome people's input.

- Pedestrian using orange flags to help alert drivers that they are crossing the street seemed to be a practical solution but were not usable by many individuals with disabilities. Wheelchair users, cane travelers, and others who use mobility devices are unable to wave a flag to alert drivers. Individuals who proposed the solution did not talk with those who use mobility devices.
- HB1739 which was proposed during the last legislative session would expand the role of the county's voter access committees. For example these committees could help counties develop a priority list for curb cuts or they could look at the crossing issues and make recommendations on a safer process that would be usable by the disability community.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Developmental Disabilities' focus on employment eliminates options for individuals who don't choose to work or for whom working is extremely challenging.
- One family moved to Canada because day programs were more readily available.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

On behalf of Mayor Jack Louws, Fire Chief, Gary Baar stated that Lynden has been working hard to make their community more accessible and that they are very proud of the level they have achieved. They have a new Library, City Hall and Fire Station: which meet or exceed the required accessibility standards.

- Fire Chief Baar said being invited to the Town Hall meeting had given him time to think about emergency management services as related to persons with disabilities. They conduct emergency drills at the fairgrounds and have never incorporated persons with disabilities in those simulations. He invited persons with disabilities to contact him about participating in the next scheduled event to increase the quality of the training for emergency personnel.
- Concerns were raised about evacuation plans for persons with disabilities in hotel rooms when the rooms are above the ground floor. Chief Baar stated that hotels are required to have sprinkler systems in every room. Persons with disabilities needed to ask where the areas of rescue are located when staying at a hotel. Fire crews and emergency rescue personnel are trained to look for citizens in designated areas of rescue in all buildings.
- "Why don't landlords have to supply fire alarms that flash lights for deaf tenants? Cowlitz and Clark counties in Washington State supply free alternative fire alarms which are available from their local fire departments. The funds to provide this service sometimes comes from fines levied on ambulance companies who go over the required response time to reach a patient.

- It was recommended that persons with disabilities provide emergency information for local fire or police response units by using a “File for Life” on their refrigerator. This file would contain a list of all medicines used by the individual and their emergency contact information, physician’s number and other critical information.
- Someone asked Chief Baar what would be an appropriate form of identification for a child who has severe communication problems? Chief Baar recommended the individual wear some sort identification bracelet with emergency medical information and contact information.
- A woman volunteered to assist Chief Baar in training his staff on disability awareness. She is also interested in assisting him in organizing the emergency drills incorporating persons with disabilities in the scenarios.

EMPLOYMENT

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- What services are available to persons with disabilities seeking employment assistance in addition to Department of Vocational Rehabilitation? WorkSource in Bellingham offers free job referral assistance and can help with resume writing and improve your interview skills. You can also contact local support organizations to see if they provide job search assistance.
- There are limited opportunities for individuals with disabilities who need more supports. Funding for job coaches and long term supports are not readily available. There seems to be a mixed message from the state; they want individuals with developmental disabilities to work but there is not enough money to support the same individuals on the job.
- Bellingham is a larger community and individuals have more opportunities and choices for jobs. Transportation to Bellingham is limited and it cost(s) more money to commute.
- Local employers are hiring persons with disabilities which increase job opportunities for students.
- Fire Chief Baar shared that some of the positions in the fire station could be filled by a person with a disability, not all positions require you to meet the physical standards of a fire fighter.
- One individual told her personal success story; she persevered and received her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) after being advised by a vocational counselor that she would not be successful. She is now working as a CNA in the local area.
- Even with support from placement agencies, the opportunity for job placement in this community are not high, we do not have a large employer base in Lynden.
- City and County government hold the majority of jobs in this community and it would be great to see an emphasis on recruiting persons with disabilities for their job openings.

HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL SERVICES

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Accessing medical services is difficult for individuals who are deaf. One individual told of his experience in the local Emergency Room where he was treated without the use of an interpreter. The individual expressed concerns about receiving appropriate care and that this lack of communication violated the requirement of effective communication and informed consent.
- Having family members provide interpreting services may increase misinformation. Just because someone uses sign language doesn't mean they can interpret medical diagnosis or services.
- What can you do if the hospital does not offer interpreters when using their services? It was suggested that they make a formal complaint with the hospital administration. You can also file a complaint with the Washington Human Rights Commission (1-800-233-3247) or you can talk with Disability Rights Washington (1-800-562-2702) about your concerns.
- It was also recommended that the local Deaf Community develop training on what constitutes effective communication and offer the training to hospital administrators and staff.
- Harborview was given as a good example where they use interpreters in routine care of patients.
- The hospital bathrooms with double doors are inaccessible; wheelchair users can get trapped between the doors not being able to get in or out independently.
- There are no accessible curb cuts near the hospital entrances.
- It was also reported that the hospital room numbers in Braille are located above the door frames making them unusable.
- Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) have difficulty finding adequate medical care. Funding structure and medical supports need to be reviewed on a national and state level. Many individuals with TBI are supported through General Assistance Unemployable (GAU) or General Assistance - Expedited Medicaid (GA-X). which is insufficient. Families are required to provide much of the day to day support which is arduous to maintain. Individuals without family support depend on the minimal amount of support offered through the state.

HOUSING

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- People who live independently should be able to hire their own personal assistants, qualified workers that they trust. "Nothing about us without us".
- Emergency Housing will work with individuals over the phone but there is a one-month wait time. If you need housing your only option right now is sleeping at the mission.
- You can use your Section 8 voucher to help purchase your own home. The Home Ownership Program help individuals qualify for grants that assist them in making a down payment on a home. The process can take up to two years but individuals end up as home owners in their community.

MENTAL HEALTH

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Professional are concerned about the limited resources for youth and adults across the state of Washington who present with mental illness. These limitations are manifested in community services for those living within the region.
- Services for individuals who need short-term psychiatric treatment in order to stabilize and/or diagnose their condition and develop a treatment plan prior to reentry and transition to community services are also limited.
- We have seen an increase in limitations which have drastically impacted individuals with mental health needs following the recent legislative cuts, the reduction of available services has been a growing concern for mental health professionals and educational staff for many years.
- Because of the limited number of beds available for youth and children in this state many individuals are being released from psychiatric care prematurely and returned to prior residence where inadequate services are available.
- Despite attempts to wrap around community services and family support, children and youth often end up in juvenile detention facilities, which are ill-equipped to handle their mental health needs, while they wait for an open bed at an appropriate child/youth facility.
- Without appropriate services, professionals observe an escalation of aggressive or self harming behavior and other symptoms related to the mental illness- which sometimes necessitates a costly long-term placement (often out-of-state.). The high cost of ongoing care and repeated institutionalization of these individuals could be reduced and funding otherwise redirected if adequate services and additional treatment facilities were available within the state, during the early stages of intervention.

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- The Lynden School District support volunteer involvement and uses volunteer assistance to transport students to jobs.
- Lynden Schools offer a good Transition Program for 18-21 yr. olds which include daily living skills and job sharing opportunities. Last year Lynden High School placed 8 students with disabilities in competitive positions with local employers.
- We are very fortunate in Lynden because the schools offer many one on one services.
- Transition services helped a student secure employment at the ARC and continued employment after graduation.
- Local employers are willing to hire students with disabilities increasing job opportunities for students.
- Blaine School District offers excellent disability services with creative interventions with positive results.

- Elimination of state funding for school to work transition continues to be a major concern for families and service providers. There are currently no back up plans for providing opportunities in the community for individuals after leaving school.
- One participant suggested that a volunteer job placement program be developed for students with disabilities. Local employers could offer jobs and help train students improving job readiness in lieu of using transition dollars in this time of budget limitations.
- There appears to be a chasm between school to work services and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services. A major contributing factor is the limited number of programs and services available to address this need.
- Although efforts to move individuals from sheltered employment and day treatment centers into the work force seemed to be a good idea at the time, funding reductions and facility closures coupled with a struggling economy have created an enormous gap in potential employment for capable youth and young adults.
- The Governor and the Legislature need to explore and reestablish incentives for businesses which partner with local communities to provide training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- Once an individual graduates from high school it becomes difficult to maintain a social network. Many individuals are on waiting lists for services and have limited options for organized activities.
- A lack of productive employment supports is further complicated by limited work training and employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.
- Limited day activity and employment options are concerns which span the entire spectrum, from significantly cognitively delayed individuals to individuals with physical and mental health disabilities, all the way to higher functioning youth with mild learning disabilities, or even those diagnosed with Asperger's.

