

WENATCHEE TOWN HALL MEETING

AND

LEADERSHIP BREAKFAST

SEPTEMBER 20 & 21, 2012

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) held two meetings in Wenatchee on the 20 and 21 of September, 2012. The meetings were held at the Wenatchee Community Center, 504 South Chelan Avenue in Wenatchee.

The local planning partners included Roxanna Jensen a current GCDE member who resides in Wenatchee, Allison Williams and members of Wenatchee's Diversity Advisory Committee who sponsored our use of the Wenatchee Community Center, and Maria Hansen and Wendy Clark-Sones with Link Transit who assisted and marketed our meetings to their customers and identified local issues. We would like to make special mention of the outstanding staff support we received from David Gerlach, Community Center Coordinator with the Wenatchee Community Center. His assistance allowed us to quickly set up for the meetings, prepare refreshments and smoothly accommodate all attendees.

We were unsure of the meeting turnout due to the local fires and hazardous air quality but extremely pleased to have over 75 individuals attended our meetings. Participants represented a diverse cross section of the community including people with disabilities, family members, service providers, and several elected officials.

The following report represents a summary of the issues discussed. Suggested actions and resources are presented. We look forward to further communications on these issues. Also included are the results of the evaluation forms that were received. Your feedback will be used to improve our outreach planning process and future meetings.

Aditya Ganapathiraju facilitated the Town Hall Meeting and Scott Shinsato facilitated the Leadership Breakfast. Both are GCDE members. Participants prioritized a list of discussion topics which directed the focus of our meetings. The top three areas of concern were employment, school to work transition and housing. During the course of our discussion other topics were included and will be included in the report.

Employment

Participant Comments and Concerns:

Many employers insist that employees with disabilities must do all parts of the job. It is difficult to convince employers that carving out job duties can be a cost effective approach to improve the bottom-line.

Amy with Service Alternatives explained that she works with a variety of individuals who are very capable of doing many jobs that employers need but it is difficult to get business managers to listen to you when you start talking about job carving.

Jenny Jensen has been volunteering at a local child care center for 5 years, when a job opportunity became available she applied for the position and found out that she was disqualified because she is unable to lift the children.

A participant shared that she can only work a few hours a week because she will lose her Medicaid.

Carrie Moomaw with Douglas County Developmental Disabilities is a benefit planner shared that there are many Social Security work incentives that allows individuals to work and keep their Medicaid or Medicare. In most cases, you will have more money working than just getting Social Security.

Managers with corporate headquarters often say they need to check with their corporate offices to see if they can make changes to their job descriptions.

Kim Belt with Mission Vista talked about the overwhelming employer inflexibility and not being able to adjust job duties which create unnecessary barriers to employment opportunities.

There is a misperception that returning veterans with disabilities are faring better in the employment arena. Veterans with disabilities are experiencing a high level of unemployment or underemployment; some reports rate their unemployment as high as 25%. They are waiting for services and many are experiencing homelessness.

We used to have a strong and well-funded supported employment program. That program has been gutted and very few people if any are getting the services they need.

A representative with the Regional Support Network stated finding and using the available community resources is important. If you are new to disability you need to learn a new language and find the appropriate service provider. It is a very complicated process! It is even very harder to understand how your Social Security benefits are impacted by working.

Resources and Suggested Actions

Ryan Warner with the Department of Transportation suggested contacting the Job Accommodations Network (JAN). JAN is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace. As a job coach, employer or a person with a disability looking for accommodations or solutions to work related issues JAN can help you find answers and resources. Assistance is available both over the phone and on line, their toll free number is 1.800.526.7232 (VOICE), 877 781.9403 (TTY) or visit their website at askjan.org.

