

GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES AND EMPLOYMENT

Centralia

Town Hall Meeting & Leadership Breakfast

FEBRUARY 18TH AND 19TH, 2010

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

INTRODUCTION:

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) met in Centralia, Washington on February 18th and 19th, 2010. Centralia is a 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 discussions that were very apparent during our meetings.

The meetings were held at the Hanson Administration Building on the Centralia College Campus; over 60 individuals attended the Town Hall meeting and 35 individuals attended the Leadership Breakfast. We were warmly welcomed by persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and elected 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.

COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- The local Chamber of Commerce and others are planning to conduct a survey of local businesses to assess the access features of local businesses.
- Chehalis post office is not accessible and there is a belief that because it is a historical building it does not need to make modifications.
- Being a historical building in and of itself is not a defense for not making a facility accessible. Architectural plans for remodeling can be designed and approved to renovate a historical building. Centralia, Port Angeles and Raymond

post offices are good examples to see how these renovations can be done keeping the historic features of the building.

- Sidewalks without curb cuts require wheelchair users to use the streets in lieu of sidewalks.
- Some of the area businesses are not accessible to wheelchair users
- The County Courthouse requires people with mobility aides to enter using the basement entrance to access the elevator to the 3rd floor.
- Commissioner Shawn Murinko, with the Human Rights Commission asked if the county or city have an ADA transition plan which is required by law. Many local cities and counties do not have active plans in place. A recent court decision requires the city of Sacramento to use 20% of their general budget for the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliance measures until the city meets ADA requirements. The ADA is not the only law that mandated accessibility. In 1973 the Rehab Act was passed so city and county governments have had an extended time to make these changes. He is tired of hearing about the lack of money to come into compliance.
- Patrick Sorenson, City Manager of Centralia stated that the city buildings are accessible. There is a lack of accessible curb cuts. They are making improvements but have a long way to go. Money is a real issue for the city; we have an old infrastructure and it expensive to retrofit for accessibility standards. Mr. Sorenson is fairly new in his position and will ask about the ADA plan. His feels it is better to listen to the citizens than to waste time and money fixing things after a lawsuit.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Opportunities for full-time employment have been reduced leaving people who used to work full-time with only a three-day work week.
- Grandparent of child with Down's syndrome reported that they received great services in the local birth to 3 programs.
- Adult employment programs for individuals with developmental disabilities are being impacted by the Waiver Caps while they may save money they also limit the number of hours of support.
- What is a waiver? The Division of Developmental Disabilities offers services under five targeted waivers – *Basic, Basic Plus, Children's Intensive In-home Behavioral Support, Core, and Community Protection* - each with specific limits on benefits, services and enrollees. An individual may request to be enrolled on a waiver or to be enrolled in a different waiver at any time. Waiver enrollment is

based upon funding and capacity. For more information visit (<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ddd/index.shtml>), you will find the Waiver button on the upper left hand side of the screen.

- The Pathways to Employment, Working Age Adults policy has helped many individuals into the work force which is very positive. Those individuals who need more time to develop work skills or not interested in working are not benefiting from the initiative.
- Special Ed teacher talks about 25% of her students on a waiver; what does the future hold for them?
- Paula Zamudio, a local expert with Reliable Enterprises (www.reliableenterprises.org) has a wealth of information on these topics. If you want to be on Paula's individual email list you should contact her directly. (360-736-9558, ext. 107).
- Centralia College operates a birth to 6 programs in the lab school and works closely with parent to parent groups. They are building a new facility to house a birth to 3 programs.
- In rural counties Birth to 3 intervention services have a difficult time finding and keeping therapists at the local pay level. More therapy services need to be available immediately to meet the local demand.

EDUCATION

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- A Centralia College staff member stated there is a much higher percentage of persons with disabilities living in Lewis county than in other Washington counties.
- It is difficult for people to acknowledge that they experience a disability making it impossible for the college to provide support services.
- Centralia College was noted to have a strong accommodation program for students and staff. Contributions from persons with disabilities are valued.
- In order to provide support services to college students with disabilities current documentation of their disability is required. It would be helpful to have a statewide resource list of agencies that offer low cost testing for various types of disabilities. (learning, cognitive and sensory) in particular.
- Centralia College offers a wonderful adult basic education program for adults with Developmental Disabilities. Recently they have had to cut over 50% of the program participants.