TRANSPORTATION

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Lynden's public transportation service has had to reduce bus service because of the reduction of funding. They have decreased the frequency buses travel which has increased the wait time between buses.
- Riders are increasing their travel time to their jobs which is also extended their work day
- Bellingham is a larger community and individuals have more employment opportunities. Transportation to Bellingham is more limited with the new changes and it costs more money to commute.
- Lynden students' ability to participate in work activities have been reduced due to the longer wait time between buses. The school district has implemented use of school vans to transport students.
- Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) offers individualized travel training to community members helping them to learn how to ride the fixed route bus service. WTA's rolling classroom will come to your place of employment or your home to let you practice using the lift and become familiar with the tie down

- process. Travel training staff helps riders plan trips, provide instruction on rider etiquette and personal safety.
- Ryan Warner from Washington State's Department of Transportation explained that bus routes are being cut statewide as a result of the reduction of funding. Transportation providers prioritize services based on need and recommended that people contact Whatcom Transportation Authority to share their concerns.
 - Ellen Barton with the Whatcom Council of Government is working on a coordinated transportation plan. Developing plans for transportation resources is a public process and citizens can help decide how they want the money spent. She said forty percent of the population in Whatcom County are non-drivers and she wants their concerns to be addressed. She encouraged people to contact her and provided her phone number 360-676-6974.

VOTING ACCESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- The Whatcom County Auditor, Mrs. Forslof explained that she has a very active Accessible Voting Advisory Committee who assisted her with informing voters about the accessible voting machines. Currently the machines are located in the County Courthouse and available for use 20 days prior to Election Day. The machines were not utilized as she would have liked. People who are computer savvy had no difficulty using the machines and voters with limited computer knowledge had some trouble. Meeting participants suggested that she bring the machines to county fairs, senior centers and disability organizational meetings so more people can have an opportunity to use them before voting day.

STATEWIDE POVERTY ACTION NETWORK – Guest Speaker

Kate Baber with the Statewide Poverty Action Network explained that her agency was a major player in the legislation that restored General Assistance Unemployable (GAU) and General Assistance - Expedited Medicaid (GAX). They also assisted with legislation restoring voting rights for convicted felons and helped implement consumer protection regulations regarding predatory lending. Poverty Action hosts an annual poverty action day in Olympia. Over 500 people attended this year and if you are interested in participating in the 2010 session you can contact her directly at www.povertyaction.org.

SUMMARY OF MEETING EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback it is extremely useful and we take it seriously.

Evaluation forms were distributed to all meeting participants for both the Town Hall and Leadership Meetings. A total of thirty-four people returned the surveys. Over all 90% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the meeting facility was accessible, registration process was timely, and the outreach helped them identify community issues that need to be addressed. Several people commented that GCDE representatives need to

allow more time for audience participation and reduce the time spent on reviewing the works of the Committee. As a result of comments received the Community Outreach Subcommittee has revised their meeting format reducing time spent on Committee activities. The subcommittee will place more emphasis on utilizing the GCDE brochure and subcommittee descriptions to explain the work of the Committee. Additional meeting time is being considered for future meetings to allow for more community participation.

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Report Distribution:

All meeting participants who signed in and provided a mailing address will receive a meeting summary. The city and county elected officials receive a copy of the meeting summary and the members of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment.

Mayor Jack Louws
Doug Adelstein, Councilor
Gary Bode, Councilor
Dave Burns, Councilor
Ron De Valois, Councilor
Toby Gelder, Councilor
Jerry Kiuken, Councilor
Nick Laninga, Councilor
Bill Verwolk, City Administrator

Barbara Brenner, Whatcom County Council Member
Laurie Caskey Schreiber, Whatcom County Council Member
Sam Crawford, Whatcom County Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, Whatcom County Council Member
Bob Kelly, Whatcom County Council Member
Ward Nelson, Whatcom County Council Member
Carl, Weimer, Whatcom County Council Member

Representative Kelli Linville
Representative Doug Ericksen
Senator Dale Brandland