



CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING TASK FORCE

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Present: Allison Bishop, Anne Granberg, Beverly Porter, Chelsea Johnson, Colton Kaltenfeldt, Jamie Desmul, Jen Wright, Jon Scanlon, Karla Anderson, Kayla Schott-Bresler, Kristi Dominguez, Megan Juenemann, Monika Mahal, Pamela Jons, Sallye Quinn, Samya Lutz, Sterling Chick, Tilda Doughty, Vesla Tonnesson

Not Present: Ray Deck, Christina Jackson, Greg Hansen, Jason Oldham, Sativa Robertson, Samantha Cruz Mendoza, Katherine Orlowski

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
<p>Welcome</p>	<p>Introductions, land acknowledgment, housekeeping, and review of agreements.</p> <p><u>Land Acknowledgement:</u> I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are here today on the ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples who have lived in the Salish Sea basin and the North Cascades watershed from time immemorial, in particular, the Lhaq'temish (LOCK-tuh-mish) people who we recognize today to be the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, and Semiahmoo.</p> <p>May we be mindful of the inherent owners of this land, our children, who are our future. Our future stewards of the land and advocates for the generation to come. May that truth guide our work and efforts to improve the well-being of all families and children, native and non-native, living in this beautiful county.</p> <p>This land acknowledgment is not meant to be a substitute for authentic relationship-building and understanding. It is meant to introduce us to one way we can show respect and honor for the sacrifices of the first people of this land.</p> <p>Please join me in expressing the deepest respect for our indigenous neighbors, and gratitude for the enduring stewardship of our shared lands and waterways. https://www.lhaqtemish.org/ -Lhaq'temish Foundation</p> <p><u>Agreements:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and self-care come first. • Be kind and gentle with yourself and others and assume everyone is coming from a positive place. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyone has the best intentions. ○ Listen with an open mind and heart. • Be mindful of this space. Step-in and step-out/Step-up and step-back. Offer your truth and insights and listen to others' truths and insights. • Treat each other with honor and grace. We are all working under difficult circumstances. • Embrace diversity. Remember that we all come from different backgrounds giving us different perspectives and only when we embrace that diversity can we develop creative solutions to address the child and family well-being needs in Whatcom County. • What is said here stays here. • Have fun. <p>Fist to Five Consensus Tool – Amended 4.25.22</p>





<p>Approve Meeting Minutes</p>	<p>Minutes from January 23, 2024 were approved as presented/corrected.</p>
<p>Agenda Overview, Meeting Input/Evaluation</p>	<p>Evaluation tool: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf59ubhijyXFZQJa0pXGgQQ5HhwJ1jamGFziQLXS6-zZC1hKQ/viewform</p> <p>The purpose of this Task Force was reviewed, as stated in the Ordinance. “The purpose of Whatcom County Child and Family Well-being Task Force is to continually review Whatcom governmental impact on children and family make recommendations for improvement for all departments.”</p>
<p>Community Shares, Shout-outs</p>	<p>Colton shared co-chairs will be hosting 2 onboarding and orientation sessions next month for new members and old members needing a refresh.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will be covering the history of the task force, current work, and structure. • Colton and Ray will be hosting a session on the 8th and then Vesla and Christina will be hosting a second session on the 14th. • Vesla shared a link to the sign ups in the chat - Sign up for onboarding • Colton shared that the task force retreat is coming up next month on the 29th, 1-5 PM. A separate form will be shared to provide feedback on topics to include on the agenda and specific learning topics. <p>Vesla shared the Parent Leadership Program starts on Saturday. Whatcom County community members can still sign up until Wednesday evening in English and Spanish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She gave a shout out to Lynn Salazar, who is a new member the task force, who came down to Olympia last week as one of the graduates of the program and met with legislative representatives for the first time. • They met with all three of Washington State representatives. Some good next steps are coming out of that meeting. • Vesla shared the link in the chat for the leadership programs, appropriate for people who work with families or families themselves.
<p>Findings and Recommendation - Evaluating living wage calculators and establishing an income threshold for childcare costs</p>	<p>Colton introduced Andrew Havens from Western Washington University (WWU) Center for Economic & Business Research Kayla-Schott-Bresler.</p> <p>Using a data-drive approach, Whatcom County contracted with WWU consultants to determine a more equitable living wage calculator to use in establishing guidelines for programs funded by the Healthy Children’s Fund. The challenge is to distribute funding from the Healthy Children’s Fund fairly to families most in need. Traditional living wage calculators don’t consider Whatcom County’s unique situation, with a mix of urban and rural areas and a shift from manufacturing to lower-paying service sector jobs. WWU reviewed various living wage calculators and recommended the MIT calculator for several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It considers various needs like food, housing, childcare, transportation, and even basic internet access. • It factors in Washington State’s lack of income tax for a more accurate picture.