- While several long-term participants were cut from the adult basic education program; this process offered an opportunity for new adult basic education students to enroll. The college would like to be able to fund more students but there are state funding restrictions.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- The communities' experience with flooding in 2006, 2007 and 2009 provided many opportunities for learning how to deal successfully with disasters as well as what mistakes to avoid. Individuals and agency representatives expressed concerns that the evacuation plan is a "book" of procedures with no relationship to reality. Long-range planning is not always practical in actual application.
- City and County official have updated the "All Hazard Plan" and it has been approved by the state. The plan is waiting for a FEMA review and approval. The revised plan is broken down by areas and agencies. It also specifies the type of disasters, identifies the at-risk population and step by step interventions.
- On the Lewis County website (<http://lewiscountywa.gov>) they have a 1-page Emergency Needs Survey, which you can voluntarily complete and return. Providing this information assists first responders in your emergency evacuation.
- One agency reported that she was approached by a disaster plan's team member to discuss how she plans to evacuate her customers with disabilities. She also stated that the people working on the plan are very open to input and encourage people to make contact with them.
- A DSHS case manager stated that she had developed emergency plans for each licensed supported living facilities which is required by law. The emergency plans identify specific people who will need help and what kind of help. During the annual home visits, reviewing the emergency plans is part of their certification process.
- A question was asked if these emergency plans should be shared with emergency planning team (e.g., sheriff, emergency coordinator). As a follow-up a participant wondered if having access to all of the individual facility plans would be helpful or would they overburden the emergency planners.
- A suggestion was made to have each facility test their emergency plans. A site visit should be scheduled for each facility with no notice. Ask the person in charge to demonstrate what they would do if they had to evacuate the facility. If outside resources are used in the evacuation process, these key stakeholders should also be contacted to make sure everyone is aware of their roles in the disaster response. .

- Cascade Mental Health is designated as FEMA’s mental health provider. They are charged with providing access to physicians who prescribe medication and delivering medications to people who are impacted or isolated by a disaster. They have not been included in the recent emergency planning process. Commissioner Schulte agreed to ask the Emergency Planning Coordinators to invite Cascade Mental Health Services into the planning process.
- The “git er done” mentality that exists in the rural communities may be a detriment to having folks getting connected. The challenge is getting the message out to the individuals who live on 60 acres and encouraging them to connect with their neighbors for disaster planning.
- A major flooding concern has been access to the hospital. There are only two roads leading to the hospital and severe flooding could make it impossible to get to the hospital. Washington State Department of Transportation is working on plans for Interstate 5 which will guarantee access to the hospital. The money has been allocated for the project, designing the project and getting it completed will take time.

EMPLOYMENT

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Good Will Industries provides opportunities for people with disabilities and/or disadvantages to have a job. They offer training programs for youth at risk, older worker 55+, offender re-entry program, and individuals with disabilities. They place workers in vocational programs, non-profit agencies and schools to demonstrate their job skills. They are working to expand services in Lewis County.

HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL SERVICES

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Persons with disabilities who use Medicaid have good access to care all over the state. Free transportation is provided even from rural areas. For those individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid; access to medical services can be problematic.
- The closest dialysis center from Centralia is in Olympia which is about 60 miles round trip.
- The University of Washington Dental Van offers free dental services in Centralia on a monthly basis. This service is done through a partner ship with Reliable Enterprises.
- Pope’s Children’s Place offers many services for families with children with disabilities. They are currently expanding services. (Please see their web-site at www.popeskidsplace.org)

- Lewis County does not have any local adult day health programs
- Dr. Greg Carter, MD stated that Centralia has reasonably good access for rehabilitation services and we have three rehabilitation physicians in the community.

HOUSING

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Reliable Enterprises is building an Apartment complex which will have 10 units for individuals with developmental disabilities and 6 units for single people at risk for being homeless. Case management and employment resources will be available. Rent will be adjusted to 1/3 of their income. They will also accept HUD vouchers and encourage those who are eligible to apply.
- Cascade Mental Health has a smaller apartment complex for people with mental health issues.
- Finding rental housing is a challenge for people who receive Supplemental Social Security. One particular rental agency seems to be discriminating against people with Section 8 vouchers. Centralia has a large agency that works with private rental property owners who are known to refuse renters with vouchers and fixed incomes. This process also contributes to the housing shortage
- It is not illegal in this state to refuse a renter based upon the source of their income. Landlords have every right to do so. There is currently a bill in the legislature that, if passed, could correct this issue.
- Lewis County has a shortage of adult family homes. Most providers are willing to take seniors but do not have a Developmental Disabilities designation. When parents pass away their family members with disabilities are placed elsewhere severing their community ties.
- Catholic community services projects: Housing for workers with some set aside for disability. Some units were destroyed or damaged in flood and have not been reopened.

