Q: Can anyone call the Ombuds?

A: Yes. Individuals with developmental disabilities who are receiving state services in Washington, as well as their friends, family, guardians, service providers, or other advocates may request our services. We do not require a formal diagnosis or documentation. The DD Ombuds services are person-centered – we work with the individual with the disability to advocate for their needs.

Q: How quickly can you expect to hear back?

A: Currently, we can generally respond in 2 to 5 business days. Currently, we are able to get back to everyone. People can call us or use the online complaint form on our website: DDombuds.org

Q: Do the Ombuds staff go into certified living situations or to private homes?

A: Yes, we regularly visit locations where individuals receive services, such as private and state-run supported living, institutions, group homes, private residences, licensed residential for children, and employment or recreation settings. Individuals with developmental disabilities, or their friends, family, guardians, or staff can request monitoring visits. If you make a complaint about your home or work, the DD Ombuds will prioritize those locations for a visit in the future.

Q: Does the Ombuds office work with teens to help them learn self-advocacy skills?

A: Yes. The DD Ombuds and the DD Ombuds self-advocacy educator work with individuals in their late teens or early 20s through workshops and trainings.

Q: How does someone know if they should be calling you or Child Protective Services?

A: You should always call CPS if you suspect abuse or neglect.

Q: For many kids who need help, their family doctor or hospital refers them to services. Can individuals call?

A: Yes- Anyone can call the DD Ombuds to request our services for a person with a developmental disability.
Q: What kinds of issues have you dealt with?

A: We prioritize abuse and neglect but we address a broad range of issues. The majority of our complaints in SFY 2018 concerned autonomy and exercise of rights, followed by issues with individual care, abuse, neglect, and quality of life.

Systemic issues identified for continued work include:
  • Systemic Report: “Diverting Crisis - Maintaining housing and supports for people with developmental disabilities”;
  • Systemic Report: “Stuck in the Hospital”;
  • Staff shortages and staff turnover in certified residential settings;
  • Access to activities and social engagement;
  • Access to behavioral supports and access to mental health care;
  • Simplification of the eligibility process for DDA services;
  • Address abuse and neglect, especially procedures for handling physical assault by one roommate against another in residential settings.

Q: How long does it take to get issues resolved?

A: It depends on the issue. Some complaints resolve in a couple days and some take months. The DD Ombuds can stay involved until the issue is resolved.

Q: Do you get involved with employment issues? For instance, if a person was suspended multiple times from supported employment or if someone is still eligible but can’t get a provider anymore?

A: Yes. The DD Ombuds takes complaints about employment related issues.

Q: How big of an issue is people with intellectual and developmental disabilities being “stuck” in hospitals?

A: In December 2018, the DD Ombuds released a report entitled “Stuck in the Hospital” in response to the significant number of complaints received about people with developmental disabilities stuck in the hospital because there is no safe discharge location. Since spring 2018, the DD Ombuds has worked with 24 adults with developmental disabilities who encountered difficulties discharging from the hospital. The DD Ombuds is receiving an increased number of complaints about people being stuck in the hospital since issuing the report. The DD Ombuds is also working with a significant number of children that are stuck in the hospital or who are frequently in the hospital due to inadequate supports and services in the community.

Q: How do you handle second and third party reports of abuse and neglect? For example, if someone calls and says x is happening do you have to report?

A: The DD Ombuds staff are not mandatory reporters under RCW 74.34 or RCW 26.44.
Q: Do the Ombuds offices here (Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Education) work together?

A: Yes. The DD Ombuds collaborates with the other Ombuds in the state of Washington to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities and to prevent the duplication of services. For example, if the DD Ombuds receives a complaint about public education, we can refer them to the Education Ombuds.

- https://ddombuds.org/
- https://oeo.wa.gov/
- http://ofco.wa.gov/
- https://www.waombudsman.org/

Q: Do you help people with fair hearings?

A: No, our services do not include attending administrative hearings, court proceedings, providing legal advice, or providing legal representation. We can provide general information on fair hearings and administrative appeals as well as referrals to organizations that may be able to provide legal advice, legal representation, or other services.

Q: How many new people are added to your caseload each month?

A: The DD Ombuds is a new program – opened in May 2017. The DD Ombuds is still new and growing so it is difficult to say how many new complaints our office will typically receive each month. Currently, the DD Ombuds receives 10-20 new complaints each month.

Q: How many people work at the Ombuds office?

A: We have 6 staff who work full-time and one who works half-time.

Q: What type of documentation does your office maintain?

A: We have a secure online database that we use to manage our complaints and preserve the confidentiality of information. The DD Ombuds has strict confidentiality requirements.

Q: Do you have interactions with the law enforcement community?

A: The DD Ombuds does not interact with law enforcement frequently, but will if it is necessary to a complaint investigation.
Q: If someone is trying to navigate through the DSHS-DDA system and is not getting any response, can they contact you?

A: Yes, the individual can contact us or a family member, guardian, staff, or other advocate can contact us.

Q: If you have someone come in at a young age, would you help connect them to DSHS-DDA services?

A: Yes, we can provide them with information on DDA services, who to contact for DDA eligibility, and other services that may benefit the person.

Q: Do families or professionals come to you for assistance?

A: Yes, both families and professionals contact us. If there are any issues with DSHS-DDA services, we may help advocate or provide information or referral to the appropriate resource.

Q: What kind of data goes into your reports?

A: The DD Ombuds reports on issues within the developmental disabilities service system. These reports are meant to highlight problems and recommend changes to the system to improve services for everyone. One report, Diverting Crisis provided data targeting housing issues. More recently, our Hospital Report underscores the pattern of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities getting dropped off, or “stuck,” in hospitals with no other place to go.

Q: What kinds of activities are you thinking about doing in the future?

A: Systemic issues identified for continued work include:

• Systemic Report: “Diverting Crisis - Maintaining housing and supports for people with developmental disabilities”;
• Systemic Report: “Stuck in the Hospital”;
• Staff shortages and staff turnover in certified residential settings;
• Access to activities and social engagement;
• Access to behavioral supports and access to mental health care for both children and adults;
• Simplification of the eligibility process for DDA services;
• Address abuse and neglect, especially procedures for handling physical assault by one roommate against another in residential settings.

Q: Do you assist youth-who are in juvenile jail because of family assault and can’t go home? How do you get involved?

A: Yes, the DD Ombuds takes complaints concerning young people with developmental disabilities that are in Juvenile detention.
**Q:** With divisions in DD community (e.g. RHC, pre-employment training) do you take positions?

**A:** The DD Ombuds is person-centered which means that we advocate for people to have the best quality of life possible in whatever setting they live in.