



Lions and Trains and Gremlins - Oh My!



For as long as her Cascade Connections supporters have known her, Heather has relished being on the move! During the 8-10 hours she spends with support staff each day, Heather likes to stay busy with outings, whether they be everyday errands or treasure hunts at local record stores and

thrift stores. For nearly a year now, Heather has aspired to undertake a longer, more ambitious trip on an Amtrak train. When train service finally returned to Bellingham just a couple of months ago, Heather and her support team began brainstorming for a meaningful adventure that would include a train ride. Eventually they decided on a trip to Seattle's Chinatown to see the Lion Dance, a traditional Chinese dance performed on auspicious occasions such as the Spring Festival at the end of the Lunar New Year celebration.

The story of how and why Heather and her staff chose the Lion Dance as a destination is perhaps just as worthy of telling as the journey itself! You see, Heather spends much of her time engaging her incredibly active and creative imagination, which is well populated with characters and scenes from old TV shows and rather obscure "B" movies that she first watched as a young person in the 70s and

80s. Heather remembers these media in great detail and references them all the time. Shows such as *Sesame Street* and the show *Electric Company* have made a deep imprint on Heather's memory. She also loves old martial arts films and asks staff almost daily about a particular scene from a film called *Forced Vengeance*, featuring Chuck Norris. She is also particularly fascinated by a literacy-focused episode of *Electric Company* (from 1971!) in which Spider-Man crushes cans and fights enemies using words.



Heather's rich inner life often prompts difficult-to-fulfill support requests. She sometimes asks the staff to dress up as various characters from her favorite shows and movies, or to take her to distant locales such as Sesame Street, Disneyland, or Puerto Rico. Fortunately, Cascade Connections' Assistant Site Manager Ian, who oversees Heather's support, often comes up with creative solutions that work well for Heather. During the pandemic, when few places were open to visit, Ian often drove Heather to local parks where they would use their imaginations to transform the place into Heather's desired destination.

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Special thanks to the dozens of individuals who have donated since November 2022!

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Ian also takes the time to research Heather's interests. He once wrote to the University of Maryland to retrieve a script of the much-beloved Electric Company Spider-Man can-crusher episode, which cannot be found online. Ian has even created a 12-page guide to help other staff participate in Heather's world.

Heather's interest in the Lion Dance first originated several months ago, during her search for a new cat to adopt after her beloved Cami died last year. Heather wanted a cat named Gizmo, who was up for adoption at Neko Cat Cafe, but he ended up being adopted by someone else. Heather eventually adopted a very sweet cat named Maude from the Humane Society, but her encounters with Gizmo had gotten her thinking about the eccentric 1984 film Gremlins. She was particularly fascinated by a scene in which the father character takes a trip down to Chinatown and brings Gizmo the gremlin home with him. That scene, in turn, reminded Heather of an episode of Reading Rainbow in which LeVar Burton visits Chinatown and watches the traditional Lion Dance.

Hearing Heather recalling these scenes inspired Ian to suggest the Lion Dance, which was coming up on February 4th in downtown Seattle, as a destination for Heather's Amtrak journey. Heather was thrilled by the Lion Dance idea and eagerly began preparing to ring in the Year of the Water Rabbit! Heather likes to live her experiences fully by belonging to and embodying whatever she's doing, so she took multiple trips to Value Village to find the perfect outfit for the journey. She settled on a kimono-style robe and even asked Lilly, one of Heather's Direct Support Professionals, to dye her hair black for the occasion.



The Lion Dance is said to bring good luck and prosperity for the coming year and to scare away bad spirits. The fundamental movements of the dance originate in Chinese martial arts, so Ian and Heather took some time to learn about and watch videos of some local kung fu schools. Ian

wrote down some Chinese words for Heather and they hung them up in her house. He also made her a special folder with maps and pictures that helped her to know what to expect on her upcoming trip.

The train times were so limited that the trip would not fit into a single-day journey, but Heather's support staff rose to the occasion! Lilly agreed to accompany Heather for an overnight trip so that they could have the Amtrak train experience. Heather and Lilly would take the connecting bus



down and return on the Amtrak train the following morning. They booked a hotel right next to the park where the Lion Dance would occur.

