

Buddy Walk

Letter from our Executive Director

The Buddy Walk 2018 will mark the 15th year of Buddy Walk® in Whatcom County! The event is a highlight for the Down syndrome Outreach community, bringing together members, friends and family to walk and celebrate with each other. The annual Buddy Walk® in Whatcom County has grown over the years from a grass-roots event with a handful of families to a 'full-on' celebration with live music, activities, games and the 2/3-mile walk through Bellingham's downtown streets. This year, food trucks will be available for participants to purchase lunch. Last year, over 450 community members participated! DsO reaches over 90 individuals & families in our community with direct support and services, accessing support meetings, receiving information and education through our lending library, and connecting and networking with other parents.

Through the support of sponsorships & your donations, The Buddy Walk is happening on Sunday, October 7!

The Arc of Whatcom County and Down syndrome Outreach of Whatcom County have the shared goal of helping to improve the lives and opportunities of people who have Down Syndrome. Since 2001, DsO has maintained an advisory committee, coordinated events for families, and supported newly diagnosed families with resources and information. Jessika Houston, DsO Coordinator, works to support the community's expanding needs, facilitated a statewide-webinar on the Down syndrome Information Act, connecting with physicians and midwives to ensure that they and families have access to accurate and up-to-date resources in delivering a diagnosis of Down syndrome. Our ongoing challenge is sustainable funding to ensure families are served. The Arc receives funding for Parent to Parent to provide parent support services to parents of children with special health care needs, developmental disabilities, and developmental delays. We receive funding for the Parent Coalition to provide community information, education, and referrals to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families/caregivers, and the general public.

Although we have written many grants and sought out foundation support, disability-specific funding has been limited and extremely restricted. As the DsO community continues to raise funds above those in support of Buddy Walk, the additional dollars can continue to sustain education, advocacy and community events. DsO provides new baby kits to parents of babies born with Down syndrome. DsO hosts community events including the Spring Fling picnic, summer park gatherings, new family reception and Buddy Walk. Our hope & plan is that increased giving can be used to organize community events, including childcare, so that parents are able to connect and support one another. Coordinating volunteers, securing accessible locations for gatherings, reviewing and collating new materials, all require savvy know-how to meet the unique needs of DsO families.

When I look back at the past year, I'm reminded of the challenges we've faced together. We rebounded from a break-in and burglary at the Dan Godwin Center. We made difficult decisions in laying off staff and reducing our personnel as resources become scarce. Our ability to recover from challenging circumstances demonstrates the commitment of our members, board, and staff of The Arc. Members who attended the Arc's annual pizza party/meeting voted enthusiastically for events that unite and support across all I/DD families. We celebrate the accomplishments of the Down syndrome community in kicking-off a spring campaign for the Buddy Walk. This generosity helps to provide a welcoming event for individuals with Down syndrome as well as build awareness in the community for understanding and inclusion. Thank you to each of you partnering in our success!

Beverly Porter
Executive Director
The Arc of Whatcom County

