



**Informing
Families**
BEST BUDDIES


Organization Spotlight: Best Buddies Washington

Best Buddies in Washington offers One-to-One Friendship, Integrated Employment, and Leadership Development programs for individuals with and without intellectual disabilities.

The Evan Effect: Inspiring Inclusion and Connection Through Best Buddies

Best Buddies International is a global nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Imagine a world where everyone feels included, supported, and celebrated for who they are. Best Buddies is turning that vision into reality—one high-five, hangout, and heart-to-heart at a time. With programs in schools, communities, and workplaces around Washington state and the globe, Best Buddies is creating a culture where inclusion isn't just an ideal—it's a way of life.

Through friendship, empowerment, and

advocacy, the organization helps individuals with and without IDD build confidence, develop social skills, and form meaningful relationships that enrich not only their lives, but also the lives of those around them.

From student leaders to corporate partners, Best Buddies brings people together to celebrate differences and champion a world rooted in kindness, acceptance, and inclusion—for people of all ages. One inspiring example of this mission in action is Evan Long.

Evan is a warm, joyful young man with a passion for cooking, learning, video games, and helping others. In high school, at just 16 years old, he helped launch a Best (Cont.)



Photo of Evan

(Cont.) Buddies chapter at his school. His commitment didn't stop there—he later became a Champion of the Year, raising significant funds to support the organization's mission.

Evan also attended the Best Buddies Leadership Conference,

a four-day event hosted at Indiana University that gathers more than 2,000 student leaders, volunteers, advocates, Jobs participants, and families from around the world. The conference features powerful performances, hands-on workshops, and confidence-building sessions aimed at creating lifelong advocates for inclusion. Evan described it as “pretty fun”—and his family was thrilled to discover it also unveiled his natural talent for public speaking.

Now 19, Evan is an active participant in the University of Washington's Best Buddies chapter, where he continues to promote inclusion and friendship through his charismatic, engaging presence. His family lovingly refers to this as “The Evan Effect”—his unique ability to connect with others and inspire joy and acceptance wherever he goes.

Whether it's through radio podcasts, public speaking, or fundraising campaigns, Evan continues to touch hearts and embody the spirit of Best Buddies. His journey is a powerful reminder of what's possible when everyone is given the chance to be seen, valued, and celebrated.

To learn more about Best Buddies programs please visit www.bestbuddies.org/washington.

Reimagine DSHS



A message from DSHS

Reimagine DSHS Update September 2025

At DSHS, we are revamping how we serve others to make things better for our clients, partners, and staff. This effort is called Reimagine DSHS, and our goal is simple: we want to help people get the support they need, when and where they need it, while also improving their overall experience.

Reimagine DSHS established two new client-facing administrations by combining the former Developmental Disabilities Administration programs, services and staff with the existing Behavioral Health and Aging and Long-Term Support Administrations, and implemented other organizational changes as well:

- **Behavioral Health and Habilitation Administration** supports people receiving residential habilitation and behavioral health services in a state-operated 24/7 setting. This significant change merges the Behavioral Health Administration with the Developmental Disabilities Administration's State-Operated Living Alternatives and Residential Habilitation Centers.
- **Economic Services Administration** offers essential public services for about one in four Washington residents. Core services focus on poverty reduction and stability, child support and disability determination
- **Finance, Technology, and Analytics Administration** provides essential support behind the scenes, focusing on finance,

- (Cont.) Facilities, and Analytics Administration with the Technology Innovation Administration.
- **Home and Community Living Administration** helps people receiving community-based supports through the state's network of contracted providers. This significant change brings together the programs of Developmental Disabilities Administration and Aging and Long-Term Services Administration, uniting all DSHS community-based care services.
- **Office of the Secretary** protects the integrity of DSHS programs through the work of several groups. Public facing programs such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Constituent Services remain in this Office. Other changes to the organizational structure have been in areas that do not directly engage with the people we support.

This new structure will reduce silos and ensure services work together seamlessly. Though there have been changes to the organizational and reporting structure, your dedicated points of contact have not changed. You should continue to work with the same person or team as before.

More information about these organizational changes is available online at these links:

- Organizational Changes at DSHS
- Reimagine DSHS Frequently Asked Questions

Projects such as transitions of care mapping and person-centered service planning are already underway, helping us reimagine how we partner with people to access the support, care and resources they need. As part of the Reimagine DSHS initiative, we are focused on making services more connected and responsive to the people we serve. One of the biggest opportunities for improvement is supporting clients and their families as they move between care settings, whether from community-based services to

residential care, or across different programs. These transitions can feel overwhelming, and our goal is to make them smoother, more coordinated, and centered on each person's needs.

Recent client survey results highlight where we can grow together:

- 64% of respondents said they know what programs and services are available for them and their families.
- 70% felt they were part of planning and goal setting for their services.
- 74% agreed that staff across social and health programs work together as a team to meet their needs.

While these numbers show a strong foundation, we want to do better. By improving communication, increasing collaboration between programs, and strengthening person-centered planning, we can improve customer satisfaction and better support individuals and families in Washington. This will enable us to fulfill our mission of partnering with people to access support, care, and resources.

We acknowledge that meaningful change requires participation of those with lived experience. Our Engagement Network Committee is made up of staff across DSHS and is preparing for conversations about Reimagine DSHS within existing meeting spaces. These conversations will focus on the three questions from the client survey. They will also include a chance to discuss challenges and success for people transitioning between settings. Our goal is to create opportunities to engage with community partners, tribal governments and other interested parties in October.

If you have questions about Reimagine DSHS, or have ideas to share with the Reimagine DSHS Team, please email us at reimagine@dshs.wa.gov

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Informing Families Newsletter Update

Starting this winter, the Informing Families Quarterly Newsletter will be available exclusively in a digital email. Families and individuals can sign up to receive the newsletter directly to their email through GovDelivery. *Please note:* the newsletter will no longer be printed and mailed. All future editions will be delivered electronically.

Sign up today to stay informed! Visit <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WADOC/signup/48024> to sign up today.

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Informing Families



We're excited to share the launch of the new Informing Families website!

The updated design makes it easier to explore trusted information and resources for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. You can explore resources and information by age, by county, or by topic. We've also kept our Bulletins, News, and much more. Visit [informingfamilies.org](https://www.informingfamilies.org) to check out the new website.



Get instant updates from the Developmental Disabilities Community Services:

- News and Announcements
- Provider Information
- Resources
- Training and Events!

How to Sign Up:

- Text "DDA" to 468311
- Visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda> and then scroll down the home page and click on the GovDelivery envelope and sign up link for news and information.