After much anticipation, the day finally arrived! Heather and Lilly enjoyed looking out the large bus windows during the journey down to Seattle. When they arrived, Chinatown was challenging to navigate due to the crowd of people gathered for the celebration. However, Heather and Lilly managed to pick up lunch and take it back to their hotel where they ate it as they watched the dancers going by in their wonderful costumes. Heather does not usually like crowds or loud noises, but her excitement about the trip helped her to accept the throngs of people, firecrackers, and everything else as part of the adventure. In fact, when a minor car accident occurred right near where Lilly and Heather were walking, Heather merely commented to Lilly: "Well, we are in the city!"

Heather enthusiastically engaged with many of the people they encountered. She talked to some Amazon workers who were on strike and signed their petition, and she remarked to Lilly how cute the Seattle police looked in their uniforms. Heather also enjoyed stopping into various shops and asking the store clerks what they sell at their store. Heather told Lilly that she wanted to



find the grandfather from Gremlins and pick up her own Gizmo. She eventually purchased a cute stuffed animal as a substitute for a gremlin.

When Heather and Lilly finally turned in for the evening, sleep proved somewhat elusive due to the new environment and the excitement in the air! A bit tired the next morning, Heather shed a few tears when it was time to leave because she didn't want the trip to be over. Lilly reminded her that the excitement of the train ride still lay ahead! She also asked Heather what would be the first thing she'd do when she got home. Heather replied: "Hang out with Maude!" Spending time with her own little lion (house cat), whom

Heather says resembles Simba from Disney's The Lion King, was a very cheering thought.

As they settled in on the Amtrak train, Lilly helped Heather to navigate the train's uneven surfaces and rocking sensation. Heather had lots of questions and enjoyed interacting with the friendly train conductors. The journey came to a particularly happy close when they pulled into the station back in Fairhaven and glimpsed none other than Ian, waiting there on the train platform to pick them up! Surprised and delighted, Heather recounted to Ian her Seattle adventures and train experience. She added that luckily the train ride wasn't like the one in the movie Bullet Train, in which huge fights break out between five assassins on a train trip across Japan!

Heather's Lion Dance experience clearly brought the joy of life to all involved and will doubtless be stored in Heather's amazing memory forever. Thank you to Cascade Connections Supported Living for going the extra mile to empower Heather and others to pursue their dreams. Congratulations to Heather on braving the journey! We hope that many more train trips and adventures await her.

Jim Moves to East Lynden Supported Living



Our Cascade Connections Supported Living team in East Lynden recently welcomed Jim. Jim lived with his parents and received Home Care services from Cascade Connections before transitioning into Supported Living in November, 2022.

Social by nature, Jim thrives in a supported living environment

where he has lots of time with housemates and staff. He particularly enjoys playing video games with staff. Jim also appreciates routine and enjoys watching sports, eating his favorite comfort foods, and listening to Western music.

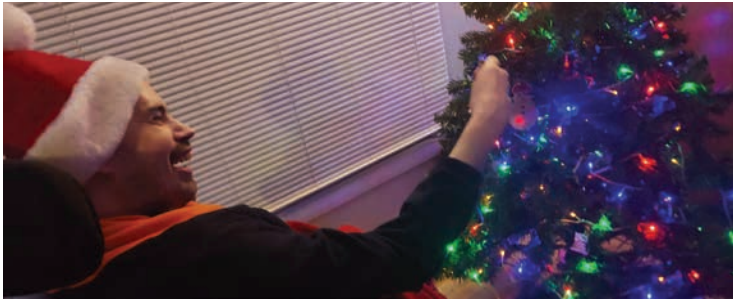
Jim enjoys exploring the wider community as well. He recently went out to watch his housemates Kevin and Corey

perform in their band, Out of the Ashes. Jim's support staff also have supported him in going to the Max Higbee Center again after a pandemic-related hiatus.

Our East Lynden team looks forward to supporting Jim further as he pursues his goals, develops new skills, and builds relationships in his community.



