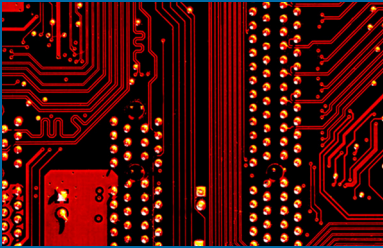




balance

... what it's all about

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A “can do” culture

By Christine Gordon

When TIL began 50 years ago, assistive technology depended upon home grown ingenuity with an emphasis on the mechanical solution. Computers and electronic technology were still years away. However, the movement for independence for people with disabilities had just begun and individuals were desperate to escape or resist institutions. Independence required support from both people and devices.

TIL responded by creating a “can do” culture, improvising and problem solving with people with disabilities. Simon Cox and Kirsty Dickinson were the face of TIL and built in the mission and values that have guided the program ever since. Some of the early devices that TIL engineered look bulky and awkward today but they worked and they gave people the ability to speak, open doors, sip and puff to move their wheelchairs and manage their environment.

Now, 50 years later, technology has changed and TIL has changed with it. Our bio-meds use Google Home, laser printers and remote monitoring. TIL members use voice activation, video conferencing laptops and cell phones that have the kind of computing power that could only be dreamed about in 1970. People with

disabilities expect to have both the right to live independently and the tools that will enable them to do so. What has not changed is TIL's belief in working with people to achieve customized solutions; saying YES wherever possible; respecting the individual and mentoring young innovators. Our annual Simon Cox Design Competition, sadly cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, keeps us ahead of the assistive technology curve and anchors us in our core mission of uniting end users with makers. If we are lucky, the future of TIL will mirror its past as it continues to help many more people with disabilities to live and thrive at home.

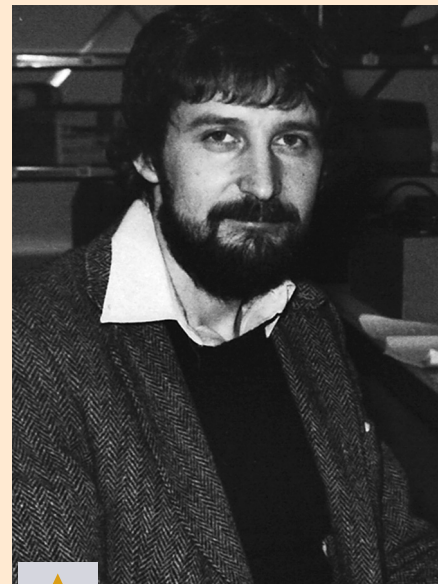




The best prophet of the future is the past.



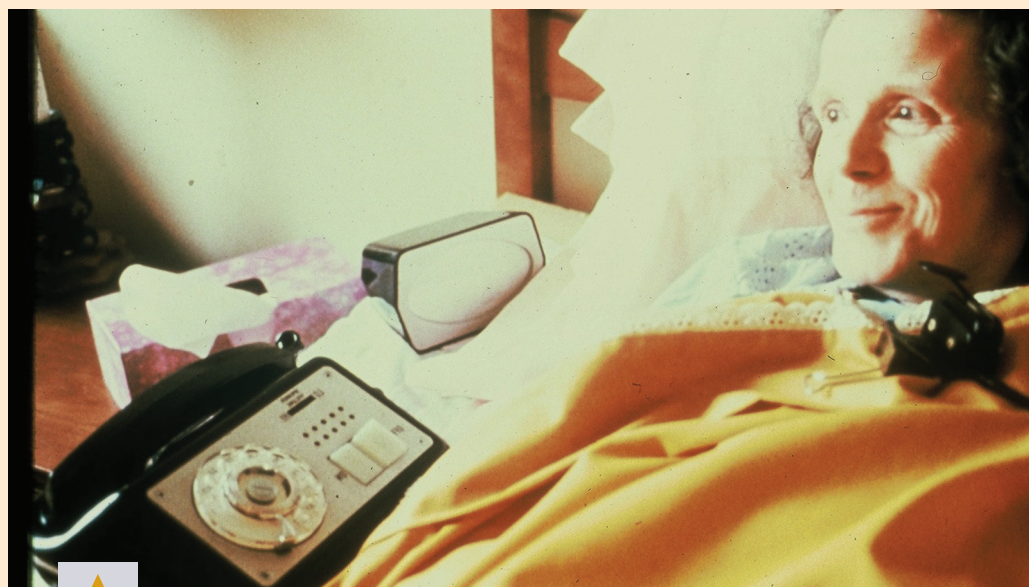
The staff of TIL and PROP in 2004 ... just a moment in time!
While people have come and gone, the legacy of the 'can do' attitude remains at the heart of it all.



