



Informing Families *...Today and Tomorrow*



A project of the Washington State DD Council

The Community Connection: Putting Ideas into Action

Thanks to the efforts of pioneering individuals, families, as well as the service system itself, we are seeing more and more emphasis on the individual growing and developing throughout life. Just like everyone else. The pace might be different, but the goal is the same: Living a good life.

There's no single ingredient that creates a good life. Depending on a person's interests, abilities, needs and resources, the recipe is going to look different for each individual.

The one thing that's clear, however, is that community connections play a significant role in helping people create a life that they define for themselves as good.

That's not to say that there's no role for services. In fact, we're pleased to announce that the Developmental



Disabilities Administration (DDA) has close to 4,000 new openings for clients in need of Individual & Family Services (see below).

Throughout the state and country, individuals and families are finding ways for services to play a supportive role, one that's tailored to the person's interests, skills and individual needs.

A big piece of this person-centered practice is creating community connections. When people connect

with their community—through friends, family, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, faith organizations, creative pursuits, common interests—living a good life becomes less about a service system and more about the individual.

This issue of our Informing Families newsletter explores the many ways people have found to create opportunities for community connections. We hope their experiences spark ideas of your own.

When it comes down to it, building community connections isn't just about creating a good life for one person. It's about creating a better community for everyone.

Ed Holen
Ed Holen
Executive Director
WA State DD Council



Enroll Now: Services Available for Individuals & Families

DDA has the rare opportunity of being able to offer supports through the Individual and Family Services (IFS) waiver to interested clients who live with their family and who are currently not receiving services, or only receiving personal care through Community First Choice. The IFS waiver provides small grants from \$1200 to \$3600 each year. These grants can help you:

- Hire someone to provide respite so that you can do something you want to do.
- Hire someone to take your son or daughter into the community to do activities.
- Buy assistive equipment such as iPads, medication-minder systems, alert systems, grab bars, etc.
- Learn how to use new technology.
- Pay for counseling for your son or daughter if needed.
- Learn how to understand and reduce harmful behaviors.

In addition, waiver recipients who meet income eligibility* are eligible for Medicaid to cover medical expenses (*family income is not considered).

Call DDA to Request IFS



For a listing of
DDA's Service Request &
Information Lines, visit:
informingfamilies.org/nps.

Taking Risks and Reaching Out

The Challenges and Opportunities of Community

by Betsy McAlister

Every time I hear the word inclusion, part of me as a parent bristles. Usually, the word brings connotations and a certain set of expectations that mean I must do something. And that is where the challenge lies.

Raising children in our ever-changing society is challenging, especially when your son or daughter has an intellectual disability. For any type of engagement or inclusion to work, it must be broader than a committed mom, dad, grandparent or family friend.

To be engaged and included, one needs the support of a greater extended community. Personality, style, dreams and hopes are a key part of the journey.

Watching her drive off with a teenager and go places without me was a bit nerve racking, but I knew then what I still believe in now: I can't be the only person in my daughter's life.

As parents, we are often so busy advocating for our family member, we may forget to pause and ask them what they would like, or listen to what we believe they are trying to communicate. What are their hopes and dreams?

Our increasingly fast-paced society pushes us to respond quickly and profess to have many answers, when often the answers and suggestions need to come from our children.

PEER MENTORING

When my daughter was in 5th grade, we reached out to a local mentoring



group called Athletes for Kids. It was a great opportunity for Leah to be buddied with an athlete at our local high school.

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Leah was lucky. Her friendship with her mentor blossomed, and they are still friends today. Both are better for having met each other.

Recently, my daughter and her friends found a local community gathering place that offered dance lessons on a Saturday. To make the event even better, teenagers were on hand to demonstrate dances and lead the way. It didn't hurt that there were several cute young men willing to be dance partners.

TAKING RISKS

There are many challenges of connecting with community resources, but I have learned that bringing a larger group to the table enriches my daughter's life. I must allow my daughter the dignity of risk.

Sometimes there are successes and sometimes setbacks, but helping my daughter expand her circle of friends is an important step to helping her

Community Connections

A Free Guidebook for Families

Family Community Connections guidebook draws from the experiences of families across



Washington state as a way to help provide ideas and suggestions on developing community connections.

It's a great tool for families with children at any age.

