



STATE OF WASHINGTON

GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES AND EMPLOYMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The Community Outreach Subcommittee of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) held two meetings in Aberdeen, Washington on November 19 and 20, 2015. The Town Hall forum was held at the Aberdeen High School located at 410 G St, Aberdeen and the Leadership Breakfast was held at Grays Harbor Community Hospital located at 915 Anderson Dr., Aberdeen, WA.

We appreciate our local liaison Jeff Meeks, Executive Director of The Arc Grays Harbor. Mr. Meeks identified local disability issues and key individuals to invite to our meetings. We would also like to make special mention of the outstanding staff support we received from Assistant Principal, Scott Stockslager, with Aberdeen High School. Scott was extremely generous with his time and provided technical assistance throughout the Town Hall forum.

The following report represents a summary of the issues discussed. Suggested actions and resources are provided. A list of meeting attendees who provided their contact information is also provided.

Meeting Summary

The Grays Harbor (GH) community is vibrant and well-connected. We were particularly impressed with the local networking and problem-solving initiatives. Several examples were highlighted, showcasing how service providers work collectively to identify the best possible solutions for addressing complex problems for individuals with disabilities. Service providers participate in open dialogues to blend and braid resources to develop positive and sometimes very creative outcomes.

Meeting participants represented a diverse cross section of the community including people with disabilities, family members, service providers, law enforcement and elected officials. We had a large audience; over 50 people attend the Town Hall forum, and 34 attended the Leadership Breakfast. Discussion topics were broad in nature, but there was a strong focus on transportation services, school to work transition, law enforcement, community accessibility and affordable housing.

Another unique aspect in this community meeting was the sharing of several local success stories. We heard about GH's strong Special Olympics Program and how it brings the whole community together. Job placement services through the GH Public Health and Social Services

Department is a hallmark of success for building pathways to employment for students with disabilities.

Best Practice: The “Let’s Get Connected” group creates and supports opportunities for people with and without disabilities to come together and share common experiences. The purpose of this group is to build a stronger, more connected and inclusive community for people of all abilities. The group meets on the first Tuesday of the month from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the Public Health & Social Service Department (Pearsall Building), 2109 Sumner Avenue in Aberdeen. For more information contact Dee Dee Garman at 360.500.4070 or email her at dgarman@co.grays-harbor.wa.us.

Community Access

Participant Comments and Concerns:

An individual shared that many of the sidewalks in the Aberdeen downtown core have been refurbished and curb cuts have been installed, improving the accessible route of travel. However, to enter adjacent businesses, there often is a 5 inch lip and people with mobility impairments are not able to go into these businesses. Business owners need to take the next step to ensure their facilities are accessible as well.

A parent expressed concerns about the accessibility of newly built county parks. There is good physical access to the park but access stops there. There are no accessible features for children with physical limitations.

A meeting participant suggested that the parent google accessible playgrounds to locate information on what is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) and it provides several examples of accessible equipment. He also suggested she contact the GH County to request a copy of their ADA plan to find out which parks are being built or renovated and the County’s plans to make them accessible.

Note: The Access Board Accessibility Guidelines for Play were adopted as part of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design by the Department of Justice in September 2010. The rules went into effect on March 15, 2011. These guidelines address routes, surfacing, ramps, access and transfer spaces, ground level activities and more. For more information click on the link <http://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/recreation-facilities/guides>. If you want additional technical assistance call the United States Access Board at 1.800.872.2253 or the Northwest ADA Technical Assistance Center at 1.800.949.4232.

Wes Brosman has been working with the Superior Court and Grays Harbor Hospital to improve access for the hearing loss community. As the community’s population ages more people are going to need access to assistive listening systems. Purchasing an assistive listening system and having it on site at these facilities is important. When requesting to use the equipment, oftentimes staff doesn’t know where the equipment is stored or how to set it up. He is encouraging both the hospital and the Superior Court to have a designated staff person responsible for the equipment and provide staff training. He also feels that there should be more than one system available at each facility to meet the community’s growing needs.

Wes shared that he found a local provider in Montesano for CART services (Communication Access Realtime Translation). CART is an accommodation for individuals with hearing loss who do not use sign language. The oral content of the meeting is displayed in typed form either on a personal computer or projected on a wall. Both the Town Hall and the Leadership Breakfast meetings used CART. Wes is hopeful county commissioners and city councilmembers will start using CART at their meetings.