MENTAL HEALTH

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- There is a critical lack of resources for persons with mental illness. A large percentage of the jail population are individuals with mental illness.
- County Commissioner Schulte stated the largest and best equipped facility for mental health issues is our jail. It should not be that way. Many of our repeat visitors are incarcerated not because of criminal problems but because of mental

health problems. Inmates receive steady, reliable professional care in jail which is not available in the community.

- Lewis County has an active chapter of the National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI). There is a need for vocational training opportunities.
- A process for early diagnosis and support services needs to be developed.
- We have a statewide systemic crisis for mental health services. You must be Medicaid eligible to access services. If you are Medicaid eligible and do not meet the access to care standards for diagnosis, you are found ineligible. Recently a local citizen was sent to Florida so they could have the services they needed.
- The turnover rate for Rural Mental Health Professionals is very high; they leave the area and take better paying jobs in more urban communities. This constant change in clinicians diminishes the continuity of treatment programs and results in people have more setbacks that add to the overall cost of care.

RECREATION AND FITNESS

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Access to recreation and fitness is available in this community. Thorbecke's facility has several programs and emphasizes inclusive fitness.
- JUMP is Thorbecke's newest program which focuses on fitness for people with developmental disabilities or mental illness over the age of 18.

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Education is an entitlement program through high school; students with disabilities then transition into non-entitlement programs. Connecting these students with housing, vocational services and higher education opportunities is difficult with no guarantee of funding.
- Visions program, Chehalis school district: 18-21 with DD, life skills, leisure skills, transition services.
- Students receiving transition services must reduce their work experience to as a little as three hours per day because of the limited bus services in the community.

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Current service delivery system is not compatible with the needs of returning veterans with Traumatic Brain injury. Need to update programs and services to accommodate the unique needs of each person.

- Information about the Washington Traumatic Brain Injury Strategic Partnership can be found at www.tbiwashington.org. They coordinate the TBI Advisory Council and their next meeting is scheduled for May 27th, 2010 from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Holiday Inn Express in Sea-TAC. If you want more information you can call the TBI Council at 360.725.2320. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Council they have two positions open and you can apply on line

TRANSPORTATION

Participant Comments and Recommendations:

- Paratransit services are very expensive but extremely important to provide. There has also been an expectation that drivers need to provide additional customer service. Typically riders are going to work, medical appointments and to the College. While Paratransit has increased their ridership over the past 2 years they have also received a 48% cut in their operating budget.
- Discussion of the JARC (Job Access Reverse Commute) program in Grays Harbor. JARC programs are funded through grants from the WSDOT. The Coastal Community Action Program is a provider and they offer a transportation service which assists riders to work. Transportation services are available in the evenings and on the weekends expanding job options for workers with and without disabilities. Morningside was interested in developing a similar program for Lewis County but does not have enough staffing. Reliable Enterprises is interested in looking into the process.
- Ryan Warner, with WSDOT recommends that people get involved in their Regional Transportation Planning Organization. (RTPO). You can learn more about transportation issues in your community and what improvements are being made. You can also impact the process by participating and providing your input. DOT's next grant funding cycle starts in July 2011.
- Lewis County has had a number of attempts to institute a county-wide Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA) which broadens the tax base but also increases the area transit operators can serve. The voter issue has always failed at the ballot box.
- Commissioner Schulte, explained that Twin City Transit had only 2 months in the black last year. Ridership is down, funding failing, an added gas tax, a fare box and grant funding will not keep transit operational. The state needs to find a better to fund transit operators; it is very difficult to stay operational.

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 42 people returned the surveys. Overall

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 helpful suggestions were made to assist with the planning of future events:

- ⇒ Limit topic discussion allowing additional time to address more concerns.
- ⇒ Provide better signage from the parking areas to the meeting facility
- ⇒ Identify the accessible route of travel
- ⇒ Broaden opening introductions to include identifying parents and family members

Respectfully submitted by:

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REPORT DISTRIBUTION:

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

City of Centralia

Mayor - Harlan Thompson

Mayor Pro-Tem – Bonnie Canaday

City Manager – Patrick Sorensen

Councilor – Dan Henderson

Councilor – Lee Coumbs

Councilor – Mathew Trent

Councilor Bill Bates

Lewis County Commissioner Ron Averill

Lewis County Commissioner Lee Grose

Lewis County Commissioner Bill Schulte

City of Chehalis

Mayor – Anthony Ketchum

Mayor Pro-Tem - Dennis Dawes

City Manager – Merlin MacReynolds

Councilor – Terry Harris

Councilor –Daryl Lund

Councilor – Dr. Isaac Pope

Councilor –Bob Spahr

Council – Chad Taylor

State Senator Dan Swecker

State Representative Richard DeBolt

State Representative Alexander