Example of a Best Practice: In an outreach meeting in Sequim we learned about a collaborative effort to improve job opportunities for people with disabilities. Tim Bruce with Clallam County Health and Human Services, Developmental Disabilities Program organized a group consisting of 31 employers who have hired workers with a disability, members of their Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board and representatives from the local WorkSource. They meet with the employer community and provide education on what it means to hire individuals with developmental disabilities. Progress is being made and 14% of their customers are currently working! To learn more about this program you can contact Tim Bruce at 360.417.2428 or by email at tbruce@co.clallam.wa.us.

The Wenatchee WorkSource office is located at 215 Bridge Street in Wenatchee. The WorkSource offers many programs and services that assist customers with their resume, interviewing skills, basic computer classes and job matching. You can also check out them out by going to www.gotoworksource.com and click on WorkSource Offices or by phone at 509.665.6605.

Another resource to find answers to your questions and possible solutions to accommodation issues is the Northwest ADA Center. It is located in Mountlake Terrace. You can call them toll free at 1.800.949.4232 or visit their website at nwadactr@u.washington.edu.

Washington State offers a program entitled Health Care for Workers with Disabilities. This program allows individuals with disabilities to work, earn money, increase their personal assets and still qualify for Medicaid. You can apply for HWD by calling 206 272-2169 or 1 800 871-9275 to leave a message with a specialized medical team member. HWD staff checks their direct message line twice daily. You can also apply on line at <http://hrsa.dshs.wa.gov/eligibility/hwd.htm>.

Through December 31, 2012 you can access benefit planning services through Plan to Work. If you are an SSI or SSDI beneficiary you can call Plan to Work to learn more about how earnings can affect your state and federal benefits. This is a free service operated through a grant from the Health Care Authority. Their toll-free number is 1-497-9443 or you can visit them online at www.plantowork.org.

To help educate employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities Allison Williams, with the City of Wenatchee suggested that local success stories be shared at the City Council Meetings and at the Diversity Advisory Committee meetings.

A meeting participant stated that she is working with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and it has been a very positive experience. DVR works with employers to get their customers hired. DVR can serve most individuals with a disability and they meet with you one on one basis to develop a vocational plan. They are very good at what they do. The local DVR office is located at 630 North Chelan, Suite B6 in Wenatchee. You can call them to apply for services at 509.662.0492.

A question was asked about available tax credits for employers who hire workers with disabilities. The Small Business Tax Credit: IRS Code Section 44, Disabled Access Credit is for small businesses that in the previous year earned a maximum of \$1 million in revenue or had 30 or fewer full-time employees. The credit is 50 percent of expenditures over \$250, not to exceed \$10,250, for a maximum benefit of \$5,000. The credit amount is subtracted from the total tax liability. The credit is available every year and can be used for a variety of costs such as:

- sign language interpreters for employees or customers who have hearing impairments;
- readers for employees or customers who have visual impairments;
- the purchase of adaptive equipment or the modification of equipment;
- the production of print materials in accessible formats (e.g., Braille, audio tape, large print);
- the removal of barriers, in buildings or vehicles, which prevent a business from being accessible to, or usable by, individuals with disabilities; and
- fees for consulting services (under certain circumstances.)
- Expenses must be paid or incurred to enable a small business to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

School to Work Transition

Participant Comments and Concerns:

A representative with Service Alternatives stated that they would like to partner with schools to provide community based assessments and job placement services.

James Stevens shared that partnerships like those with Goodwill are very much needed. Teachers are working hard to prepare students for jobs and would appreciate feedback from services providers to know if their students actually get jobs. Scott Shinsato with Goodwill Industries and a GCDE member said that Goodwill's partnering with parent night was very successful.

Laurel White, a speech Language Pathologist stated that more coordination of funding across county/city lines is needed. Collaborations are limited by geographic and other arbitrary barriers. These barriers limit student opportunities for work, friendships, and social opportunities.

Another participant shared that there is a bigger concern than just partnering with agencies. The arbitrary age criterion which excludes students from state supported service programs is a major systemic issue that needs to be addressed at the state level.

