

# Resource Content:

## 1. About LifeCenter Northwest

Who are we? What is our mission? Includes donor registry information.

## 2. Check Your Vocabulary

Learn how we talk about organ donation and why.

## 3. Suggestions and Outlines for a Donation Story

These tips will help guide your storytelling.

## 4. Frequently Asked Questions in Our Communities

(And answers!)

## 5. Fast Facts

## 6. Donor Registration Flyer

Online registration is always available, but some people prefer using this hard-copy method.

## 7. More Donation Resources

## About LifeCenter Northwest

LifeCenter Northwest is the nonprofit organ procurement organization that facilitates organ and tissue donation in Alaska, Montana, North Idaho and Washington.

LifeCenter Northwest works collaboratively with 200+ hospitals to save lives through organ and tissue donation and serves the largest geographic area of all organ procurement organizations nationwide.

### Mission

Working together to save lives through organ and tissue donation.

### Established

January 1997

### Service Area

LifeCenter Northwest serves 10.4 million people throughout Alaska, Montana, North Idaho and Washington.

## LifeCenter Northwest Services

- Donor Family Care and Support
- Organ and Tissue Recovery Services
- Hospital Development
- Community Relations
- Donor Registry Management

## About the LifeCenter Northwest Team

300+ team members living in our donation service area

### Team member backgrounds include:

- Licensed medical professionals including:
  - MDs, RNs, NPs
  - Surgical Technicians, Respiratory Therapists
- Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians
- Social Workers / Counselors / Chaplaincy
- Business and Non-profit Professionals
- Hospital Administration
- Military Veterans
- Certified HR Professionals

## **Donor Registry Information**

LifeCenter Northwest manages the organ, eye and tissue donor registry for Montana and Washington. It is a confidential database of donation decisions to be carried out at the time of death.

### **How to register as an organ donor in Montana and Washington?**

- Register online at [lcnw.org](http://lcnw.org)
- Call toll-free at 1-877-275-5269 and request a brochure to fill out and return.
- Say "YES" to organ, eye, and tissue donation when you apply for or renew your driver's license/ID card. Residents who already have a heart on their driver's license are automatically added to the donor registry.

### **How to register as an organ donor in Alaska?**

- Register online at [AlaskaDonorRegistry.org](http://AlaskaDonorRegistry.org)
- Call toll-free at 1-800-719-5433 and request a brochure to fill out and return.
- Say "YES" to organ, eye, and tissue donation when you apply for or renew your driver's license/ID card. Residents who already have a heart on their driver's license are automatically added to the donor registry.

### **How to register as an organ donor in Idaho?**

- Register online at [YesIdaho.org](http://YesIdaho.org)
- Call the Idaho Donor Registry toll-free at 1-866-937-4324.
- Say "YES" to organ, eye, and tissue donation when you apply for or renew your driver's license/ID card. Residents who already have a heart on their driver's license are automatically added to the donor registry.

## **Contact LifeCenter Northwest:**

General: [info@lcnw.org](mailto:info@lcnw.org)

Media: [media@lcnw.org](mailto:media@lcnw.org)

Toll-free: 1-877-275-5269

Learn more about organ donation: [lcnw.org](http://lcnw.org)

# Check Your Vocabulary

Language plays an important role in the misconceptions and fears about organ, eye, and tissue donation.

When talking about donation, it's important to consider how the general public may perceive certain language. By avoiding terminology that may cause concern, you will help further understanding and improve the overall acceptance of the donation process.

## 1. “Recover” organs instead of “Harvesting”

“Harvest” is a word that has long been used by the medical community. However, the word harvest is often associated with crops, crows and combines. It can be unpalatable, especially to donor families, when associated with their loved ones’ organs. The word “recovery” helps people understand that removal of a loved one’s organs and tissues for transplant is a respectable surgical procedure.

## 2. “Deceased Donor” or “Deceased Donation” instead of “Cadaver”

In the past, the term donor did not require any specificity. Today as more people choose to become living donors, there is a need to distinguish between living and deceased donors. Reportedly, the term cadaveric depersonalizes the fact that a gift was offered to someone upon an individual’s death. The word cadaver is defined as “dead bodies intended for dissection,” which does not display the honor and respect we give to all individuals who have courageously chosen to give the gift of life.

