

“To me it’s a lifesaver”

I was exhausted. Trying to care for Amy, hold down my job, and be a mother to my two other children felt impossible. Amy has an extremely rare chromosomal disorder with four life-threatening health conditions, and functions at the level of a 12 month-old infant. She weighs just 45 pounds.

For 19 years, I never slept through the night. I was on alert for feeding tube alarms, seizures and breathing difficulties. I called 911 to my house 32 times for grand mal seizures that wouldn’t stop. As she got older, her medical fragility and intellectual disability meant a group home simply wasn’t an option. There wasn’t one that could care for her.

Fircrest was a lifesaver for us. Amy is thriving there. The excellent staff are amazing and not at all fazed by her medical issues. It’s what they do every day. Amy is happy, healthy and safe, and close to us. It’s what we all want for our children.

Liz Patterson

“A like a big weight lifted off our shoulders”

At age 19, Leanne moved to a State Operated Living Alternative (SOLA)—an intensive tenant support program. Due to her aggressive and self-abusive behaviors, the staff could only isolate her with little to no activity. Leanne’s severe behaviors continued to escalate, resulting in several 911 calls and trips to Harborview ER. This cost an incredible amount of money and also failed her miserably.

After 5 years at SOLA, a severe self-abusive incident resulted in her hospitalization and surgery. Leanne was sent to Fircrest for recovery. A full psychological evaluation was ordered with emphasis on her self-abusive tendencies. A trained psychologist with expertise in self-abusive behaviors, along with trained caregivers, provided her the program that she required all along. SOLA and other agencies could not provide an appropriate program for Leanne and refused to take her. Fircrest was her only option.

Today, at age 35, Leanne lives full-time at Fircrest. Her care there is superior. She’s safe, comfortable, and has developed close relationships with her caregivers. She knows how to ask for help when she needs it, and has activities she could never do before. She has a small job, goes to a campus art program, and enjoys being taken in her wheelchair to watch the dogs at the dog park. We take Leanne out once a week, to her choice of restaurants and shopping. She does so much better now. It’s like a big weight lifted off our shoulders.

*Lloyd and Mary Ann
Baker*

“We could sleep at night knowing our daughter was safe”

My wife and I have a 23 year old daughter on the autism spectrum and with profound developmental disabilities. Michelle lives at Fircrest.

In 2010 I had major craniotomy surgery. We could no longer care for Michelle at home and there was no extended family available to step in to help. We began to explore and evaluate our options, including community-based options. There was nothing appropriate or safe. Fortunately, we were able to get Michelle into the Frances Hadden Morgan Center* in Bremerton.

We thanked God for the Morgan center and now Fircrest! We could sleep at night knowing our daughter was safe. Fircrest is in the community, and it is a part of the community. It is not a prison. The staff members are devoted and caring people. Families and guardians are active and involved. The clients are each other’s friends. For the first time in Michelle’s life, after living at Fircrest, we heard her say, “I have

friends"! She considers it her home now. While we would love to have her continue to live at home with us because we love her dearly, we know it is not possible or in her best interest and Fircrest is the best place in the entire state of Washington for her to call "home."

Chris Hartzog

"He's very involved in everything"

Thomas has a rare neurodegenerative disorder. His brain is shrinking. My husband and I thought he'd live with us at home always but at age 13 he developed mania and psychosis. He had several prolonged hospitalizations and ultimately was dually diagnosed with intellectual/developmental disability and mental illness. His complex care was very taxing and my own health began to fail, making it impossible for me to safely care for him too.

His care team began to suggest that we start to look for alternative residential care for Thomas, given my failing health and his safety. It was the hardest decision to make. We looked at many community homes but there were none that could accommodate his needs. There simply wasn't any place that could give him the one-on-one attention he needs to be safe and happy. Thomas has boundless exuberance and energy that's hard to contain and needs constant vigilance and a lot of hands-on care to be safe and on task. He likes to go places and do things. If he can't go out and participate in the community he becomes very agitated and destructive. For him, living in a home without the ability to go out would be like being in solitary confinement in prison.

Fircrest is a true home for Thomas. He's happy there, he knows everyone and loves to greet them. He's involved in everything; he has a job nearby at Lowes, and is constantly on the go with his caregivers or family, going to movies, shopping, church or the many local events that he participates in. He has everything he needs to live his life to the fullest.

Cheryl Felak

"It's not isolation. It's a whole new world."

My daughter, Vivian, has brain damage as well as autism. The summer she was 18 she had trouble taking her medications. She ended up in the ER under involuntary confinement. It's what they call "boarding" for psychiatric patients, and can go on indefinitely. As parents, we were frantic. Then we got the word that there was a spot for Vivian at the Rainier School.

It was a complete miracle. We arrived after hours, when the medical staff usually are gone, but they'd stayed late to intake her. There was an entire team of doctors, a psychologist, intake people, house managers, all sitting in a huge room and they said to us, "welcome." They said they "we're going to help you."

It was the first time I felt relief in all the years. This was the help that I'd been looking for. To have all these people around us, and understanding all the things I was telling them about her behaviors. I'd say "she does this and she does that" and they'd nod and say "yep." I was so relieved.

Vivian lives at Rainier for now. In her new environment, it's not isolation. It's a whole new world, with activity and engagement. There is coming and going of staff and multiple levels of oversight. It's so different from what people think. Our daughter is stable and safe. She's well supported and cared for.

I only worry about what will happen if they make her move out. DSHS told me she can't stay at Rainier, that she has to "fail in the community" first.

If I died tomorrow I'd be happy for her to live the rest of her life at an RHC. I'd feel, as a mother, that enormous relief, knowing she is safe and cared for.

Rhonda Meyers

* Now closed