



Mark's Story



Meet Mark, a member of Cascade Connections' Board of Directors and a recipient of our Supported Living services in West Lynden. Mark is well known and loved in the Cascade Connections community and beyond for his stories and his excellent sense of humor. Mark was born in 1948

and has achieved many accomplishments, including a Bachelor of Arts from St. Mary's in California and a Masters in Recreation Education from University of Iowa. Mark joined the Cascade Connections community about 10 years ago and currently receives 24-hour Supported Living services at his house in Lynden.



Although his mobility has become quite limited over the years, Mark still spends hours carefully folding his own laundry because he cherishes his independence. He also spends hours at his computer writing stories, which he often shares with staff. He is currently working on an autobiography with the help of a hospice volunteer. Mark loves Christmas and writes an annual "Bobby Bear" Christmas letter, which is a reference to a stuffed bear and book from his childhood.

Mark really appreciates his housemates, Larry, Eric,

and Galen, and Mark's sense of humor contributes to a convivial house environment. Mark and Galen sometimes race down each other in their electric wheelchairs, and the housemates often eat dinner together and sometimes go on fun excursions together around Whatcom County and beyond. Mark frequently requests to "go find the donut fairy" – which is code for taking a group trip to LaFeen's Donuts!

Mark loves telling stories and joking around with staff, with whom he has accumulated lots of inside jokes and traditions over the years. He has nicknames for all of his staff and enjoys teasing them. Cascade Connections Site Manager Jessica told us that Mark jokingly calls her "Miss Nice" when she takes them to get donuts and "Miss Mean" when she is getting serious about something! After Thanksgiving, Jessica and Mark also have a ritual of going ugly Christmas sweater shopping at Value Village. Mark loves attending Cascade Connections' events such as our agency picnic and our Christmas party.



Cascade Connections Supported Living team in West Lynden has assisted Mark in pursuing various other interests and hobbies. A fan of Michael Bublé, Mark attended one of his concerts in Seattle a few years ago. Mark also tried kayaking for the first time at the Community Boating Center two summers ago, and he went again



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last summer. Mark and his housemates and staff went to a Seattle Mariners game together in 2023. In 2024, they took a trip to the Museum of Flight, where Mark recalled many memories and stories. Mark also goes swimming at Forge Fitness and attends church on Saturday nights at St. Joseph's Catholic in Lynden. He has befriended his pastor, Pastor Ben, who often stops by the house to visit Mark.



Our Creative/Marketing Department staff recently had the opportunity to interview Mark about his life and his contributions to our community, and he gave us permission to share the following excerpts.



Mark, you've been a significant community member here in Whatcom County for a long time. Have you always lived here?

I was born here in this area in 1948, but I grew up in the Bay area. My parents were in the Navy, and my mom was a nurse in the medical corps. When I was little I used to fall down a lot, so my parents felt like they were not able to provide all of the physical therapy and support I needed. When I was three, I attended a boarding school in California that provided intensive physical therapy and occupational therapy. I attended grade schools, graduated from high school in Oakland, and attended college at St. Mary's College of California before moving to Whatcom County in 1981.



Did you enjoy college?

Well, I wanted to fit in, be a regular guy, and party, but there were some barriers. However, I performed well academically and graduated with a degree in literature. I love reading and hearing people's stories, and I actually write stories myself. I am currently writing a love story featuring a girl with cerebral palsy and a boy without a disability.

You have donated a lot of your time to various community efforts over the years. Will you tell us about some of those?

Back in California, I was president of the Lion's Club. I received the Melvin Jones' Award and am now a Lion's Club member for life. I've been involved in the Lion's Club in Lynden as well. I helped them establish Lion's Camp Horizons, a nonprofit that provides recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

I joined Cascade Connections' Board of Directors several years ago, and I assisted with the 2017 Wheelchair Van Fundraiser video (<https://bit.ly/cc-2017-fundraiser>). I also help the Cascade Connections' Training Center with staff training and orientation.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not volunteering?

