



PHT Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2025, 8:30-10:30 am

Chinook Meeting Room

Members: Dan Berard, Patty Codd, Bill Henkel, Sonia Garza, Chris Johnston, Marueen Pettitt, Lyndie Simmonds, Mario Paredes, Claudia Avendaño-Ibarra, Kevin Murphy, Margaret Rojas, Erin Von Fempe, John Sternlicht, Maddy Mackenzie, Leon John, Linden Jordan

Community Stakeholders: Kas Church, Kristen Ekstran, Jennifer Sass-Walton, Keith Higman

Ex-Officio: Howard Leibrand

Guests: Neil Panlasigui, Kelli Baker, Andrew Gill, Jeremy Hiatt, Javana Herrera

Agenda review and Steering update

Bill welcomed the group and provided updates from the most recent Steering Committee meeting. Much of that conversation was regarding ongoing plans for the Community Health Assessment.

Sustainability plan for COVID Recovery Plan child care project

Kristen informed the group that there was exciting news about PHT child care efforts in Skagit. Before sharing the news, she invited Jennifer to provide some background about the project and to provide achievements from the initiative thus far. Jennifer reminded members that the need for quality, affordable child care was identified as part of the Covid Recovery Plan and that some funding from the American Recovery (ARPA) was used to launch the project. The Trust identified The Center for Retention & Expansion of Child Care (C-RECC), a partnership between the Opportunity Council and the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, as a collaborator to do the work in Skagit.

Since launching in 2023 there have been,

- 11 new family child care businesses opened in Skagit
- 2 new/expanded child care centers in Skagit County
- 1 new employer/child care provider partnership

Unfortunately, all involved knew that the ARPA funding would eventually end, so members have been working on a sustainability plan for these efforts. At this point in the meeting, Maddy joined the conversation

to share information about a new initiative, the Skagit Childcare Partnership Fund. She shared that the Skagit Community Foundation had identified an individual willing to donate \$20k to start the fund. Additional funding is needed, Maddy estimates around \$65-70k a year, to keep the program going. She invited members to information about the program to encourage other donors. The hope is that eventually there will be enough ongoing donation to make the program truly sustainable.

Youth panel discussion – part 2

As a continuation of data collection on youth wellness, Kristen invited three panelists to share more on the topic. Joining the conversation were Jeremy Hiatt with the Boys and Girls Club, Andrew Gill from Consejo Counseling, and Linden Jordan, a Trust member and leader with PFLAG Skagit. Panelists were asked a series of questions centered on the health and wellbeing of the youth they serve. Below are the questions they were asked and a summary of their responses.

1. Thinking about the youth that you work with, what are their most pressing health concerns?

Panelists expressed concerns around the resilience of youth today compared to other generations and thought that possible contributors could be social media, not enough access to services, especially behavioral health services. For LGBTQ youth, a significant challenge is receiving gender-affirming care, especially in the current political climate. Another panelist reinforced concerns around mental health for kids and the role that intergenerational trauma can have on the wellness of some youth. Nutrition is also a challenge, not just because of the lack of access to nutritious foods, but for kids taking care of and preparing meals themselves, they may not know how to put together a healthy meal.

2. How do factors like family life, money, neighborhood, and housing affect student health?

Right now, a challenge for young people is fear that their family could be being broken up through deportation. The threat of deportation is causing a lot of stress for families, which contributes to additional stress on youth. For some kids, their family unit has been impacted by incarceration. Another panelist supported the idea of the stress on families negatively impacting kids, especially as families try to shield kids from what is happening politically. He expressed specific concern for trans youth; kids that often already struggle with feeling accepted.

3. When it comes to supporting youth wellness, what strategies/approaches are working?

One panelist shared that they were making some good progress getting kids connected to mental health services through therapists in schools, offering specialized modalities of treatment, and through the creation of peer-led mental health groups. Another panelist highlighted the work that local libraries are doing to support youth, especially LGBTQ+ kids. For the Boys and Girls Club specifically, they have had success in strengthening relationships with schools. Some outcomes of this have been the implementation of the PAX Good Behavior Game and hosting a drama club for Concrete youth when budget cuts ended the school-based program.

4. How can schools and other community organizations collaborate to help improve youth health outcomes?

When asked this question, Consejo stressed the importance of having school support. They also noted a need for more funding/opportunities for their counseling staff to be trained in specialized therapy modalities. Right now, there is more need for that type of care than they can provide. PFLAG is looking forward to the YMCA's new host family program that will provide more shelter for homeless youth. The Boys and Girls Club is always in need mentors for the youth in their program.

5. If you had the power to make one big change to improve student health, what would you do and why?

The panelists appreciated this question. Their responses included, having some basic safety expectations for companies that supply social media to youth, providing parents with spaces where they can feel safe, connected and free from the stresses of raising a family, and to create a feeling that we All belong.

Table Discussion

Following the panel discussion, Trust members were invited to discuss all that they had learned about youth wellness. Specifically, members responded to the questions below,

1. When you consider all that we have learned about youth over the past two meetings, what do you see as the most significant challenges to youth wellness?

2. *Do you have any different interpretations of youth wellness themes as a result of the panel discussions?*
3. *What is working well in our community to support youth wellness?*

Responses will be catalogued as part of the CHA and referred to when synthesizing and prioritizing themes.

CHA update

Kristen provided the Trust with an update on the CHA timeline. We are currently in the data collection process, with plans to host a series of youth focus groups later this month. Neil, our new epidemiologist, is finishing up analysis of data collected in a series of focus groups around access to care. The assessment and planning team will be heading out into the community in the coming months in a series of pop-up events to get input from the community on both assets and current health challenges.

Up Next

The Steering Committee will meet on Monday, March 10th and the next Trust meeting is on April 3rd.