



One Department, One Vision, One Mission, One Core Set of Values

August 2012

The DSHS History and Transition



Contents

DSHS during Governor Gregoire’s tenure	2
Safety.....	3
Person-Centered Service Delivery	7
Partnerships	13
Efficiency	20
Data	26
Advice	30

DSHS Secretaries January 2005 – January 2013

Dennis Braddock, July 2000 – March 2005

Robin Arnold-Williams, March 2005 – January 2008

Stan Marshburn (Acting), January 2008 – May 2009

Susan N. Dreyfus, May 2009 – January 2012

Robin Arnold-Williams, January 2012 – January 2013

The DSHS Story

The DSHS story began in the late 1960s, at the behest of Republican Governor Dan Evans, who convened a task force to consider the consolidation of several state agencies. The task force, which included top executives from major corporations, recommended in 1968 the creation of the Department of Social and Health Services.

In 1970, the Legislature passed Governor Evans' request legislation combining the then-separate departments of Health, Institutions and Public Assistance, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Veterans Rehabilitation Council into the new Department of Social and Health Services. Evans appointed Sidney Smith to be the first DSHS Secretary.

The rationale for the consolidation: "Rather than take a family and slice them into little pieces and push them in all different directions for the needs of bureaucracy, why not organize based on the needs of an integrated family?"

That was not the end of the reorganizing discussion. In 1972, during the gubernatorial campaign, the Democratic candidate proposed dismantling the newly assembled DSHS. In 1975, Governor Evans vetoed a bill to remove Veterans Affairs functions from DSHS, but the Legislature overrode the Governor's veto and thus created the separate Department of Veterans Affairs. In 1981, the Department of Corrections was separated from DSHS. In 1986, Secretary Jule Sugarman reorganized the Department based on groups of clients with similar service needs. The divisions were health and rehabilitative services; economic and medical services; children, youth and family services; aging and adult services, and productivity and administration. In 1989, the Legislature created the separate Department of Health.

In 2011, the Legislature approved Governor Chris Gregoire's moving the single state agency for Medicaid from DSHS to the Health Care Authority, resulting in the elimination of the Health and Recovery Services Administration and moving behavioral health responsibilities to the Department's Aging and Disability Services Administration.

DSHS is currently made of up five program administrations: Economic Services Administration, Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, Children's Administration and Aging and Disability Services Administration, and the Secretary's Office. The Department was originally divided into 13 geographic districts and later six regions. The Department now serves the state through three regions.



Nineteen people have held the position of DSHS Secretary in permanent or acting roles. Four individuals have held the position twice, including current Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams. When she leaves the post in January of 2013, Arnold-Williams, who first came to the job in March of 2005, will have held the position the longest of any DSHS Secretary at 57 months.

The mission of the Department of Social and Health Services is to: “Improve the safety and health of individuals, families and communities by providing leadership and establishing and participating in partnerships.”

The Department is the primary agency in state government that serves as a safety net for children, families, elders and persons with disabilities.

DSHS during Governor Gregoire’s tenure

We asked current and former Department leaders and some key community partners to share their thoughts, memories and advice. During more than 20 hours of conversations, the focus fell on six key themes:

- Safety
- Person-centered service delivery
- Partnership
- Efficiency
- Data
- Advice to future leaders

Safety

“Most important is to believe in a system – a home and community based system – a person, family based, strengths based system where first and foremost the job is to make sure that children are safe, to make sure that when calls come in and are appropriately screened that the right response is given.”

– Former DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus



Lessons learned:

- First priority is to keep children and vulnerable adults safe
- Safety of children and vulnerable adults is a Department-wide, community-wide responsibility
- Hold leadership and staff accountable

One of the Department's key responsibilities is the safety and well-being of the people we serve, with particular emphasis on the safety of both children and vulnerable adults.

Beginning in 2005, Governor Gregoire and Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams brought a new urgency to the safety of children, through quicker response times to allegations of abuse and neglect. This focus was strengthened by Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus through efforts such as executive staffing of high-profile Children's Administration cases and increased compliance with the Braam Settlement's focus on children in foster care.

There have also been continuing improvement efforts in Adult Protective Services with an emphasis on safety of aged adults and people with disabilities living at home and in state licensed adult family homes and assisted living.

Although faced with budget reductions through the Great Recession, the Department strategically worked to minimize the impacts on children and vulnerable adults. This was accomplished through reductions and consolidations in administrative functions as well as partnering with the judicial, non-profit and private sector to leverage resources across systems.

Are the children safer?

DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams said the answer is yes. “One example is the 24/72 hour response times to allegations of abuse or neglect that Governor Gregoire demanded of us; when we get a referral that is accepted we are out there sooner,” she said. “The system today and over the last eight years has moved to a position that says, ‘yes, there is always a balance between preserving families and keeping kids safe, but let no one ever forget child safety is No. 1.’”

But it was more than the policy of 24/72, she said. “For me it was the amazing response of staff.” Without getting new resources, their performance from day one was high.

The Government Management, Accountability and Performance (GMAP) role

The Governor’s directive on quicker response to child abuse calls began in April 2005 during former Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Cheryl Stephani’s tenure.

In June 2005, we had the privilege of appearing before the Governor and her top leadership team to talk about issues of child safety and permanency, the first in a new accountability process initiated by the Governor called GMAP, Government Management Accountability and Performance. “The Governor had set down her particular challenges around child safety,” Stephani remembered. “Quickly and very clearly, Robin and the Governor set out that the first thing you have to do is keep kids safe and to do that you’ve got to respond more quickly to allegations of abuse and neglect. We were expected to show results, especially for responding more quickly to reports alleging child abuse.” During that GMAP, 84 percent of emergent reports received a response in 24 hours. Today, we respond to more than 99 percent of emergency child abuse reports in 24 hours, and close to 98 percent of non-emergency reports in 72 hours.

“So, thank goodness for GMAP, because it gave us an opportunity to talk to the Governor directly. And that’s when we were able to have a discussion about how the resource wasn’t there; she was very successful in getting resources on the table. And it became really clear that their initial approach was the right approach, because as we were able then to look at the data about re-abuse rates, we saw those falling,” Stephani said. Children today are half as likely to suffer re-abuse as they were in 2005. The rate of repeat child abuse within six months of an initial call fell from 12.3 percent in 2005 to 6.3 percent as shown in the August 2012 GMAP report.

Case staffing

Case staffing of Children’s Administration critical incidents at the headquarters level plays a key role in accountability and finding ways to improve practice and policy. Case staffing – a quick and thorough executive-level examination of a critical incident involving child safety or well-being – is something that the current Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson has championed.

“I came from a system where we always did case staffings internally, especially around a serious incident,” Revels Robinson said, “and when I got here we had to formalize that into how we did our business.”

Another child safety focus was integrated case management – understanding that children and their families intersect with programs and services across the Department – and communication and cooperation across the Department, trying to see the whole child and the context in which he or she exists.

“Both the energy going into our work together, and all the lessons learned have just been fabulous and brought easier collaboration, whether it’s around the substance abuse, mental health, the behavioral health needs of our children, or other issues,” Revels Robinson said.

“Most important is to believe in a system – a home and community based system – a person, family based, strengths based system where first and foremost the job is to make sure that children are safe, to make sure that when calls come in and are appropriately screened that the right response is given,” said former DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus.

Dreyfus said that when children are in need of programs and services “we do everything we can to keep them within their families and everything that we can to get them back within their families while assuring their safety, and I believe during my tenure those were the values that Denise Revels Robinson and I really brought forward and I think they were very consistent with the values of the Governor.”

Abuse of Elders and Adults with Disabilities

While safeguarding children and adults is important, there are different factors at play with adults. Adults have the right to decide where and how they live, unless declared by a court to be incompetent to make those decisions.

As Kathy Leitch, former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary explained, “the one thing that is different between children and adults is that adults come with certain rights. So when somebody is going to decide to live in any particular long-term care setting, they or their representatives are making that choice. They’re not wards of the state.”