Simon Cox, a young biomedical engineering technologist, would eventually become a leader in advocacy for people with a disability living independently at home. During his career, Simon had an impact on many lives by using technology to adapt the homes of TIL members.



Robb Dunfield, a long-time member of the Technology for Independent Living Program, using a mouthstick to operate an early Apple computer.



Joe Kelly using the first environmental control device supplied by the Kinsmen Rehabilitation Foundation in 1971. With this device, Joe was able to contact her family when home alone.

technology for living

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY TECHNOLOGY FOR LIVING

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Technology for Living houses the Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program (PROP 1.866.326.1245) and the Technology for Independent Living Program (TIL 604.326.0175). PROP is funded by the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Health through Vancouver Coastal Health. TIL is funded by the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Health and other independent funders.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 41682526

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Building a bright future on our inspiring past

By Wayne Pogue

Picture a day back in the early 70s. Joe Kelly, living with a severe case of arthritis at home, feeling utterly vulnerable, living daily with acute anxiety while her husband is at work. She knew she was physically incapable of phoning for help should she need any.

Joe became the first person in BC receiving an assistive technology device installed by technologists from the Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program 50 years ago, which had been formed by the Kinsmen Rehabilitation Foundation after they saw a need in the community, to assist people with physical disabilities in BC to live more independently at home.

The device was cutting edge then, costing thousands of dollars. Today it is most likely replaced by Google Home, achieving the same result for a lot less money: making it possible for people with disabilities to live safer and independently at home.

Assistive technology has dramatically changed since then, it has gone from Enkos to Kin Controls to Gewas to Google Home.

Still, we are only at the beginning and TIL is ready for the challenge. Yes, traditional assistive technology, smart technology and home automation will continue to make up a large portion of what TIL is all about as we move forward. But there are also some incredibly exciting new initiatives I want to introduce our members to.

TIL technologists as makers

We call this initiative the YES PROJECT. The idea is to be able to offer to members more individualized, one-off assistive solutions.

In order to accomplish this we are planning to hire contract technicians who will continue setting up the regular home automation for our members. That will free up TIL technologists to focus on special projects. The entire TIL team will be trained to work in this so called "maker" environment. This also includes having access to the right tools to complete these projects and one step in this direction was the recently purchased *Ultimaker S3 3D printer*.

Simon Cox Student Design Competition

2020 saw the 6th annual competition. Sadly, it was stopped in its track due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But in 2021 it will be back bigger and even better. TIL has always been a big proponent of harnessing the creativity and synergy of students working alongside TIL members in a team environment, developing unique projects to support our members living ever more independently at home.

From 2021, TIL will be opening the competition up to students from across BC's post-secondary institutions, increasing peer involvement, increasing prize amounts, and publicizing the competition to a much wider audience.

TIL at the forefront to help design inclusive communities

TIL has begun working with stakeholders on the George Pearson Redevelopment Project in an advisory capacity ensuring the technology is in place right from the outset that allows people with physical disabilities to live independently in the new buildings.

We are hoping to eventually grow this third initiative to become an integral part in buildings across the province, in effect consulting with developers, architects and housing advocates to ensure new buildings in BC will be designed and built with inclusivity and independence in mind and, as such, become a coherent component of any building process.


The way forward with TIL

We will never forget our history or the dedicated staff that has been part of it. Yes, our locations have changed occasionally, the TIL program has evolved over the years, but one thing remains the same: TIL continues to be as dedicated and passionate as ever about assisting people with physical disabilities in BC to live more independently at home.

There is a lot of work ahead of us but we are committed to make it happen, with ingenuity and dedication. Just as our members have come to expect of us during the last 50 years!

My world of assistive devices

By Arjo

 **1998.** Newly injured with a spinal cord injury, I entered the world of assistive devices. Here are some reflections about some. *Bonus:* Technology for Independent Living (TIL) can set you up with any of them.

When returning home in 1998 from the hospital, I had an automated door installed. But having lost my finger dexterity, I couldn't activate it! I contacted TIL to see if they would be able to set up a control unit so I could actually use it. Abracadabra! TIL technicians showed up, did their magic, and I was free to come and leave my home as I pleased.

Since then TIL has been providing me with many of the control mechanisms I need in my daily life like Sip & Puff, button switches, Kin Controls and more.

