

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &
Community Services

DATE: March 3, 2025

TO: Human Services Commission

FROM: Saada Hilts, Human Services Planner
Parks & Community Services Department

SUBJECT: Panel Conversation: Youth Disabilities and Service Gaps

Background

Access to inclusive services for youth with disabilities is essential to improving the quality of life for Bellevue residents. However, many families face barriers to accessing services that meet their children's needs. The 2023-2024 Human Services Needs Update shows that while 14.4% of Bellevue residents live with a disability, only 38% of those seeking disability-related services are able to find the support they need in the community. Challenges include limited specialized services, long wait times, and transportation issues.

In response, Human Services staff have assembled a panel of experts from organizations doing exceptional work to support youth with disabilities. These agencies are leading efforts in providing innovative services, advocating for accessibility, and improving outcomes. Their dedication is making a real difference.

The panel will discuss the current trends and challenges, and how emerging strategies, technologies, and collaborative efforts are helping to break down barriers and create a brighter, more inclusive future for youth with disabilities in Bellevue. The conversation will focus on the critical work being done, and how we can continue to build upon these successes to create lasting positive change. Toni Esparza, Assistant Director of Parks & Community Services for the City of Bellevue, will also provide a brief overview of the city's efforts to advance universal design and improve accessibility.

Representatives from the following organizations will be joining the panel:

- Arzu Forough: Executive Director at Washington Autism Alliance
- Safio Abdi: Youth Program Manager at Open Doors for Multicultural Families
- Alison Morton: Chief Advancement Officer at Kinderling
- Adina Rosenberg: Teacher at Bellevue School District
- Leonardo Salas Ramos: Student at Bellevue School District

Discussion Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of your agency. Could you also highlight the specific services you offer to youth with disabilities and the communities you serve?
2. From your perspective, what are some common misconceptions or overlooked challenges related to accessibility and support services for youth with disabilities in Bellevue?
3. What innovative services or emerging technologies do you believe hold the potential to transform the future for youth with disabilities, offering new opportunities and better outcomes? How do you see these developments fostering hope and empowerment for these youth and their families?
4. What kind of training do your staff and service providers receive to ensure they are prepared to work effectively with youth with disabilities?
5. Are there any recent legislative changes, emerging trends, or shifts in your field of work that you believe are having a significant impact on the services provided to youth with disabilities? How do these developments influence your approach to care or service delivery?

Commissioners will be invited to ask questions additional questions.