But when the news media carries stories about serious allegations of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults, Leitch said, “People get outraged and start to think in terms of these people being wards of the state. But they’re not. A lot of people in the long-term care arena are actually private-paying individuals, not somebody who we’re financing with state or federal funds.” For example, almost all of the individuals portrayed in the Seattle Times series “Seniors for Sale” on adult family homes were private-paying individuals. The newspaper series cited examples of individuals who received inadequate care at several adult family homes, which are licensed by the state through DSHS.

“When you are a private pay person you are responsible for all your decisions. The state’s not your case manager, you and your family are your advocates. The incidence of adult abuse is increasing and we need to keep the community involved,” Leitch said.

The Department is funded only to routinely inspect community facilities about every 18 months, she said. “The system is built on receiving complaints. If you don’t get a complaint you don’t know something’s wrong,” she said.

“We have tried a lot to educate people on how to choose a place. It’s important to have your family or a representative always involved in monitoring your care. It’s actually not much different than going into a hospital. Everybody will tell you if you’re in a hospital you ought to have an advocate.”

One result of the Seattle Times articles, Leitch said, “was the Department published a lot more on the Web about the deficiencies of the homes, so that people at least had a set of information that they could use before deciding where they wanted to live.”

During the GMAP forum following the Seattle Times series, the Governor was very interested in the fact that adult family homes were businesses and directed the Department to think about how the quality assurance and oversight process needed to be paid for by the business owners.

“So, then when it came time to ask this basic question: Should government subsidize this activity? The Governor wanted to say NO; the providers should, which is the right direction to go. The Legislature made some strides,” Leitch said, “but the licensing process is still not self-sustaining. The Legislature will continue to address this issue in each biennial budget.”

Person-centered service delivery

“Service integration really is about relationships.”

– Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson



Lessons learned:

- Service integration begins with the Department but must go beyond the Department
- Connections to educational performance
- Connection between physical and behavioral health
- One-Department approach helped
- Health care reform presents challenges and opportunities

A driver behind many Departmental decisions has been an orientation toward the delivery of person-centered services and supports that meet the unique needs and strengths of clients. Two areas in particular were positively impacted through this orientation: 1) integrated case management, and 2) the home- and community-based continuum of care.

Not another program but an orientation

Integrated case management is a holistic approach to delivering services across the Department. Under this approach, we don't view client needs or services in isolation. We understand that very few people come to us for a single reason. According to the most recent data available, nearly half of our clients are using two or more social and health services. Just as multiple needs can come from multiple causes, multiple responses may be necessary to meet those needs. Former DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus emphasized that integrated case management should be viewed as an orientation for our work. "Integrated case management shouldn't be viewed as a program. It should be normalized as simply the way in which good work is done, good social work is done, and good case management is done," she said.

Former Aging and Disability Services Assistant Secretary MaryAnne Lindeblad had focused on integrating behavioral health with health care in general and on the efforts to serve clients who were both Medicare and Medicaid eligible, the so-called "Duals."

Lindeblad remembered when, "we brought the Washington Medicaid Integration Partnership (WMIP) on board. While it was very challenging to implement, when I think of the work that we are doing with the Duals, this pilot was the laboratory to help us integrate acute medical with mental health, substance abuse and long-term services and support."

Lessons learned from WMIP implementation and operations are being applied to the design of our dual-eligible project. "Despite the current challenges with the Duals project, we can take what we learned from WMIP and other integration efforts to create an efficient, effective and high quality program that addresses the needs of our most vulnerable citizens," Lindeblad said. "It is absolutely the right thing to do and we now have a framework of how to do it.

"One of the big 'ah ha' moments for me was the challenge around Medicare. It started with just the data and the work our Research and Data Analysis Division has done to be able to understand the complete picture of a very high-needs, complicated population. But then there are the limitations that Medicare has around flexibility," Lindeblad said.

The central issue is that improving care for dual eligible individuals will result largely in savings for Medicare, through decreased medical services and hospital use. Our challenge is to work with CMS to share the savings.

"Then there is the integration of the work that we [ADSA] have done with Children's Administration on foster care. I think that we have seen some of the most positive results with our Fostering Well-Being program led out of ADSA. This program provides care management for some of the highest-need foster children living with foster families," Lindeblad said.

“I remember going to a Braam Panel meeting, and how they really complimented us as being national leaders. We are paying attention to the health needs of these children in a very different way now. Care is now better coordinated and needs are being addressed earlier.”

Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration Assistant Secretary John Clayton noted “House Bill 1088,” which sets out a series of state goals to improve mental health care for children, saying, “I think this was a great accomplishment for us overall as an agency. It was nice to have everybody who works for the Department sitting down at the table to look at how we were giving benefits to the youth.”

Clayton praised the relationships that have developed between JRA, CA and all of the other administrations and agencies that have been working together on integrated case management.

Despite the gains, Clayton said there is still much yet to do. He shared a recent story about a 14-year-old youth exiting a JRA institution with services from both JRA and CA who ended up homeless. According to Clayton, “We cannot let that happen. We should come together to talk about a zero tolerance for that type of case.”

Home- and community-based service delivery systems

Washington is considered a leader among states in the provision of long-term services and support for elders, adults with disabilities and family caregivers. Despite our high rankings, there is always room for improvement. For example, the Great Recession served as a catalyst to revisit long-standing debates within the state focused on the continuum of care for persons with developmental disabilities. The policy challenge we faced was identifying more cost-effective service systems while respecting individual and family needs and choices, and redefining the roles and functions of a range of service delivery settings from institutional to home- and community-based. The journey was challenging and continues as we try to determine the right size of our institutional footprint.

Former Aging and Disabilities Services Administration Assistant Secretary Kathy Leitch recalled some of the institutional downsizing conversations with some disappointment and challenges, “We didn’t continue the work from Governor Locke’s Administration, where we had started the downsizing of Fircrest. But by the second [Gregoire] term the issue had come back and the budget crisis once again afforded an opportunity to have a discussion about what we want government to fund, and whether we can provide services to people in a more efficient way,” Leitch remembered.

“The Governor, who has been a guardian of a person with a developmental disability who lives in the community, has some strong values about that and started to talk to us about what we should be doing.”



“The Governor, who has been a guardian of a person with a developmental disability who lives in the community, has some strong values about that...”

At one point, Leitch recalled, the Legislature called for a review of institutions at Juvenile Rehabilitation and Department of Corrections. But, she said, the call for institutional review did not include those serving people with developmental disabilities.

“I told them that I know that this issue is always hard and I know that people get tired of talking about it, but you shouldn’t have this independent contractor review all of these other things and not review these institutions. I saw it as another opportunity to have the discussion,” Leitch said.

The Legislature did end up including the Department’s residential habilitation centers (RHC’s) in the study.

“The Governor read every word of that study I am sure,” said Leitch, “From that she visited Frances Haddon Morgan Center and she made some decisions about moving in the direction to reduce the institutional footprint. It may take another 10 years to do another one, but it’s the direction that all states are moving and more than 10 states in the nation no longer have any institutions.”

Dreyfus said, “We made a commitment that children should not be in institutions, and that persons living with developmental disabilities need to have every opportunity to live within the home and community with fullness of life, whether it was keeping children out of the foster care system and able to live at home with their families safely, or whether it was persons with developmental disabilities not living out a lifetime in one of our rehabilitation centers.”

“We did something historic at a time when the recession was bearing down on us,” Dreyfus said. “We didn’t just cut away at our RHC’s. We fundamentally changed the system in the process.”

Going forward, reductions in institutionalization must continue to be balanced by increased access to services in the community. For example, the legislation authorizing the closure of the Frances Haddon Morgan Center added provisions for SOLAS (State Operated Living Arrangements), crisis respite, crisis teams and other resources to support community services. Future downsizing or closure of institutions will mean greater need for investment in home-and community-based services.

While the institutional downsizing conversations may have initially lagged, Former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary Kathy Leitch remembered the priority on and the efforts to preserve the focus on home- and community-based services during Governor Gregoire’s first term in other areas.

