**Profile of Kaden Szczepaniak – IGNITE Fusion Host**

Kaden Szczepaniak has been dancing for 15 years, beginning with a friend at WWU’s Swingkids, they ran the gamut of dance styles, lindy hop, east coast swing, ballroom, blues, with a break for a while, and recently regained their passion for dance about two and a half years ago.

Their first fusion experience was with Bellingham Community Fusion, the dance venue that was taken over by Szczepaniak and Sean Keller at the beginning of 2019. “I just kinda walked in blind and didn’t really have any idea what I was doing or what I was walking into.”

“I remember the first night I went, going ‘Oh my god, I can’t believe I’ve gone this long without dancing.’ Also, I love this, and I never want to not do it,” said Szczepaniak.

Szczepaniak is a very open, yet reserved person. They always seem poised, as dancers so often do. They come across as very trustworthy and yet gracious, which shows in their involvement in IGNITE.

“[Hosting IGNITE,] It’s a very indescribable feeling, there’s always moments every Thursday where I’ll go up front and sit on the stage, and look out at all the people dancing, and sit in awe… I think, ‘look at all of these humans, having a really great experience and being so happy.’”

As for their own personal style of dance, “I feel like my home style IS fusion,” said Szczepaniak. “I don’t really feel like I had a style that I fell into and got really really good at before I entered fusion.”

“I like to dabble in other styles to add to what I can do in fusion!”

Leading a dance venue was not something that Szczepaniak expected to be doing, but as the previous Thursday night fusion venue began to fail, Szczepaniak’s understanding that “people do have many different identities, and people come from many different backgrounds, and have many different skill levels and everything,” came in crucial as new leaders were needed. “People weren’t feeling welcomed or safe in the space because of safety issues and dramas that had come up,” said Szczepaniak.

As for why they were chosen, Szczepaniak said “Sean and I are both neutral people… who [could] take this space and open it up and just start it fresh, create a new code of conduct, make sure that everyone knows that this is what’s we stand for and this is what we’re working for and repair broken bridges” [within the dance community.]

“We welcome all identities, we welcome all abilities, we welcome all humans to our space, as long as you can respect our code of conduct. We just want everyone to know they have a place they can come to learn to dance and have a good time, feel safe and be open and welcomed,” said Szczepaniak.