

Snohomish County Children's Commissioner Biographies

Desmond Pullen grew up on a farm in Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe, and now lives in Snohomish, WA with his wife, Karen. He is the sixth of eleven siblings, seven of whom are still living. Desmond attended a Catholic boarding school in Rhodesia from the age of 7 until graduating in 1965. He then attended the all-white Bulawayo Teachers Training College of Rhodesia; although he could attend classes, he was not allowed to live or have meals on campus. He moved to the USA in July 1972. He and Karen taught in a private junior boys' school in Deerfield, Massachusetts. They lived in a dormitory while at the school and Desmond taught in the classroom, coached soccer (aka football), skiing – although he had never seen snow before, basketball – although he had never heard of it before, and track and field. He remained at the boarding school for fourteen years before moving on to become a principal at two consecutive private middle schools before retiring in 2006 and moving to Washington State in 2007. Karen and Desmond have two daughters and five grandchildren. One daughter lives in Snohomish, Washington and the other in Atlanta, Georgia. Desmond learned about the Children's Commission from a friend and Commission member Chris. He attended his first SCCC meeting February 27, 2013 and decided to become a member a short time thereafter. Desmond now is sort of 'unretired.' **He was the Children's Advocate at the Interfaith Shelter for Homeless Families in Everett, WA until 2015. He served on the board of the Snohomish County Health and Safety Network and was board chair of the Network Advocates. He now is the Chair of the Snohomish County Children's Commission and is on the board of the Edmonds Driftwood Players. He also is a member of the Children's Mental Health Coalition. Desmond's favorite sport is soccer which he played in high school, college and semiprofessionally in Rhodesia. He also ran soccer camps in Greenfield Massachusetts for 21 years and currently coaches – with his daughter – a soccer team of ten-year old girls, including his granddaughter. Desmond's acting career ended with a part in the Kaufman/Hart play, You Can't Take it With You. No, he never did meet Jean Arthur and yes, a grandfather of his was a renowned medicine man (a so-called witchdoctor).**

Laura Hamilton returned to Snohomish County after 21 years, now living in Edmonds with her husband. She has two sons who live in New York with their wives and three wonderful grandchildren. Laura has represented District 3 as a Children's Commissioner for 8 years. She brings 35 years of experience in education to the Commission where she worked with students and families with special needs. She helps to provide insight and support for children from birth to age 21 and their families, aligning with Snohomish County's long history of recognizing and valuing the importance and challenges of raising children. Laura has served as a Co-Chair, Chair and a member of the Executive Committee throughout her tenure as a commissioner. She serves as vice-chair on the Chemical Dependency/Mental Health Board for Snohomish County. **She peaked in her acting career in 3rd grade where she starred as "Miss Nonsense Book."**

Jerry Strieck is currently serving his second term on the Children's Commission representing District 1, and is currently the co-chair for the Community Juvenile Justice Coalition. **Jerry is a lifelong resident of Snohomish County and enjoys working with the Commission on matters benefiting Snohomish County's children.**

Karen O'Mara Pullen joined the Commission in the spring of 2015, representing District 5. Since 2007 she has lived in Snohomish with her husband, Desmond; they moved from New England, where Karen grew up, to the Pacific Northwest – drawn by their grandchildren, the mountains, the mild winters and the coffee. She spent more than 40 years in education – as a teacher and administrator – with students grades K through 12 at a number of different schools on both coasts of the US. She currently serves part-time as an instructor and

curriculum coordinator in the Leadership Development Program of Rainier Scholars in Seattle. She volunteers at a variety of organizations for children in Snohomish County and serves on the Board of the Monroe/Sky Valley YMCA. Since her first teaching experience in segregated southern Africa, she remains committed to promoting equitable access to education for all students.

Ron Riter is a retired engineer who participated in the development, testing and safety analysis of software that is used to control airplanes. Ron's three children grew up in the country near Carnation while he did engineering work and was involved in King County juvenile diversion program. Ron has lived in Snohomish County for 22 years. He was a member of foster care citizen review board for 12 years and has been attending Children's Commission meetings for six years with interest in WeValueKids.org. Ron has served as Chair and has been a member of the Executive Committee. He enjoys spending time with his three children's families that includes four grandchildren. He is a member of the Everett Mountaineers Scramble & Snowshoe Committees and enjoys traveling. Ron represents Council District 2

Kristen Anderson is the 2015-2016 Co-Chair of the Snohomish County Children's Commission and has been a Commissioner for District 5 for the last 4 years. After growing up in Spokane and graduating from Washington State University (Go Cougs!), she moved to Snohomish County in 1998. Kristen, her husband, and two young children live in Lake Stevens and she works in the Mukilteo School District. In addition to the Children's Commission, Kristen participates in many local coalitions and collaborations across Snohomish County.

Kristen brings over 17 years of experience in grant/program management, drug and alcohol prevention science, and community organizing. Other areas of professional expertise include risk and protective factors, working with youth, understanding and navigating the public school system, and accessing local resources for families in need.

In her spare time Kristen loves to spend time with her family and friends, travel, read books, plan parties, and play with her kids. She also volunteers at her children's school and is an avid volunteer for the American Cancer Society. During the fall, you can find Kristen and her entire family at many Cougar football games and events as they are huge WSU fans!

Nancy Mickels has served on the Children's Commission since 2012 as a representative for Dist. 5 in Snohomish County.

As founder of Nancy's Noah's Ark Early Childhood facility in Mill Creek, she has served the children and families in the community for over 36 years. Nancy brings years of experience working with children developing engaging programs to inspire their curiosity, grow their intellect and diversity while learning compassion for one another.

Nancy has served on several boards including Parents as Teachers, Snohomish County Association for the Education of Young Children, and State Representative for the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She has worked collaboratively with Everett School District over the last 25 years on their Strategic Planning Teams and the statewide P-3 Literacy Program aligning early childhood education with public school programs K thru 3rd grade.

Nancy loves spending time with her family, her children and four grandchildren she considers her greatest joy. She enjoys crafts, swimming, and boating.

Charlotte Zissel has been a part of the early learning community for almost 30 years. She has been involved in family childcare, Montessori schools, corporate childcare. Her previous positions range from toddler teacher to center director. Charlotte currently works for

Childcare Aware Northwest and the Opportunity Council as a Coach and trainer. She enjoys spending time with her family and especially enjoys spending time in the outdoors.