“[The Governor] was a big supporter of home- and community-based care,” Leitch said. “Collective bargaining rights had been granted to homecare workers through a voter initiative and so you saw a little bit better wages; you saw better benefits and, eventually you saw increased training, which was something the workers really wanted.”

The debate about the role and function of institutional settings will continue. “A challenge we face,” said Lindeblad, “is the continued effort to downsize our hospitals and our institutions and to really look at them as a part of a system. They should be designed in such a way that they serve people as they need them, but it should not be an expectation that you live your life out in a residential habilitation center or in a state hospital.”

But, said Lindeblad, “there certainly are individuals and families who believe that these institutions are the safest places and this is where they want their family member. It’s challenging to educate folks that there are opportunities even for folks who have a significant disability, and that they can take risks and that they are a part of a community and that they can be employed.”

DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold Williams said she was struck by the fact that, on the one hand “there is such a distrust of government, and a perception out there that government can’t do anything right. But on this issue, for many families, the perception is that the absolute safest, most high-quality placement for their loved one is in a state operated facility.”

“They just feel that nothing ever goes wrong there,” Lindeblad said, “but in fact things do go wrong there.”

“The interesting thing,” Leitch said, is that “if you’re a parent today of a kid with a developmental disability who’s in elementary school, you probably don’t even know what an institution is. Those folks are not planning for their kid’s life where an institution is going to be necessary. There’s so much more value on inclusion, and community integration. We still have institutions but this new generation is not going to be a consumer group who wants that. This will also have a significant impact on this question about what government should invest in.”

Exchange of information

Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson talked about how important it has been to get information from other Administrations, especially at the point in time when children are coming into care. “If a child had previously received services through Medicaid, having their information available to the social worker placing that child is important.” Having information about special needs or health issues of a child is important in identifying a foster family that matches the needs of the child. Revels Robinson also spoke of the value of that information for the foster parent and translating that information so it is more useful to the foster parents. “It really is a very powerful kind of thing,” she said.

Lindeblad said that having a framework of looking at the Department as one Department provided excellent direction. “The framework really has us thinking more collectively than individually,” she said.



“I think it was almost like being given permission, with the One Vision, One Mission idea. We gave each other permission to share information, ...”

Babette (Babs) Roberts, Director of Economic Services Administration Community Service Division, agreed. “I think it was almost like being given permission, with the One Vision, One Mission idea. We gave each other permission to share information, to be part of it and to be helpful. We didn’t wait anymore. It became automatic.”

DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams said there are two criteria for the success of integration. “One is the professionals working together and the other is that it becomes automatic that we share data better. None of that is going to matter if we are not getting better outcomes for people we serve.”

Ongoing challenges

Clayton struck a cautionary note, “One of the concerns that I often have about having service integration projects is that sometimes there is the expectation that this project will actually be the issue that solves poverty. My point is that integration services are very important, but let’s not forget the big picture. I don’t want us to not have an understanding of what integrated services are. It can deal with certain things, but it is not really the panacea of solving the big-picture problems. So, let’s not lose focus on the real issues, issues that we are still working with a lot of families with very serious problems.”

There are also legal questions around confidentiality of clients’ information. The Department looks for ways to share information among agencies working directly with the clients, while protecting against unnecessary and inappropriate sharing of the information.

Clayton said that he worried about the client’s perspective.

For example, he said, “if I am a poor person receiving services from some different agency, am I going in with the understanding that I am talking to a professional in a one-on-one and that my information is confidential, or I am talking to a government agency and if someone else wants my information they can have it?”

Revels Robinson added that, “Although I have seen improvement, we still have some challenges around when you are working across agencies and what information can be shared or not shared and sometimes it is under the heading of confidentiality and sometimes that can be a smoke screen. That is a challenge because it pushes us up against what has always been the way to do certain things.

“Service integration really is about relationships,” she said

Partnerships

“We work together and partner internally and externally to embrace a shared sense of responsibility and common purpose. We leverage all resources and engage cross-system partners for greater impact.”

– DSHS Values Statement



Lessons learned:

- Take the time necessary to establish, build and nurture relationships in order to build a solid foundation of trust among various partners
- Develop a partnership based upon a shared agenda, goal or outcome
- Understand the unique contributions that partners bring to the experiences
- Partnerships extend beyond just fiduciary relationships; developing strategies for sustainable engagement is critical

The Department is actively engaged in a number of strategic partnerships with other state agencies, tribal and local governments, education, philanthropy, businesses, faith-based organizations, the judicial branch, public housing authorities, community-based networks, non-profit organizations and others. Participation in these mission-aligned partnerships has created opportunities for the Department to articulate a shared commitment and maximize and leverage resources toward common goals and outcomes.

The Great Recession resulted in tremendous losses within the public and private sectors. In many ways it served as a catalyst for bringing people together to quicken the pace of existing efforts. In 2009, to help embed the concept and practice of partnerships, the Department used its strategic planning process to revisit its vision, mission and values. The Department changed its mission to include the words “establishing and participating in partnerships” to help improve the safety and

health of individuals, families and communities. Former DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus emphasized the importance of this change. “We had to reduce the number of people living in poverty; we had to improve the number of people able to live safe and healthy lives; and we had to put more people onto pathways for educational and employment success. And to do that, we had to look into our mission statement and add two key words that were not there before: ‘community’ and ‘partnership.’”

The intentional focus on the development and participation in partnerships signaled a change to staff as well as to our external partners about the level of importance being placed on partnerships. Dreyfus recalled that “We surprised people with being collaborative by nature and with truly sharing power and decision making -- not only with the people who benefited from our programs and services, but from our partners, and the best example of the funding partnership that we developed was with the Benefit Portal,” which became Washington Connection.

Washington Connection - The Importance of Relationships

One of the existing partnerships actually aided by the Great Recession was Washington Connection (an online portal for Washington state residents to apply for federal, state, or local benefits). The Washington Connection Advisory Committee has 21 members from a variety of sectors. While work on this Benefits Portal was under way before the Great Recession, the pace of implementation quickened due to the urgent need to help people apply for and access a variety of benefits.

According to Economic Services Administration Assistant Secretary David Stillman, “the work would not have been as deep, meaningful, or fast if it had not been for the Great Recession. A great idea that would have taken five to seven years to mature was really aided by the demand and by the recognition that we had to take advantage of the opportunity.”

Former Economic Services Administration Assistant Secretary Troy Hutson noted that, “We raised \$6 million from private entities, mostly the Gates Foundation and then money from the feds, to build out Washington Connection, which allowed a lot of our work to become more efficient because clients could then apply online instead of having to come in.”

“One of the very specific projects that we did from philanthropy was in light of the recession and the waves of newly impoverished people” said David Bley, Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “We knew there would be unprecedented increases in needs and demands for state-funded services. So we went into what was called the Benefits Portal Project, or the Washington Connection website. That was a very important and difficult set of both technological changes and cultural changes, getting philanthropy and state government to know how to work together more effectively and quickly on behalf of families.”

Once the two groups began to understand how to work together, Bley said, “the portal has proven to be valuable to the state, driving more efficiency despite the fact that you’ve had to lay off staff and at the same time helping families navigate through systems that were not designed to work together and many times for families in their first time through. You’ve been able to serve more people more efficiently, so that was a great case study in how you can turn on a dime and try out some new stuff because you have to.”

Stillman said the Washington Connection project has provided positive outcomes. “It is not only a tool that’s going to be beneficial to a broad spectrum of existing partners and potential partners, but it also creates an environment in which we can talk about what we have in common and how what we’re doing can help them and what they’re doing can help us. “

Strengthening relationship with Tribes

Governor Gregoire has long been a champion of the state’s Centennial Accord and Millennial Agreements and expected all agencies to establish strong government-to-government relationships with Washington tribes. DSHS had already established a strong Office of Indian Policy and Indian Policy Advisory Committee with delegates from the 29 Tribes and Recognized American Indian Organizations. DSHS Administrative Policy 7.01 provided a foundation for state, regional and tribal collaboration and tribes were taking advantage of the option to consolidate their individual contracts with the Department into a Consolidated Contract. In 2005, the Department moved to further strengthen and formalize our tribal partnerships by negotiating and securing tribal support of a comprehensive Communication and Consultation Protocol.

