



## Informing Families... *Today and Tomorrow*

A Resource of the Washington State DD Council

# The Story of Dan Thompson

## His Life, Work, and His Lasting Impact on the Community.

By Margaret-Lee Thompson, Parent Advocate for Developmental Disabilities



I am delighted to write an Informing Families article about the Dan Thompson Developmental Disabilities Community Services Account.

Dan is our son who lived with Down Syndrome. I'd like to talk about how the

lives of people with Down Syndrome have changed in the last 55 years.

Dan was born on Dec. 30, 1968. Dan was our oldest child. He was born with a block in his intestine and needed immediate surgery. The pediatrician suggested no surgery. Just let Dan die. We disagreed. My life of advocacy started then. The surgeon who operated on Dan, came into my room and told me he would do the best job possible. Then, they found that Dan also had an inoperable heart defect.

### Dan rode on the crest of change.

Before Dan's birth, neither my husband nor I, had ever met person with Down Syndrome and we came from large cities. Persons with Down Syndrome were kept at home or were living in an institution. At this time, there were no Early Childhood programs, no schools, no Education for All, no jobs, no independent living.

With encouragement from our new pediatrician, Dan started in some therapy services. Dan was one of the first three boys with Down Syndrome to enter a new birth to three program at University

of Washington. All three progressed well and got national recognition, demonstrating that early intervention worked. Our pediatrician also suggested we join the Arc and we did. We were then also told to go to Rainier institution to get a needed genetic test. It was an awful experience at Rainier-so many people doing nothing. Yet, I noticed that individuals with Down Syndrome were unpaid staff – they were pushing people in wheelchairs. When we left Rainier, my husband quietly said to me, "We can take care of our own baby." We never looked back.

When Dan was three years old we moved to University of Wisconsin in Madison, where they had a very new Early Childhood center. We enrolled Dan. Dan's sister was born. Two years later, we advocated that Dan be part of a small group from the early Childhood Center that went to Kindergarten. Dan excelled.

In 1974, when Dan was 5 ½ years old, Education for All was passed in Wisconsin. Dan was standing next to Governor Lucey as the bill was signed.

Next, we moved to Richardson Texas, close to Dallas. Dan went to a segregated class in a regular school. He was the first individual with Down Syndrome to go to a regular Jr. high school. Dan's brother was born. Three years later, he was the first individual with Down Syndrome to go to the regular high school. These were not our local schools. Dan had some good teachers and some awful teachers. It turned out some of the poorest teachers in the district were assigned to teach the Special Education students. *(Cont. Page 2)*

Dan started going to Special Olympic practices. We parents started a parent group at the practices and didn't realize it.

Next, we moved back to Seattle. We settled in the Lake Washington School district which had started a School to Work program. That meant WORK!

I got permission to start a parent group and we parents were really strong advocates. Our son's teachers acted as Job Coaches. This was a new concept. We were so fortunate.

By the time Dan was in his last year at Lake Washington High School, he had had jobs all over our community. He learned to independently ride the Metro bus. We learned what he loved (reading, working with people and working inside) and what was never going to work (picking up trash).

Our parent group decided we wanted jobs after graduation for our sons/daughters and we advocated for this.

King Co. Developmental Disabilities held monthly Board meetings. I went to these and every month I stood up and talked about how Dan wanted a job. Then, I attended a Town Hall meeting for our local Congressman. I stood up during the input time, and told the whole room that Dan wanted a job but there was no funding for any special education individuals graduating from school. There had been no funding for this group for years.

## **Our son wanted to work.**

A reporter for the local area newspaper came up to me. She wanted to do a story on Dan. I met with her. She took a picture of Dan and me and we ended up on the front page of the Sunday newspaper. My cousin's husband who worked at Microsoft asked for a copy of the article. He took it into the head of HR and told them that they should hire Dan – he was good worker. This worked.

At the King County Board meetings, I was asked if I would like to organize parents within King Co. I knew many parents from Special Olympics. Thus, parents became part of a Team with DDA, Counties, self advocates, providers and teachers. It has worked well.

One month later Dan started work at Microsoft in the Supply Center. He graduated from high school, 6 weeks later.

He worked at Microsoft for 15 years. He was promoted by a Sr. Director into the Mail Room. She saw his potential and when she asked him if he liked his job, he said "Yes, I love my job, but I could



*Dan pictured in the mailroom at Microsoft.*

do more." He was an excellent mail sorter. The week before he died, he bested his own record. He was the most accurate and fastest mail sorter. He was a good reader and he liked things to be in the right place. He also printed out and placed hundreds of labels every month on the magazines coming to Microsoft employees. He had found the right job and he LOVED it.

Dan knew legislators from our annual King Co. Board Legislative forum.