As an educator I see gaps in the service delivery. The delineation between different agencies like the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Developmental Disabilities is unclear and needs to be better defined. The arbitrary age cutoffs for various programs are getting in the way of seamless services.

Negotiating with employers and marketing the transition program is difficult and not something teachers should do or are they trained to do.

In years past, we had the Chelan-Douglas Counties Transition Council. With continual funding cuts it just fizzed out. We still need counties to provide places to meet, opportunities to talk, etc. What I learned here is that there are other people and groups like me who want the same services and resources reinstated.

Schools are required to work with students until they are 21 years of age. We would like to be able to partner with the county and state developmental disability programs but they are restricted by laws and can't help until the student reaches 21. We need to find ways to change this restriction and start partnering with these agencies earlier in the transition process.

Many families decide that their son or daughter will graduate with their peers at age 18. These students leaving the school system at age 18 must wait for services. No one should be sitting at home for three years until they are eligible for an adult program.

The 18- 21 waiting game provides a big gap in service delivery and during the wait; the individual can lose academic proficiency and job readiness skills.

School District's budget issues are also a barrier. How can we share the funding costs for various programs? We need more flexibility with our funding vs. the current silo process within school districts, DDD and DVR.

Resources and Suggested Actions

Laurel White suggested that a forum be organized to provide an opportunity to discuss our concerns and develop collaborative solutions. It would be great to hold mini town hall meetings, webinars or conference calls

with the stakeholders. Invite teachers, service agencies and DVR and DDD to start talking about funding issues and develop solutions.

We need to start modeling other successful school districts that contract with job placement agencies for job coaching services. Using skilled professionals who have connections with the business community provides a stronger path to successful job placements.

The best case scenario would be to design a system where funding goes with the person, not with the agency.

Flexibility in determining how much classroom time vs. how much job training time needs to individualize for each student. Ideally, it would be great if students graduate from high school with a paying job.

Residential Services and Housing

Participant Comments and Concerns:

Marilyn Dold, with the Wenatchee Planning Committee is working on a 10 year plan to reduce homelessness for the city. Wenatchee consistently has a tight housing market and consistent problems with affordability. Homelessness is on the radar screen for the city council.

Patricia with the National Alliance on Mental Illness, (NAMI) commented that people need to remember that mental illness is also considered a disability. If you can find a home for someone with mental illness, their mental illness decreases and they get better. In our county we have many landlords who do not rent to this population; they say they worry about property damage. If you happen to have a criminal record it is an absolute no!

A family in Chelan who lives on Social Security disability income is able to afford rent but struggle to save for the required security deposit and the first and last month rent. They are currently homeless.

Recovery Innovations in Wenatchee offers emergency services for people in mental health crisis. The number for the Crisis Recover Line is 509.662.7105 or 1.800.852.2923. Their office is located at 701 North Miller Street, Wenatchee, WA 98801.

Resources and Suggested Actions

The NAMI website has some excellent information on housing and they set four criteria for appropriate housing; affordability, independence, accessibility and housing free from discrimination. There is also a publication entitled “Housing Tool Kit” which provides information to help the public mental health community meet the housing needs of people with mental illnesses. Go to www.nami.org to find out more information.

A recommendation was made to work with local advocacy organizations to help develop educational opportunities for landlords and tenants on their rights.

The YWCA in Wenatchee offers a class entitled –“Smart Renter”. Participants attend a 6 hour housing readiness class where they work closely with housing staff and peers. The class addresses how to overcome barriers to rental housing and become a successful renter. For more information call 509.662.3531 or visit their website www.ywcawe.com.

Alicia with the Chelan County Housing Authority shared that the Recovery Innovations (RI) has an intense case management program for people with housing issues. The eligibility criterion requires you to have a diagnosed mental illness, having a hospitalization within the last year and that you are currently homeless. The program is

called P.O.R.C.H. (Permanent Options for Recovery Centered Housing). For more information on the program you can call Recovery Innovations at 509.662.7105.