Switches

Switches facilitate the use of other attached technologies. The first piece of technology I was able to use was my Sip & Puff control, a system based on pneumatics that sends signals to a device using air pressure created by blowing and sipping on a straw, tube or wand. While I don't need to use this control myself any longer, I still would say it is one of the most accessible and easily operated switches built by TIL in house. Even a person as completely immobilized as I was in the initial years after my spinal cord injury is able to use it.

Over the years, I continued experimenting with various *button switches*. I also tested *micro lights* which are adequate but expensive. I found them to be sometimes a little too sensitive. Do explore the range of switches out there to discover which ones work best for you.

Radiofrequency (RF) transmitter/receivers

Radiofrequency has the advantage of being able to go through any substance, like a wall for example, using radio waves. That means it is not dependent on a line of site relationship between transmitter and receiver. They are great for activating household AC devices that plug into a regular household socket and get activated by turning the power on – lights, fans, etc. Two things to bear in mind: check the limit of unique frequencies available on your switch as this will limit the number of devices you can

control and check the maximum amperage of the device you are trying to use to avoid blowing a fuse.



The first control unit TIL set me up with was the *Kin Control*. To this day it remains a favorite, allowing the activation of up to 10 devices. Before I was able to use my hands, I used to puff to move along the options/functions and sip when I reached the device I wanted to activate, like turning a phone on/off, to open the door, light on/off etc. Unfortunately, it has since gone out of production, so I'm looking for a replacement.

In 2007 I received a *GEWA*, possibly the most powerful assistive technology controller on the market. It allows for multiple infrared sequences. But bear in mind not every device can be controlled via infrared. Additionally, infrared control has to be line-of-sight to the receiver. For instance, a TV that uses infrared: the remote has to be pointed towards the TV, you cannot change channels from behind a wall. Personally, I still prefer to run a fan and light using my *Kin Control*.

Regarding smartphones: I can't physically access one. But since 2014, I've used an *Ameriphone RC-200*. It offers large buttons for ease of use, including 20 programmable speed dial buttons. Since it also allows for RF input, I am able to pick up calls remotely. Microphone input gives me a clear voice even when away from the base.

In 2018 TIL set me up with *Google Home* which is able to control multiple devices. Unfortunately, it interfered with my computer. I haven't found any solutions yet to solve the issue to my satisfaction. For now, *Google Home* is on hold for me.

The most important part: TIL is only ever one phone call away. Even more astonishingly, if you are a member of Technology for Living all of TIL's services are free of charge, including the devices you require to live more independently. A heartfelt thanks for your services, TIL – you are a Christmas gift every day of the year! Happy 50th anniversary.

Freedom and Independence Through Technology

Don Danbrook, Terry LeBlanc and Walt Lawrence

Don, Terry and Walt have been friends for a long time. “I actually met Walt in 1978,” Terry explains, “during the first week after my accident. He came and checked in on me, doing what Walt does so naturally: mentoring people. Do you remember how we first met, Don?” Don laughs: “Sure do, it was at a friend’s second wedding, in his backyard. And Walt, I met you at Pearson [the George Pearson Centre in Vancouver] in 1983. I had heard you guys were looking for someone to somehow live in a group home environment. I was warned not to get my hopes up because they wanted someone on a ventilator. There wasn’t really anyone around on a ventilator they wanted to live with, so I guess they thought I was ok.” One thing seems clear: Don moving out of Pearson was partially made possible by using technologies provided by TIL.

Walt has a long history with TIL and Simon Cox, the first executive director of TIL: “I met Simon in the early 70s through a volunteer at Pearson, Brenda. She came up to me one day and said, ‘Walt, I want you to meet someone!’ And that was Simon. Turned out Brenda and Simon got married.”

Don remembers: “I was on the spinal cord ward at Shaughnessy Hospital then when I first came across TIL and Simon, the Kinsmen Rehabilitation Foundation. It was early days for me, after my accident. When I wanted to change channels on the TV on the ward, I had to call the nurses for help. So, I had to make sure to pick a good channel since they couldn’t keep coming over and switching them for me. One day Simon showed up with a TV and a speaker phone and showed me how to use it.” Terry recalls: “I met Simon when I was living in a group home. He set me up with a TOSC [touch operated switch control]. The phone function it provided was super helpful! I was able to phone my carer at night or for any emergency. I also used it to turn on my IBM Selectric typewriter which had this amazing feature: it could erase mistakes.”

