

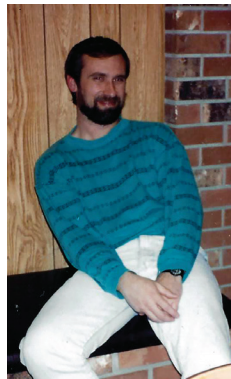


George Beanblossom Retires After 43 Years of Service!



Yes, you read that correctly: Our longstanding Executive Director, George Beanblossom, retired at the end of 2023. Although Cascade Connections will never be the same without George, our community feels extremely grateful for his decades of faithful service. Needless to say, George

will be sorely missed by Cascade Connections' staff, people we serve, and their families!



Allison Hill, our former Training Director, will be stepping into the role of Executive Director. Allison has worked at Cascade Connections for over 30 years, including 10 years of service as our group home administrator. Allison founded the Cascade Connections Training Department in 2011 and has served as our Training Director ever since.

Allison grew up in Whatcom County and is a foster parent with a family of six. She holds a Bachelor's in Psychology with a Sociology Minor from Trinity Western University,

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and she is a certified DSHS Community Trainer, RIGHT RESPONSE Instructor, Red Cross Instructor, True Colors Trainer, Health and Sexuality Trainer, and DDA Developmental Disabilities Specialty Trainer. She looks forward to bringing her knowledge and experience to bear as Cascade Connections' next Executive Director.

Allison and George have been trusted colleagues at Cascade Connections for decades, and when George announced his retirement at the agency picnic this summer, Allison emphasized: "We want to thank George for 43 years of service... how amazing, and what an impact you've made in our community!... We've gone from serving 12 individuals

to nearly 300." She added, "We hope to continue George's legacy and see even better and bigger things to come."

Cascade Connections held a casual, open-house retirement party for George at our Ferndale office on December 14th. The gathering was filled with laughter and a strong sense of camaraderie as colleagues, friends, and community members gathered to express their appreciation for George. Attendees enjoyed reconnecting with one another as they looked at decades of Cascade Connections photos and sampled the tasty finger foods provided.



To further recognize George, we have taken the opportunity to ask him a few questions about his work at Cascade Connections. His answers appear below, and they have much wisdom to offer!

What are some of the things you've loved or valued most about working at Cascade Connections?

George: *The people! I've had the privilege of working with many people with various backgrounds, and it's been very rewarding seeing the work we do affect peoples lives so much. Individuals we serve don't always see change very quickly, but we do see them bloom and grow over the years. In the early days, I remember parents and guardians sometimes telling us that their son or daughter could only live in a group home and only could achieve what a 5 or 6-year-old could, since this was told to them many times by a family doctor. It has been a privilege to watch those we serve exceed these expectations by leaps and bounds! I used to tell people that you get what you expect, and if you expect 100% out of someone and you get only 50%, you still get something. Everyone has gifts, and we all have needs. We lose out when we don't allow people to use their gifts. All of us have various things we can and can't do, and people just need to have a chance. Most of those who were told they couldn't move into the community now have jobs, live in their own apartments, and live happy and productive lives.*

What have you learned during your years of service to our agency?

George: *I can really say that the people I've worked with have been my teachers. They have taught me important lessons about what is really important in life: things like not taking yourself so seriously, realizing that you don't need to know everything, living one day at a time, and being thankful for the little things in life. Are the people we work with perfect? By no means! All of us are very imperfect and we all need each other. We all need to realize that we all make mistakes and hopefully we learn from those mistakes. I've really appreciated all the people that I've had the privilege to work for and with. We don't all come from the same background or think the same way, but we try to respect and*

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value each other. Did we all get along all the time? No, but I knew that I could always depend on my team. Even when I made mistakes, they were always there for me. Cascade Connections is very family friendly, and we are a big family!

What do you look forward to in the next chapter of your life?

George: *I don't think that you really retire – you just re-purpose! I've talked to a few of my retired friends, and they tell me that they are really much busier than when they were working. I will probably look for chances to volunteer and maybe work part time – I really don't know at this point. I also look forward to Cascade Connections' future because Allison will do a great job leading the team. She has a competent, gifted team that will take the agency to the next level in terms of growth and organization.*

Autumn Outings at Cascade Connections



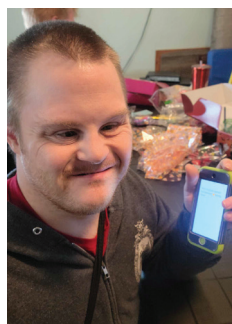
Heather and Ryan recently visited Bellewood Farms & Distillery, a very popular destination this time of year! Heather especially relished the tractor ride, which seemed to bring her joy for hours afterward as she commented several times: "This was a fun day!"

Ryan was particularly excited about having lunch at Bellewood, especially when he discovered fish and chips on the menu and ran into some friends of his. Ryan also spent ten minutes searching for the perfect pumpkin.