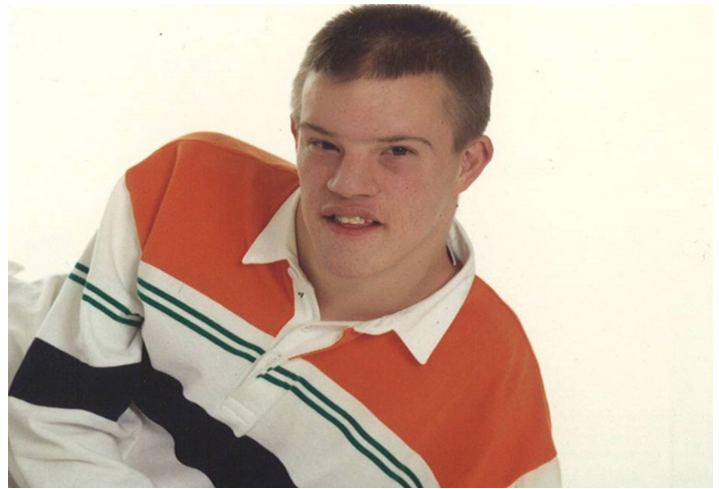
He passed away in January of 2005. (He shouldn't have made it out of childhood with his heart condition. He far outlived others with similar heart problems.) Microsoft flew their company flag at half-mast in honor of him. He died in the midst of the 2005 Legislative session. They passed a Developmental Disabilities Land Trust bill and both Republicans and Democrats wanted it named after Dan.

Then, recently when the COVID money came into our state, Governor Inslee allocated \$50 million for Developmental Disabilities Land Trust, which was renamed, the Dan Thompson Memorial Community Services Account. (Cont. Page 3)

Many groups all over the state have applied and many have received grants to help individuals with disabilities.

Over the last 50 years, can you see the path from institutionalization to the opportunity for schooling, a job, and the goal of living the life he wanted? Dan was able to be involved in many of these changes.

Dan had humor and changed many people's opinion about individuals with disabilities. He loved his sister and brother with a passion and was always very protective of them.



Today, Dan's legacy lives on through the Dan Thompson Account (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda/dan-thompson-account>) and the Dan Thompson Employment Rallies, which are held across the state throughout March and April (<https://www.gowise.org/initiatives/employment-rallies/>).

## Reporting Abuse and Neglect

A message from the DSHS' Developmental Disabilities Administration

### Signs to look for:

- Injuries, bruises, sores or weight loss that happens for no known reason.
- A change in mood or personality, such as being afraid around a particular person or place.
- Poor hygiene and signs of neglect such as not bathing, wearing dirty clothes, not taking medication and living in an unsafe home.
- Money or belongings that go missing or being pressured into giving money and things to someone.
- Being yelled at, threatened or made to feel bad or less worthy.

### *Anyone can be a victim of abuse.*

If you think you or someone you know is being abused or neglected, take action:

- Call 1-866-END HARM (1-866-363-4276) for children and adults.
- Make an [online report](#) to Adult Protective Services (for adults only)
- Call or email your DDA case manager. If you do not know who that is visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-locations> to find a DDA office and talk with a DDA employee.

Always remember to report a crime, physical or sexual abuse or a life-threatening situation **call 911.**

### Resources

- Department of Children, Youth & Families: [How to Report Child Abuse or Neglect](#)
- Adult Protective Services: [Report Concerns Involving Vulnerable Adults](#)
- CDC: [Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

Check out these videos on what abuse looks like and how to report.

- [Washington APS 2-minute Explainer](#)
- [End Harm video by Informing Families](#)

## Do you know what abuse looks like?

Abuse takes many forms. It can be physical, financial, verbal, emotional and neglectful. Abuse can come from strangers, caregivers, family members, friends and others.

State of Washington  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES  
Developmental Disabilities Administration  
P.O. Box 45310  
Olympia, WA 98504-5310



## **Summer Camps and Recreational Activities**

*Resources are available!*

The warmer weather is here which means summer camps are right around the corner! Now is a great time to look into camps available to you and your family. The Arc of Washington offers a camp resource page that highlights summer camps across the northwest. Visit <https://arcwa.org/parent-to-parent/info-resources/camp-resources/> to learn more.

Looking for more activities for you and your family to participate in? Visit <https://informingfamilies.org/summer-resources-for-families/> for resources on spring and summer activities available to you.



***Get instant updates from the Developmental Disabilities Administration:***

- News and Announcements
- Provider Information
- Resources
- Training and Events!

***How to Sign Up:***

- Text "DDA" to 468311
- Visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda> and then scroll down the home page and click on the GovDelivery envelope and sign up link for news and information.