DDA and DDC Community Strategic Listening Sessions

General Community Feedback and Notes

August 2021

Background

The Office of Equity asked that DDA conduct listening sessions with stakeholders, customers, clients, families, and self-advocates and hear their ideas on how state agencies can better identify and address opportunity gaps and inequities. In partnership with the DDC, DDA compiled feedback and recommendations that will be used to help advance progress on becoming an anti-racist and transformative organization and help the Washington State Office of Equity to create a five-year equity strategic plan that bridges opportunity gaps and reduce disparities.

The listening session notes that follow were compiled by Anjulie Ganti, MPH, MSW (Consultant) and KeliAnne Hara-Hubbard, MPH (Consultant) with support from Justin Chan, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Administrator. Though a vast majority of participants were opened to sharing their names, some participants preferred to remain anonymous and have been listed either by initials or not listed at all. Participants were broken up into smaller break out rooms on zoom, where there was a facilitator and notetaker. This report captures all the comments shared in each breakout room. The notes are organized by questions the OOE suggested were asked. **There were 60 participants on August 23rd and 84 participants on August 27th for a total of 144.**

Facilitators & Note takers:
- Anjulie Ganti
- Norma Timbang
- Jeremy Norden-Paul
- Gita Krishnaswamy
- KeliAnne Hara-Hubbard
- Gabriela Ewing
- Jen Self
- Adana Protonentis
- CeliaViveros
- Michelle Sturdevant
- Sonia Garcia de Ceron (Spanish interpreter)

General Structure:
A total of 8 rooms (4 during each listening session) were hosted to gather perspectives from individuals with disabilities, caregivers of individuals with disabilities, and individuals working at organizations serving people with disabilities. Listening sessions lasted two hours with a 15-minute break halfway through. These sessions were hosted over Zoom, facilitated by individuals who are not part of the DDA.

Agenda:
5:00pm: Tech Checks

5:10pm: Welcome and Opening Remarks
5:15pm: Participation Guidelines
5:20pm: Move into breakout rooms for Listening Session
5:25pm: Introductions and Participation Guidelines in Breakout rooms
5:30pm: Listening Session Part 1
- **Imagine creating an anti-racist (equitable) Washington state where everyone flourishes and achieves their full potential for the common good: an equitable and just state for all.**
  - What opportunity gaps need to be bridged?
  - Which disparities need to be eliminated?
  - What, in your opinion, must be measured to achieve this reality?

6:30pm: Break
6:45pm: Listening Session Part 2
- **Imagine creating an anti-racist (equitable) Washington state where everyone flourishes and achieves their full potential for the common good: an equitable and just state for all.**
  - **What one thing do you want the Office of Equity (OOE) to know?**
  - **What one thing do you** want the Office **of Equity to accomplish?**
  - **What else does the Office of Equity need to meet?**

7:45pm: Closing and Thank Yous

Summary of Themes that emerged from the listening sessions

Accessibility to critical information about available services

Participants expressed that there is great difficulty in navigating DDA paperwork, not being eligible or identified for services and information is either hard to find or is not shared in a way that makes sense for families making participation in services a challenge. A huge barrier is long waitlists for services for BIPOC and low-income families. There is a need for plain language processes and plain language documentation. It's accessible across all identities. In addition, unconscious biases need to be addressed as the "whole approach is biased against people of color."

Continued lack of access to in language services resulting in frustration when accessing services

Participants expressed that language access is a huge barrier, even when state agencies are mandated to provide language services. Further challenging matters is that families rely on case managers to be culture brokers and support the development of culturally responsive care plans. Participants expressed that "we always question, does this happen to me because I'm a person of color? Is it because I'm a parent of a child with special needs? Is it because I have disabilities or because I don't speak English well? Is it because I'm an immigrant?"

Lack of Trust

Participants expressed a lack of trust in accessing services and in participation in these listening sessions. One participant noted that "I think talk is cheap. I'm skeptical. I spent 3 hours here and what will be the outcome? I'm not sure. There are so many people out there who have disabilities themselves and to provide feedback in this format would not work. This system isn't acknowledging the needs of people with disabilities. The listening session is another way of "checking the box." Moreover, families who are using language services, feel at a disadvantage because "people only listen to the social workers." Some mentioned that they wait for hours, only to find that no help is available.

Extreme Fatigue for families and self-advocates

Many participants expressed their extreme fatigue in navigating services and keeping systems accountable for providing services. A common example offered was working with DDA and the school system. Parents and caregivers mentioned that they spend as much time receiving services, as they do point out gaps and advocating for their family members who have disabilities to get services. Even when a service is available, they are not sure that it will be safe for their children to even be there. One family mentioned that when caregivers get sick there is no additional access to back up caregivers.

Ableism is a major issue and is often overlooked in equity discussions

Participants mentioned that the online format at all was a barrier as some self-advocates and family members find registering for a meeting to be a barrier, or they have a hard time navigating the internet or they do not have the right accessibility software at home to create access. Participants mentioned that a "starting point is looking at issues of biases, systemic challenges. Don't just say inclusion as guiding values while working with people with developmental disabilities or differently abled people. So, for me the whole appreciation, the context, the language, there's a whole lot we can do together if we can create the environment to discuss." Many people need additional education about disability.

Services must be accessible across many social identities

Individuals often mentioned their multiple, intersecting social identities (e.g., being both an immigrant and a person with a disability). Navigating systems that were built to serve one social identity but not the other was frustrating and challenging, as the system was not built for these individuals. A strong need for language services is one example of the ways in which the system does not serve individuals with intersecting identities (e.g., Spanish speaking and disabled). Many participants discussed how the system wants to "put people in boxes" and that those who do not fit neatly into that box are often left behind. In addition, participants also expressed a need to stop the school to prison pipeline as to "stop racially profiling our black boys." The intersections between being low income, BIPOC and having a disability make for a wide array of barriers when attempting to create a more equitable WA State, especially given the unevenness of services provided at schools. Participants wondered how to practice inclusion in a way that ensures no one is left out?

Lack of access to services

This seems to impact at the intersections of race and disability as well as families with fewer resources (e.g., lack of access to ABA, culturally responsive providers, not enough language access, etc.). Services available are designed as **one size fits all**, e.g., having to do waivers, not enough services available for specific needs, isolates and creates a "throw away" system. Families are struggling to receive CFC hours. Having more interpreters to relay information in different dialects can do a lot for inclusion.

Challenges in systems regarding assessing the needs of individual people

Participants mentioned that "square peg, round hole"/systems tools are not efficient in determining what the client and family needs, for example, taking good care of their child resulted in services being taken away.

Not enough services

Participants mentioned transition services, employment, housing, school programs such as para providers and integration into general classrooms, early intervention, childcare for clients in diapers, respite for parents/caregivers, etc., are not readily available.

Need more and more voices at the table

Participants mentioned the need to include the voices of Self-advocates, not just white voices.

Accountability

Institutions should work together to make change; keep creating spaces like this; don't be afraid to fail; monitor DDA to ensure changes happen; "hold legislators' feet to the fire"; increase funding and prioritize disability services.