- It considers different family sizes and working adults in the household (single parent, two parents, one working parent, etc.).

They accounted for these considerations for Whatcom County:

- Housing costs differ significantly across the county. The calculator needs to account for this variation.
- The shift from higher-paying manufacturing jobs requires adjustments to income thresholds to reflect the reality of lower wages in the current job market.

WWU evaluates the following Living Wage Calculators:

- MIT Living Wage Calculator: Chosen for its comprehensiveness, tax specificity, and family flexibility.
- Universal Living Wage Calculator: Rejected because it only considers housing costs, neglecting other essential expenses.
- Anker Methodology: Considered but ultimately not chosen because the MIT calculator offered a wider range of needs represented.
- Economic Policy Institute's Living Wage Calculator: Rejected because it's geographically limited and doesn't account for childcare costs specific to Whatcom County.
- Center for Women's Welfare (CWW) and Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) Self Sufficiency Standard: Rejected because the MIT calculator offers sufficient family type variations.
- ALICE Calculator: Rejected because it uses data for the entire state of Washington, not specifically for Whatcom County, leading to inaccurate cost estimates (e.g., childcare costs vary significantly between rural and urban areas).

WWU recommends using the MIT calculator with a modification for childcare costs. They propose using the Center for American Progress' (CAP) age-specific childcare cost estimates (infant, toddler, preschooler) because they are more accurate and reflect the varying costs throughout a child's development. The benefits of the Modified MIT Calculator:

- The calculator can determine the income threshold for eligibility in the Healthy Children's Fund programs.
- An Excel calculator is provided to easily determine the living wage benefit cap based on family size, number and ages of children, and the number of working adults in the household.
- This calculator is not meant to dictate wages or represent the average wage in Whatcom County.
- It simply reflects the income needed to cover basic necessities in Whatcom County, considering factors like urban/rural location and childcare costs specific to the area.

This revised approach ensures the Healthy Children's Fund effectively targets low-income families across Whatcom County by considering the unique needs of the community.

Drew and Kayla opened the discussion for questions

- Kayla shared she is interested in this committee's policy guidance about how we operationalize the calculator as it relates to the Healthy Children's Fund.
 - In some situations, the income is startling high we might have a policy decision that we want to cap benefits lower in order to provide more targeted deep investment to certain subsets of families.
 - The Task Force may want the HCF to have the most universal frame possible so the goal would be to keep benefit caps as high as possible. That is one area where we're looking for guidance.



- On the operational side we'll have to put this through some sort of additional lens where we look at averages or something similar. We're not necessarily running a benefit calculation on every individual family. Can use the calculator to think through how to target investments, measure public benefits in terms of slots a childcare provider might provide, or services that a particular service provider might perform on behalf of families.
- Those are just initial jump start policy questions. The plan is to write a resolution that would sort of memorialize this work and the Task Force feedback on this work to take to County Council some time in March.
- It's clear that sort of our traditional frame of looking at 50-60% of the AMI is inadequate given the severe costs families are facing, particularly on the child care front.
- Sallye asked for a specific way in which this might be applied. The way she interpreted this information is that the County might say we are only going to give grants to childcare providers who make sure that they have X number of slots available for families with income of less than the living wage as opposed to say 10 slots are available for families that have 80% of the AMI.
 - Kayla said that is a perfect example and one they will use most often.
 - Kayla gave another example. If there's an organization providing social services, or like speech therapy, we could fund the costs associated with that therapy for kids who would be under this income limit.
- What restrictions the county has in setting something like this, saying we are no longer going to use the AMI standard or percentage of AMI, but are going to set a living wage standard as best we can for our county.
 - Kayla answered the safest thing the county can do from a legal perspective is to be conservative and keep things in line with the income threshold that set under the Working Connections Program.
 - There are other counties that are pushing boundaries, King County is funding programs up to 95% of the AMI then the state is continuing to escalate sort of the income cap on its Working Connections Program.
 - We think about this as one more tool in the toolbox for County Council to set up policy direction for us and then we would work with the county attorney to try to accomplish that policy direction.
 - This is the initial work to figure out what that threshold is from a policy perspective. The Council would be considering the advice of this group as well as advice from the prosecuting attorney's office.
- Sallye asked if the presentation to council would be everything that Drew presented to the Task Force.
 - Kayla answers she isn't sure they would do this detailed of a presentation to County Council.
- Vesla asked how this calculator either supports or takes away from the concepts of the threshold for childcare costs should be no more than 7% of the household income. It's a metric we've been hearing a lot so it seems like from a different angle.
 - Vesla added just for us to consider childcare workers are nowhere near this hourly wage. How are we thinking about supporting when we think about those childcare subsidies? How can we use the calculator to help support the arguments for those subsidies?



