



**Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board**

Monday, January 26, 2026 4:30-6:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting – via Zoom and In Person at 110 Unity Street

**Meeting Minutes**

**Board Members Present:**

Myla Musselwhite  
Jennifer Thistle  
Lindsay Foreman-Murray  
Valerie Billmire  
Zosia Sherwood  
Gina Bring  
Elizabeth Boyle

**Board Members Absent:**

**Board Members Excused:**

Zelda Rood

**Guests Present:**

Beverly Porter, ARC of Whatcom County  
Pam Blanton, Partners for Housing  
David Inscho, DDCS  
Dan Franklin, Community member  
Patricia Alderete, DDCS  
Alyssa Jones, Max Higbee  
Shanon Haber, DDCS  
Shannon Neely, DDCS

**WCHCS Staff:**

Jessica Lee, Program Specialist  
Naomi Siegel, Program Specialist  
Chelsea McGlothan, Coordinator II  
Ann Beck, CHHS Manager  
Amanda Burnett, CHHS Supervisor

**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

The meeting was called to order and introductions were conducted.

- Elizabeth Boyle was introduced as the new County Council representative on the board.

**2. Minutes Approval**

The September 22, 2025 minutes approved as presented.

- Aye: 7, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0

**3. DDAB Nominations**





Jessica reviewed the board positions.

- Officers – Co-Chairs: Responsible for general leadership and facilitation of meetings
- Committees
  - Executive committee: Officers and two board members, meet as needed between meetings if a formal recommendation is needed.
  - Nominating committee: Three board members, meet as needed to review applications to the board and make recommendations to the Executive's Office and County Council
- Valerie self-nominated to be a co-chair.
  - Lindsay has asked to step down from co-chair position, but willing to be a fall back if needed.
- Executive committee elections were tabled pending the second co-chair being filled.
- Jennifer, Gina and Zosia agreed to volunteer for the nominating committee.
- Full slate, minus second co-chair and executive committee, was motioned by Myla, seconded by Jennifer, and approved
  - Board approved the one co-chair and nominating committee, remaining positions deferred to the March meeting.
    - Aye: 7, Nay: 0, Abstain: 0

#### **4. Housing Discussion**

Naomi shared that housing is a top identified community need. 25% of survey respondents in the statewide DD Council survey named it their primary concern.

Naomi introduced the two speakers.

Pam Blanton with Partners for Housing.

- Partners for Housing is a nonprofit that helps families of individuals with disabilities plan for independent housing.
- Key services include a Benefits and Housing Review (\$500 fee post-grant period), Section 8 housing voucher navigation, a roommate matching pool and Shared Living Development Services.
- To date, they have helped establish 66 shared living homes serving 134 people.
  - The process typically takes 2–5 years.
- The organization previously operated under a 3-year Dan Thompson grant, which ended June 2025, that served 2,000+ families statewide, partnering with the Arc of Whatcom County.
- Renaming the "Residential Assessment" to "Benefits and Housing Review" significantly reduced family hesitation to engage.
- Partners for Housing provides a structured, family-driven pathway to independent housing, but families should start the process early
- Section 8 vouchers are a powerful but underutilized tool; persons with disabilities can request reasonable accommodation to port vouchers immediately.
- Pam provided her contact information: [pam@partners4housing.com](mailto:pam@partners4housing.com)

David Inscho with DDCS



- DDCS currently contracts with 8 adult family homes across Whatcom, Skagit, and Island counties
  - There are 5 in Whatcom County.
- Enhanced Adult Residential Centers, formerly boarding homes housing up to 20 residents also exist
  - One in Ferndale, one in Bellingham.
- Eligibility requires Medicaid eligibility plus demonstrated personal care needs.
- Vacancies are limited and placement involves a matching process which includes gender, transit access, and demographic fit.
  - Adult family homes cover personal care and medical needs but do not cover community activities.
  - Beverly noted the Adult Family Home Locator tool was shared in chat for reference: <https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/adsaapps/Lookup/AFHAdvLookup.aspx>
    - Valerie raised concern that the locator tool does not clearly distinguish DD-dedicated homes
    - In the locator tool, you can filter for “Specializing in DD,” which means the home has completed specific DD training, not that it only housing people with DD.

#### Naomi spoke on the County Rental Assistance Program

- A new rental assistance program is in development, partnering with the Opportunity Council and Whatcom Homeless Service Center.
- Eligibility: households with a member age 5+ enrolled with DDCS, at or below 60% AMI, or with proof of SNAP/Medicaid/SSI
- Program covers current month's rent, deposits, other housing expenses
- For severely cost-burdened households
  - Housing costs  $\geq 50\%$  of gross income, the program can pay up to 3 months of future rent/utilities
- One-time assistance, up to once per calendar year, capped at \$3,000 per household
- Contract not yet in place; rollout anticipated within the next couple of months
- The county's new rental assistance program fills an urgent gap but is one-time and capped not a long-term subsidy.
- Naomi will be conducting outreach to DDCS, ARC, and school districts to publicize rental assistance program once it is finalized

#### **5. 2026 Washington State Legislative Session**

Jessica gave an update on the current legislative session.

- The 60-day supplemental session began January 12th.
- The governor's proposed budget includes narrowing waiver service eligibility thresholds
  - This effects the scoring threshold within assessments that qualifies someone for waiver-funded services.
  - Approximately 2,500 people statewide could be affected out of 26,000 on waivers.
  - Beverly noted that in Whatcom County alone, 823 people currently receive no paid services, a number that could grow if thresholds change.



- DDCS staff confirmed the proposal is still in process; no final decision has been made.

Jessica shared information on how to find your representative.

- The Washington State Legislature website has a search tool.
- The majority of the county is in District 42, those living in Fairhaven are in a different district

Jessica also shared the Arc of Washington Bill Tracker: <https://arcwa.org/advocacy/bill-tracker/>

- On the website you can find information on upcoming hearings, look at the budget and it lists bills of interest.

Valerie asked for clarification on the threshold that people have to meet in order to keep their benefits.

- Jessica emphasized that this was still just a proposal, which would change the threshold for waiver eligibility as defined within the DDCS assessment. For example, if the threshold is currently a score of 90 to be eligible the threshold would move to a score of 100 to be eligible. DDCS eligibility under this proposal would not be impacted.

## **6. Public Comment and Open Session**

Naomi mentioned the Transition Fair taking place on March 19th, 9am–noon at the Ferndale Event Center

Dan Franklin, an autistic self-advocate, addressed the board. He described his personal experience living with autism, his extensive advocacy work through presentations, podcasts, policy engagement, an upcoming documentary, and his goals: mandatory autism training across public-facing institutions, improved accommodations, and an autism foundation. He thanked Beverly for her support and knowledge.

## **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned at 6:02pm

## **Resources**

- [Whatcom County Developmental Disabilities 5-year plan](#)
- [Adult Family Homes for People with Developmental Disabilities](#) – video from WA State DSHS
- [Informing Families](#)
- [STARS Adult Family Home Locator for Professionals & Providers](#)
- [DDC 5-Year State Plan Survey](#)
- [Washington State District Finder](#)
- [Arc of Washington Bill Tracker](#)

**Next Meeting:** Monday March 23, 2026 - 4:30-6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jessica Lee, Program Specialist.

### **HD Staff**

Jessica Lee  
Naomi Siegel

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