DSHS Office of Indian Policy Senior Director Colleen Cawston reflected that “it took a lot of trust on the Department’s part to say, ‘let’s not let policy be that the tribes always have to ask, but let us propose.’ We’re much further down that road on contract consolidation and now we’re looking at the next big step and big leap of faith for us to move that forward. We seized opportunities that otherwise we would have just looked at as a little bit more work.”

Cawston identified one of the key components of building a trusting relationship as open communications. “It wasn’t always us talking but also us showing up and listening. We learn so much more when we listen. We can find bright solutions if we’re willing to realize they don’t always have to come from within ourselves.”



“It took a lot of trust on the Department’s part to say, ‘let’s not let policy be that the tribes always have to ask, but let us propose.’”

Coming together based on shared agendas, goals and outcomes

Finding commonalities among a variety of internal and external partners takes leadership and a relentless commitment to look for opportunities to join together for a common purpose. Sometimes, these partnerships stem from common needs. It's the right thing to do in this climate and it's really the way to do business now," said Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration Director of Community and Parole Programs, Bonnie Glenn. "We can't just work in our silos."

Through enhanced data integration and analytics and use of knowledge to inform decision making, the ability to understand our client's strengths and needs from multiple service delivery systems became apparent. ESA Chief Operating Officer, Roxie Schalliol pointed out that, "We serve common clients. We're in the same places and we're in the same community. It is about how we can make a better connection to cover all the bases because you can't do it alone."

Children's Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson talked about the value of the Department's relationship with Casey Family Programs. "They are invested in the public child welfare system and they do things to support children in and out-of-home care. We've gotten more funding from them as we have aligned our values with their mission."

Unique Contributions of Partners

In 2010, the Department adopted an early childhood orientation to 1) create engaged and inspired parents through parent education and training opportunities both within and outside of the Department; 2) creating stability in a child's life for those we serve; 3) help to ensure that vulnerable children start school ready and able to learn; and 4) to impacting the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of children. We knew we could not do this work alone and that it would require unique contributions from a variety of sources. One of the key partnerships supporting our orientation is the Frontiers of Innovation Initiative.

DSHS Planning, Performance and Accountability Senior Director Jody Becker-Green described it this way: "It's a unique opportunity to partner with the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, the Department of Early Learning, Health Care Authority, Department of Health, and Thrive by Five Washington to make policy and practice changes based on the science of early brain development.

"If we believe in cross-systems work, and if we want to make investments to get this work done, you have to have positions that are responsible and have authority to work across those lines. This initiative provides an opportunity to test a new staffing model," she said.

Becker-Green said she has seen a real change from when she joined the Department five years ago on the concept of the private sector funding government. In part, data has been a central key to building a case for working toward a collective agenda in different areas. She said, “I have seen a growing trust and willingness of different partners to make investments in the public sector, especially around funding those things that are at the leading, creative edge. I think we are soon going to enter this new era of sustainability planning as some of our work moves forward in partnership with philanthropy because we know the funding is time limited yet there are valuable contributions partners can still make that are not only fiduciary in nature.”

Revels Robinson argued that people who said, for example, that the Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Corrections would never be able to work together on issues related to children of incarcerated parents were wrong. She said the two agencies thought about how much they had in common. “We are about child safety. It has been such a strong collaboration. We have shared resources and training and children have come first. It just really was an amazing journey. It really started with someone within DOC who was as committed as we were to the needs of the children being impacted by parental incarceration. We were always in agreement that the child was at the center.”

“These kinds of initiatives got more energy and even more focused over the last probably two or three years under the most recent leadership of Denise Revels Robinson and Susan Dreyfus,” said Ron Murphy, Senior Director Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs, “to where activities have engaged even more communities and different partnerships in how to support the different kinds of reforms that Children’s Administration has toward reducing foster care, continuing to implement its practice model and a number of other areas. They’re engaging more around the housing and homelessness issues, etc.”

David Wertheimer, Deputy Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, agreed. “One of the areas particularly relevant for family homelessness in light of the recession is the importance of aligning the resources that touch at-risk and vulnerable families from multiple systems with the goal of our strategy of reducing family homelessness. DSHS has been a very valuable thought partner and a source of the resources,” he said.

“We’ve really appreciated the partnership of DSHS and thinking outside the box,” he said. “For example, Denise Revels Robinson championing the Title IV E Waiver application process within state government as a way of thinking about a variety of different ways to enhance and improve the child welfare system, including creating stronger linkages to housing stability as a way to both reduce family separations and also accelerate reunifications.”

Wertheimer noted that, “it’s been interesting to watch the evolution of DSHS over the last eight years and the significant shifts that have occurred in the interest DSHS is having in and the energy it’s putting into cross-systems work.”



“We are about child safety... We were always in agreement that the child was at the center.”

“What’s interesting,” said Ben de Haan, Executive Director, Partners for Our Children, “is that I’ve seen a dramatic change in the Department’s willingness to share information and to let the public know exactly what they’re working on and what the challenges are.”

DSHS Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration Assistant Secretary John Clayton pointed to the Department’s stronger partnership with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, which he attributed to the Department “putting a lot more emphasis on education for youth who are coming up through our system and there are a lot of reasons to do that. So we have been very intentional about that. I think that the OSPI partnership has been something that we pushed though.”

Babette (Babs) Roberts, Director of Economic Services Administration Community Service Division, agreed. “OSPI has been a great partnership on the food program and a real help in bridging that gap over the summer for families and helping children return to school more ready to learn.”

Dreyfus recalled her first visit with OSPI leadership. “I went over and sat down with Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn early in my tenure and I really thought he was going to fall off of his chair when I looked at him and said, ‘Randy, what can I do to help you increase the graduation rate in the state of Washington?’”

Revels Robinson also cited collaboration between the courts and the child welfare system and others, “like guardian ad litem and CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and people who represent parents and older youth,” she said. “Those are things that really help people to continue to be motivated to do even better.”

DSHS Human Relations Senior Director Glen Christopherson remembered the Department’s efforts in putting together tough budgets. “We partnered with sister agencies. We partnered with the community. We even partnered with individuals who were willing to give grants, like when we moved to a Mobile Community Services Office and were able to eliminate some offices in remote areas that were not sustainable because we were able to get the services to client by moving on wheels.”

Sustainable Engagement

Cawston emphasized the importance of ensuring that partnership practices become embedded and not just sporadic. She said, “We should be striving to do great work every day. That is what our staff do. That’s why they come to work every day.” JRA’s Glenn added that practices need to be embedded “in the culture in which you do it. It really is working across systems and working with other partners in order to have the best outcomes.”

That is critical, Cawston said. “We need to make sure the strategic partnerships are embedded so they cannot be undone. We have come a long way in the last eight years with respect to understanding tribes truly as governments and not as contractors or an external public interest. We have really been working in alignment with government-to-government.”

Arnold-Williams emphasized the need to build sustainable partnerships and funding that will survive the transition from the budget reductions necessitated by the Great Recession and to an improving economy that may bring some budget restorations.

“It could be a real unhappy ending to some of these partnerships if we don’t adequately plan that transition and that go-forth strategy,” she said. “The next administration is going to have to be very mindful about those discussions and about making sustainability a reality or these partnerships could fall apart and have negative consequences.”

Stillman agreed on the need to preserve partnerships as economic conditions improve. “Even if we were able to successfully replace funding and don’t do a good job about talking about the relationships, and we presume that they are just in the rear view mirror, now that could truly undermine key relationships.”

Labor partners

There was another important partnership – with labor.

“We were leading through an incredibly different time and I felt strongly that labor was a critical partner to us,” Dreyfus said, “They needed to be engaged with us and helping to make some of these really difficult decisions.”

“From the beginning,” said former ESA Secretary Hutson, “I went to meet with (Federation leader) Greg Devereux and said, “here is what we are going to be facing; we are going to need to make significant reductions in our budget and it will mean an impact on FTE’s (full-time-equivalent staff); at the same time we are going to be seeing a dramatic increase in our work load because of how many people are going to need assistance going forward. So we need to get ahead of this and the way I’m proposing to do it is for us to engage in this exercise of focusing on some clear principles.”