Recovery Innovations also offers funding assistance for first and last month rents. They do not assist with deposits. The program has eligibility requirements and may be restricted to individuals with mental illness.

The Northwest Justice Project (NJP) also offers legal assistance and can provide help to community groups and non-profit organization working with low income families and individuals. Visit their website <https://nwjustice.org> to get more information. CLEAR is NJP's centralized intake, advice and referral service for low income people seeking free legal assistance with civil legal problems the toll free number is 1.888.201.1021. Their Wenatchee office is located at 300 Okanogan Avenue, Suite 3A.

Another resource for understanding your housing rights is the Washington State Human Rights Commission (HRC). They offer technical assistance and educational workshops. If you feel you have been discriminated against you can file a complaint by talking with an investigator at 1.800.233.3247. For more information about HRC and their services check out their website at www.hum.wa.gov.

Community Access

Participant Comments and Concerns:

A participant stated that the Chelan County Courthouse is not accessible. Skip More, the Chelan County Auditor explained that the he has ensured that any place in the courthouse is accessible, it may not be convenient, but it is accessible. To access the Courthouse you need to go to the **Law and Justice Building**, take an elevator up, cross the skywalk and every floor in the courthouse is accessible. The auditor offered to conduct a walk through with anyone who needed assistance. Directional signage is available during election periods. The voting access route is surveyed every two years, but not the rest of the building.

Leavenworth's tourist area is basically not accessible to individuals who use wheelchairs. Many of the stores have small doorways, steps, or are located on a second floor without elevator access. The area is built on a hill and much of the terrain is difficult to navigate.

The YMCA has limited accessibility. You have to go outside and down a steep ramp to access the accessible restroom.

Ryan Warner, Statewide ADA Coordinator, with the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced that DOT is conducting surveys on state highway routes in communities with less than 250,000 people as part of their ADA Transition Plan. The survey areas will address ADA compliance issues within their jurisdiction. For example DOT would be reviewing cross walks and curb ramps adjacent to on ramps. The survey process is expected to be completed by Spring of 2013. Based on the results of those surveys, a prioritized list of improvements will be developed. Public meetings will be held in locations throughout the state to gather more input on their findings and to set priorities for the work to be completed. DOT anticipates the town hall meetings will be held in the Spring/Summer of 2013 and will be working with the GCDE Community Outreach Committee to accomplish this.

Steve King with the City of Wenatchee Public Works Department explained that the City's Street Division is responsible for maintaining city streets which includes sweeping, plowing, signage, painting and stripping. He is very proud of their work to install several audible signals at busy intersections. He is also the person to contact if you have a concern about curb cuts.

Council Member Bailey was unable to attend our meetings but emailed a concern regarding individuals using motorized scooters, power chairs or wheelchairs who enter into major arterial intersections or travel in the street without regard to traffic. What can we do to reduce the risk to everyone, the pedestrian and the drivers?

A GCDE member noticed that many of the downtown stores in Wenatchee have their merchandise on the sidewalks blocking access to sidewalks and adjacent crosswalks.

A participant asked if there is something on a state level that can help people find resources locally and on a state level.

Resources and Suggested Actions

The courthouse provides a variety services in addition to voting, it was suggested that a group of people with disabilities meet with the County Commissioners to talk about organizing a task force to survey the courthouse and make recommendations for permanent directional signage. Pat Bauccio with the Governor's Committee offered to participate in this project.

Example of a Best Practice: In Olympia, \$50,000 was set aside each year for the installation of curb cuts. A committee comprised of people with disabilities and interested citizens was establish to assess the communities need for curb cuts and to evaluate how to maximize the effectiveness of the \$50,000 fund. To Assist the Committee, the city maintains a detailed map that identifies all existing curb cuts and pertinent information (e.g., intersections, sidewalks, driveways, commercial and public facilities, and roads scheduled for resurfacing or modification). The Committee meets once annually to evaluate the community's needs and make recommendations. Prior to this meeting a notice requesting community input is placed in the local written and radio news media.

