

Allies Community Discussions Report

Description of Allies in Advocacy

Washington State Allies in Advocacy (Allies) is an activist organization whose mission is to improve the lives of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). We are governed and staffed by people with I/DD. We advocate for policies and programs in all aspects of society that increase the power of people with I/DD to make the decisions to live the lives we choose, the ability to access all the resources available to everyone else, the opportunities to build wealth and have an equal say in our local, national, and international communities.

We believe the concerns of people with I/DD are often the same as many others who are trying to break down social and community barriers. We are committed to building partnerships to fight for common concerns.

We believe all people with I/DD should be free from ableism and other forms of discrimination, be treated as equals not only in word but through the true exercise of power and have the same opportunities in our lives that are available to our neighbors.

Community meetings Locations and # of people

Allies in Advocacy hosted Community Discussion Zoom meetings 4 times with advocates in the following areas of Washington State: Northwest, Puget Sound, Southwest and Central and Eastern Washington.

10 people in Northwest Washington

9 people in Puget Sound

8 in Central and Eastern Washington

6 in Southwest Washington

We will be trying more targeted discussions with other groups in the future.

Description of Meetings

Each community meeting started with an introduction of Allies and why we are doing these community meetings.

1. We are doing these meetings as part of the KUNI project to find out what are the good things and the problems of living in different Washington State communities.

2. We are doing these meetings to help self-advocates connect with their legislators. Self-Advocates interested will have meetings with legislators with Shawn in September and October about some of the issues brought up in the community meetings.
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Community meeting results

What is good about living in the community?

People like living in the community by their friends and family. Each group discussed how they enjoyed going out for walks and bike rides. People in Snohomish enjoyed their park system. Those in Seattle also enjoyed some parks but also were nervous to visit certain areas due to crime or perceived crime. People in all areas enjoyed doing activities such as Special Olympics or joining other social, religious and activity groups and clubs. They enjoyed the opportunity to socialize with their community and meet new friends. People stated that they appreciated when communities were more welcoming to them and included them in all aspects of the community. They appreciated that services were becoming a little more person centered though there is still a long way to go. A few individuals mentioned that because they lived in the community and had rights, they were able to start families like their friends and neighbors. Individuals also valued the job opportunities in their communities though there is room for a lot of improvement when it comes to jobs and careers. Overall, they appreciated when community members treated them like everyone else in the community.

What are the general problems of communities or State Services?

People said the major issues in their communities had to do with accessibility and safety. In certain areas of cities there aren't enough curb cuts and sidewalks. Also, many crosswalks aren't as accessible as they need to be because traffic moves way too fast for individuals who can't go fast. It was also mentioned that Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane had unsafe areas that were dirty and not kept up well. People mentioned, it wasn't safe to travel down some streets especially at night. Also, in Spokane one of the people said their apartment got broken into. It was suggested that these cities improved sidewalk access and help those living on the street to get a permanent residence, so that the areas can be cleaned up.

It was also brought up that many services aren't accessible for a variety of reasons, one being that the materials advertising services aren't in plain language or in alternative languages or in alternative formats. People thought service agencies and transit providers should use more plain language materials and have more staff available to assist people when they have questions. They need to also put materials in a variety of formats that would be accessible to different disability populations. They also should make sure racial marginalized communities are able to understand what services are out there for their communities. The groups mentioned that Cities and Counties should also be encouraged to make their lines of communication better.

Housing

When asked where people lived. The most common answers were either in their own apartment, or with family. A few said they live with roommates. One lived in senior housing, one in supportive living and one didn't have a permanent residence. Several individuals have subsidized housing. When asked if they wanted to move to a different residence could they, most answered either no or it would be hard too. This is due to the lack of affordable, accessible, integrated housing options out there. Since there are only so many subsidies to go around most low-income individuals must be placed on a wait list. Some wait lists in Washington State have a lottery system to get on it. People can often wait up to 2 to 3 years for housing. For the individuals who make enough money to pay for general rent, it can still be hard due to rental costs skyrocketing. The average rent for a one bedroom in Seattle is \$2,302, in Marysville its \$1,438, in Tacoma its \$1,739, in Spokane its \$1,244 and in Olympia the average price for a one bedroom is \$1,479. This data is according to Apartments.com August 2021. Due to the high rent prices individuals are deciding to stay more with family or rent a smaller place with friends.