## 3. “Ventilated Support”

The terms “mechanical” or “ventilated support” are appropriate for the support given to a deceased person in the event of organ, eye and tissue donation. There are two ways to determine death:

- Circulatory death: the heart stops beating and there is irreversible loss of circulatory function.
- Brain death: the irreversible loss of brain function.

The term “life support” proves to be a confusing term when used in conjunction with brain death. When death occurs, there is no support that can make the individual live again.

# Story Format Suggestions

## Donor Family

- Describe the person in your family who was a donor. Paint us a picture of who they were to you.
- Describe the circumstances of his or her death.
- How did you know donation was right for your loved one?
- What is the legacy your loved one left through donation? What does donation now mean to you?

## Transplant Recipient

- Describe your life before you became ill.
- Choose a moment when your illness truly impaired your life. What was your life like then compared to before you were sick?
- How did it feel to wait for a transplant? How did your emotions vary throughout the wait?
- Think about when you received the call for your transplant. What did you do right after the call? What were your thoughts and emotions?
- Describe your life now, after the transplant? What does donation now mean to you?

## Transplant Recipient Family Member

- Describe the life of your family member before he/she became ill.
- Choose a moment when he/she was truly impaired and impacted by their illness. What was his/her life like then? How did it affect the family?
- How did it feel to wait for him/her to get the transplant? How did your emotions change throughout the wait?
- Think about when he/she received the call for the transplant. What were your thoughts and emotions?
- Describe your family's life now after the transplant? What does donation mean to you now?

## Living Donor

- What motivated you to donate a kidney?
- Do you know the person who received your kidney? If so, do you know what their life was like just prior to the transplant?
- What was it like for you when you found out you were able to be a living donor? What were some of your thoughts and emotions?
- How do you feel about having donated? What does donation now mean to you?

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. Who can be an organ, eye and tissue donor?**

All individuals can register their intent to be a donor. Please do not rule yourself out for age or any medical issue or condition. A medical assessment will take place at the time of death to determine whether donation is a possibility.

## **2. How do I become a registered organ, eye and tissue donor?**

Say "yes" to the organ donation question when receiving or renewing your driver's license.

**Montana and Washington:** Register at [lcnw.org](http://lcnw.org) or call 1-877-275-5269

**Idaho:** Register at [YesIdaho.org](http://YesIdaho.org) or call 1-866-937-4324

**Alaska:** Register at [AlaskaDonorRegistry.org](http://AlaskaDonorRegistry.org) or call 1-800-719-5433

## **3. Is there any cost to the family for organ, eye or tissue donation?**

No. All costs related to organ donation are paid by the organ procurement organization. Expenses related to saving the individual's life and funeral expenses remain the responsibility of the donor or donor's family.

## **4. What if an individual registered to be a donor, but their family is opposed to organ donation?**

Being a registered organ donor means you have given first person authorization for donation and transplantation. No one can override your registration and donation choice. LifeCenter Northwest works closely with donor families and loved ones to support them through the donation process and to honor the gift of life that is being given. We suggest that people talk to their families about their donation choice in advance as it can be helpful to their family to know their wishes about being a donor.

## **5. Will being a registered donor affect the medical care I receive at the hospital?**

**NO!** Hospital and emergency personnel are only concerned with saving your life. They do not have access to the donor registry, and they do not make any determination as to whether someone is able to donate. The organ procurement organization's medical team will assess for donation suitability only after all lifesaving measures and treatments are given.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **6. Can organs, eyes and tissue be given to different ethnic groups or individuals of the opposite sex?**

Transplantation can exceed these boundaries, however, transplant success rates increase when organs are matched between members of similar ethnic backgrounds. Multicultural communities are in need of more organ, eye and tissue donors as they represent 60% of the national organ transplant waiting list, but only 30% of actual donors.

