

Music Introduction: (voiceover) KGMI Morning News Extra (music)

Mike:

We're talking about the COVID-19 pandemic with Todd Holloway, from the Center for Independence and Todd, first real briefly, what is the Center for Independence?

Todd Holloway:

Thank you, Mike. The Center for Independence is a nonprofit serving people with disabilities from ages 14 on up, we're basically a resource for individuals with disabilities to fully access participate in the community through outreach, advocacy, and independent living skills develop.

Mike Davis:

And you do that in counties, including Whatcom and Skagit County, it sounds like.

Todd Holloway:

Absolutely. Our North our Northwest region covers every County West of the cascades from Snohomish all the way to the border.

Mike Davis:

Okay. What are some unique challenges that persons with special needs may be encountering because of all the changes from the pandemic?

Todd Holloway:

Well, there, there are some gaps that had been present even before the pandemic, including transportation challenges, challenges to communications. We're spending a lot of time, of course communicating with each other through zoom and other broadband platforms that the digital divide that exists for people with fixed-income has been a problem. So with that we have identified the fact that people may have difficulties getting to places where they need to get basic commodities like food and such. So we're trying to bridge those gaps with them.

Mike Davis:

What would be some examples of connections you might make for somebody that reaches out to the Center for Independence, for help in this way?

Todd Holloway:

Some of those would be through the emergency food network throughout the state of Washington. We, we partner with them to not only identify the need within a phase specific diet, but also looking at the needs that they may have for commodities in the home and to plan to actually get that stuff to them in a, in a timely manner. That includes the transportation that usually involves a lot of volunteers.

Mike Davis:

I assume that you're open to advocates for persons with special needs reaching out to you and asking for help on their behalf.

Todd Holloway:

Absolutely. Without question, we, we work with school age children, children and adults who are in transition from secondary education and so forth, as well as people who are at risk of becoming institutionalized. That is one of the things that is our fifth core service, really, to help people live in the community and not become institutionalized, say at a skilled nursing facility where they would likely not have the same freedoms that they would on the outside and be at a much, much higher risk of catching the virus.

Mike Davis:

Okay. How has the change to education going online as opposed to face to face impacted some of your clients?

Todd Holloway:

It's a huge challenge. Like the, the fact is that with the digital divide that I spoke of earlier being the cost of broadband and the access to broadband being so much of an issue for the people that we serve, who are trying to go to college or to public education. It adds a barrier that is really difficult to have been difficult to overcome in the past. We're starting to see some movement that will help in that regard, like Comcast essentials. Comcast does provide in the areas that it serves a broadband to people who qualify for \$9.95 a month. And that is something that we've partnered with Comcast and others to try and get access for folks that may not otherwise be able to afford it.

Mike Davis:

Okay. If persons are seeking, these sort of helps, how do they reach you all at the Center for Independence, Todd?

Todd Holloway:

They can reach us through our phone numbers. My phone number in the Lakewood area is (253) 582-1253. And there should be someone there answering the phone, even during the pandemic. We have the website, which is www.CFI-WA.org. And on that site, you should be able to get all of our information on how to make contact with us throughout the Western part of the state.

Mike Davis:

All right. Well, I'm sure many persons appreciate the work you all are doing to advocate for persons with special needs throughout the pandemic here. Todd Holloway, with the Center for Independence. Thanks for joining us today on KGMI.