I love getting out to see people, riding around my neighborhood, and having people over to my house. I also enjoy watching basketball, baseball, golf, football, and the TV show Perry Mason. My favorite sports teams include the Hawkeyes, Mariners, and Giants.



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What do you tell new staff on orientation day?

I give them an idea of what it's like to be a caregiver and how they should treat people. I ask them to reflect on the reasons why they want to work with people with disabilities. I ask them to always remember that they are caring for a person and that to be successful caregivers, they need to get to know their clients and how to best support them.

I also share some of the things that are most important to me: that I have the chance to try to do things as independently as I can, that my caregivers take the time to listen to me, and that I get to participate in the community.

I tell them that the truth is, caregiving can be a challenging job but it is also very rewarding! I fell in 2010 and lost the ability to walk, and I mention to the students that I am someone who needs a lot of assistance with personal care, including two-person Hoyer lift transfers out of my electric wheelchair into the bathroom and into bed. I tell staff that caregiving may be a hard job but it's worth it, and I wish them luck!

Site Manager Jessica, who works closely with Mark, told us that Mark looks forward to participating in Welcome & Orientation Day and frequently asks when the next one is happening. Mark has told Jessica that his assisting with caregiver training adds to his sense of purpose and belonging in his community. Our Training Coordinator Michael had the following to say about Mark's contribution:

"Mark provides an excellent look into the future of our caregivers. He has goals and a way of life that he wants to live on his terms, with the support of caregivers assisting him to get there. Mark's participation in our new hire process is of vital importance toward increasing our staff's understanding of how to support our clients' agency and independence. Mark Hildebrand is a pillar within his community who advocates for individuals with disabilities by breaking down potential biases associated with people with disabilities."



Our Marketing/Creative Department staff recently had the opportunity to sit in on Mark's conversation with new staff, and it is worth adding that Mark's sense of humor made itself apparent almost immediately! He elicited quite a few smiles from the new staff as he assured them, with a twinkle in his eye, that he and his housemates in West Lynden "are always on our best behavior!"

Needless to say, the Cascade Connections community would not be the same without Mark! It is a privilege to work with him.

2024 Community Satisfaction Survey



Please fill out our annual community satisfaction survey! Your feedback helps Cascade Connections make decisions about strategic planning, policies, and service offerings.

<https://bit.ly/cc-2024-community-survey>

Cascade Connections Home Care Services for Seniors

Are you looking for part-time or round-the-clock home care services for yourself or a loved one? Do you know any caregivers who could use a break for a few hours or more per week? Cascade Connections Home Care can help!

Have questions?
Call us at: 360-594-4216

Kyle Joins Ferndale Supported Living



Cascade Connections is thrilled to introduce Kyle, a charismatic young man who recently began receiving Supported Living services in Ferndale. Our Ferndale Area Manager, Nikki, was thrilled when Kyle's family called Cascade Connections a year ago to tell us that they had a three-bedroom house

where Kyle could live if he had the right Supported Living services. It took longer than anticipated to get the house ready, but Kyle finally got to move into his new home in April. Nikki and Ferndale Site Manager Ryan S. are excited to support Kyle and his housemate James, who moved over from East Lynden Supported Living.



Cascade Connections' Marketing/Creative Department staff met with Kyle and Ryan recently in order to get to know Kyle a bit and introduce him to our community. We learned that Kyle grew up in a commercial fisherman family and is a hardworking guy with a lot of skills, knowledge, and experience in boating and fishing. Kyle's also very fun-loving and social, and he has lots of local connections from growing up here in Whatcom County. When asked about this, Kyle smiled and declared:



"Everybody knows me, baby!"

Ryan agreed that Kyle seems to know people wherever he goes and enjoys joking around with friends and acquaintances at various local coffee shops and restaurants such as Cruisin' Coffee and Chihuahuas.

Kyle has several strong likes

and interests, which he shared in his interview. He enjoys riding quads at the 10 acres near his dad's shop, watching WNBA games and other sports (particularly the Huskies and the Seahawks), playing the drums, and listening to music. He loves the band AC/DC so much that he requested that we play a song during the interview – which we did! Kyle also likes Taylor Swift, saying "you can't stop her, baby, you can't stop her from Swiftin'!"