## **7. Are organs bought and sold on the black market?**

No. According to the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act of 1984, human organs, eyes, and tissues, cannot be bought or sold in the U.S. Organ recovery for the purpose of life-saving transplants is strictly regulated by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS).

## **8. Are there religious objections to donation?**

Most major religions support donation as a humanitarian act of giving. Transplantation is consistent with the life-preserving traditions of these faiths.

## **9. What is the legal age of registration?**

The legal age to register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor varies from state to state:

Washington:

- At the age of 15.5 years, you can register yourself as an organ donor.
- Prior to turning 15.5 years, a parent or guardian must register you as an organ donor. When the individual is 18 years old, they must register themselves.
- Before the age of 18, a parent or guardian can revoke consent only at the time of donation.

Montana:

- At the age of 15, you can register yourself as an organ donor.
- Prior to turning 15, a parent or guardian can register a child to be a donor. This designation will continue until they turn 18.
- Before the age of 18, a parent or guardian can revoke consent only at the time of donation.

## Fast Facts

- Anyone has the potential to be an organ donor regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or medical history.
- Most major religions in the United States support organ, eye and tissue donation, and see it as a final act of love and generosity toward others.
- If you are sick or injured and admitted to the hospital, the number one priority is to save your life. Organ, eye and tissue donation can only be considered after death is declared.
- People on the waiting list for an organ are categorized by the severity of illness, time spent waiting, blood type, and other important medical information, not financial or celebrity status.
- An open casket funeral is possible for organ, eye and tissue donors. Through the entire donation process, the body is treated with care, respect and dignity.
- There is no cost to the donor or their family for organ, eye or tissue donation.
- One organ donor can save up to eight lives and heal the lives of many more through tissue and eye donation.



# Donor and Recipient Stories

## Honoring donor Mark Cook



Mark Cook Jr. was born and raised in Hoonah, Alaska. As a child, the elders in his native community nicknamed Mark “Baby Eagle” as he danced with them for hours.

As he grew older and stronger, Mark would chop firewood for those who needed it and was always finding ways to help others. Mark was also a talented musician and guitarist. Early in his career as a young adult, Mark worked as an EMT—and that's when he formally registered himself as an organ donor.



When Mark died in 2023 at the age of 27, his heart made headlines. It was flown 2,500 nautical miles from Bartlett Regional Hospital in Juneau, Alaska, to Boston to save another man's life, the farthest a heart had ever traveled for transplant.

Mark also saved two others with the donation of his kidneys.

“It was really cool to know that his heart flew the farthest,” said Mark’s mother, Jodee. “I was thinking about that during the storm [of grief] and said ‘Kid, you’re still doing great stuff after you’re gone.’”

Because of advancing technologies, organs can be preserved allowing for extended total ischemic time—saving more lives.

## Recipient Ginny Fagerstrom

Ginny Fagerstrom—a native of Nome, Alaska—likes to say that she's a part of an enormous community of "Inupiaq grandmas and Gold Rush grandpas."



"My extended family includes everyone I grew up with in Nome and everyone my parents know," Ginny said. "I have a wonderful, supportive husband named Kevin and three amazing kids: Taia, Kira and Remy."

Ginny's transplant story began in 2006, when she was found to have extremely high pulmonary hypertension—a condition in which lung damage makes it hard for the heart to push blood through the lungs.

Medication and supplemental oxygen stabilized Ginny's health for about a decade, but in 2017, tests revealed that her condition had worsened. Ginny was unable to work, take care of her kids, or do anything besides sit on the couch and struggle to breathe. Doctors told her a double lung transplant would be her only hope.

Ginny was placed on the lung transplant waiting list at UW Medicine and temporarily moved from Alaska to Seattle to be close to the transplant center where she hoped to receive her new lungs. Ginny was prepared for a long stay on the waiting list, so she packed her sewing machine and a suitcase full of yarn.

After 13 days, which is almost unheard of, a perfect match became available. Ginny received her gift of life on December 14, 2018. In the years since, Ginny's health has improved dramatically thanks to her lung donor.