Download your free copy today and get started: informingfamilies.org/guide.

develop a meaningful life.

Attending art walks, library events and community concerts, and trying new things like a cooking class, help Leah continue to explore her likes and dislikes. Some days when I am out of ideas, I lean on other parents or resources for ideas and encouragement.

IDEAS FROM FAMILIES

Some of the best ideas come from other families who have explored a variety of ways to get connected to community.



The newly released Family Community Connections guidebook (see above) has many examples of ways to connect your daughter or son to the community.

It's a lot of hard work to make inclusion happen, but when I see my daughter defining life on her terms, in community with others, the rewards are priceless.

It's Never Too Early Fostering Life Skills and Relationship Building

by Matt Graffagnino

I am very lucky to be surrounded by many special people who have influenced my growth and learning as a person, and as a father of two children with special needs.

Although professionals and educators are doing their best to help with a game plan for skill development, we caregivers are the ones who have to make sure it happens on a daily basis. Believe me, I know how tough this is.

We are so caught up in the day-to-day survival that we can't look outside today to see what's down the road. We do things just to make it until bedtime. When additional things are presented to us by professionals, we often feel like, "Yeah, that's not gonna happen any time soon!"

The truth is, I have always been open to suggestions, and willing to give them a try, but only when I was ready to implement those changes and be in a place where I could consistently follow through.

When I was presented with questions about teaching employable skills to my kids, along with community participation, I could not believe it!



The thought of adding additional tasks to an already hectic day seemed almost impossible.

However, my friends have helped me realize that there are ways to incorporate essential skills and social connections into our already busy lives as early as the toddler years, and continue them through the elementary levels and beyond.

The average learner needs to hear or experience new information several times to be able to retain it. I was able to buy into that philosophy and

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began to work on some skills with my boys. The key with anything is your willingness to buy into the "thing" and give it a shot.

I'll use my oldest, Matty, as an example. He was already showing an interest in housework and chores by the age of five. He always liked to vacuum and I encouraged it.



New Video *Dylan's Dream*



After 10 years of preparation, and with the help of his Yes Team—friends, family and local community—Dylan Kuehl pursues his lifelong dream of becoming a student at Evergreen State College.

Informing Families documents Dylan's journey over the course of a year as he struggles to gain acceptance and prove himself in the face of institutional and human obstacles.

Dylan's Dream shows the very real challenges, risks and rewards of pushing past the disability label and forging new possibilities in life.

Watch Dylan's Dream: www.informingfamilies.org/dylans-dream.

I started slow, bringing him to the stores with me. It was more about what I could handle, not him. After a while, the stares were fewer and the smiles were more.

From there, we built on the successes and started to go to fast food restaurants. You'd be surprised how the majority of the public is supportive and encouraging. The more we did these things the better we both got at it.

Being consistent is a key to building success. This didn't happen overnight. It took years. And with Matty's maturity level increasing, so did the level of community activities. It was trial and error, though. Plenty of trips were cut short or aborted.

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Last year was a huge step for us. We started Boys and Girls Club. I didn't want to, but I was reminded about all the progress he had made. I let go of my fears. It turns out there were several children there with various challenges. I explained Matty's situation to the staff and my concerns were very well received.

And guess what? The days Matty wasn't scheduled to go to the club, he was asking—almost demanding—to go! Even if it was just to go for breakfast and see his favorite counselor.

Matty also takes part in all kinds of inclusion events with peer mentors at his middle school.

I am not kidding when I say he is recognized everywhere we go with a "Hi Matty!" as I stand there like the third wheel.

It's been more work upfront, but

investing the time now will pay off down the road. Incorporating skill building and community exposure a little at a time has given us a real boost, and we are making improvements all the time.

Our ultimate goal is that our children are able to provide for themselves, and create a life as independent as possible to be productive members of society. Let's give them a head start!



Caregiver Support

The Family Caregiver Support Program is available to unpaid caregivers of adults needing care.



Family Caregiver Support helps:

- ✦ Find local resources/services.
- ✦ Find caregiver support groups and counseling.
- ✦ Get training on specific caregiving topics.
- ✦ Get respite care.

Services are offered free or at low cost. Certain eligibility requirements may apply and availability varies from community to community.

Find the telephone number for your local Family Caregiver Support Program at: dshs.wa.gov/AL TSA/resources.