DSHS Chief of Staff Tracy Guerin said that none of the administrative consolidations across the Department could have been done without labor eventually supporting it. “We were all working with labor partners in a very different way that has created relationships, which is essential when you’re making these changes,” she said. “And I appreciate our labor partners stepping up to it because they realized that this was better for their members.” Guerin said.

Christopherson said that “it has made a tremendous difference that our management feels comfortable going to labor and saying, ‘I have a situation that I’m trying to resolve; here are some options that I’m thinking about. What do you think the impacts are going to be or how can we get there?’”

“When I first came we couldn’t do that,” Guerin remembered.



“We should be striving to do great work every day. That is what our staff do. That’s why they come to work every day.”

Efficiency

“This agency has a real commitment to the clients and the taxpayers.”

– DSHS Chief of Staff Tracy Guerin



Lessons learned:

- Never waste a crisis
- Put clients first
- Begin preparing early
- Focus on core values and roles
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- It's not over yet

Government is always expected to manage the taxpayers' money well and to accomplish as much as possible with the finite resources provided, even when the challenges in human services seem infinite. And because resources are often outstripped by demand, it has always been important to allocate resources where they will accomplish the greatest outcomes for the people they are meant to serve.

But the Great Recession brought economic and budget challenges unparalleled in the experience of virtually everyone in state government, including DSHS.

DSHS rose to the challenge, taking cuts, finding efficiencies, streamlining processes and finding new ways to do business that focused on core missions and largely sparing service reductions to the state's most vulnerable people.

Storm clouds

DSHS Human Resources Senior Director Glen Christopherson recalled an August 2008 warning. “Robin sent out a note to folks saying that the nation was in an economic crisis. We were starting to have struggles with our budgets. We started talking about what reductions we needed to take.” Christopherson said that at that point the expectation was for 10-15 percent cuts. “Nobody knew that those 10-15 percent cuts were going to come almost every year, every biennium all the way through 2012,” he said. “Nobody envisioned the consolidation of Human Resources at that point, or the consolidation of the maintenance crew, of the financial groups and all of that. We weren’t even talking about that. We were only talking about how we pare things down.”

It was then that DSHS Chief Financial Officer Stan Marshburn started talking about expecting a decade-long downturn. “That’s when it sobered us to thinking about how we’ve really got to think about leading through a different type of slowdown,” Christopherson said.

“Even long before 2008, when Governor Gregoire became governor in 2005,” remembered DSHS Chief Financial Officer Kathy Marshall, “there was a very significant cut in Washington Management Service positions. All of the regions took significant administrative cuts in their budgets, long before we came into what we now know as the Great Recession. So we also had to think about how we were going to deal with the cuts that had already happened, as we went forward into more cuts for programs,” she said.

“We had naturally been talking for quite a while about whether we needed as many regions as we had and whether we needed every region doing the same function. In some ways the major economic crisis gave us the opportunity to do things that I think we envisioned for a while and just had not been able to push over that edge.”

“We were having these conversations in early 2009,” said DSHS Chief of Staff Tracy Guerin. “I remember sitting in these executive conference rooms. Because the heat had been turned way down for the weekend, it was very cold and we were sitting there saying that we’ve got to make more cuts, and asking what are we going to do differently on the administrative side to preserve as many critical services as possible.” Much of the conversation was focused on getting leadership in the administrations and the programs to reconcile themselves to the fact that work was going to be done differently.

Former DSHS Chief Financial Officer Gary Robinson recalled that the Department leadership concentrated on other areas as they were dealing with the budget reductions, areas where there were opportunities associated with the reductions, areas in which we could reduce administrative cost or streamline operations in a way that did not impact direct service delivery for the clients.

Consolidation

Department leaders concentrated on changes that they could make in a whole series of administrative practices. “These would be practices with regard to how we were contracting, how we were making purchases, where we could team with other departments within state government to gain economies of scale on an administrative service,” Robinson said.

“We teamed very closely with the Department of General Administration with regard to purchasing and with regard to how we were entering into lease agreements for facilities that were leased by the Department. As a result, we’ve been able the last couple of years to reduce the amounts of space that we lease by 8-½ percent. That is a \$12 million annual savings. We’re still in a six-year plan looking at another 10 percent reduction in the next year or two,” reported DSHS Capital Programs Chief Bob Hubenthal.

Robinson said the Department also looked at how to consolidate administrative functions, “not only within the headquarters portion of the Department, but also within regions and within institutions. In conjunction with assistant secretaries and the superintendents for the institutions, we sought out opportunities where we could bring together in a shared fashion common accounting functions and common personnel functions, common purchasing functions, common facility support function. That resulted in a consolidation of those administrative functions in the field into regional offices and I believe that we were successful in doing that at a lower cost with greater efficiency.

“As we worked together across the Department, each individual administration identified reduction options and we came together as a leadership team within the Department and all of the reductions were listed on some very substantial spreadsheets that we had up on a board in our conference room. We then began as a leadership team for the Department overall in prioritizing what reductions we felt would be the most appropriate ones for us to take forward for the Governor and the Legislature to consider,” Robinson said.

“At Economic Services Administration,” according to former ESA Assistant Secretary Troy Hutson, “we didn’t start out to say let’s consolidate, but as we looked at how we did the work and how we wanted to do the work in the future we found that it allowed us to then naturally consolidate or flatten the organization in ways that were necessitated by the new ways in which we would do work.”

Out of that grew the Economic Services Administration’s Service Delivery Redesign, “which was essentially to say let’s look at what our No. 1 goal is, which is to serve the customer,” Hutson said. “I never really felt a whole lot of pressure around making the cuts required.”

One reason the consolidation of administrative services happened, according to Guerin, “was because we were taking so many administrative reductions that those areas were no longer performing at the level needed. And there was the realization that you can’t cut around the edges anymore; you have to do something significant in order to maintain the integrity of the administrative program.”

Meanwhile, Christopherson recalls, “We were cutting the central areas for maintenance, finance, and HR and all of that and it was having a dramatic impact on the administrations, who were also taking cuts in administrative overhead. We were all shrinking so rapidly and the employee base we served wasn’t shrinking as fast as the support groups were shrinking.”

Atmosphere of fear

DSHS Financial Services Administration Finance Director Stacey Scott recalled when she came to work in the Central Budget office in 2010. “Their staffing had been reduced by 50 percent, and in accounting services they had been reduced by 40 percent and I can remember my first impression was that these people are just full of despair. There was this atmosphere of fear.”

Christopherson agreed. “Human Resources had been cut by 38 percent; Budget had been cut by 50 percent. The Central Service areas of the Department that served everyone had taken huge reductions and weren’t able to keep up with the reductions that the administrations were now taking in their administrative overhead.”

So, it was time to look at it in a new way of combining all of that, Christopherson said, “and exercising the leadership of helping people understand what we were doing, because there was a tremendous amount of fear at that point.”

Prior to consolidation, institution maintenance took a lot of cuts. “I certainly don’t fault those superintendents for the choices that they made,” said Capital Programs Chief Hubenthal, “but as you begin to make cuts and you lay off painters or groundskeepers, eventually at some point at some institutions they had no groundskeepers any longer, so we had skilled trades – carpenters, electricians, plumbers – out riding lawn mowers because our acreage didn’t decrease and we still had to maintain that.”

“It was pretty amazing,” Guerin said. “We have 3,000 fewer employees. We have gone from six regions to three. We’ve consolidated Human Resources and rolled out Talent Management, looking at staff in very different ways, and we consolidated our maintenance functions.

“It was Thomas (Shapley, DSHS Public Affairs Senior Director) and his group who helped us communicate why we were doing this, not only to our staff but also to our partners. I think one of the things that made me most proud was the way we treated our staff,” she said.



“I think one of the things that made me most proud was the way we treated our staff.”