Note: If you are interested in arranging CART services you might consider contacting Connie Church who is with Capitol Pacific Reporting 1.800.407.0148 out of Olympia, but she lives in Montesano.

Employment

Participant Comments and Concerns:

One individual talked about the difficulty of working and losing her benefits. She lost her health care coverage for personal care attendants because she earned too much money.

Dee Dee Garman with the GH County Developmental Disabilities reported they experienced an increase in employment outcomes this year; 64% of their customers are employed. The Grays Harbor community is very fortunate to have great supported employment agencies in GH - they are doing an awesome job. Agencies like Morningside, Coastal Community Action Program, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the ARC are working closely with the employer community to find or carve out jobs for their customers.

Another person added that the rules and policies have changed about working. There's this idea out there that if you go to work, you're going to lose your Social Security benefits. Social Security has developed many work incentives which allow you to keep your benefits or to get back on benefits when you lose your job. Parents and school personnel need more education to reduce the fear of going to work.

One participant talked about the disincentives she experienced when she went to work. She qualified for Apple Health for Workers with Disabilities previously known as Health Care for Workers with Disabilities which is a state program that allows people with disabilities who are working to purchase medical coverage by paying a monthly premium. Now that she is receiving a stipend instead of wages she no longer qualifies for the program.

Note: The monthly premium for Apple Health for Workers with Disabilities (HWD) is based on a sliding scale and it cannot be more than 7.5% of your total monthly income –and it may even be less. For more information visit the Apple Health (Medicaid) Manual for HWD <http://www.hca.wa.gov/medicaid/manual>.

A staff member with Coastal Community Action explained that she uses Plan to Work, a benefit planning provider in Spokane, for their benefit planning services. Plan to Work staff even traveled to Aberdeen to meet with our customers. It has been a very successful program for us.

Note: **Plan to Work** is a free benefit planning service that assists disability beneficiaries understand how working will affect their cash and/or medical benefits as well as other state-

specific benefits. To get more information call toll free: 1 866 497.9443, email Emma Henselbecker at emmah@community-minded.org or visit their website: www.plantowork.org.

First Responders and Law Enforcement

Participant Comments and Concerns:

A high school student talked about her idea for her school project. She wants to develop a training session for law enforcement to give them some tools to work with people with disabilities. She was in a situation which did not go well for her or for the officer involved. If the officer had more training the encounter may have had better outcomes for both parties.

Another attendee noted that not everyone with a disability has a mental illness. Police officers need more training on all disabilities.

Wes suggested first responders and law enforcement agencies watch a video developed in Spokane dealing with communicating with deaf and hard of hearing citizens. The web address is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSKZHZdflmc>.

Police Chief Robert Torgerson serves on the GH National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI). They have sponsored a fair amount of training through grants and it has been very successful, especially for law enforcement. Chief Torgerson is hopeful that there may be an opportunity to expand that training to cover intellectual and developmental disabilities. Officers often deal with individuals who are not in crisis but need social supports. Individuals intentionally commit minor infractions so they can be arrested because they are homeless and hungry. GH has transitional housing and programs that work with people who are homeless but there are not enough services for everyone and the jail, by default, becomes a shelter.

A parent added that he is teaching his son with a disability to drive and wants him to be prepared if he is stopped by law enforcement. The son's mannerisms can seem unusual, and it may be possible that a law enforcement officer may think he has been drinking.

Chief Torgerson referenced the Spokane video which depicts a deaf person immediately showing an identification card to a law enforcement officer indicating he is deaf. This may be something to consider.

Another constituent expressed concern that when the community loses funding to support behavioral health interventions, the needs don't just go away; we just shift the costs from human services to law enforcement. There is really no cost savings and most likely we are providing less services at a much higher price. It is important that we continue this discussion locally because, it is up to us to solve it. We need to advise and work at the legislative level because they make the funding decisions.

Note: The contact information for the GH Alliance for Mental Illness organization is NAMI Washington Coast, PO Box 153, Aberdeen, WA 98520 and their phone is 360. 268.2385.