- Kayla responded that in regards to that 7% of the income the HCF is not sufficient to be able to get us to that level for a large number of families in the community that we frame from an operational and contract standpoint. We are so far off the 7% that it didn't feel useful for that policy conversation at this point.
- Vesla added that she thinks about it in similar forms like sales tax conversations were 7% for a certain income is much more manageable, and therefore higher income folks maybe that percentage is more like 25%. We could see it grouped out that way, might be easy to digest a little.
- Pamela mentioned the assumption of the adult that stays home would be providing childcare. There are adults in the home that aren't able to work for a variety of reasons that actually increase costs. Presenting it that way is hard to hear that you'd assume someone's not working, that they're able to take care of the kids because that may or may not be the case for a lot of people in the community who are able to work and maybe also aren't able to take care of their children full time.
- Pamela asked that in the model that is being used are our local food costs and gas and property taxes figured in to the calculator. We have a higher cost of living for those specific items than many other parts of the country. Is the calculator that fine-tuned?
 - Drew answered that yes, the MIT calculator that these costs are based off of uses cost of living data specific to Whatcom County.
- Council Member Scanlon asked about as far as maintaining this calculator in the future, what might that look like? Given that we are pulling from multiple data sets and will there then be a cost for the county associated with that?
 - Drew answered that he feels confident that the county would be able to update it whenever necessary.
- Council Member Scanlon also asked what happens for families that are just above the threshold? Do we have anyway of having a graduated way to support families that are just above whatever threshold we determine?
 - Kayla answered there are a couple of ways to look at that. The threshold we are talking about in any one program may not be the sort of operational threshold we're using because of constraints on funding and a desire to target families who are low income. When we're making policy choice to target lower then we should be thinking about a graduated benefit as incomes get higher.
 - There are some legal considerations here where there's ultimately going to be a cap on families that can directly benefit from the program. There are universal benefits that are coming from HCF investments.
 - With Sally's example we're going to provide a capital grant to a child care center and 20% of slots must be below 85% AMI or whatever it is, there's still 80% of slots that are going to go out to the broader community that would not have happened but for the public investment.
 - Kayla said they are going to bring some recommendations on the subsidy program back to the Child and Family Well Being task force over the course of the next couple of months and that question becomes really clear when we're looking at those different models of assistance. We'll



get to see that one in action and how we want to tailor our programs to respond to the benefit cliff.

- Jamie asked about offering this to families that don't meet the qualifications for Working Connections or because the State has a program in place for licensed childcare that hits most people that make up to a certain wage? Are you thinking that this funding will help more than people that don't qualify for Working Connections? Or are you extending it through the whole thing even though the State has a plan in place for those people?
 - Kayla answered I think it'll be different for different strategies in the HCF implementation plan. For a childcare subsidy program, the idea is that if we can get to a place where the County is justified in supporting a family up to 85% of AMI but Working Connections is only going to 65% or 75% of AMI, then you could bring the HCF and it's a local subsidy or scholarship fund to support those families.
 - Going back to the capital example you're not using the HCF money to necessarily subsidize an individual family, but you are essentially saying we are investing public money in this childcare business. In exchange for this investment we know there's going to be a certain set of slots that are reserved for families and children who are struggling to afford basic necessities.
- Jamie responded that it may extend the funding a little bit better if we focus on those families that are right above that working connection threshold.
- Kayla said we anticipate with any subsidy program that the county does is that we will fully get everyone into Working Connections. Possibly use this program to serve at least a little bit higher income or to fill the gaps and co-pays.

2025 Comprehensive Plan – Recommendations from the Rapid Response Group

Colton introduced the next topic of discussion. In January, the Task Force was asked to present feedback on a few chapters of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan in preparation for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan. The primary focus was on Chapter 7, but the team also reviewed other chapters, particularly those concerning housing and the environment.

