



Respite Program Case Study *Respite in the Time of COVID-19*

Lifespan Respite Washington (LRW) – Voucher Program

Program Description

Lifespan Respite Washington (LRW) offers caregiver support through vouchers or mini grants for unpaid caregivers supporting a family member, friend, or neighbor who has a special need or condition. Recognizing the important relationship between a caregiver and care recipient, the program offers short-term breaks. Vouchers are provided across the lifespan for caregivers of older adults, those with dementia, and children and adults with disabilities.

PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment) is the host agency responsible, in partnership with the state's Aging and Long Term Support Administration (AL TSA) within the Department of Social and Health Services, for providing lifespan respite vouchers for families in Washington.

Washington was impacted early in the pandemic with the LRW Voucher Program office closing in mid-March and the Governor implementing a "stay at home" order March 23, 2020. At the same time, a primary program staff resigned. Initial efforts focused on stabilizing the voucher program, continuing to process vouchers, and ensuring that state and local public health guidance was followed.

Planning and Guidance for Ongoing Voucher Services

The LRW Voucher Program continued providing services during the pandemic. Staff used the pandemic crisis as an opportunity to create flexible options for families using vouchers for respite and securing ongoing and future respite program funding.

- **Conducted internal planning** through staff discussions to plan for adjusting the voucher program process to be more flexible in meeting family needs.
- **Reached out to statewide collaborating agencies** as needed. Since the voucher program is funded by a federal Lifespan Respite grant and is managed through the Washington State [Aging and Long-Term Support Administration](#),¹ their approval was sought for program changes and to ensure the program would continue.
- **Researched information and resources** through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Governor Orders/Guidance, Washington State Department of Health and multiple county health departments due to local guidance and phases. Accessed additional respite information and resources through the ARCH National Respite Network's [COVID-19 Respite and Caregiving Resources](#)² page including webinars and guidance.
- **Requested that PAVE be designated as providing essential services, including respite and other programs.** The Governor's Office approved this designation in April 2020. Safely accessing the office helped staff and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) as they continued processing payments and adjusted systems to finalize all online billing and payment of registered respite providers.
- **Reached out to the Respite Provider Agencies (RPAs)** to communicate and support their efforts, thank them for all they were doing, and share survey results and ongoing encouragement to attend LRW Coalition meetings as time permitted. RPAs followed state and local guidance during the pandemic and were able to secure their own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and families.
- **Reached out to families** by email to see how they were doing, address any immediate concerns and extend their voucher usage time frame. In the late spring through the summer, LRW had in depth phone calls with families to follow-up on voucher awards, and discuss and conduct searches of respite options. Respite search results were shared with caregivers via email.
- **Focused on securing respite funding for the future** by applying for:
 - New 3-year Lifespan Respite grant through the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL). Experiences with COVID-19 and family preferences and needs impacted the new lifespan respite grant request.

- LRW Coalition requested additional ACL funding (\$33k) for technology needs to support coalition activities for Zoom memberships, lighting for virtual settings, and other related technology needs; and
- Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation - Respite Care Grants Program funding.
- **Planned for and initiated more flexibility and options for how respite vouchers could be used including:**
 - Caregivers can select a provider from the currently registered providers on the LRW website. All respite providers are searchable (i.e., by county, type of respite, age, etc.) and providers have responsibility to conduct background checks for their employees, show proof of insurance, have a signed Interagency Agreement, and agree to follow state statutes when working with vulnerable populations.
 - Planned for expanded respite options for the new 3 year grant so that caregivers can use vouchers for recreation programs including YMCAs, 4H Clubs, and horseback riding/equine classes.
 - Planning intentional collaboration among providers to explore utilization of camp facilities with other respite provider agencies (e.g., weekend get-a-ways, retreats, tutoring options to support work and education, etc.).