Guardianship

Participant Comments and Concerns:

One parent shared her experience with guardianship. It is extremely difficult to get a guardian appointed; it generally happens only in life and death situations. You need to have an attorney and it is too costly for most people. She would like to see state funding available to help families through this frustrating process.

A community representative suggested that she contact David Lord with the Disability Rights Washington. He is very knowledgeable and may be able to provide some assistance or resources.

Notes:

- David Lord with Disability Rights Washington (DRW) was recommended as a good contact to talk about guardianship. DRW is located in Seattle; their address is 315 Fifth Avenue South, Suite # 850 and their toll-free number is 1.800.542.0866. The website link is www.disabilityrightswa.org.
- Representative Steve Tharinger is the Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Aging and Disability Issues. David Lord is also a member of this Committee. The Committee is charged with identifying the need for high quality public and private guardianship services and information about assisted decision-making options. More information about this committee is available at http://leg.wa.gov/JointCommittees/ADJLEC/Documents/JLEC_Final_Report_2015.pdf
- Office of Public Guardianship – their mission is to promote the availability of guardianship services for individuals who need them and for whom the services may not otherwise be available. For more information contact the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts, Office of Public Guardianship, Shirley Bondon, Manager, 1112 Quince St. SE, PO Box 41170, Olympia, WA 98504-1170, phone 360.705.5302 or shirley.bondon@courts.wa.gov. You can also visit their website at www.courts.wa.gov.
- WINGS – Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders
Washington State joined the National Guardianship Network in 2015. By combining the efforts of all court and community guardianship stakeholders into WINGS, states can better improve judicial processes, protect individual rights, address insufficient funding and ensure guardian accountability and fiduciary standards. To learn more about the work going on in Washington State visit their website at https://www.naela.org/NGN/WINGS/State_WINGS_Groups_in_Action/NGN/WINGS/State_WINGS.aspx

Housing

Participant Comments and Concerns:

One person explained there are no Section 8 Vouchers available in Grays Harbor. If you're on the waiting list, it will be a long time, over a year before you will be contacted.

Another individual commented that GH housing units are older and many are not accessible. If you need an accessible unit, it will be a longer wait. There are approximately 6 complexes currently run by the Housing Authority. There are two issues for housing; one is the need for accessibility, and the other is affordability.

A community representative shared that six years ago the City of Hoquiam bought 5 or 6 houses and renovated them making them accessible. Their investment was about \$150,000 each and they had a grant to help fund the renovations. He noted that making newly built rental property accessible is much cheaper than renovating existing facilities. The need for accessibility is increasing everywhere as people are living longer. It would have been better and more cost effective for the city to use the money to build new homes. In the end they may have had more accessible houses for the same amount of money.

Meeting participants noted the following:

- We have very limited choices for housing options. My daughter can't live on her own and living in an adult home is not what I want for her. I would like to see more housing options for young people with disabilities.
- I live in an apartment complex and it is supposed to be a secured building. Guests have to be buzzed in but some people give access to anyone without checking who they are. I see strangers just walking in the halls and it is a safety concern.
- I worked with the staff at the Housing Authority and they are willing and interested in helping you. If you have issues with your housing situation, you should report your problem to the Housing Authority.

Note: The Grays Harbor Housing Authority is currently accepting public housing waiting list applications for families and senior/disabled individuals. Also they give preference for the terminally ill. There are two ways to apply for public housing. You can pick up an application or you can request an application be mailed to you. A completed application can be mailed or dropped off at the office. No documentation is needed to apply. The office is located at 602 East First Street in Aberdeen and their phone number is 360.532.0570.

Best Practice: The Arc of Spokane's Home Ownership Opportunities program helps families with members that have an intellectual or developmental disability, navigate the complex process of buying a home. They offer regular home buyer classes as well as one-on-one housing counseling. They have a down payment assistance program for qualified candidates. Since 2004, they have helped more than 200 individuals purchase safe, affordable housing. To learn more contact Theresa Griffith at 509.328.6326 x8326 or tgriffith@arc-spokane.org.

Medical Services

Participant Comments and Concerns:

Chief Torgerson expressed concerns about the inappropriate use of the ambulances. Many times individuals will call the fire department indicating they have a problem and need to get to the hospital. It is not a life threatening situation but they need medical attention. They have no one else to call. He would like to see more transportation services available for these less-than-emergency situations be developed. It is too costly and a drain on services to use these emergency vehicles for general transportation needs.