Christopherson credited the employee blog for helping the process. “We all had to respond to the blog and there were times where the blog almost felt as if it was in our way to getting the work done because we were constantly responding to it. But it helped having that feedback from our staff and knowing where they were. I really did appreciate knowing what was coming before it hit me,” he said.

The employee blog (BlogCentral) is a monitored, non-anonymous forum for employees to make suggestions, post complaints and compliments, and ask and receive answers to questions from Department leadership.

Employees were also kept in the loop through all-staff e-mails on emergent issues and through an Intranet employee newsletter. In addition to its existing YouTube site, the Department has recently added Facebook and Twitter capabilities for communicating with employees and the public.

“The work that we did around the town hall meetings was helpful,” Guerin said. “We got that feedback and we were able to tell the story through the data, through the research... That’s how people were able to understand.”

When it came to making difficult and strategic decisions during difficult economic times, CFO Marshall said that “it helped to have people who hadn’t been through the history of all the times that we had tried and failed. It was important to have people in leadership who hadn’t been through that history, who could push us forward and not have to say ‘we’ve tried that before and it didn’t work.’”

She also credits Marshburn and what he said “about how this isn’t just a two-year problem. We did have to dramatically change the way we do business to get us through the long haul, and that’s very different than other times that we’ve been through these exercises.”

“The tough times really have stretched us to think about doing business differently,” Hubenthal said. “Take for example the role of technology in both the background check central unit and central contract services, where, even though they’re working with 40 percent fewer staff, by automating and consolidating and scanning a lot of their documents they’re able to do the same level of work or even more work with fewer staff by using electronic resources.”

Scott credited DSHS managers and employees. “They really do care about the citizens of Washington and they really care about our clients. They want to make a difference here, and they have a heart for the people. They’ve absorbed more work. They’ve taken on more tasks. They’ve done with fewer resources. This agency has been a whirlwind of change in the last four years and they have risen above.”

DSHS Senior Director for Planning, Performance and Accountability Jody Becker-Green pointed out that the Department made some intentional decisions around investing our continued quality improvement efforts at least initially on our administrative functions using Lean tools and techniques.

“Lean process is working really well,” Christopherson said. “Another thing that is really helping the organization dramatically is Motivational Interviewing (an interview approach that engages the client or employee as the center, not object, of the conversation). Folks are embracing that and it’s working in all areas of the Department.”

“And it’s really along the same lines as Talent Management,” Guerin said. Talent Management is an innovative human resources approach that creates a collaborative workplace in which employees are empowered to define and achieve their career goals with support from supervisors and managers. “And what I love about it is that the philosophy of the Department and the values of the Department that are coming through everywhere.”

Another area where those values are coming through is in developing the cultural competence of our employees. “The Department has successfully enacted an Administrative Policy on Cultural Competency (Administrative Policy 7.22), with supporting guidelines and key principles of conduct,” said DSHS Diversity and Inclusion Senior Director Victor Chacón, “the only one of its kind in all of Washington state government.”

The Office upholds respect, understanding and inclusion as the standard of how the entire Department does business with its staff, its clients and all of its partners.

The Office works to develop and monitor the Department’s programs related to valuing diversity and its integration in the operations of the Department. A recent focus has been developing an Integrated Employer Plan that promotes the Department’s hiring of people with disabilities, former clients of public assistance, and older foster youth.

Not everything worked exactly as planned

Guerin listed the Consolidated Maintenance Operations among those. “We’re still looking at that. It works, but not as well as we want it to and we must focus on continually improving.”

Hubenthal remembered the first discussions about maintenance consolidation in late 2012. “We were just brainstorming on the concept that some facilities just don’t have the resources that they need to do their maintenance and some of the larger facilities do and can we share that in the concept of a roving team?”

But there are flaws in the roving team application, he said. “For example, I’ve got a team from Rainier School traveling to Western State Hospital and passing each other on the freeway; a team from Western headed to Rainier to do similar services. Why are we doing this?”

Guerin raised the change in the number of regions. “I think that changing the number was good. I’m not sure that three was the right answer. Four would have been more reasonable. I think that three is great on a business side, but just thinking about the numbers of people we serve in the geographic areas, it is just too darn much. But you can’t do it and then undo it that quickly, so it’s something that sometime in the future really needs to be looked at.”

Data

“DSHS is leading the nation in increasing use of data to drive both its analyses of problems and the development of solutions.”

– David Wertheimer, Deputy Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Lessons learned:

- Data can be used strategically to inform policy, practice and budget decisions
- DSHS is leading the nation in terms of the use of integrated client data both internally and with external partners
- Integrated data is instrumental in breaking down program silos

Over the past eight years, the Department has increased the ability to use data and analytics to inform policy, practice and budget decisions. In part, this was attributable to the Government Management, Accountability and Performance (GMAP) process that required the Department to identify a core set of measures across programs, track data over time, develop action plans and hold programs accountable. In addition, the Department expanded its own research and analyses capacity through the leveraging of investments from a variety of funding streams. As a result, the Department has been able to move beyond just reporting on services to analyzing risks and outcomes. The Department has one of the most robust integrated data systems in the nation that has allowed us not only to inform our actions but to contribute to the knowledge and decision making of many of our strategic partners.

Gotta have data

DSHS' Integrated Client Database is a longitudinal client database containing more than a decade of detailed service risks, history, costs, and outcomes. The Integrated Client Database is used to support cost-benefit and cost-offset analyses, program evaluations, operational program decisions, geographical analyses and in-depth research. DSHS serves almost 2.4 million clients a year. The Integrated Client Database is the only place where all the information for each client comes together. From this central DSHS client database, it is possible to get a current and historical look into the life experiences of residents and families who encounter the state's social service and publically funded health care systems, as well as other markers of adjustment such as employment, arrests and vital statistics. In addition to these resources, DSHS has developed and provides PRISM clinical decision support applications to a variety of health, behavioral health and other providers. PRISM (Predictive Risk Intelligence System) is a secure web-based electronic health record providing an integrated and accessible view of a patient's Medicaid- and Medicare-paid medical, behavioral health, and long-term care service utilization. PRISM uses predictive modeling to provide clinicians and care managers with timely and actionable information to target health interventions for high-risk, high-cost patients with complex care needs.

We are using data in ways that we haven't in the past and are able to look at our clients across all multiple systems, ways that aid in decision making about how we best serve them.

That made the difficult job of budget balancing more manageable, former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary Kathy Leitch said. "I always felt the leadership team building the budget understood that we had more information and more data available to at least make these decisions in a more informed way, with this vision always of who are we serving and where we want to serve them."

Former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary MaryAnne Lindeblad explained that, "we have backups to data in a different way than we have had before, and are able to get cross-Department information when we ask for something from RDA (Research and Data Analysis Division). What has made a huge difference is having the integrated client database and knowing so much more about the folks we serve than we ever had in the past."

David Mancuso, DSHS Chief of Program Research and Evaluation in RDA, said that one of the things that has evolved over the last eight years is moving beyond just the service view of who are we serving and where they live, “to developing more of an understanding about the risk factors that have the greatest impacts on outcomes for our clients.” Babette (Babs) Roberts, Director of Economic Services Administration Community Service Division, said that having integrated data in a more overarching view of what services our clients are utilizing within and outside the Department is what has driven the WorkFirst redesign.

“The data that we got around the clients and what barriers they are facing is driving the policy shifts we are making in this program that we think are going to be better for the families,” Roberts said.

“The data that we are able to glean together internally and externally gives us an opportunity to revise our assessments and how we work with these families so that we can move them faster through some of our programs.”

Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson said she appreciates the “rich data about the relatives who are caring for the children, primarily outside of the public child welfare system, children not on dependency, and the needs of these caregivers and the children whom they are caring for.” She spoke of “great work that has been driven by what we have learned from the data, bringing that to light and who those families are, and what their needs are, and how to better serve them.”

Another area where Revels Robinson said data is helping inform decisions is “all our work with the Administrative Office of the Courts and the data that we contributing and their tracking of the data.”

