



Looking Back at Last Year and 2017 Outlook



By George Beanblossom
Executive Director

Another year has passed and another new year is here. Last year was a hard year for most of us. We lost two of our residential clients due to the effects of Alzheimer's disease and two employees due to auto accidents. Another hardship was with staff turnover and staff shortages, especially in our residential programs. We are blessed to have very good, well-trained staff, but many had to work extra-long

hours to fill gaps left by high turnover.

What does this year bring? Sadly, more of the same when it comes to our residential programs. When voters raised the minimum wage, our starting wage – which had been \$1.50 over minimum wage – fell to the same level as minimum wage. We lost a valuable incentive to recruit staff.

In addition, our contracts with the state have not been adjusted to reflect the minimum wage increase. This leaves us with a gap: if we raise wages in order to draw applicants, we cannot maintain the cash outflow with what we are paid by the state.

Right now, the governor and our state legislators are working on a budget that could increase our contracted rates. However, if passed, this budget will not go into effect until 6 months after the minimum wage increase.

Last year the average turnover rate for residential programs in the state was more than 50%. Per state law, new staff may not work unsupervised with clients until they have taken the required 75 hours training and pass a Home Care Aide test. This process takes 4 months.

That lag time can make it difficult for programs to meet their contracted hours without stretching their already thin staff and ballooning overtime levels to new highs. This is expensive and causes staff burnout, which adds to high turnover rates.

Agencies are finding it difficult to accept new clients, even though the need for our services is great. We need quality staff to serve those waiting for services. Currently, 60 people living in state institutions are requesting residential provider settings, and another 109 people have funding

approved but are unable to move to community settings because of staff shortages. Many of the people who are receiving care do not have consistent providers because of the high turnover rate. Many of the people working in the field do not last very long and do not get to know their clients well, and this effects quality and consistency of care.

People that work-providing care to the most vulnerable people living in our community should not be paid the same rate that someone is working in the fast food industry.

Providing care to our population requires a special skill set and great responsibility. To work in the care field requires extensive training in medication administration, communication skills, personal care, finance management, and health and safety needs. People receiving this care need stable, competent people to provide these services. Because of low wages, many our staff must work multiple jobs just to cover basic needs. These people deserve more.

Here is what one of the parents of one of the people we serve recently said at Advocacy Day on February 15th that I attended with some of the staff and clients in Olympia. Holly Harris was one of the speakers at the rally:

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“I was really pleased to be asked to speak at Advocacy Day on behalf of the exceptional Supportive Living caregivers who work at Cascade Connections, and voice my support for the urgent importance that they be compensated appropriately for the challenging services they provide. I am so profoundly grateful for the mentorship, guidance and belief in my daughter Hilary that her advocate Kathy Connors consistently provides for her and others in her care, and I was honored to speak to that. My daughter’s dreams - to be employed, live independently in an apartment on her own, and have a full and satisfying social life - have been realized thanks to the efforts of Cascade Connections. It was heartening to see the numbers of people from all over Washington gather on the State House steps to speak out in favor of a living wage for dedicated support providers. And as a parent, I was really proud and pleased to be able to march with my daughter in support of something we both feel is so very important - A Living Wage for Supported Living!”

How can you help?

- Please pray! God is in control and we desperately need His wisdom and intervention!
- Please Contact your state legislator and tell them that this needs to be fixed immediately

Contact your legislator at:

District 42 Legislators

Sen. Doug J Ericksen, Republican - (360) 786-7682 - <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/42/0>

Rep. Luanne Van Werven, Republican - (360) 786-7980 - <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/42/1>

Rep. Vincent Buys, Republican - (360) 786-7854 - <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/memberEmail/42/2>

Rainbows In The Storm

A series of Storms hit Whatcom County several days from February 3- 9. While some people see this time of year as a beautiful winter wonderland, many see it as a time to get to work. Cascade Connections crew members could be found traveling across the treacherous terrain in the north county to clean and clear snow from the border crossings in Lynden, Sumas and Blaine Truck crossing.

While the cold temperatures can bring out the worst in some we found some rainbows amongst the storm.

With road conditions closing down main highways our crew member David, who lives in the Sumas area, was the only one who could make it to the Sumas Port for several days. This left him to be the custodian and the sidewalk snow removal person. While Cascade Connections was extremely appreciative of David’s work ethic we were not the only ones to notice.

The officers at the Sumas Border Station collectively purchased him a gift card to thank him for all of his hard work.



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Donations for Businesses, Churches and Foundations/Civic Groups:

- Eaglemill Farms
- Harbor Lands Co.
- Netherlands Ref. Church
- Kroger
- Third CRC
- Tesoro Foundation Inc.
- Kiwanis of Lynden

These people made a donation in memory of Gloria Tisdell:

Arnold Van Dyken

These people made a donation in memory of Ricky VanderHaak:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Bernice Kooy | Gary Clay |
| Gertruce Statema | Ray Stuit |
| Diane Van Beek | Darryl Vander Haak |
| Doria Vander Haak | Joan Vander Haak |
| B. Vander Haak | |

Ian's Story

Written by Susan Radke, Ian's mother

Ian was born in Rochester, New York in one of the worst snowstorms of the year, perhaps that is why he doesn't like winter! Around six weeks of age on a nice early spring day, Ian's older sister who was a very verbal 27-month-old child at the time, "suggested" to me, "take Ian outside as he calms down out there." Hmmmm, out of the mouths of babes. Let's just say Ian was a fussy, loud, and cranky baby who was difficult to soothe.

