

Blaine Ace Hardware Wins Employer of the Quarter



Cascade Connections has chosen Blaine Ace Hardware to be celebrated as Cascade Connections' inclusive employer for this quarter! Ace Hardware was founded in 1924 and is the largest non-grocery retail cooperative in the country. The locally-owned location in Blaine fully opened in February 2024, and they have started things off right by being a great employer for Kaitlyn, a recipient of Cascade Connections' Vocational Services. Kaitlyn started at Ace last year, before the store officially opened. She 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 Kaitlyn helped the store get ready for its official opening, she enjoyed a variety of tasks, including assembling wheelbarrows and lawn furniture, cleaning grills and equipment, sweeping and dusting, cleaning windows, and assisting with putting up shelf brackets. Once the store opened and Kaitlyn learned to take the bus by herself, the store increased her hours to 3.5 hours per week. She now does regular stocking, organizing, and cleaning. She has learned how to stock items by matching SKU numbers/UPC codes, and she uses the Zebra scanner to print price tags. Kaitlyn is also learning to follow plan-o-grams to set shelves for merchandise and track inventory.

Store Manager Ray Maxon says that Kaitlyn has exceeded his expectations with all of these new things she's learned! He plans to continue to challenge her to see how much she can take on, including training her on how to use the key machine to replicate keys. Phillippe Boulos, the owner of the Blaine and Ferndale Ace Hardware stores, agrees with Ray Maxon that they are committed to Kaitlyn working at Ace long-term. 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."



Kaitlyn really enjoys her job at Ace. She 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. She says, "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 in trying new things and proving that she can do things she hasn't done before, such as following plan-o-grams to set merchandise locations and using ladders for cleaning."

Tanya also really appreciates the work environment at Ace. She observes, "Ray is open to having Kaitlyn help out with what they need each week, even if it's something more





challenging. It's been a great work environment for Kaitlyn to learn and grow." Kaitlyn's coworkers have been a big part of her growth. Tanya reports: "Kaitlyn's coworker Jess, who has been helping her learn stocking tasks, is an excellent natural support, very patient and supportive, and so are Kaitlyn's other coworkers Mar, Christina, and Caleb." Tanya added: "Everyone has been excellent at teaching Kaitlyn how to do new tasks, giving her space to problem-solve on her own, and being open for any questions or help she needs."

Many thanks to everyone at Ace for not only hiring inclusively, but also providing on-the-job training in ways that allow Kaitlyn to flourish! Ace Hardware certainly deserves the Employer of the Quarter Award. We look forward to a continued partnership in the years to come.

THOSE THAT ARE DOING IT RIGHT!

Since 2005, Cascade Connections has recognized local employers who are "doing it right" in their hiring of employees with disabilities. Employers who receive this recognition have contributed substantially to Cascade Connections' mission. By offering meaningful employment, these local partners have helped us to empower individuals with disabilities to enhance their quality of life.

What does it mean to do it right? Our recognized employers have been open to looking at their hiring practices a little differently. In collaboration with our employment consultants, these employers have formed partnerships that benefit business and support our applicants. By working together, we have changed the face of employment in our community.

Please join us in thanking all of Whatcom County's current and former employer recognition recipients for helping Cascade Connections to provide opportunities for everyone.

A Child's Life Learning Center
Among Friends Adult Family Homes
Anvil Corporation
Avamere Bellingham Healthcare
BAAY
Blaine Ace Hardware
Burlington
Cascade DAFO
CHS Northwest Bellingham Farm & Home
Connections Speech Language Pathology
Costco
Denny's

Downtown Bellingham Partnership
Elenbaas Country Store
Family Care Network
FastCap
FitEvo
Fred Meyer
Haggen
Hannegan Home and Farm
Justesen Industries Inc.
Marlin's Auto Service
Marshalls
Millard Mall Services

Northwest Health Care Linen
Red's Aquarium & Pet Supply
Rusty Wagon
Safeway
Samuel's Furniture
Soy House
Target
The Seedlings Early Learning Center
Walmart
Whatcom Transportation Authority
Woods Coffee

Cascade Connections Vocational Services has been providing employment services throughout Whatcom County since 1992. We are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce. Join us to create opportunities for everyone. For more information, contact us at **360-647-9087** or visit our website at: cascadecconnections.org/vocational-services