Mancuso noted that there has been a lot of very recent development in building and integrating educational data into the infrastructure of DSHS. “You will start to see some of that flowing out pretty soon and you really do see fairly stunning things about kids and where risks are and where opportunities are for investments,” he said.

For example, “the average child whose is on Medicaid and a freshman in high school has a GPA of about a B-minus. The average child who is on Medicaid and a freshman in high school and has a substance abuse problem has an average grade of a D. You see similar challenges for kids who have mental health needs and kids with a history of child abuse and neglect,” he said.

The education research ream is producing the first series of reports identifying the challenges faced by children served by DSHS in achieving educational outcomes, due to the impacts associated with factors such as the experience of child abuse, the presence of mental illness or substance abuse, or involvement in the juvenile justice system. These analyses are stimulating policy conversations with DSHS programs that will help inform the design of strategies to improve educational outcomes for children served by DSHS. Those conversations are just beginning.

“An area of great strength”

The Department’s comprehensive integrated client databases and internal capacity to convert raw data into usable information is recognized as one of the best in the United States and the envy other states. David Wertheimer, Deputy Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said that the gathering and analyses of data “has been a real area of great strength” for the Department. “I would point in particular to the work of the Research and Data Analysis folks within DSHS, where there is now in place one of the most sophisticated integrated client databases in the United States.”

Wertheimer said that “DSHS is leading the nation in increasing use of data to drive both its analyses of problems and the development of solutions. It’s providing the data that’s allowing for a really informed conversation about what we need to do about some of the thorniest cross-system issues that touch vulnerable families in the state.”

Ben de Haan, Executive Director, Partners for Our Children, remembered that in the early days of the Gregoire administration, “there was a large push on the use of data and I certainly agree that through DSHS and its Research and Data Analysis Division we now have one of the most impressive integrated data bases in America and our organization is working very closely with them.”

The other important feature, he said, “is that the Governor herself was really focused in on data.”

David Bley, Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said that the Department’s emphasis on integrated data for both research and improved practice “is a real hallmark of the last eight years. And there is the cross-systems work both within DSHS and across departmental lines. An example of that would be the work that has occurred between DSHS and DEL (Department of Early Learning) around early childhood development. Also, the Governor and the department heads have not been shy about their personal direct involvement in building relationships with philanthropy.”

While there has been tremendous progress and advancement in the area of data analytics within the Department. Mancuso spoke of the challenge of attracting the talented staff needed to continue with Department’s groundbreaking use of predictive modeling to help inform the delivery of social and health services. He referred to it as “an area of risk and opportunity.” Data analytics has grown complex, requiring high end analytic programming, system engineering, and econometric analyses. These skill sets are hard to recruit and retain in government service.

Executive leadership has recently provided some flexibility in compensation levels that has allowed us to retain specific mission-critical software engineering staff who are employed as contractors through Washington State University. Comparable flexibility for high-level research staff would provide intellectual leadership and direction to our software engineering and analytical programming teams,” Mancuso said.

Advice

“This job is not about me – or you. It is about first and foremost the people we serve. Secondly it’s about our staff, because that’s how we serve them.”

– DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams



Lessons learned:

- Trust in your staff
- It is about the people we serve
- Have a sense of clarity and values
- Understand past decisions before making changes
- Look for ways to continually improve
- Measure results
- Learn from mistakes
- Continue to build public trust through clear communication and engagement
- Work closely with the Legislature
- Anticipate more tough budget years and accept that there is a “new normal”

Current and former DSHS leaders and key community partners were asked what advice they would give to those who will lead the Department into the future.

Trust

“I think it’s really trusting in the staff,” said DSHS Chief of Staff Tracy Guerin. “I think that’s why we have been as successful as we have been going through all of this change. They are incredibly talented; they’re very devoted to the mission; they step up and actually rise beyond anything you ever expected them to do. If you can give that direction and take the feedback, and adjust accordingly, you’re going to be successful.”

DSHS Chief Financial Officer Kathy Marshall agreed that trust was a key factor, “I think it’s trust – especially when I think of the consolidation efforts. We’re learning, and we’re improving as we go, and things are not perfect and they won’t be perfect on January 15. But trust in the process and trust in the work.”

DSHS Human Resources Senior Director Glen Christopherson said the Department is, “moving out of a command-and-control system and into a Talent Management role. In a lot of respects, management has gotten out of the way of innovative ideas for improvement.”

Talent Management, championed by DSHS leadership, is based on employees’ strengths and aspirations. It creates a collaborative workplace in which employees are empowered to define and achieve their career goals with support from supervisors and managers.

DSHS Financial Services Administration Finance Director Stacey Scott described the managers in the field as “awesome” and said that “they are doing a great job. But they’re still meeting pockets of resistance. So keep building those people up and supporting them and reassuring them, because they really are the people out in the field, on the ground, making all of these things happen.”

Former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary Kathy Leitch said that, “one thing that I have always appreciated in the field of aging and disability services is that there is such a core group of people who really enjoy the work, the topic of the work. You need to continue to cultivate that group of people who are in that administration to continue to be the idea makers, the innovators.”

Keep moving

Leitch cautioned that “you can never be stagnant; you need to be always trying to see if the service that you are providing is meeting the consumer needs and how to better improve it all the time, even in lean times. You will always have issues that you want to address and you have to figure out how to prioritize them, again keeping the consumer in mind.”

“Keep revisiting ideas when things don’t work out right away,” Leitch said. “Things do not happen overnight in government, and it’s not because people are slow, it’s because there are so many points of decision to be done.”

Leitch warned of a growing population that is aging and a growing population with disabilities. She cautioned that “the aging and disability wave is going to really hit hardest eventually with the people who are not going to be able to put enough money away to pay for their long-term care. A collision is coming. This one is growing. It’s been growing and it’s going to really explode in the year 2020 – 2030.”

Continuous Improvement

And the Department is so different that it was eight years ago.

“People tell me, I hope it’s true,” DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams said, “that in the first term we built some credibility back for the Department on some of the basics, like, how we did the budget, how we were transparent with the accountability. The whole GMAP process (I love the GMAP stuff!) – I have always loved accountability. I have loved those opportunities to sit there and take advantage of that public stage with the Governor and senior staff to put our issues on the table. I think that worked for us. I don’t think we would have gotten the child welfare support without those opportunities.”

Most important, she said, “I want the new administration to know that they’re inheriting a Department that can perform.”

Economic Services Administration Assistant Secretary David Stillman cautioned that difficult economic times can both motivate and challenge. “Scarcity often tends to reinforce the human competition for resources among agencies,” he said. “While our hearts and minds might say that we’re going to collaborate, at times we find ourselves in competition or being less open than we might. It is important to keep focused on that as a potential issue in order to not let it creep into the conversations. Scarcity can be a good thing, a good motivator. But scarcity can also be a challenge and it can also motivate us in a different direction.”

Former Aging and Disability Services Administration Assistant Secretary MaryAnne Lindeblad said that “Whatever you decide to do, you need to build an evaluation at the front end so that you are not trying to think about successes at the back end. Then recognize that this is evolutionary and be able to step back and say, ‘okay, what do we need to do differently to improve it?’ And if something isn’t working, you need to be able to end it and go on to something else.”

Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson echoed that advice, saying, “We’ve learned as much from those things that didn’t go as well as those things that were successful. Don’t miss the opportunity to learn from the mistakes, because you are on a continuum, trying to improve, and not everything works, or not everything works forever.”

Communication and Engagement

Babette (Babs) Roberts, Director of Economic Services Administration Community Service Division, urged clarity of messaging about services with staff, partners, advocates and other state agencies. “The clarity of the message includes having some idea of what outcomes we are looking for and steps that we want to take and being able to admit to mistakes when we make them and go back and try again,” she said.

Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration Assistant Secretary John Clayton offered advice about working with stakeholders at the local level. If you are talking about service integration projects where you are involved in serving people at the local level, make sure that you have local people as the primary drivers.

Clayton also urged future leaders to “look at the integration, or the lack of integration, on the planning process with juvenile justice in the state. It is fragmented and so it is weak, and you have so many outside agencies that are able to take advantage of that, and it is going to hurt us in the long run. I think that something very dramatic is going to happen and it is going to be because of the lack of a good strong planning process.”