- The feedback came from Lyn, Ray, Samya, Vesla, Christina and a few other community members.
- Colton asked for a vote to finalize the feedback letter to the County Council.
- Colton reviewed the changes that were suggested. Notable changes were making the language more inclusive and adding specific policy suggestions.
 - The team suggested designating resources to develop a landscape assessment for connecting families to behavioral health support. They also proposed investing in peer support programming as a cost-effective and accessible way to provide mental health support to young people.
- Colton asked for comments, concerns, and criticisms from the group.
- Pamela stated she appreciated the work done and raised a question about the term "food sharing programs." She suggested that the term might not be a common way to describe food pantries and food banks, and asked for clarification.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Colton explained that the term was pulled from the Food System plan. He mentioned the food sharing fridge by Sustainable Connections as an example of a food sharing program. ○ Colton suggested to meet with Pamela in the next couple of days to discuss the topic further. He also asked the group if they were okay with voting on the current issue. <p>Colton called for a vote and explained the voting system, using fist-to-five. Vesla and Allison provided clarification for new members on using Fist to Five. The Comp Plan recommendations were approved.</p>
<p>Health Children’s Fund (HCF) Update</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sarah provided updates on various RFPs, including the interlocal agreement with the Career Development Network, the housing RFP, and upcoming RFPs for trauma-informed peer-to-peer support programming, drop-in care, mental and behavioral health, and innovation. ● Sarah also mentioned the closure of the position for the Vulnerable Children’s position for the Healthy Children’s Fund. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The position would help with contracting and RFP writing. They had a very large application pool of over 23 people, many qualified candidates. Hoping to start interviews in the next week or so. ○ The recommendations from the Healthy Whatcom team for developing an RFP evaluation process are being finalized. Developing an RFP evaluation process that will continue to enhance community involvement and expand the implementation team ● Sarah introduced the Rapid Survey in collaboration with Stanford Center on Early Learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Rapid Team collaborates with communities to conduct surveys that promote caregiver feelings and needs. Helps create data informed programs, advocacy and policy. We could use it to create our own customer survey content and then define the data collection goals. ○ One of the neat aspects of the projects is the Community Learning Network which is made up of city, county and state-based organizations that are also implementing the Rapid Survey and we get to share together our learning on the process and data findings, explore common challenges and solutions across communities as well as contribute to the iterative development of the Rapid Community Voices model. ○ Participants will be compensated at a rate of \$20.00 per hour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vesla Tonnessen provided additional information about the Rapid Survey. Rapid Survey was launched in response to COVID to get real time information about the health of families and communities. There are also companion surveys to Childcare providers and includes qualitative and quantitative data. ▪ Stanford has a lot of really good practices. Data can often be extractive and they are trying to make sure the folks participating in the survey would know what is happening with the survey and how to get information. ▪ Can provide answers to questions like: What is the current health of our families with young children this quarter? What is it the next quarter? What is changing? ▪ The questions are standardized so that they can compare communities across the nation but if Whatcom County is selected for this cohort we would be able to tailor things based on what we need and what we are interested in. ▪ Stanford provides a lot of technical support and does a lot of the data analysis.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sarah and Vesla plan to connect with community partners for the application process. ● Sarah mentioned ongoing meetings with Casey, a childcare policy expert at the state level, around subsidies.
Update on ARPA funding for childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chelsea reported that the latest ARPA RFP funding for childcare and early learning facilities has closed. ● Five applications were received, and the Application Evaluation Committee has begun the review process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Applications were received from Ferndale School District, Generations Early Learning and Family Center, Meridian School District, Mountain View Early Learning out of Skagit looking to open up a new location in Whatcom as well as YMCA. ○ There is a total request of \$2,643, 143 which would work towards a total of 197 new slots in Whatcom County. ○ The Application Evaluation Committee has been formed and approved by Erica and they have trained on the rating tool. ○ All of the ratings are due from the AEC by this Friday at 5 pm and have a discussion on the recommendations for next Monday at 9 am.
Public comment	<p>No public comment.</p> <p>Additional discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Samya discussed the implementation and tracking of the living wage calculator and comparing it to existing thresholds such as the USDA food in childcare settings and area median income. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ USDA food in childcare settings uses a 200% poverty threshold ○ When the calculator is done, how that relates, if we can look at it both in a dollar figure result as well as a percent - median income percent ○ It would be interesting to do testing on that and kind of understand if there are commonalities that come through which might end up helping funders and also helping childcare providers that are already taking paperwork in that has some of these other threshold ○ It's one thing to use it as a determination of grant or loan funding and it's another thing to sort of monitor and verify over time ● Vesla reminded the group that the Racial Equity Commission applications are open for three more days.
Closing	Meeting adjourned at 4:57 pm
Next Meeting	Next regular meeting: March 29, 2024 <u>Location: Hybrid</u>