

Shelton Mason County Journal

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Committee on disabilities releases Mason County summary

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Mason County has plenty of success stories and promising practices, according to the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, but barriers remain.

A subcommittee tasked with community outreach for Gov. Jay Inslee's committee summarized its findings from its two February meetings in Shelton. On April 9, subcommittee Chair Damiana Harper released a 27-page outreach summary of the meetings, which took place Feb. 27 and 28 at Mason PUD 3's Johns Prairie Operations Center.

The meetings centered on three major discussion topics — restoring hours for Dial-A-Ride service and addressing 1-976; establishing a centralized resource and service network; and addressing homelessness and the unique barriers for local residents with disabilities.

"Our meetings were informative, productive and a lot of fun," Harper said in an email. "We were impressed with the enthusiasm and positive spirit of the participants."

The full report can be found at <https://bically2ydrbc.com>.

The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment aims to "promote equality, opportunity, independence and full participation in life for people with

disabilities." The committee advises the governor, legislature and state agencies on policies that affect people with disabilities and more. It has a 27-member board of contributors from throughout the state.

Shelton resident Kevin Frankeberger, a recently appointed member of the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, wrote in an email that he was impressed with his volunteer colleagues producing the document. He wrote that he hoped it would be disseminated far and wide.

"Most importantly though, the report cites the many challenges we have (for) services needed in our county and action steps to get to/increase the support we have around us," he wrote. "Too many residents are always isolated, like we are all today. We have homeless, we have those (who are) hungry. We as a county can and will do better, as the summary reports."

The summary listed six "10-ical success stories and promising practices":

- Mason PUD 3 offers fully accessible meeting facilities that are free for nonprofits.
- A local parent and son are taking initial steps to start People First, a self-advocacy center for individuals with intellectual disabilities in Shelton.
- Gateway Property Manage-

ment and Mel Property Management were recognized for their willingness to work with people with disabilities to find housing.

■ County Auditor Paddy McGuire and Mason County commissioners and leaders are working to establish a local Accessible Community Advisory Committee, which could lead to funding opportunities for programs and activities for individuals with disabilities.

■ Moving Mason Forward Resource Coalition facilitates the community's work to address health priorities and promote "sustainable, lasting change."

■ Mason Transit Authority's Volunteer Driver Program provides transportation service for residents age 60 and older who are unable to drive or use public transportation to get to medical appointments and run errands.

The governor's committee's Community Outreach Subcommittee hosted the two Shelton meetings — the first of which was a town hall meeting that aimed to start a discussion about issues residents with disabilities face, specifically transportation, affordable housing, employment, education and more. The summary includes resources for those topics, and comments from meeting attendees.

Some attendees brought up local problems for residents with disabilities. Frankeberger, who lives in the Lake Lim-

erick area, expressed concern about Mason Transit Authority's Dial-A-Ride program. He said the agency recently decided to stop the program's service after 6 p.m., which limits his and his wife's ability to go out, eat dinner and socialize.

Frankeberger, who is blind, suggested MTA re-establish its citizen advisory board, which he was on for 13 years.

Mike Ringenberg, operations manager for MTA, said the agency adjusted those hours because requests for service after 6 p.m. were minimal. He said MTA plans to reevaluate the program again in June to see if adjustments are needed. The meeting took place before Inslee's order to "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" that limited all nonessential services.

Ringenberg said if officially approved, Initiative 976, which would lower the state's vehicle registration fees, would affect about one-third of MTA's funding and potentially reduce rides. He said he's concerned it will affect riders who rely on the service to get to medical appointments.

During the subcommittee's leadership breakfast on Feb. 28, attendees were asked to think about how to increase ridership and service hours for Dial-A-Ride. Some suggestions included developing an agreement with other services such as transportation business The Patty Wagon, hold

town hall meetings in rural communities; educate community members about how transportation funding works; and promote ridership in senior newsletters.

MTA said it would collect data through March and create a survey, which the agency said it planned to have completed by April 30. It also had other outreach plans.

The subcommittee also asked how the community would design and implement a centralized resource and service network. Some ideas included identifying what's available and combining resources and marketing those available resources.

Finally, attendees were asked what steps could be taken to identify and mitigate barriers faced by people with disabilities who are also experiencing homelessness.

Suggestions included developing a rapid response network; offer a mobile food bank for people living in the woods; tell their stories, and meet and talk to them; and increase collaboration of resources for agencies in the community.

"Community leaders made commitments and I'm so hopeful those will be carried through to fruition," Frankeberger wrote in an email. "Shelton/Mason County deserves nothing less." For more information about the governor's committee, go to esd.wa.gov/gcde.