"In our Inupiaq culture there is a strong emphasis on sharing, giving, respecting others and showing gratitude," said Ginny. "Receiving the lungs of another person is beyond description, beyond any kind of sharing or giving or gratitude. This gift has given me joyful days, quiet moments of reflection, conversations with my parents, trips home to Nome, silly family group texts and sewing sleepovers with my friends. I feel the deepest gratitude in my heart, and I promise to live my gifted life in the best way I know to honor the gift."



# Donor and Recipient Stories

## Honoring donor Rachel Givens



Rachel Givens was full of life, love and laughter. She had a passion and natural talent for athletics, but she also loved to make people laugh and enjoyed being goofy.

As a proud member of the Navajo Nation, Rachel felt it was important to serve as a role model for young Native Americans. She coached girls' basketball and co-ed soccer at a local tribal school.

Tragically, Rachel passed away after an accident at the age of 23. Even after her death, she continued to help others.

Through the gift of organ donation, Rachel saved the lives of five people. Her corneas restored sight to two others, and she healed countless people through tissue donation.

“I’m very proud of Rachel’s decision to donate,” said her mother, Laura Givens.

“She always thought about the bigger picture and about other people.”





## Recipient Eddie Harper

Eddie Harper is alive today because of a heart transplant.

Eddie had been ill for much of his life when he collapsed suddenly at age three on the kitchen floor, with no heartbeat or pulse. His father, John, performed CPR to revive him, and doctors diagnosed Eddie with restrictive cardiomyopathy and immediately listed him for a heart transplant.

Just two weeks later, Eddie's heart failed again, and he spent the next three months in the cardiac ICU at Seattle Children's Hospital.



When the Harper family finally got the call they were waiting for—that Eddie was about to receive a lifesaving heart transplant—they couldn't believe it.

"It was so hard to wait, knowing that each day we waited he could actually die," said Sarah, Eddie's mother. "We were so relieved and so happy to have this chance, but we also felt sad, knowing that someone else was going through the hardest time in their life, dealing with the death of their beloved child."

When Eddie got home from the hospital, he was much healthier than he'd ever been. Sarah and John noticed that he was running around, something he never did before he got a new heart.

Eddie is now 16 and thriving—running high school track—at Cedarcrest High School in Duvall, Wash. He has four older siblings and two grateful parents who walked a harrowing but joyful journey through chronic illness, organ transplantation and recovery.

John works to raise awareness about the concerns and experiences of families grappling with a child's severe illness as a LifeCenter Northwest governing board member.

"It's important to give back, having received so much through the hospital, LifeCenter, and others," he said. Sarah volunteers to make LifeCenter quilts for pediatric donors and both Sarah and John volunteer at Seattle Children's.

# Donor and Recipient Stories

## Honoring donor Julie Shepherd



Julie Shepherd was fiercely competitive and an exceptional athlete but also radiated empathy and kindness to friends and strangers alike. In her short 17 years, her generosity touched the lives of many.

Just as she did in life, Julie helped numerous people in her passing by becoming an organ, eye and tissue donor. Her gifts saved the lives of six people through the donation of her pancreas, liver, lungs, both kidneys and

her heart, which was described by the transplant surgeon as the “mythical perfect heart.”

Julie’s heart recipient, Maddy, a high school athlete, suffered from congenital heart disease and experienced a heart attack at just 14 years old. Thanks to her life-saving transplant, Maddy is back to swimming competitively, keeping Julie’s heart in the athletic events she loved.

“The donation process has helped to ease the pain of her death by giving us the knowledge that other people’s lives were helped,” says Julie’s father, Derrek. “Her drive to be the best, to compete with all her abilities, to explore, and above all, to love and care for those around her has given our lives new meaning.”





## Recipient Todd Ware



Todd Ware's life has been all about flying, ever since he was seven years old and flew in his father's Cessna, sitting on a phone book to see out the window. Todd went on to lead a fast-paced life as a flight instructor and a racing pilot based in Bigfork, Mont., until he was unexpectedly grounded.

A nasty bout with pneumonia in 2015 revealed that Todd had an underlying genetic disorder that was weakening his lungs. Five years later, Todd's breathing capacity had decreased to 21% of normal, and a double lung transplant was his only possibility to keep living.

