



PUSHING BOUNDARIES

The PNW's first and only exercise therapy center for paralysis

PROVIDED BY PUSHING BOUNDARIES

In 2001, Sharon and Allan Northrup's lives changed forever. While driving over Snoqualmie Pass, the Bellevue couple's car hit a patch of black ice and rolled over, leaving Allan with a spinal cord injury. Rehabilitation facilities offered hope, but the closest facility was in Southern California, so the couple picked up and moved. For a few years, they commuted between facilities that helped Allan slowly regain more independence. Missing home and their family in Bellevue, they decided to purchase some of the equipment and move back home. That's when they got the idea to open a facility that could help others like Allan in the Pacific Northwest.

In 2005, they founded their nonprofit, Pushing Boundaries, the Northwest's first and only exercise-based therapy center for clients with paralysis. The Redmond-based center offers state-of-the-art equipment for anyone dealing with spinal cord injuries, stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's Disease, traumatic brain injuries, and other mobility disorders. As Sharon states, "We've always felt that if you see there is a need, you help them and it comes back to you."

Because exercise therapy is not currently covered by insurance companies, the Northrups started the center as a nonprofit, which allowed the services to be partially subsidized for clients. Pushing



Sharon on her 80th birthday.

Bellevue resident Joe Rohrbach has a spinal cord injury and has been coming into the facility since 2007. "Joe is an amazing artist and to see him be able to continue to do what he loves with his wood carving is so inspiring," says Sharon. Wood carving involves physical activities such as bending, twisting, and holding a drill, all things that Joe credits he can do because of Pushing Boundaries. He says the "toys" (Pushing Boundaries' state-of-the-art equipment) and frequent chocolate breaks help too.

For Joe and every client here, an Exercise Therapist works on a one-on-one basis to make sure they are meeting their goals, while also working adjacently with other healthcare practitioners that the client may be seeing to ensure goals are being met. But everyone's goals are different. For some, it is to take a few steps unassisted. For others, it is to be able to hold their child or help a spouse wash the dishes after dinner.

Sharon reflects on her journey and the journey of everyone who walks through the center's doors. "It's an all-encompassing healing process," Sharon says. "But it's not just me. Allan and I just started it. It couldn't have gotten to where it is without the amazing staff and people that have poured their time and love into it. Pushing Boundaries wouldn't be here without people that have that belief and caring. It takes a village and we've got a pretty amazing one."

Boundaries is the only center in the Pacific Northwest that has a wide range of specialty equipment available under one roof--from robotic gait training devices to machines that utilize electric stimulation to produce muscle contractions that create movement. Recently it received federal funding to buy more than half a million dollars in equipment. These purchases would not have been possible without this support.

While Allan passed away in 2011, Sharon continues to serve on the board and frequently makes snack drops for the clients and staff. She says she continues to be inspired by the people she meets every time she comes into Pushing Boundaries. And while the accident was a few decades ago, she vividly remembers the difficulty of supporting a spouse going through a traumatic injury. "From a caregiver

standpoint, it was helpful for me to be with other caregivers and it allowed me the opportunity to learn from some of the experiences they were having that we weren't alone," she says.

She says coming into the center allows her to see those ties that are so important to her family.

"You can just see it in people's faces that this place understands what they need," she says. "It's a place where anyone can come and they absolutely understand what you are going through. There's a camaraderie that happens. I believe in the relationship that happens between the clients and the staff. You are still the same person inside since the accident. We respect that person. When you watch the trainers work there's a push, and yet they joke and laugh through it. There is such deep respect. It's amazing to watch that happen."



In Loving Memory of Allan Northrup, Co-Founder of Pushing Boundaries: Sharon and her late husband leave behind an enduring legacy.