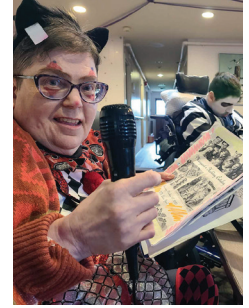


Meanwhile, East Lynden Supported Living community members Lisa and Kem enjoyed an autumn visit to another local farm where they saw cows, goats, sheep, pigs (and piglets!), and a lovely field full of pumpkins.

Over at our group home this fall, residents and staff hosted their biggest and best Halloween party yet. Well over 60 people stopped by, including community members and staff from many other Cascade Connections departments. There really was something for everyone to enjoy in the party's well-planned array of activities, which included cookie decorating, karaoke, coloring/crafts, a cake walk, a bone scavenger hunt, and a photo booth with three different backdrops. The festive menu included pumpkin-shaped pizzas, Caesar salad, fruit kabobs, and Halloween-themed treats, including a bubbling and steaming witch's brew. Thanks so much to everyone at the group home for hosting!



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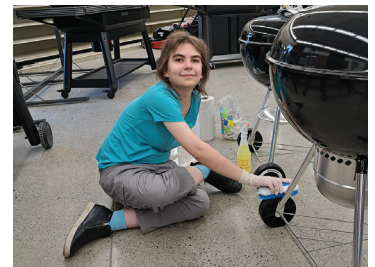
Kaitlyn Starts Work at Ace Hardware



Congratulations to Kaitlyn on her job at the new Ace Hardware in Blaine! Kaitlyn landed her Merchandise Stocker position after first completing a paid internship at Ace. Her Cascade Connections Vocational Services Employment Specialist, Tanya, supported Kaitlyn and Ace throughout this process.

As she helped the new, locally-owned hardware store prepare for its official opening, Kaitlyn enjoyed varied tasks such as assembling wheelbarrows and lawn furniture, cleaning grills and equipment, sweeping and dusting, cleaning windows, and assisting with putting up shelf brackets. Kaitlyn told Tanya that her job is a good opportunity to be productive and get out of the house. Kaitlyn also likes the variety of tasks at Ace Hardware, saying "it helps me focus as it's not the same repetitive thing every week." As Kaitlyn's job coach, Tanya appreciates Kaitlyn's inquisitive nature and desire to problem-solve: "It has been fun supporting her trying new things and proving that she can do things she hasn't done before, such as getting up on a ladder to clean windows!"

Ace Hardware owner Phillippe Boulos and manager Ray Maxon say that they are committed to Kaitlyn working there long-term, doing regular cleaning, organizing, and stocking when the store opens. Ray commented: "I appreciate Kaitlyn's attention to detail [...]. She is thorough almost to a fault, but that is what we prefer. She has a good attitude, and I know she will do a good job with whatever task she has."



Tanya really appreciates the work environment at Ace: "Kaitlyn's coworker Caleb has been excellent at teaching her how to do things such as put the wheelbarrow together, while also giving her space to problem-solve on her own first. Each week, Ray is open to having her help out with what they need, even if it's something more challenging. It's been a great work environment for Kaitlyn to learn and grow."

Way to go, Kaitlyn and Ace Hardware! We are honored to support your work!

Randy and Alex Visit Padilla Bay Reserve



Randy and Alex recently took a trip down to the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve down in Mount Vernon. Neither Randy nor Alex had been there before, and they seemed to really enjoy spending some quality time together as they admired the sea life in the tanks and interacted with creatures in the touch tank. Alex used his digital camera to photograph many of these fascinating critters as well.



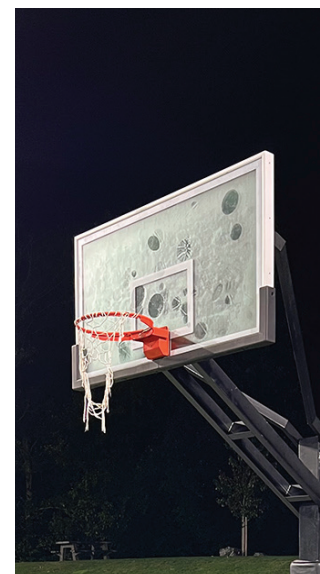
Shooting Hoops at Bender Fields



When Kevin, James, and Jim found out that the Bender Fields basketball courts in Lynden are open until 10pm, they opted to head over at 8:30pm to shoot a few spontaneous hoops.

James, Kevin, and

Chase played basketball while Jim and Senna, a new staff-in-training, cheered them on. James was really excited when he sank a three-pointer! Nice one, James!



Thank You to Our Donors!

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Special thanks to the dozens of individuals who have donated since July 2023!

FitEvo Wins Cascade Connections' Employer of the Quarter for Fall 2023!



Congratulations to supportive employer FitEvo, the winner of our Employer of the Quarter award this season!

Located on Iowa Street in Bellingham, FitEvo has been in business since the late 1990s. This spacious, locally owned and operated fitness center focuses on

creating affordable ways for people to improve health. For an unusually low monthly membership fee, gym users get access to a wide array of fitness classes as well as the usual free weights and fitness equipment. The gym also features personal training opportunities, a kid's club, a smoothie bar, and a cardio theater where you can watch movies during your workout!

