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# Beyond Disabilities spreads awareness about life with disabilities and eradicating bullying

by [LEAH ABRAHAM](#), Renton Reporter Reporter  
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Steve Ferreira likes to keep his bio short: "Steve is just a regular guy living a regular life. He just happens to have cerebral palsy."

Ferreira was diagnosed with cerebral palsy after complications during his birth. The 28-year-old Renton native is bound to a wheelchair, but doesn't see his chair anything but an impairment.

After all, Ferreira has made a name for himself as a local athlete who has mastered shot put, discus, rugby and basketball. He has won multiple medals and competitions, and even participated at the 2016 Paralympic trails. And while he wasn't selected to attend the Paralympics in Rio, he did win two gold medals at the trails.

But even with his impressive athletic record, Ferreira is most passionate about raising awareness about living with disabilities. It even led him to create his own nonprofit, Beyond Disabilities.

Beyond Disabilities aims to educate the community that people with disabilities are capable of many accomplishments. Ferreira focuses on motivational speaking to raise awareness and dispel stigmas about people with disabilities.

Ferreira traces his love for speaking and advocacy back to high school where he attended a program by Challenge Day, an organization whose mission is to provide youth experiential programs that demonstrate the possibility of love and connection. Inspired, Ferreira knew he had to do something.

"It made me think I can make a difference in the world. I want to start speaking," he said. "I did a trial run to a health class at my high school. Then I created an email and I started sending out emails to schools and other places, but I was so young that I had to go to the school and introduce myself to prove to them that I have a disability... So between 2004-2010, I spoke at numerous high schools all over Washington."

Ferreira wanted to take his speaking and advocacy to another level, so in 2014, when he was a student at Bellevue College, he created Beyond Disabilities.

Now Ferreira is a sought-after speaker, especially in middle and high schools. He speaks on what it's like living with a disability and importance of eradicating bullying.

"I've been a victim of bullying since I was in third grade," he said. "I believe that no one should be bullied because bullying leads to suicide. If you're hanging with the wrong set of friends, find new friends. I've seen on the news so much kids who are 14-15 years old committing suicide because they were being bullied. It's honestly the saddest thing. They don't get to enjoy their life because it has a pressure inside of them to do something completely stupid rather than talk to someone and seek help."

Ferreira has worked with city of Bellevue with their ADA plans. He was also invited as a guest speaker at the kick-off event for Bellevue's playground for all abilities.

Even with the growing success, Ferreira's number one fan remains to be his mother, Mary Ann.

"When he graduated high school, his middle school invited him to be a guest speaker at their graduation," she said. "So I raced from work to get there, and I see him speaking in front of 2,000 people. And I'm standing there with tears coming down my face. The guy next to me turns and says, 'He's pretty good, isn't he?' And I say, 'He's my son!'"

"It's so nice to see him. There are some people with disabilities who sit at home and it's hard to get them motivated. And he's one of the motivated people I know. He pushes himself and he continues to surprise me."

Ferreira said that his motivations stems from wanting to prove other people wrong.

"The people that say I can't do, I prove them wrong," he said.

Currently, Ferreira is gearing up for his long list of speaking engagements for disabilities awareness month in October. He is also in the process of setting up scholarships for kids with disabilities who are interested in sports or higher education.

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