

Recognizing & Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities within the Homelessness System



The Arc of King County is a non-profit for people with developmental disabilities (DD) and their families. More and more people with DD are becoming homeless, often due to very limited income, need for very specific and accessible living quarters, and challenges with communication and problem-solving skills needed to stabilize. This is especially concerning because people with DD are much more likely to experience abuse and exploitation and be negatively impacted by trauma. They also need more support to stabilize.

The Arc provides FREE information and support to individuals with DD, families, and professionals to help connect with community resources that could result in stabilized housing. We are a useful resource for individuals and families in addition to case management services through a shelter or rehousing program, as we have specialized knowledge of local DD resources.

Contact our team for assistance

English
(206) 829-7053
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(206) 829-7030
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Recognizing Developmental Disabilities

Common DD diagnoses include Intellectual Disability, Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and other similar conditions. Disabilities are not always visible, especially developmental disabilities. The way disability impacts an individual varies for each person, the situation, and the environment. However, if you notice a combination of these characteristics in a person you serve, they might have DD:

- **Challenged communication skills** – They struggle to speak, get their point across, or understand what you are saying. They tend to take things literally and struggle to read between the lines in communication and social interactions. They become frustrated easily when trying to communicate.
- **Slowed processing speed** – It takes the person more time to understand or respond to information. They might forget things easily. They might struggle to follow through with something you told them to do. You find you need to repeat yourself a lot, or you aren't sure they are fully getting it.
- **Sensory challenges** – You notice the person seems overly sensitive to sound, light, movement, touch, etc. They might frequently plug their ears, wear sunglasses, flap their hands, or struggle to sit still. They might hum, talk to themselves, or rock back and forth on their feet or when sitting.
- **Unusual social skills** – The person may talk too much, too loudly, too closely, too fast, etc. Or, they may talk very little, very quietly, very slowly, without making eye contact, or while pacing. They may struggle to get along with others or be overly friendly. They might appear to be a “loner” or perhaps have no sense of privacy and boundaries.
- **Unusual coping and self-regulation skills** – The person may seem to become upset or overwhelmed easily. They may struggle with changes. This could be in the form of pacing, running away, clenching fists, crying, yelling, hitting things, OR just closing off and seeming to be unresponsive.
- Talking about having a guardian, payee, receiving SSI or Social Security, or being in special ed.

How can I better support people with DD in my work?

- Assume competence – believe the person with disability can understand you and successfully work with you; adapt as you see clues otherwise
- “Work with me not on me” – create a mutually respectful partnership with the individual that recognizes and uses their strengths. Ask them what help they need to be successful, rather than trying to make them receive support in the same way non-disabled people might.
- Believe them when they disclose disability or supports they need to be successful
- Use combination of communication strategies (e.g. speaking, writing, pictures, videos, use of check lists, etc.) to explain things and when follow through is needed.
- Offer quieter spaces with less distractions, both for meetings and when folks are living in a shelter.
- Be direct. Avoid euphemisms, slang, etc.
- Break things into smaller steps that are easier to accomplish, help with reading and writing may be needed.
- Allow more time for communication and problem solving
- Be patient and expect repetition

Disability Resources to Support Housing Stability:

Rather than one single resource for people with DD guaranteed to secure and maintain stable housing, there are a variety of resources that could be helpful. Each resource has very specific eligibility criteria and a timeline for accessing services, depending on the nature of the individual's disability. The Arc of King County can help people with DD and their families identify and access relevant resources such as:

Social Security Benefits: Cash benefits specifically for people with disabilities (e.g. SSI and SSDI).

Representative Payee: People who receive Social Security benefits but struggle to manage their money can have another person manage their finances on their behalf.

Supported Decision Making, Durable Power of Attorney, or Legal Guardian: Some people with DD struggle to make safe decisions for themselves. These legal supports help a person make critical decisions about their medical and financial (including housing) needs.

DSHS – Disability Services (DDA and HCS): DSHS has programs for children and adults with disabilities including possible housing or care services. A parent caring for an adult child with a disability could be paid by the state to provide this care.

People enrolled in DSHS-DDA could be eligible for special housing resources outside of the general Coordinated Entry for All and Housing Authority systems, including HASP Section 8 Vouchers and Subsidized Units. Individuals must be enrolled with DDA and have natural supports (e.g. family or friends) and/or professional supports (e.g. case management, representative payee, etc.) to access these resources.

Employment Services: There are specialized employment services for people with disabilities through Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and DSHS-DDA.

Special Needs Child Care Subsidy: Families utilizing the DSHS Working Connection Child Care Subsidy Program can utilize the Special Needs Child Care Subsidy to help pay for additional support within a child care program.

Public Education: Certain students with disabilities can receive educational services through their local school district as early as age 3 all the way up to age 21. The student needs to be eligible for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

**Contact The Arc for support accessing relevant resources.
For professionals, we can also give you ideas on ways to better support a person or family with DD.**

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