The Governor's Committee is in the process of establishing an accessible community's website that will provide technical assistance to local governments and to the general public. It will include examples of best practices and a searchable listing of local public accommodations.

BluePath operated by the Northwest ADA Center, is a searchable data base of businesses committed to accessibility. BluePath has pictures and descriptions of the accessible features at member businesses that help customers know the level of access before they arrive. To learn more about BluePath go to their website at <https://blue-path.com>.

Emergency Management **Participant Comments and Concerns**

A mother of a 40 year old son with Down's syndrome wondered if there was anything available to assist him with accessing support services over the phone that would not trigger a 911 call. A suggestion was made to program your landline or cell phone with a speed dial function. The speed dial function allows the caller to dial a number using 1 number instead of the entire number. You can also purchase a large button phone and place a photo over the number to indicate who you are calling when you press the button.

Chelan/Douglas Health Districts called for a state of emergency because of the hazardous weather conditions as a result of the local fires. LINK Transit is offering free rides during the state of emergency and is working closely with the Emergency Management Teams.

In case of a mandated evacuation, would an individual with a mobility impairment need to be pre-qualified for LINK services?

The Red Cross is closing their emergency shelters which were organized to assist with the local fires because no one is choosing to use them. LINK and the Red Cross have been working together to find shelters in outlying areas and coordinating transportation to these destinations.

Getting care givers during a time of emergency was mentioned as a concern. If no public transportation services are available and evacuation is mandated what can people do to prepare.

Resources and Suggested Actions

In the event of a mandated evacuation, first responders have the responsibility to ensure everyone has a way to get out of the area. Persons who need accessible transportation will be provided that service even if they are not pre-qualified for public transportation services. LINK having access to a list of pre-qualified individuals can provide valuable assistance in implementing the evacuation process.

The Department of Justice has been quite active in emergency preparedness in the past year, and they've produced "*An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities*" see <http://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm>.

Individual planning for emergencies is a personal responsibility. As an individual with a disability or having a family member with a disability, it was recommended that you register with your local fire department. Letting first responders know about your individual needs should be part of your individual emergency planning process.

There are many websites that provide tips for individuals with disabilities on how to prepare for emergencies and natural disasters. Below you will find a few to help you start your search.

- Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network – www.cepintdi.org
- Disability.Gov – www.disability.gov
- Easter Seals (s.a.f.e.t.y. First program) - www.easter-seals.org
- Federal Emergency Management Agency - <http://www.fema.gov/plan/>
- National Organization on Disability/Emergency Preparedness Initiative - www.nod.org/emergency
- Northwest ADA Center - www.nwadacenter.org
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disability: Emergency Preparedness Toolkit - www.hhs.gov/od/disabilitytoolkit/index.html

Transportation

Participant Comments and Concerns

Jenny Jensen explained that the door to door service for Link has changed. People with jobs in Leavenworth are forced to change buses and some riders are not capable of doing that. Family members are currently providing her transportation but she prefer to use public transit and not be dependent on her family.

Maria Hanson with Link responded that unfortunately budget cuts required Link to make some significant changes in their services. Link drivers do a very good job accommodating riders and provide good service.

Ryan Warner stated that this problem is not exclusive to the Chelan-Douglas counties. Boundaries are shrinking everywhere across state. Shrinking budgets and service changes can provide an opportunity for communities to come together to try to find other ways to provide services, such as group trips and shared trips.

It is challenging for some to ride the fixed route system especially in the winter months. Qualifying for alternative transit is very difficult.

One participant who returned to the area after 25 years is very proud of Wenatchee and Link transit which worked with her. She is also proud of the entire community for coming out today even with the hazardous air quality.