Best of all, FitEvo employs Josh and Larry, both of whom receive vocational services from Cascade Connections. Josh cleans and sanitizes machines and other high-touch areas, and Larry cleans the locker rooms and cardio deck. Josh and Larry also contribute substantially to the positive workplace culture at FitEvo.

According to Josh's Cascade Connections job coach Jackie, FitEvo "has really fostered a supportive and inclusive environment for all its employees, including Josh. It's clear that he feels a part of the team as much as he is! As a job coach, one of the best parts of the shift is seeing him and his coworkers help each other out, joke around, and have a good time."

This past August, FitEvo and Josh assisted Cascade Connections with advocacy by hosting State Senator Sharon Shewmake during her tour of FitEvo to learn more about supported employment. Josh got to meet Senator Shewmake, show her what he does for work, and give her an idea about how supported employment works.

FitEvo has been very supportive of both Josh and Larry as

they grow and learn on the job. Josh's other job coach, Abi, recalls how "back in the summer months, Josh asked for additional tasks during his shift. His coworker Avery helped create a new task list for Josh and even laminated it!"



Meanwhile, according to Larry's job coach, Riley, "Fitness Evolution has played a pivotal role in creating a workplace culture that is conducive to Larry's personal and professional growth." When Cascade Connections approached Larry's manager, Jerad, with ideas for how Larry could work more independently, Jerad replied affirmatively: "Well, isn't that the goal?!" Jerad has encouraged Larry's growth by attending meetings to discuss fading plans with Larry and his job coaches that will help foster more independence at work.



FitEvo's inclusive culture was in evidence on Larry's birthday a couple months ago, when his coworkers went out of their way to appreciate him with cupcakes, a birthday song, and even an announcement over the loudspeaker. When we posted about this celebration on our social media, FitEvo commented: "We had a great time celebrating Larry on his birthday! And we appreciate his hard work, quick wit, and playful banter about sports teams!"

Cascade Connections Employment Consultant Rhiannon emphasizes the FitEvo management team's impressive dedication to creating a positive and accommodating work environment: "when complications arose with Larry's work routine or schedule, the management team has truly shown that they care about their employees. Jerad and

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Avery have worked with Larry and Cascade staff as a team, showing compassion, kindness, and a desire to make sure everyone feels heard, comfortable, and safe.”

When asked about FitEvo’s partnership with us, Jerad replied: “It is an absolute honor working with Cascade Connections to help employ amazing individuals, Josh and Larry. The relationships we have built with them, and the

inclusive environment that our entire staff helps promote, ensure that our Cascade Connections team members and partners feel supported and valued! Our business and the culture of our gym wouldn’t be the same without them!”

As Cascade Connections job coach Riley put it, “FitEvo offers a great example of what inclusion and empowerment can look like for the people we serve.” Thank you, FitEvo, for setting an example for other local businesses! We look forward to a continued partnership with you.

Cascade Connections Receives \$14,100 Check from Haggen Inspiring Change Together Fundraiser

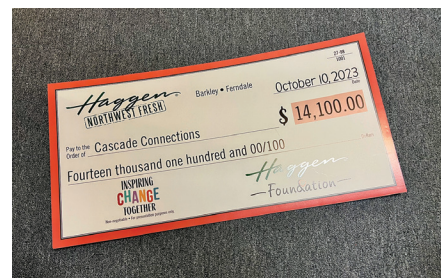


This fall, Cascade Connections received a \$14,100 check from the Haggen Foundation! Donated by Haggen and generous Haggen

shoppers during Haggen's 2023 Inspiring Change Together this past summer, these funds will go directly toward funding financial literacy and work-preparedness courses for individuals with disabilities. These courses support job seekers and employees with disabilities in developing

crucial interviewing skills, healthy workplace relationships, and financial skills such as personal budgeting and account management.

Thank you so much to Haggen, for choosing us as a fundraiser recipient, and to all those who donated! We are so honored to partner with Haggen in inspiring change in our community!



Thank You, CTK Volunteers!



Yet again this year, our faithful community partner Christ the King Community Church (CTK) Bellingham rallied more than two dozen volunteers to spruce up Cascade Connections’ group home – inside and out! With

the help of group home staff, who had prepped the areas in advance, CTK's amazingly helpful volunteers painted several of the home's main rooms and did a bunch of yard work, including purchasing bark and trimming trees. The volunteers also fixed four kitchen cabinets faces that were broken and scratched up, and they plan to put a new floor in one of the residents' bedrooms over the next couple of months!

For years now, CTK has been supporting Cascade Connections in various ways, including supplying volunteers and donating resources toward agency activities and events. Our group home Director, Tara, expressed her heartfelt gratitude for CTK's ongoing commitment to our community: "It has been such a blessing to have all the help of the church volunteers! A big shout out to the coordinators as well -- it takes time to make sure that big projects like these go smoothly." Thank you so much, CTK, for always going above and beyond in your support for Cascade Connections and the individuals we serve!



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Please visit us on the web at
cascadeconnections.org
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Fall 2023 Newsletter

Cascade Connections

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