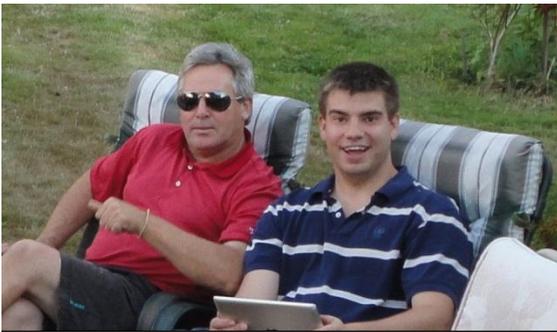


Greg's Story – The Magic of Connecting through Shared Interests

“Greg’s future is looking much brighter now that he is on the way to building a stronger and more dynamic community network”, reports his mom, Carolyn Booth. She noted that, since leaving high school, her 25 year old son has grown increasingly isolated and less active overall. “It is a time of life when he is seeking more freedom and independence and we want to pave the way for him”, says Bob, Greg’s dad. As members of the local PLAN group, the Booths are already sold on the idea of creating a personal network for Greg. But creating connections, “asking others to be involved” has been a daunting task and the family has been happy to have Lesley Thorsell, *Art of Asking Facilitator* involved to jump-start this process. “Having a network is pivotal to Greg’s quality of life”, notes Carolyn. “Not only is it critical for helping Greg to be safe and secure in his community but it is also paramount that he enjoy reciprocal relationships with others so he has a sense of contributing to and being part of community like all of us”. Since Greg’s involvement in this project and in PRACL’s customized employment program, things are gradually changing for the better. Greg is starting to build connections with same aged peers through his 2 part-time jobs. In addition, building on his interests in music and golf, he has made 2 important new connections and others are in the works.



As a golf coach for Greg I learned "Length doesn't matter." I was showing Greg some complicated moves to get the ball to fly out there and Greg just wanted to hit the ball, no pressure, no stress. This is a good reminder of not over analyzing and comparing in life, just hit the ball!

Toni, a teacher who knew Greg through school, happened to be at the golf course one day when Lesley took Greg to the driving range. Lesley enrolled Toni in sharing his golfing skills with Greg. Ever a teacher, Toni was able to tap into what worked for Greg and before you know it, Greg was able to drive the ball more consistently where he wanted it to go. Through the summer, they met several more times. Carolyn noted that Greg so looked forward to these opportunities and was ready and out the door as soon as Lesley arrived.

Similarly, when Lesley introduced Greg to her friend, Randy at his sound studio, Greg jumped right in. A fan of music videos and a bit of a free form keyboard player himself, Greg needed no introduction to the studio. He sat right down and started playing, took to the head sets right away, and by the end of the first session, Randy already had a recording. Since that magical moment, Greg has been to the studio

several times, made another recording including vocals and has spontaneously joined Randy on stage at Willingdon Beach for one of the local festivals. Greg enjoys spending time with Randy and clearly the enjoyment is mutual. “Genius is often misunderstood, even by the masters. Greg is learning to understand his music is a great muse for him” says Randy. .

Work has opened new opportunities for peer aged relationships for Greg. At his new seasonal job with Terracentric in Lund, Greg formed an immediate bond with his co-worker Shane who was teamed with him to wash the kayaks. Greg worked alongside Shane following his lead as he learned the step by step process for ensuring the kayaks were cleaned properly in readiness for the next trip. Carolyn saw a natural fit between the two young men who kept pace with one another. She noted that Greg stayed on task right to completion...he genuinely enjoyed and was able to benefit



Shane and Greg kayaking

from the social aspect of the job without getting distracted. He talked about Shane throughout the week, looking forward to working with him again. Shane, in turn, enjoyed his interactions with Greg and it is hoped that they may be able to continue their connection electronically once Shane returns to university this fall. Greg also enjoyed a similar connection at his other job with Kal Tire when the manager's son joined the staff for the summer. Greg was teamed with him on some different projects that brought new life to his job. He came home enthused from this interaction. Again the social bond with a peer at work made all the difference!



Greg and Youth Pastor, Mark with Mark's children, Kaylan and Brinley

Recognizing how important same aged peer relationships are, Lesley has drawn on a connection to a youth group through a co-worker on the employment team. It is hoped that Greg can share his love for music with the youth involved with the Pentecostal Church where music is an important theme. The youth pastor is on board and this new connection is ready to launch!

Tapping into such a variety of people to build this network for Greg has been a passion of Lesley's. She is a natural at engaging others and sharing her excitement for all that Greg brings to relationships.

Her enthusiasm is contagious and has resulted in the beginnings of a very rich and diverse network.

To help launch the network more formally, all of Greg's new connections were invited to a barbecue. Carolyn is keen to carry the momentum along. While she is a little anxious that, with the project coming to a close, the strong role that Lesley has played will be gone, she is determined to do what it takes to carry it forward. Seeing the joy Greg experiences when engaged with his friends is the inspiration! It is magical and so worth it for everyone who has come to know Greg through this process!

A bud opening can never be a bud again- can never go back. It has to be a flower and open. Such is with a network. It may fall flat sometimes, friends may dwindle, but life will never be as it was alone, it is always moving toward its fullest magnificence and fragrance.

Lesley Thorsell



All the gang at the 1st network potluck. The momentum has begun!!!

Submitted by Liz Kellough, September 2011