Kyle and his housemate James are really enjoying each other's company so far, joking around and engaging in some friendly (and productive) competition to get tasks



completed! Kyle has dubbed himself and James "the Birch Street Boys"! Both guys have expressed interest in finding girlfriends, and Ferndale staff are hoping to support Kyle and James

in navigating the dating world and participating in the Healthy Relationships course offered by our Training Department. Kyle's other goals include playing with the band Out of the Ashes, going to see an AC/DC cover band called Hell's Belles, and going to a WWU game in November.

We are so thrilled to welcome Kyle to our community, and we look forward to being part of his successes!



Park Bowl Wins Employer of the Quarter



Congratulations to Park Bowl in Bellingham for being awarded Cascade Connections Employer of the Quarter for Spring 2024! A family business that has been in our area since 1954, Park Bowl is a 28-lane bowling alley and family entertainment center that includes an arcade, pool tables, and Splitz Grille food counter and bar service. This

inclusive employer has employed Cascade Connections' Vocational Services customer Caelan since October of 2022.

Caelan started working at Park Bowl after graduating from the Transitions Program at his high school. He currently works 15 hours per week as a Porter/Lane Attendant, and his responsibilities include helping with food orders, monitoring the lanes, helping with shoes at the front desk, and cleaning (when needed). The job can be fast-paced – there's lots of walking involved and plenty of tasks to be done. Fortunately, Caelan thrives in this kind of work environment. In fact, when asked what he likes most about his job, Caelan responded: "That it's always moving!"

Caelan's Cascade Connections job coach, Abi, really enjoys supporting Caelan on the job: "I really appreciate his sense of humor and the positive energy he brings to his workplace." Abi is genuinely grateful for the efforts made by the managers and staff at Park Bowl to understand and support Caelan at work. In the past 6 months, Caelan began living with roommates for the first time. Abi appreciates

that "Caelan's coworkers also give him advice about getting transportation to and from work, budgeting tips for meals and apartment living, etc. You can tell they really care about him as an employee and as a person – they want him to succeed."

When Abi checks in with staff at Park Bowl, Caelan's managers and coworkers tell Abi: "It is wonderful to have Caelan here!" Caelan's coworkers also enjoy that Caelan can be "such a jokester!" His manager Holly says that Caelan provides "good comedic relief and has good banter, but knows when to be serious." Park Bowl management emphatically declares: "We wish we had two of him."

Congratulations, Park Bowl, on your great employee – and on winning Employer of the Quarter! By becoming an inclusive employer, you set a great example to other businesses in Whatcom County. We hope to continue this partnership in the years to come.



Our Vocational Services

Since 1992, Cascade Connections has created more than 1,070 employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Whatcom County.

Join other employers who value respect and inclusion! All services are at no cost to a business.

**For more details, please
call us at: 360-647-9087**

E-Newsletter



You can get this newsletter in your email! To sign up, go to:

cascadeconnections.org/newsletters

Challen Achieves Health Victory



Our West Lynden Supported Living team is delighted to announce that thanks to some dietary changes, Challen's Crohn's disease has gone into full remission and she is enjoying new levels of activity out in the community!

Challen began receiving services from Cascade

Connections in 2016, so she has been with us for almost 10 years. She used to stay in bed a lot due to stomach pain from her Crohn's disease, until she and her care team found the Mediterranean diet that has done wonders for her health! While sticking to a new diet has not been easy, Challen has always been willing to try new meals. In fact, she now takes great pride in helping pick out, shop for, and prepare her meals.

Now that she feels much better, Challen is a lot more active and has made it a part of her daily routine to get out in the community. Her ability



to walk has increased tremendously! She used to only be able to walk for short minutes at a time, but she can now walk over a mile with her staff. Challen enjoys picking out places to adventure! She often walks by the library, the mall, Boulevard Park, and downtown areas in Lynden and Bellingham. She has explored several local parks, such as Berthusen Park and Birch Bay State Park, and she also takes frequent walks to a nearby gas station she likes to visit. In combination with the Mediterranean diet, all this exercise has helped Challen lose over 30 pounds!



