

Disability Empowerment Center

Cover

You made a great thing possible.
2023 Community Impact Report

Visual description: A group photo of Disability Empowerment staff and other supporters at a rally outdoors on a city sidewalk. They are holding signs that read “nothing about us without us,” “Disability Pride,” and “Disability rights are human rights!” The cover design is orange, green and blue and includes the Disability Empowerment Center logo that features those same colors.

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Thank you

Thanks to our supporters, funders and community partners, we have so much to celebrate from the past year. We are grateful for your commitment to disability inclusion.

We had an action-packed year reaching more community members than any other year in our organization’s recent history. Here are a few highlights to share:

We celebrated Disability Pride Month in July by asking community members to film short videos of themselves talking about what disability pride means to them.

Our staff spent hundreds of hours out in the community meeting people and sharing information about Disability Empowerment Center through tabling events and information fairs.

We launched a new program called EPIC that invites people with disabilities to come along on excursions around our city, like the aquarium and museums.

We began a new partnership with the Summit Community Center to provide regular programming for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We started offering a new 10-week workshop called Healthy Community Living to help people with disabilities achieve their goals, solve problems, prepare for change and gain more confidence.

Our Executive Director Kimberly Meck was named chair of the Washington State Independent Living Council.

We moved into a new space in Redmond in the Together Center joining dozens of other amazing nonprofit providers to work together to serve community members on the Eastside.

We’ve now had our new name for more than a year and a half—and community awareness has increased significantly, helping us serve more people.

Visual description: Statistics are displayed in orange, blue and green bubbles.

2,600 total community members served

481 people provided with intensive services

1,200 hours of consultation, education and advocacy provided to businesses, community organizations and government agencies

5 staff Independent Living Specialists providing one-to-one coaching and empowerment

3 monthly or quarterly peer support groups led by staff

60+ tabling or community events staff participated in last year

2 Healthy Community Living 10-week workshops put on for community members to set and achieve their health goals

60% of participants reported being a minority

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Visual description: Blue background with an orange stripe through the title Elizabeth's story. A small circular photo of Elizabeth, who is a white middle-aged woman with blond bangs.

Elizabeth's Story: Crossing the Country for Community

Elizabeth (she/her), a writer, was living in Florida and struggling to find resources and support for her multiple disabilities including Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a genetic tissue disorder with which she had recently been diagnosed.

"One place told me that I was not disabled enough to qualify for services. And I just remember thinking, what does that even mean? How do I not even fit into my own community?"

At the same time, there was political backlash and discriminatory policies being enacted against people who are LGBTQ+ in Florida, and Elizabeth was feeling increasingly uneasy as a disabled bisexual woman.

"I thought, where can I safely live as a disabled bisexual person who is on Medicare, under age 65, with a rarely diagnosed disorder?"

After much research, Elizabeth chose Washington state for a number of reasons. It seemed more inclusive and had better options for EDS medical care, as well as an EDS peer-support group. She also found Disability Empowerment Center and reached out to see how the organization could help.

Staff at Disability Empowerment Center helped her find a housing provider in Seattle that she qualified for as a Section 8 housing voucher recipient. This helped relieve some of Elizabeth's

anxiety about how she would secure safe and reliable housing in her new city while still in Florida.

But because of complications with her move-in timeline, Elizabeth had to start her cross-country journey without a move-in date or keys to her new home secured. Knowing she had a resource in Seattle, she got on the Greyhound bus to begin the long four-day trip.

"The only reason I had the courage to do that was because of Disability Empowerment Center," she says.

Now settled in after moving into her new place last fall, Elizabeth is pursuing other goals with help from Disability Empowerment Center staff. One of those goals is to return to writing and ultimately apply to Hedgebrook, a women's writing center on Whidbey Island.

"It's such a healing process to feel heard and seen and not be penalized for asking for help," she says. "I don't feel alone knowing that Disability Empowerment Center is there. I felt very alone as a disabled person in Florida for years."

Elizabeth is enjoying living in a community that feels safer and more inclusive—and where she feels like people know what ableism means. She is also learning how she can advocate for herself and other people with her rarely diagnosed disability.

"That's what Disability Empowerment Center feels like. It's a place where we can go for help, to learn to help ourselves—and then pay it forward."

Resources

Connective Strength EDS Support Group (Seattle area): connectivestrength.org

Learn about EDS through the EDS Society: ehlers-danlos.com

Some of our key partners in King County include:

Arc of King County

City of Redmond

Eastside For All

Elizabeth Gregory House

King County Disability Consortium

Lifelong

Seattle/King County Public Health

Summit Community Center

Together Center

Washington State Independent Living Council

Your Money Matters

Back cover

Visual description: Green and white background with three circular photos: A group of staff and supporters meeting legislators inside the state capitol in Olympia; staffers Terry and Leanna at a

tabling event sitting behind the Disability Empowerment Center table; staffers Mandy and Cassidy in the hallway outside our new Redmond office inside the Together Center. Icons for Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube.

“Even if you can’t fulfill a person’s immediate needs, if you make them feel comfortable and listen to them, you can build a relationship. If they feel comfortable and they trust you, they’re more likely to seek help.”

~ Terry, Staff Member

“Disability Empowerment Center is important because the resources are there but a lot of people don’t know how to find them.”

~ Doris Jeong, Board Member

About Us

Disability Empowerment Center provides free services to people who reside in King County. As a community-based organization led and run by people with disabilities, we are a crucial hub for people to receive free individualized services and access community-based resources. We work with people of all ages and backgrounds who have all types of disabilities—including physical, intellectual, sensory, neurological and other disabilities. Everyone is welcome regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or citizenship status.

Executive Director: Kimberly Meck

2023-2024 Board Members: Robert Blumenfeld , Doris Jeong, Steve Lewis, Ather Sharif, Grace Swanson and Toby Willis

disabilityempowerment.org

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Centers located in Seattle, Auburn and Redmond.

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