The Legislature’s role

Arnold-Williams emphasized the importance of understanding the role the Legislature plays as the state’s policy-making entity.

“When I got here,” she said, “the advice I got from people was to spend as little time as possible at the Legislature, which is how the Department had operated. Seriously! So I thought, ‘okay, that must be how they do it here in Washington.’ “

“I learned after my first session that I got the wrong advice,” she admitted, “but I think that is one of the strengths of this Department eight years later: amazing relationships and processes” that have raised the Department’s standing with the Legislature.

“So spend as much time as necessary at the Legislature, and see it as a team effort because you aren’t going to be able to go independently.”

Arnold-Williams said she has also seen a transition in her time here to more bipartisan efforts. “I think that’s also a product of the tough times, when you need to reach out in a little different way. I’ve seen much more willingness to do some things in a bipartisan way, which is always more comfortable. I don’t see human services as a partisan issue.”

Former DSHS Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus also praised the bipartisan approach. “I was so fortunate to have the Governor set such a bipartisan tone. The Governor always had both sides of the aisle in her office for meetings and she wanted consensus and I really followed her lead in maintaining strong working relationships” with both Democrats and Republicans. “Legislators are critical partners in the work. You can’t be successful in the work if you don’t work on both sides of the aisle.”

Former Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Cheryl Stephani emphasized the importance of stakeholders in legislative success. “Somehow – and this is a tough one – you have to figure out how to get buy-in from all the multiple stakeholders,” she said. “Together you can identify the pieces that need to be tackled first, second, third. That’s difficult when legislative priorities may change from one session to the next.”

Stephani recommended that “you have to have a strong awareness that even though the accountability may lie with the state child welfare program, you’ve got a lot of other people who are setting policy and setting direction.”

Another new normal?

Former DSHS Chief Financial Officer Gary Robinson counseled caution as signs begin to indicate an improving economy.

“We should anticipate that we are not going to have an increase in resources of any substantial amount to expand or restore programs,” he said.

“We, as leaders within government need to continue looking at ways to have good service delivery at a lower cost through more efficient operations. We shouldn’t step away from that endeavor because the economy is improving. We need to continue to partner with other state agencies, local governments and non-profits.”

He said that DSHS also has to demonstrate the value of the services that it provides, “because we are going to continue in an environment where the available resources are going to be very competitive.”

Former Economic Services Administration Assistant Secretary Troy Hutson agreed with Robinson's budget concerns. "I worry that as the revenue starts coming back even if it remains flat, there is less of that impetus to continue some of these efficiency efforts. This is about designing systems appropriate to the current situation that could be more effective and more thoughtful and more strategic."

Hutson said he worries to that "we're still comparing our budgets and revenues and everything else to the bubble that we had a number of years ago, and we need to get back to some sort of normalized situation and realize the new normal is what it is and we need to continue to live within that new normal."

Arnold-Williams echoed the economic concerns expressed by Robinson and Hutson, arguing that "there may be another new normal coming" with health care reform.

"We have developed and run a human services system that has assumed a large number of people without health care coverage. So we have crafted programs and work-arounds because a good segment of the population we serve weren't eligible for Medicaid. I don't know yet that we have really thought through all of the opportunities from the human services side when the health care system changes in 2014. I doubt that any state has really grappled through that yet because we have been so busy running at the fast pace of implementation, of expansion and the exchange."

Dreyfus advised, "Do not sit in your office too much. Be visible, be present. What the employees need more than anything from you is your presence; your honesty and your inclusiveness of them, your true respect for them and for their work."

And if there is anything you need when you're leading through such a complex time as the Department leaders were, Dreyfus said, "you need to have a sense of clarity and confidence in the direction that you are going. But you also have to have a framework that gives you the type of agility that you need to change quickly with the ever-changing economic environment that we saw ourselves in. It was shifting on us daily."

Hutson recommended that future leaders "get outside of the advocates and the advocacy organizations and really engage the broader public." And, he said, "I can't stress enough that this is all about leadership and I think that we are too humble sometimes and deferential, but at the end of the day this required leadership to step up and take the risks and make the decisions."

"One of the things that all incoming administrations succumb to is building policy based on the outlier cases," David Bley, Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said. "You will have bad cases, but making a policy based on what is a very unusual event is often politically expedient but it ends up creating a hodgepodge network of policies that turn out to be pretty ineffective."



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He said to avoid what he called “policy whiplash.”

“How many times have you seen new Secretaries come in with the shake-‘em-up mentality? I would say don’t just change things because you have to put your fingerprints on it. DSHS is suffering from initiative fatigue. There is only so much bandwidth for change and so I would really discourage bringing in a model from another state and trying to make it fit or just changing things to get your fingerprints on the organization,” Bley said.

“Job No. 1 for the next Secretary,” Bley said, “is trying to find ways to rebuild public and taxpayer confidence in government, and particularly in agencies that are the lifeline for poor people in the state. Until the community and taxpayers believe it’s a worthy investment, it’s going to be very hard to come in and drive continuous improvements and keep morale up and create efficiencies.”

Bley said that the Department is going to need messengers; “not just the Secretary or Governor, but people outside of state government who have standing and are able to vouch and help us rebuild the public’s confidence in the mission and the work.”

He said that the philanthropy sector remains highly motivated and engaged and not only would like to see some continuity across the initiatives that this Governor started and into the next administration, “but we really want to get our hands dirty and work in the trenches with state government and a broad set of partners to figure out how we can do this work better together.”

Alice Shobe, Executive Director, Building Changes, recommended that the Department do some quick mapping that could be done of things that are inter-departmental kinds of collaborations that could be quick wins that would also set up a new cabinet thinking about system change.

“We have been working with Commerce and with DSHS to relook at how to develop a policy platform for vulnerable families and we’re off to a good start and I would say that this could be an opportunity for a new administration to come in and join with the private sector and others who are working on some of these issues to put some of their mark on it,” Shobe said.

“We’re hoping to add some new energy to the broader cross-department thinking, and DSHS and Commerce are the center partnership on that and so it’s a real opportunity for new leaders to join with us.”

David Wertheimer, Deputy Director, Pacific Northwest Program, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, confirmed the importance of finding such inter-departmental collaborations, even though they are difficult to structure and sustain. “They are going to be critically important and one of the best opportunities that we’re going to have in the years ahead to align the resources in ways that make the most efficient use of the dollars that are in play and to get the best outcomes possible for our vulnerable citizens.”

Ben de Haan, Executive Director, Partners for Our Children, pointed out that the last legislative session gave the child welfare system a fairly profound change in the policy framework.

“There are four or five critical bills that, implemented together, could have dramatic impact over all, long term,” he said. “So recognizing that we have very strong political statements about the direction of the system, giving this organization an opportunity to digest all of these things and implement them wisely should be at the top of the new Secretary’s agenda.”

Take a deep breath

Arnold-Williams invited future leaders to figure out what has transpired and think about what decisions have been made and why they were made, and, before changing them, understand that thoroughly.

“I haven’t met any director in my 30 years in this business who made decisions arbitrarily or capriciously,” she said. “There was a reason a decision was made, even if it was a decision that they did not want to make. A lot of the decisions that were made over the last couple of years in the budget cuts nobody wanted to make, but they had to be made.”

She recommended “taking a deep breath, recognizing that you inherit all that went before you; you buy it on day one. So, be respectful of it, understand it and when you change it be very thoughtful in how you do that and explain why you are doing it. Explain that to the staff, because they deserve that.”

Arnold-Williams said she understood that “You are the target and you take a lot of criticism. And one of the ways I cope with that is to not take that personally – even though it is said very personally at times. You have to recognize you are the symbol of a very large system. There is rarely one side to any story and there are often five sides.”

So, she concluded, “this job is not about me – or you. It is about first and foremost the people we serve. Secondly it’s about our staff, because that’s how we serve them. I can take the criticism and I can bounce back and say this is criticism not about me but about the system and I can do something to change the system.”

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