A bus rider shared that he used an ambulance to get home from the hospital because the dial-a-ride would not pick him up.

Another person explained that if a person is on Medicaid and is unable to use public transportation and has a medical emergency, he or she can use a medical coupon to pay for a taxi or cabulance but prior approval necessary.

Best Practice: Alameda County Hospital Discharge Transportation Service: The Hospital Discharge Transportation Service is a collaborative project between the Alameda County (Oakland, California) Transportation Commission (Alameda CTC), city-based paratransit program in Alameda County, and area hospitals. The Hospital Discharge Transportation Service is supported by Measure B funds (half-cent transportation sales tax) and participating hospitals pay \$5.00 per ride while the passenger rides for free. The service provides same-day, door-to-door transportation for people with disabilities who have a health or disability condition that prevents their use of public transit and who have no other resources for transportation from the hospital. Click on this link for more information.

http://www.alamedactc.org/files/managed/Document/11649/Hospital_Discharge_Transportation_Service-flyer_20121130.pdf

School to Work Transition

Participant Comments and Concerns:

A meeting participant explained that GH County used to have an annual transition fair for students and their parents but funding disappeared. Someone heard that the Transitional Council is trying to find funds to bring the transition fair back.

Another individual added that some of the challenges revolve around the vision parents and teachers have for young people with disabilities. Teachers need more training about work opportunities and job accommodations. Many parents don't see their loved ones being able to be employed. They also worry about losing disability benefits. Transition fairs offered information on benefits and employment opportunities. It was an excellent opportunity to get information out to parents and teachers.

Notes:

- The ARC and the Transition Council are offering 5 educational workshops for parents, students and educators on subjects relevant to transitioning from school to adult

community life. Starting in January 2016, the workshops will be held on the second Tuesday of the month, at 5:30 p.m., in the Pearsall Bldg., 2109 Sumner Ave. For questions, call The Arc at 360.537.7000.

- **Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)** is a program offered by GCDE each summer for high school students with disabilities. Kids come from all over the state for a week-long program on a college campus. The kids learn about advocating for themselves and how to become a leader in the disability community. YLF gives kids an opportunity to experience many firsts: first time they have been away from their family, first time they have lived in a dorm and experienced college life, and it is often the first opportunity to meet other young people with similar disabilities. GCDE provides all needed accommodations, pays travel, lodging and meal expenses, there is no cost for the student to attend. For more information contact Debbie Himes at 360.902.9362 or email her at dhimes@esd.wa.gov.
- **Youth Employment Solutions (YES)** programs are multi-week summer camps focused on career preparation, sponsored by the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) and the Washington State School for the Blind.

YES 1 is a two-week program for 14-15 year-old students, hosted in Vancouver, Washington. YES 1 offers students who need minimal assistance with their independent living and travel skills with the opportunity to explore their interests and aptitudes through different assessments; explore different careers; and visit work sites.

YES 2 is a six-week program in Seattle, Washington, designed to provide valuable work experience and learning for high school students, age 16 through graduation. Accepted candidates are provided five weeks of paid work experience with internships created for them in cooperation with Seattle-area businesses.

For more information on the Youth Employment Services Summer programs, or to request an application, please visit www.dsb.wa.gov or contact the YES program staff: **YES 1 - Paul Baldwin** Program Director, paul.baldwin@wssb.wa.gov, 360.696.6321, ext. 113, or **YES 2 - Janet George** Program Director, janet.george@dsb.wa.gov 206.906.5530.

Special Olympics

Participant Comments and Concerns:

Everyone was excited to learn about the efforts to have Hoquiam high school students who participate in Special Olympics, qualify for letterman jackets. The athletic director has a child with a disability and he brought the issue forward.

Emily Hetland with Aberdeen School District's Human Resources offered to help continue the discussion and bring the idea back to her colleagues.

Best Practice: Foothill High School in Pleasanton, California has a policy allowing students who complete an entire season of a Special Olympics sport to qualify for a block letter F that

they may then put on a letterman's jacket. Letters are available for students in grades 10-12. For more information go to <http://www.foothillfalcons.org> and click on athletics.