Don turns the conversation back to moving out of Pearson in the 1980s. “Without a doubt there were a lot of people who were skeptical about us moving into an independent living situation.” Smiling, Don continues: “Simon was very supportive along with other advocates from the Vancouver Health Unit (now Vancouver Coastal Health Authority), and the BC Paraplegic Association (now SCI BC), assuring

everyone that there was appropriate equipment available to keep us safe.” “Oh yes, not many people at Pearson liked the idea of them moving out,” Walt agrees. Don believes one reason may have been that the staff was overprotective. Walt nods: “Whatever their reason, TIL, the Kinsmen and BC Rehab made it happen. To most people, something as simple as answering a phone is nothing. Until you can’t do it. Same for opening a door. And then, all of a sudden, TIL would install all these accessible devices and we could do it again ourselves. We were no longer cut off from interacting with the world.”

Terry remembers another situation: “The elevator at Linden Tree Place! It’s a perfect example of Simon’s persistence. He spent three years chasing Otis Elevators. Three years that I was stuck in my building. In the end, little receiver units were installed and they work fantastic.” Don recalls, “Yes, entering and leaving my home independently with the automatic door openers the Kinsmen and TIL install has been a great benefit to me. Before having one I had to wait outside my front door until my staff showed up to let me in.”

While the past is full of amazing examples of assistive technology provided by TIL, the three men believe it’s important for TIL to continue being part of exploring emerging technologies. Terry explains: “For example, Google Home. It’s great. All the things I can just say out loud now and they happen. If I am hot, I just ask Google to turn the heat down.” Don believes: “It’s really important for TIL to be able to stand financially on its own. I think that is a positive strategy going forward.”

Assistive technologies today remain mostly reactive technologies: adjusting something that already exists to accommodate a special need. However, Walt thinks ‘universal design’ is a better approach. As TIL moves into the future, possibly partnering with BC Housing in an advisory role, the hope is to create products and/or environments that are designed, from the outset, to accommodate individuals with a wider range of abilities and disabilities. For example, rather than retrofitting ramps on existing buildings, a universal design approach would involve working with architects to design buildings that are accessible from the outset. Walt thinks this could also make everything more cost effective. The future is accessible, and TIL will be a part of it.



**DISABILITY
FOUNDATION**

I first heard of Technology for Independent Living when I started working at the Tetra Society in 2001. I've had the privilege of being asked by TIL staff member Wayne Pogue to sit on the judging panel for the 'Simon Cox Student Design Competition Awards'. This competition is an amazing showcase for the next generation of young engineers. Congratulations TIL. It's been a great 50 years! I look forward to a continued partnership, seeing the ongoing impact you will have on people's lives for the next 50 years!

*Eric Molendyk, National Coordinator
Tetra Society of North America*



The Cerebral Palsy Association of BC has partnered with TIL over the last 50 years in assisting people with cerebral palsy who live with physical disabilities to reach their maximum potential. We wish TIL all the best on the 50th anniversary!



Spinal Cord Injury BC

Very few organizations have provided service in BC for 50 years, fewer yet that have made as much of an impact over that time as has TIL. From its beginning, TIL has been transforming lives and has played a critical role in our collective efforts to help people with disabilities adjust, adapt, and thrive.



DABC wishes TIL all the best in its 50th year, we look forward to continuing our long partnership of collaboration for people with disabilities! We are so grateful for the work TIL has done and we anticipate even more amazing work from TIL in the next 50 years!



AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Words never seem enough to express our heartfelt gratitude to the support TIL has provided over the past 50 years to people living with ALS in British Columbia.

Your outstanding support has, and continues to enhance the quality of life for those living with ALS. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

With sincere gratitude, Wendy Toyer, Executive Director

individualized FUNDING resource centre



Paul Gauthier, Chris Hofley and all the team at the Individualized Funding Resource Centre (IFRC) wish to congratulate TIL on their 50th year. IFRC looks forward to working with you on the 'Pathways To Independence' peer group meetings and other projects to further our shared vision of supporting people with physical disabilities living independently in the community!



Neil Squire

The Neil Squire Society passes on its wholehearted congratulations to Technology for Independent Living's (TIL) celebration of 50 years of service! In our early days when we started our organization over 36 years ago we had the privilege of working closely with TIL. In fact through their generosity we actually had our first small base of operation. Over those years we watched this very important program continuously supply much-needed and innovative technology solutions that have enabled so many British Columbian's with disabilities to live more independent lives. We look forward to continued and future collaborations with TIL. Congratulations on this amazing milestone! Keep up the great work. Best wishes from the Neil Squire Society.