Challen's care team is very excited and proud of her for making such huge breakthroughs with her health. Great job, Challen! And many thanks to the West Lynden team for supporting her!



If you would like to learn more about Challen, you can read her success story on our website:

<https://cascadeconnections.org/challens-story/>

2024 Inspiring Change Together Fundraising Campaign



Haggen has selected Cascade Connections again as a recipient of funds from their "Haggen - Inspiring Change Together" fundraising campaign this summer! **Through August 6, 2024**, the Ferndale Haggen grocery store will

ask customers if they would like to donate to Cascade Connections when checking out at the register. We will

use these funds to renovate our group home's bathroom counters, sinks, and laundry room, so that residents in wheelchairs can access these facilities and achieve greater independence, satisfaction, and confidence.

Thank you, Haggen, for being such a generous and reliable community partner to Cascade Connections – we are extremely grateful for your support! Check out Haggen's website or search #HaggenHelps on social media to learn about the many ways Haggen inspires change in local communities.

First Fed Foundation Grants \$5K for Interviewing Skills Workshop



Cascade Connections is thrilled to announce that the First Fed Foundation has chosen Cascade Connections as a Community Support Grant recipient! This \$5,000 grant will make it possible for more job-seekers with disabilities to participate in Cascade Connections' Interviewing Skills Workshops.

Many of the people we serve benefit from extra support in learning the social cues and professional expectations that help people get and keep jobs. Due to many factors,



individuals with disabilities usually do not have access to the same work opportunities as other people. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with disabilities are far more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than those without disabilities.

Cascade Connections works to close these equity gaps by expanding access to training that increases career opportunities for job-seekers with disabilities.



Our Interviewing Skills Workshop (ISW) helps these individuals to build confidence and skills that help them get and keep jobs.

This workshop also connects participants with local employers who participate in the course's mock interviews. These photos were taken during our most recent set of mock interviews, where local employers from Fred Meyer, Mountain Pacific Bank, Edward Jones, and Archer Halliday



interviewed ISW participants to give them some realistic interviewing practice! We are very grateful to these employers for their support.

Data gathered by our ISW instructor suggests that in the 15 years this workshop has been presented, about 75% of unemployed ISW graduates get jobs after taking this course. The support of local businesses and foundations like First Fed Foundation make a measurable impact on the lives of those we serve because jobs change lives!

We are extremely grateful to the First Fed Foundation for partnering with us to level the playing field for job-seekers with disabilities.

Thank You to Our Donors!

Donations from Foundations and Churches:

Hope in Christ Church, Netherlands Reformed Church, The Lairmont Foundation, The Norcliffe Foundation, Third Christian Reformed Church

Donations From Businesses:

Braven Auto & Metals, Kroger

Memorial Donation in Memory of Parker Duncan:

Laura Cohn

Special thanks to the dozens of individuals who have donated since March 2024!

Please visit us on the web at
cascadeconnections.org
to learn more.



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Summer 2024 Newsletter

Cascade Connections

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We Are Hiring!

View our current openings here:
bit.ly/cascadejobs

Save the Date! - 2024 Stakeholder's Meeting

Cascade Connections invites you to our Stakeholder's Meeting, to be held **at Pioneer Pavilion in Ferndale from 6:30pm to 9:00pm on Wednesday, August 21st**. Over pie and coffee, we will outline the progress we've made since last year and identify plans for the coming year and beyond. Our staff will offer brief reports on each of our programs, as well as a financial report.

We will also discuss the feedback we receive on our 2024 Community Satisfaction Survey, so please fill out our survey (<https://bit.ly/cc-2024-community-survey>), whether or not you can make the meeting!

Your feedback helps Cascade Connections make decisions about strategic planning, policies, and service offerings. We highly value your opinion, and we look forward to gathering with you!