Maria Hanson with Link responded that eligibility for Link para-transit services is based on a functional assessment; it can also be based on weather related issues. A rider can have a two tiered eligibility; for example someone who has health concerns in the winter months could be eligible for door to door service and in non-winter conditions would be required to ride the fixed route system. Certification process is required every 3 years and is conducted by a contracted medical person. The assessment is based on the ADA regulations and there is an appeal process. To learn more about LINK services visit their website at <https://www.linktransit.com>. Or call their customer service line at 509.662.1155.

LINK provided a discounted rate for disabled employees at Goodwill. But the transit operation hours were not compatible with their work hours. When transit services worked, many times workers arrived late due to the para-transit scheduling.

Link buses do not run at night or on Sunday. It limits my options for attending evening support group meetings and dinners with my family. I can't get to church on Sunday unless I find a volunteer driver.

Resources and Suggested Actions

Many times persons with disabilities only look to buses for transportation services. All riders are challenged by Link's operating hours and the lack of Sunday service. Does Link have a van pool program? Does your employer encourage a ride share program? Solving these issues can be more effective if you team with others with similar needs.

Example of a Best Practices: Mason County Transit in Shelton Washington operates an After School Activity bus line. During the school year Mason County Transit converts school buses by placing a magnetic sign on the bus indicating it is available for general ridership. These buses serve four of their longer commuter routes. Another best practice is that they operate a volunteer driver program for persons age 60 and older for whom it is too difficult or impractical to use regular transit service, due to age or physical limitations for shopping, banking, medical appointments etc. In 2011 they had 7 volunteer serving 82 customers, traveling 5200 miles, volunteered 2300 hours and made 1300 trips. To learn more about these best practices visit them online at www.masontransit.org.

Pay Your Pal is federally funded and is operated through SNOTRAC in Snohomish County. Program eligibility requires you to have a disability, live in rural Snohomish County and not near a bus stop. Qualified individuals identify a volunteer driver who is willing to provide transportation to get you where you want to go. Drivers are reimbursed for their mileage at 30 cents per mile. Rides are not restricted to certain hours or days. You are responsible for ensuring the driver and vehicle have appropriate insurance and that both are safe. To find out more information you can call the SNOTRAC Program Coordinator at 425-265-2226 or online at www.snotrac.org.

Guaranteed Ride Home - Link Transit has established a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program to assist commuters who have an emergency at home during the day, or are delayed at work unexpectedly. For example, this service may be used when you have ridden Link Transit to work and must unexpectedly leave the worksite. The policy does not apply when the employee drives alone to work. The intent of the GRH program is to

ensure you a ride to your car or home in the case of emergency or unforeseen work requirements. Transportation will be provided within a 50 mile radius of the city of Wenatchee, but must stay within the boundaries of Link Transit's service area.

To learn more about the operations and future planning for LINK Transit you can attend their next Public Hearing on December 18 at 3:00 PM. The meeting will be held at the Link Transit Center located at 2700 Euclid Avenue in Wenatchee.

Meeting Evaluations and Comments

Thank you for taking the time to complete the evaluation forms. Your feedback is extremely useful and we take your comment and suggestions seriously. Evaluation forms were distributed to meeting participants for each meeting. A total of twenty-four surveys were returned which is a 32% return rate.

- 98% of the respondents agreed that the outreach helped them identify community issues that need to be addressed.
- 98% of the respondents agreed that the outreach provided an opportunity to network with other concerned
- 87% would like to be involved in addressing the concerns that were identified.
- 91% would recommend attending an outreach meeting in the future.

Report Distribution – Everyone who signed in will receive a copy of the written report. The city, county and state elected officials and the Members of the Governor’s Committee will also receive a copy of the report.

Respectfully submitted by:
Subcommittee Vice-Chair
GCDE Staff

Cathy Warmes
Melinda Johnson