The groups did discuss possible solutions like increasing the Housing Trust Funds, encouraging local communities to build more affordable accessible housing options, building tiny homes for people with disabilities. We also discussed possibly building an apartment system like 55+ communities do only this would be for individuals with disabilities. The feeling from the groups were this is not the way to expand accessible housing, since it would isolate people with disabilities to a particular area. The groups felt it would be better to make all communities more inclusive so that individuals have more choice on where they live.

A few issues that came up due to COVID-19 were around the housing moratorium. Although for some the moratorium has been a positive, due to less income coming in, others felt it prevented individuals who are dangerous from being evicted. Another concern was that some landlords weren't as willing to make updates or repairs to apartment complexes.

Transportation

There was a lot of discussion about transit services. For those in the Spokane and Seattle area who had access to the public bus they were generally happy with the weekday service. They sometimes dealt with not being able to go out to a nighttime event depending on how far they live from the center of town. There were also issues with weekend service some had good weekend service and others had little to no service. For those in the suburbs areas it was sometimes harder to do things as they had to wait longer for a bus. People also talked about it being difficult to travel to certain areas due to them having to take three or more buses. This can be time consuming and a little confusing when it comes to navigating.

Those needing para transit services were able to use the service to make trips in the daytime but had to be ready for early or late pickups as it is hard to know when the para transit bus will be in the pickup window. It was also mentioned it can also be hard to get from County to County on para transit as each local transit provider uses its own para transit services. Also, because each service is different it can be hard to understand the rules for each service.

In some areas people have used taxis just to get around quicker but due to the high prices of a cab ride this is not reasonable for everyone. Plus, not all areas have accessible taxis.

In a lot of rural areas people who couldn't drive had to rely on friends and family to get around, which limits their ability to get involved in their community to get a job, go shopping or attend social events. This has led to some individuals feeling isolated while others feel force to move to a city with good bus service.

Employment

Employment came up a few times in the discussion. First while most were thankful for Department of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and other job coaches many thought they needed to provide more person-centered services and respect individuals choices. They hoped that more employment providers could be more open to out of the box ideas and not just be set on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities getting certain jobs. They also wanted the Developmental Disability Administration case managers to be more open to a person's personal preferences. Another issue that was talked about was turnover. Since employment providers/job coaches have high turnover, it can be hard to find and keep job opportunities for the job seeker. This causes a lot of starts and stops and makes it extremely hard to keep things on track in a reasonable amount of time.

Personal Care

People talked about a few issues with personal care. First, that it can be hard to even find any provider let alone a provider that works well with the individual. This has to do with many factors including lower pay for providers, services not being person centered enough, communication barriers, location of the person needing assistance and other things. A few Individuals had issues with agencies who couldn't or wouldn't send providers out when needed or sent incompatible matches out. Another key issue was those living in group settings especially during COVID, there were times when individuals couldn't leave the premises because either it was unsafe for the individual or for fellow residents or the fact that staff didn't feel comfortable taking individuals out. While many places shut down for a time during the pandemic, it seems like a few individuals couldn't go out for longer periods than the State requirement times.

Medical

While there was less talk about medical services a few issues did get brought up. Once again individuals had issues understanding medical documents because they weren't easy to read. It also was stated that connecting with some medical professionals were hard depending on the area. Some individuals did like there was more online ways medical businesses were using to communicate or schedule appointments. There are still issues also with what Medicaid can and can't pay for and which medical worker will accept Medicaid. This can be confusing and time consuming to understand.

Next Steps

Allies will be continuing discussions with self-advocates to improve our understanding of what is happening in our communities. We will also be working with our self-advocacy partners, Developmental Disability Network partners, and other disability partners to improve the issues listed above. We will be collaborating with other marginalized groups and organizations to work on common issues. Lastly, we will be working with self-advocates to help them connect with their legislators.

For more information on this project please contact Shawn Latham, (253) 304-5762
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