Note: Special Olympics provides training and competition opportunities for developmentally disabled youth in 19 Olympic-style sports, including aquatics, athletics, bowling, gymnastics, soccer, etc. For more information call toll free 1.800.752.7559.

Transportation

Participant Comments and Concerns:

A meeting participant shared that being dependent on public transit services limits job options. Many local employers are reluctant to hire workers dependent on public transportation because of its limited operation hours and no weekend service.

One individual encouraged bus riders and service providers to work collaboratively to change or expand the transit board make-up to include service providers and a cross section of bus riders. Persons with disabilities and others riders need to provide input to help improve services from a ridership perspective.

A community member clarified that transit ridership was down and that is why weekend service was stopped. When Grays Harbor Transit restarted weekend service many people who needed the service were no longer working because they had no transportation. Transit only tested the service a couple of months. It takes more than a couple of months for people to find jobs and start using the service again.

Another person commented that Grays Harbor Transit does not offer reduced fares for riders with disabilities.

Note: On the GH transit website, it lists monthly passes for Senior/Disabled Main Line Zone 1 at \$18.00 which is a reduction from the general pass of \$28.00.

Council Member Cook stated that with newly elected, first time mayors and county commissioners, Grays Harbor is in a unique position to develop working relationships with members of the transit board. A first step to improve programs and services for persons with disabilities is to establish communication with these newly elected officials.

Another individual added that the new Mayor of Hoquiam will be joining the transit board and she is a frequent transit user.

Notes:

- Currently the Grays Harbor Transit Board consists of the three Grays Harbor County Commissioners and the Mayors of Aberdeen, Hoquiam and Westport. The position held by the Mayor of Westport alternates with the Mayors from McCleary, Elma, Montesano, Oakville, Ocean Shores, and Cosmopolis. The Transit Board holds public meetings monthly at the Grays Harbor Transportation Authority's Administrative Offices in Hoquiam on the second Tuesday of every month at 5:00 p.m.

- RCW 81.112.040 - Regional Transit Authorities is the section of the law that addresses board appointments. In addition to the required members each Public Transportation Benefit Area can identify additional core representatives to serve on their board. For example Mason Transit Board includes representatives from school and hospital districts. Intercity Transit Board in Olympia is governed by a nine-member board consisting of five elected officials, 3 members are Citizen Representatives appointed by the Board, and one member is a labor representative.

Best Practice: Lilly Longshore, a GCDE member talked about citizen's advisory committees, a best practice being used by C-TRAN in Clark County and many other transit operators around the state. C-TRAN's Citizens Advisory Committee is comprised of volunteers who represent a broad spectrum of C-TRAN riders and stakeholder groups within the C-TRAN service and taxing boundary. The committee meets monthly to advise the C-TRAN Board of Directors on transit and paratransit policies, programs, plans, and other related issues to help improve transit service. Find more about C-Tran at <http://www.c-tran.com/about-c-tran/citizens-advisory-committee> or call Walt Gordon, Paratransit Program Manager at 360.906.7305.

Meeting participants offered the following suggestions to increase individual transportation options:

- Grays Harbor Transit offers vanpool services designed to make commuting to work easier and less expensive. If you are interested in learning more about vanpools and how they work you can email Ms. Patti Carlin at patti_ghtransit@comcast.net, or click on this link <http://www.ghtransit.comcastbiz.net/vanpool.html>.
- Think about carpooling with co-workers. Limited transportation services affects everyone; employers may have car pools already available or may be interested in developing them.
- Job Access Reverse Commute Program (JARC) is funded by Coastal Community Action. It provides rides for qualified low-income, TANF recipients and individuals with disabilities in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties. Customers are connected to work-related sites, either by connecting the rider with currently available transit routes or by direct transportation to the rider's destination regardless of income. The work-related sites include, but are not limited to: job sites, child care, job training and job interviews. There is a recommended donation of \$1.00 per trip but you can ride for free. Rides are scheduled in advance and slots fill up quickly. For more information contact Jamie Garcia at 360.500.4505.
- Local employers know that transportation services are limited, and many are willing to negotiate work schedules and coordinate work hours with the bus schedule.

Meeting Summary

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