Todd thankfully received his double lung transplant in late 2020 in Seattle, and he's now in the best physical, mental and spiritual shape that he's ever been in—and has committed to a healthy life to honor his donor.

Todd has done 447 yoga classes (and counting) since his transplant and completed a rigorous push-up challenge (1,776 push-ups in one month). Todd has shed tears of gratitude for his donor more times than he can count since his transplant and hopes to meet his donor's family soon.

# Donor and Recipient Stories

## Honoring donor Eric Ellis

Born and raised in Spokane, Wash., Eric Ellis never left the Inland Northwest. For many years, he lived happily in Post Falls, Idaho, with Megan, his wife of eight years, and his three children. An industrial painter by trade, Eric was known for his car-painting prowess and his generous nature.

“He’s the type of guy who would drop everything to help someone,” Megan said.

In March of 2022, Megan heard the wail of an ambulance, and she soon found out that the person being rushed to the hospital was Eric. Tragically, he had been involved in a major car accident.

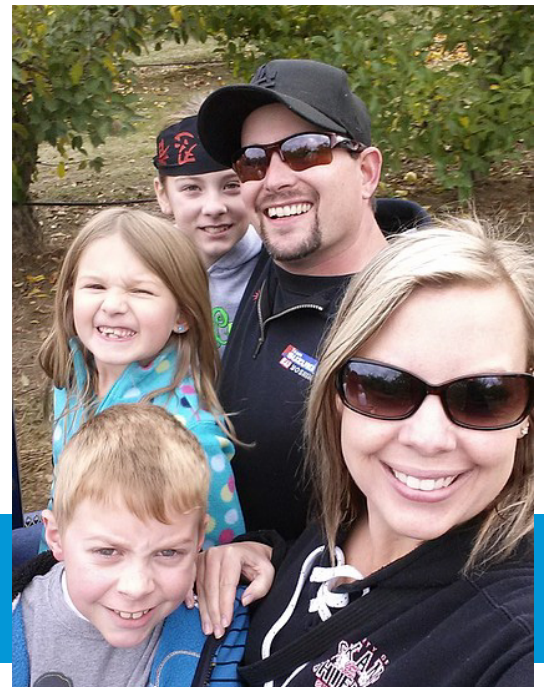
He was still breathing when first responders arrived at the scene of the accident, but he’d been intubated by the time Megan reached him at Kootenai Health, the hospital in nearby Coeur d’Alene. Eric suffered a head injury and was unresponsive to neurological tests.

Shortly thereafter, at the age of 45, Eric was pronounced brain dead.

While Megan didn’t know Eric was a registered organ donor, she wasn’t surprised. Eric remained on a ventilator, allowing for recipients to be matched with his organs. Ultimately, Eric donated four organs: his heart, kidneys and liver.

Soon, Megan expects to receive the age, gender and general location of the people who received Eric’s gifts. After that, it will be up to the recipients to reach out. Megan hopes they will. Above all, Megan wants Eric to be remembered for the way he lived.

“He put other people first,” she said.  
“I’m hoping people can learn from that.”





## Recipient Troy Schlimgen



During the fall of 2010, Troy Schlimgen was diagnosed with nonischemic familial cardiomyopathy.

“When I look back at my life knowing that I was living with a bad heart, I can trace every loss in my life and how it really started affecting not only my mind, but also my heart.”

Troy loved to hike, mountain bike, wakeboard, downhill and cross-country ski. It wasn't until Oct. 2010 that he received an official diagnosis.

The sickness slowed him down. Troy and his doctors tried to maintain his condition with medicine and a pacemaker, but this only worked for a few months. At that point, Troy was flown from Missoula to Spokane to get a Left Ventricle Assist Device (LVAD) to help his heart function properly.

For the next two years, he emotionally withdrew to stay strong. After a long wait, a suitable heart became available, and he underwent the life-saving surgery at Sacred Heart Medical Center.

He would check for chest to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He now enjoys all the outdoor activities he used to.

"I plan on impacting my community, city, and nation in huge ways with this amazing gift of life that was given to me."