

# Informing Families Winter Newsletter

2025



## **Navigating the Complex Landscape of Housing for Individuals with Disabilities: A Compassionate Approach**

Written By: Pam Blanton, Founder/CEO of Partners4Housing

The journey of finding a resilient housing solution for a loved one with disabilities is often fraught with complexity, varied emotions, and seemingly insurmountable hurdles. Families frequently find themselves lost in a maze of fragmented services, conflicting information, and overwhelming administrative processes. This challenge is particularly sharp for parents and caregivers of individuals with developmental disabilities, who must simultaneously plan for immediate housing needs and long-term independence.

The critical gap in support systems is not only about finding a space in which to live, but creating a holistic environment that supports individual dignity, personal growth, and meaningful independence. Traditional approaches often focus on housing placement while overlooking the nuanced needs of each individual – their personal preferences, support requirements, social connections, and potential for skill development. Successful housing solutions must transcend mere physical accommodation and create pathways that honor the unique potential of each person. [this provides a segue into what Betsy and Ron have done for Joey]

Meet Betsy Hicks-Russ, mom to Joey, who has autism, and founder of Autism Odyssey. Betsy has taken great strides over the years to create an ideal nutritional environment for Joey, as well as nurture his self-expression and encourage the pursuit of his favorite hobbies and activities, while working together as a family to make sure everyone's needs were met. Then, right around

the time Joey was turning thirty, their family's vague thoughts and dreams of the future started coming more into focus. It was time for a big shift in their lives. They were sure about some things, not sure about others, there were a lot of details to sort out, and the processes weren't at all clear. So, through her thorough research, Betsy found us at Partners4Housing and started putting all the pieces into place for Joey, beginning with our Benefits and Housing Review.

The cost of the Review for Betsy's family (and all those who are residents of Washington State) was covered by a generous grant from the Dan Thompson Memorial Fund, and Reviews will continue to be of no cost to families and self-advocates in Washington through June 2025. Here's what you can expect from your Benefits and Housing Review no matter which state you live in:

- A comprehensive, online, self-paced questionnaire that covers everything in your or your Loved One's life, including financial matters, housing needs, care needs, and much more.
- A Zoom meeting with a Solutions Coordinator from our team that has thoroughly reviewed your family's wants and needs and will answer any questions you have.
- Follow-up documents detailing your consultation and the next steps for you to take based on your unique needs, and the support of our team if you need further clarification.
- Membership in our secure Roommate Matching Pool, with very few exceptions.  
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(Cont.) Some of the greatest insights we have received have come from families and others who support someone with a disability. Just this past year, we have been told by those who completed the Benefits and Housing Review process that, “There was an incredible amount of misinformation that I was given...This meeting was helpful in correcting the misinformation,” “Although I have been attending housing information sessions for years and felt like I know the basics this connection pulled it all together concisely,” and “I’m an info collector but the Section 8 information was brand new to me and highly relevant!”

Each family needs and deserves the peace that comes from having dependable information curated especially for them so that they can make the best choices for their future. It is our mission to provide this vital piece of the puzzle so that you can focus on your bigger picture.

The path forward in disability housing isn’t about finding quick solutions, but about making informed, thoughtful decisions that honor both the individual with disabilities and their family’s vision for the future. As we’ve seen through stories like Betsy and Joey’s, transformative change becomes possible when families have access to reliable information, expert guidance, and a supportive community that understands their journey.


For families ready to take the next step in their housing journey, remember that you don’t have

to navigate this complex landscape alone. Resources and support networks exist to help you create a sustainable, enriching living situation for your loved one. Whether you’re just beginning to explore housing options or seeking to refine an existing plan, the most important step is to reach out and connect with experienced professionals who can guide you through the process.

The future of disability housing lies in our collective ability to share knowledge, learn from each other’s experiences, and work together to create innovative solutions that truly serve the diverse needs of our community. By acting today, we help build a stronger, more inclusive tomorrow for all individuals with disabilities.




*About the Author:* Pam founded Partners4Housing to provide a better way for families of people with IDD to find roommates and set up shared housing solutions. Her career has spanned 30 years in special needs housing, and she is an acknowledged expert in her field and a Friends of Housing Award Honoree. As housing coordinator in Seattle, she assisted 450 people with IDD with their move into housing over a 5-year period and has an in-depth working knowledge of how to help people navigate SSI, SSDI, State Residential Support, Medicaid-funded personal care services, supported employment income, and Section 8 housing subsidies.



**Free Benefits and Housing Review Available for Washington State Families**

Thanks to a generous grant from the Dan Thompson Memorial Fund and a contract through the DSHS’ DDA, Partners4Housing is offering a FREE Benefits and Housing review for individuals with I/DD 16 and older in Washington state. To learn more visit <https://signup.partners4housing.com/promo>.



**5 Year State Plan Survey**

The Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) is gathering feedback to better understand the challenges faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), their families, and other stakeholders across Washington State. This input will help shape the DDC’s 5-Year State Plan, which guides our work to address barriers and improve services statewide.

**Take the Survey: Share your insights and experiences here: [bit.ly/WADDCSurvey](https://bit.ly/WADDCSurvey)**



**The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** can help households this fall and winter by providing assistance with energy costs. To learn more about the program and eligibility visit <https://liheapch.acf.hhs.gov/search-tool/>.

LIHEAP eligibility varies by state and is based on household size, income, and other received benefits.

## Legislative Advocacy: How You Can Be a Legislative Advocate!



**What is a legislative advocate?** They are a person who has a passion about issue that is affecting their community and want to make sure state legislature know their concerns.



**How do you become a legislative advocate?**

First you need found out who your legislators are. There is a website that can show you who your legislators are. It called <https://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder/> you just type in your address or just your zip code. The site will show your both your congressional district (for federal legislation) and state legislative district legislators information including their email, office mailing address and phone number.



**It is good to meet with others who feel same way about your cause and work together on meeting with legislators.** Sometimes groups of people can work together with their legislator in creating and supporting a bill or opposing a bill.



**A bill is document that if passed by both legislature and governor can pass into Washington state law.** Important ways you can support or give concerns about a bill is writing letters, giving testimony at public hearings and schedule in-person/virtual appointments to meet with legislators and tell them why you support the bill, or you have a concern about a bill.



**Public bill hearings are events of legislative committees that review bills.** Legislators host public hearings to get community input on said bills. People can sign in either pro/has concerns/and oppose a bill. There are different ways you can testify, in person, virtually or you can submit written testimony.



**The bill process is both fast and slow.** All bills have to go through multiple committees, and you don't always know when a committee going look at your bill. When a bill passes through their committees, they then get voted on the floor by both the house and the senate when the bill passes on the house it then must go to the senate committee process and there are more public bill hearings.

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**When a bill passed on floors of both chambers then they go to governors' desk for signing. If you supported the bill, it is a good thing, go to bill signing to celebrate it passage!**

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES  
Developmental Disabilities Administration  
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## Winter Weather Resources

- **Winter Storm Preparedness:** Storms can last hours to days and may knock out power, heat, and communication. It is important to stay up to date on weather forecast and check your emergency supplies. Visit <https://www.ready.gov/winter-ready> to learn more on how to be ready for winter weather.
- **Winter Travel Safety:** Make sure to prepare your vehicles and check road conditions before traveling during the winter season. Visit <https://wsdot.com/travel/real-time/> to help prepare for your trip. Learn more about winter travel at <https://www.ready.gov/winter-ready#travel>.
- **Home and Health Preparation:** It's important to be ready for illness. Learn the symptoms and what to do. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/> for information on the flu and COVID-19.



**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.