Respite Voucher Service Delivery During the Pandemic

- **Voucher program continued to operate using the existing Policies and Procedures** with some adjustments due to the pandemic.
- **Proactively contacted families and focused on what each family was encountering.** Increased capacity to provide individualized family supports and resources beyond existing information and referral services. During the pandemic did even more statewide collaboration and coordination and shared state, national, and ARCH resources with families (e.g., Family to Family Health Information Center/F2FHIC; Parent Training and Information/PTI Center, Parent to Parent/P2P).
- **Planned to decrease any stalls or lapses in respite service delivery and lapses in respite funding.** For example:
 - determined how to provide resources when families apply for and use voucher funds right away – how to ensure they can access respite options for the remaining months of the year;

- addressed partial usage of voucher funds related to the pandemic and how services are provided or limited; and
- helped families determine the best way to use their voucher funds, did respite program research for families, and provided sustained personal support that has continued throughout the pandemic.
- **Families were given more time to use their voucher funds.** In the past funds were required to be used within 90 days. In April 2020 began offering more flexibility. This is expected to continue until pandemic cases reach levels that allow Washington residents to safely resume activities. While we continue to encourage using vouchers for needed caregiving breaks, we understand this is a time of disruption, change, and uncertainty.
- **Respite voucher program usage changed during the pandemic.** From March 1, 2019 through August 31, 2019, 181 vouchers were used, whereas from March 1, 2020 through August 31, 2020, 81 vouchers were used by families.

Resource Dissemination During COVID-19

- The [Pathways to Respite Toolkit](#)³ was designed for those who provide respite care for an older adult or someone with a disability. This toolkit provides respite resources such as orienting in home respite providers, dealing with stress, new caregiver checklist, and assistive technology resources.
- **With the [LRW Coalition](#)⁴ focus on support groups, discussions are underway with ALISA and LRW staff to develop a clearinghouse of support groups** so families can more easily find support groups either through phone support or virtually using Zoom and other platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams). Moving forward the LRW Coalition will review and explore support group options with other key partners (e.g., ADRCs, AAAs, Kinship).

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Staffing transition for the LRW Voucher Program** meant that initially there wasn't a designated person to address day-to-day voucher program issues. This ended up also being a benefit since there wasn't a need to do any layoffs and staff found other ways to be creative and address needs.
- **Planning and addressing voucher program implementation required more time, follow up and learning** as staff, families, and the community adapted to the new reality by making modifications to internal systems for providing respite vouchers.

Respite Registry Service Continuation

- **Continue to focus on voucher program sustainability and flexibility** to meet ongoing and emerging needs.
- **Monitor voucher program usage** and identify and address caregiver and provider agency issues and concerns as they occur.
- **Provide ongoing supports to families and respite provider agencies** through phone calls and emails.
- **Enhance cultural diversity** through inclusive planning including drawing on RPAs with this expertise and conducting outreach to specific populations (e.g., tribal affairs).
- **Plan to provide tip sheets to assist caregivers** and enhance their use of the [ARCH Family Decision Guide](#)⁵ during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Expand types of respite providers** (e.g., recreation, classes, cultural enrichment, etc.) and update the LRW resource [Potential Questions to Ask a Respite Provider Agency](#)⁶ with questions tailored to new providers as needed.
- **Received new ACL Lifespan Respite grant** for 3 years which will allow the program to continue and to enhance and improve efforts started during the pandemic.
- **Update the LWR website to enhance outreach to RPAs and families/caregivers**, which will provide increased opportunities for sharing information and resources in a more timely manner.

Respite Contact, Email and Phone Number

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<https://www.lifespanrespitewa.org>

<https://www.lifespanrespitewa.org/voucher-program>

Website Link URLs

1. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa>
2. <https://archrespite.org/Covid-19-Respite-Resources>
3. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W1taNMR53BeQV5-zKqm4V0MRppryccAJ/view?usp=sharing>
4. <https://www.lifespanrespitewa.org/about>
5. https://archrespite.org/images/COVID-19/Guidelines/ARCH-Family_Decision_Guide_Form.pdf
6. <https://www.lifespanrespitewa.org/respite-care/potential-questions-to-ask-your-potential-respite-provider/>