Cascade Connections Christmas Festivities



Our community really enjoyed celebrating Christmas together this past December. As usual, anticipation and preparation were an important part of the holiday fun! Cascade Connections Supported Living community member Chad and Site Manager Bea got into the Christmas spirit by watching Christmas movies, listening to Christmas music, and decorating Chad's Christmas tree with lights and ornaments. As the above photos shows, Chad really liked wearing the Santa hat and grinned the whole time!



Meanwhile, over at the group home, residents and staff prepared for Christmas by creating and decorating salt-dough Christmas ornaments from scratch! After making the dough, cutting it using cookie cutters, and waiting a day for it to dry, everyone participated in a painting and glitter party that resulted in some pretty snazzy ornaments. Before long, the house Christmas tree was glowing with bright candy canes, angels, and snowmen!

On December 10th, 2022, community members and staff from across Cascade Connections' several departments gathered at The Four Points by Sheraton for our first agency-wide, in-person Cascade Connections Christmas Party since December of 2019! The party brought together many friends and supporters who had not seen one another in years. The ballroom's large, festively decorated space served our purposes well and offered plenty of room for people to move about freely. The hotel provided a lovely buffet lunch of honey-roasted salmon, rosemary chicken, roasted vegetables, and Caesar salad. As they ate and mingled, attendees enjoyed viewing a 1.5-hour slideshow featuring hundreds of great photos of the Cascade Connections community. Our very popular Cascade Connections Santa also made an appearance and brought joy and merriment! Thanks so much to everyone who helped with or attended the Cascade Connections Christmas party. It was wonderful to revive this annual holiday tradition and reconnect with one another.



Dinner Out in Lynden

Heather, Nichole, and Meleah enjoyed a dinner out at Red Robin recently, along with support staff Eduardo, Emily, and Itzel. Having this casual, social time together felt really important. Meleah has had some trouble getting out of the house due to anxiety, but she had a blast eating dinner with friends! Nichole has not had housemates in quite some time, so being able to socialize with her neighbors is great for her as well. Thanks to our East Lynden Supported Living team for helping to keep the good times rolling!

Eric Visits the Arcade

On New Year's Eve, Eric closed out 2022 with a trip to the Ruckus Room Arcade and Fun Center with Cascade Connections Supported Living Site Manager Jessica. Eric particularly loved playing air hockey, spinning the prize wheel, and beating Jessica at the Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter game.



Cascade Connections Loves Park Bowl



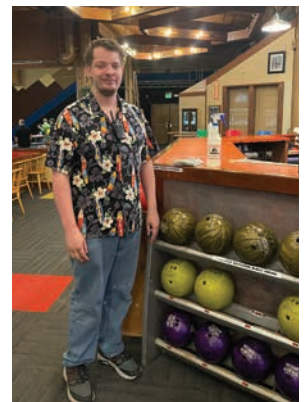
Cascade Connections' Supported Living community in West Lynden took advantage of Park Bowl's great \$2 Tuesday bowling deal recently. Fun was had by all as they played this affordable, classic game in a relaxed community atmosphere! Meanwhile, Cascade Connections

Vocational Services Department's Employee Enrichment Committee also planned and held a department bowling party at Park Bowl this winter. Cascade Connections provided attendees' shoe rentals and first game, and each employee was paid for their first hour of fun. Twelve staff showed up and had a great time! Bowling scores did not matter - everyone laughed a lot and enjoyed spending time with their coworkers.

Our Vocational team was especially happy to give Park Bowl their business because Park Bowl fosters an inclusive work culture and employs someone we serve. Caelan



works as a Porter/Lane Attendant at Park Bowl in Bellingham for about 15 hours a week. His job responsibilities include helping with food orders, monitoring the lanes, helping with shoes at the front desk, and cleaning (when needed). Caelan's 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: "In the short time that I have gotten to know Caelan, I really appreciate his sense of humor and the positive energy he brings to his workplace." When Abi checks in with staff at Park Bowl, Caelan's managers and coworkers echo these sentiments, telling Abi: "It is wonderful to have Caelan here!" Caelan's coworkers also appreciate that Caelan can be "such a jokester!" His manager Holly says 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."