We moved to Michigan when Ian was a toddler. Ian, his sister, and I flew to Montana to visit my parents for three weeks when Ian was 22 months old. Ian's father (whom I was married to at the time) joined us in the middle of the visit for a week. Upon our return home, Ian made no indication he recognized his dad; Ian did not smile, hold his arms out to be picked up or hug his dad. By this time Ian was not chattering like a two year old should, playing with his sister or toys either. My suspicion that something was amiss was now more than a distant thought in the back of my mind. Two months later an article appeared in the local paper with the most common signs of autism, and I had my answer. Ian was formally diagnosed with classic infantile regressive autism when he was 2 1/2 years old.

Rather than feeling shock with the diagnosis, I felt relief intertwined with grief and wonder. Early intervention services began in home until age three, PPI (Pre Primary Impaired) preschool for two years, then 10+ years at a public school for students with autism in Michigan. During this time, Ian was also diagnosed with epilepsy and catatonia. Lots of speech therapy, OT, PT, medical visits, hospital visits – you know how it goes.

In April of 2012, we bid adieu to friends and family in Michigan to move to beautiful Bellingham so that Ian and I could begin a new life with an "old" love of mine, who loves Ian unconditionally. Ian was able to make lots of local connections through his year-long program at the Community Transitions program at Bellingham High School.

Today, Ian is a familiar face and loud voice often seen and heard at the Max Higbee Center, Out of the Ashes musical group, the SPIN dances, the summer concert series in the parks, Special Olympics, YASA through The Arc of Whatcom County, and as the Recycling Ambassador for SuperFeet in Ferndale. Ian also has friends, male & female, who want to spend time with him. Something I did not think would happen due to Ian's significant impairments. Life in Bellingham and work in Ferndale is good. Real good. Whatcom County has truly embraced Ian and enriched his life. I am forever grateful.

Ian has been with Cascade Connections Home Care since 2013. We took the opportunity to ask Susan, Ian's mother, about their experience with Cascade Connections over the past few years.

1. How did you hear about our services?

Our DDA case manager gave us a list of providers DDA approved for respite care.

2. What would you tell another parent or guardian who was interested in obtaining services through home care?

a. Ask many questions! Ask families if they would leave their loved one in the care of the agency or provider. Ask a person with a disability who they like as a home care provider? Why or why not?

b. Ask the agency what the employee turnover rate is, and if it is high, what is the agency response? How can employee turnover be reduced?

c. Ask about the training the caregivers receive. What additional training does a caregiver receive after the "basic training" is completed? How are the caregivers trained to handle challenging behaviors?

d. Is the agency licensed and bonded?

e. How are emergencies with the person who is supported handled?

3. How does Ian enjoy spending his time?

a. Ian really enjoys watching animated Disney movies such as Lady and the Tramp, The Great Mouse Detective, The Lion King.

b. Ian also is happy when he is outside walking, preferably on Taylor Dock, whether it is a sunny or misty day.

c. Listening to the local band Out of the Ashes.

d. Ian is happiest when he is eating pizza of any kind, anywhere. He will even find the leftover pizza slices in the freezer and eat them frozen, while standing in the kitchen with the freezer door wide open.

4. What types of activities does Ian do with his care aides?

Watch movies at home, go for a walk, have some crunchy & salty snacks.

5. Are there any experiences you have had with Home Care that have stood out?

Many of our caregivers have been younger or about the same age as Ian. I continue to hold all caregivers, especially those of similar age as Ian, in high regard and with the utmost respect for joyfully working with Ian who requires one on one personal care and often isn't the easiest of individuals to determine what's going on with him .

6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Having caregivers for Ian has been a wonderful break not only for me, especially as a single parent, but for Ian as well. He has someone spending quality time with him who is not his mother making demands or nagging him!

Cascade Connections greatly appreciate Susan sharing her story about Ian. Getting to spend time with Ian in the community and with some of his daily activities is a privilege, and we are grateful to be a part of his life.

We also want to thank our supporters for your prayers and financial support. By partnering with us, you help people like Ian and help them to live and work and be part of their community.



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



Spring 2017 Newsletter

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Cascade Connections partners with Stremler Gravel in our efforts of snow removal in order to keep our point of entry open. The operators at Stremler Gravel worked around the clock to keep up with what seemed to be a never ending storm. Mike and Virgil Stremler answered every call and were pleasant and accommodating. Virgil went above and beyond to help one of our staff who found themselves in a snow

covered ditch one evening. Stremler Gravel is made up of good people who care about their community.

One morning our crew found themselves in a very challenging situation. They were stranded on a north county road, surrounded by nothing but snow, just outside of Sumas. They were not going to be able to go anywhere. A local farmer, Kevin, came through as the rainbow in their otherwise frigid morning. Kevin used his tractor and worked tirelessly for more than two hours and led our crew to safety.

Cascade Connections would like to thank every one of our staff and community members who have gone above and beyond during challenging times. We are all truly blessed to live and work in such a positive place as Whatcom County