Burlington Wins Employer-of-the-Quarter Award for Winter 2023



Cascade Connections Vocational Services has chosen Burlington on Meridian Street in Bellingham as Employer of the Quarter for Winter 2023! Founded as Burlington Coat Factory in 1972, this national department store operates over 1,000 stores in 40 states. The Bellingham location currently employs Christopher and Katya, both of whom receive services from our Vocational Services department.

Christopher started his job as a Backroom Associate at Burlington in November of 2019. His main task is to break down cardboard boxes for recycling, load them into the cardboard compactor, then operate the compactor. On a given morning, he may process pallets stacked eight feet high! He also straightens shoes when time permits. Christopher loves when his coworkers blast music in the back while he works. Proud of being a hard worker, he often expresses his satisfaction at a job well done.



Christopher's coworkers and managers also really appreciate Christopher's work ethic. His Cascade Connections job coach, Karen, observes: "It is a whirlwind when Christopher goes in, as his coworkers are unpacking merchandise to

prepare it for the sales floor. His tasks help with clearing space in the backroom to prepare for more merchandise to come in. He's an integral part of their team!" Store Manager Jesse Williams affirms this: "Christopher has been with Burlington for over three years now, and he has proven that he is a core member of our team. He brings an admiring attitude each and every shift, and everyone loves having him around as much as he loves working with us. Thank you, Christopher, for your dedication and loyalty!"

Katya, a more recent hire at Burlington, has worked there as a Receiving Associate since September of 2022. As a member of the processing team, Katya unpackages clothing and accessories, organizes it, places items on hangers, and adds price and security tags. She also stocks, faces, and zones products on the sales floor. Manager Jesse Williams told Katya's Cascade Connections Employment Specialist Tanya: "Katya is a strong member of our Burlington family. She puts forward her best effort every shift and has become a very valuable part of our Receiving team. Thank you, Katya, for your superb attitude and willingness to learn and grow with us."



Burlington treats Katya and Christopher just like they treat their other employees by recognizing their work, inviting them to take employee surveys, and encouraging their learning of new skills and tasks. Jesse Williams told Cascade Connections staff: "We at Burlington believe in equality and that all individuals deserve a chance to be a part of a working society. Cascade Connections gives us a chance to connect with hard-working individuals to find a place where they can grow and be a valuable part of a team."

Burlington shares Cascade Connections' beliefs in equal opportunity and in the dignity of work, and the store's staff have manifested these values beautifully in the ways they have supported both Christopher and Katya. We appreciate Burlington's inclusive work culture, and we are happy to award them their well-deserved status as Employer of the Quarter! We look forward to continued partnership with Burlington in the years to come.

The New Wheelchair Van Has Arrived!



From left to right: Cascade Connections Communications Specialist Sarah, Ferndale Haggen Guest Service Manager Sherry Vanweerdhuizen, Ferndale Haggen Garden Manager and Haggen Community Squad Representative Tonya Matter, Ferndale Haggen Store Manager Janet Holmes, Cascade Christian Home (CCH) Program Director Tara, CCH Program Coordinator Mekayla, CCH resident Kendon, Haggen Community Relations Managers Kaily Hetherton & Pilar Hari, Barkley Haggen Guest Service Manager Melissa Copenhaver, and Cascade Connections Executive Director George.

We are excited to announce that the long-awaited wheelchair van has arrived! This new van brings with it the promise of many new possibilities and community connections for individuals we serve. Thanks again to all the businesses and individuals who donated to our 2022 Wheelchair Van Fundraiser last year. We are so grateful for your support!

Haggen provided over 90% of the funding for this beautiful van, so we invited Haggen managers from both the Barkley and Ferndale grocery stores over to our group home in February, 2023 to take some celebratory photos. No fewer than six awesome Haggen managers showed up, the weather cooperated, and we got to witness Kendon testing out the new van!



Thanks so much to Haggen for making this new van possible. Haggen's generous partnership directly supports our mission by empowering individuals with disabilities to improve their quality of life. Check out our recent article in WhatcomTalk to learn



more about Cascade Connections' ongoing partnership with Haggen:

<https://www.whatcomtalk.com/2023/02/13/haggen-funds-new-wheelchair-van-for-cascade-connections/>

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Winter 2023 Newsletter

Cascade Connections

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