Keep going, come what may

Kirsty Dickinson



Kirsty worked for the Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program from 1997 – 2014. Today you can find her pruning vines, picking grapes or anything else that needs doing on her family vineyard in the Okanagan. That is who Kirsty is: someone who gets the job done, no matter what the job is.

Recounting her job interview for TIL, which was led by Simon

Cox — executive director with TIL at the time— Kirsty demonstrates she is a woman who rolls up her sleeves to tackle any challenge: “In typical Simon fashion it wasn’t a structured interview, just an informal chat. He told me they needed someone to help answer phones, organize the work schedules for the biomed and work on keeping up the client database. There was no actual job description. It was a ‘figure it out as you go along’ sort of job. It wasn’t like anything I had done before so there was a steep learning curve. It was the sort of position that if you saw gaps you just tried to fill them as best as you could.”

Kirsty brought a unique set of skills to TIL’s expanding operations. She was both a physiotherapist and had a diploma in not-for-profit management. She jumped in with both feet and thoroughly enjoyed the ride: “It was really a good match for me, using all the skills I had learned. For example, I was able to apply my physiotherapy background to understand access issues concerning the technology. More than anything I liked the informal atmosphere and the let’s get it done approach.”

She appreciated her co-workers, the volunteers and the culture of the organization. She recalls: “Katie was the voice of the Kinsmen [which used to run TIL], as she answered the phones and directed calls. Joyce worked in general fundraising and for the Mothers’ March.” TIL had the comfortable feeling of a grassroots organization, yet the program moved dynamically with the times, developing unique technologies while providing ever-expanding access to a wider range of assistive devices.

Kirsty recalls welcoming two more programs to the team, the Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program (PROP) and the Equipment and Assistive Technology Initiative (EATI): “It was a huge transition when we took on PROP. One day

we were just TIL and the next a client list arrived along with equipment and we were operating another whole program. Lots of long hours and dedicated staff helped us make the transition. My job was constantly evolving. I enjoyed the change and challenges that this presented. Simon fostered an environment that encouraged us to take on new responsibilities and spread our wings. My initial job had no connection to what I did over the years.”

A low point for Kirsty was when the Kinsmen were no longer able to provide the funding needed to keep TIL operating at capacity: “There was a moment we had only 2 employees: Simon and myself. Thanks to the efforts of many supporters, eventually funding was secured to enable TIL to continue providing our invaluable services.”

Recently she was reminded how far technology has come. Celebrating a family birthday via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, her 21-month-old grandson stole the show: “He spent most of the call instructing Siri [on the iPad] to play ‘Dump Trucks’ again and again.” For Kirsty, this drove home how technology provides an ever-increasing level playing field for people with different abilities, and also how TIL has evolved with the times: “Kin Controls are now in a museum and the biomed are using a completely different range of tools to provide environmental controls.”

She recalls a story about growing pains of TIL-provided technology: “When voice activation was in its infancy, it really wasn’t very reliable. One client, using an early version of a voice activated phone, experienced mysterious activations. Even after numerous visits, the biomed could not figure out why the phone kept switching itself on. Finally, one day it happened while a biomed was visiting. The culprit? A budgie. When the bird tweeted, the phone activation was turned on!”

It wasn’t always the kind of job that you could leave behind when going home in the evening, Kirsty reflects. “People we work with are some of the most vulnerable in our society and their needs aren’t always in our control to meet. But at TIL we always tried to find other resources to help fill the gaps.”

Walking the long rows of the vineyard, she talks about her lifelong passion for gardening. She admits that every once in a while she feels a bit intimidated by the scale of the operation, wondering if she will finish before the next job needs to be done. One thing is certain: she will always give it her best shot.

It takes a village...

By Joanne Bengert

This is a phrase we often hear and one I have come to fully appreciate after working on a project to install accessible elevator controls in an apartment building in Vancouver.

Some of the Balance readers who have been members of Technology for Living for a long time may remember me from when I was working as a technician with the Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program. I have since moved on to work with the Disability Alliance BC on the CARMA Program.

A while back, CARMA was supporting a man living with a high spinal cord injury move from long term care into his own apartment. Shortly after he had moved into his new place, he contacted me to say that he needed to use the elevator to leave his home and that was impossible for him: the elevator wasn't equipped with accessible controls. What could be done to help him leave his home?

The building he was moving into has a number of accessible apartment units, owned and operated by the Vancouver Resource Society. I realized immediately that if we were able to install accessible controls into the elevator it would benefit many more than the man who had initially approached us and could provide equal access to everyone in the building living with mobility issues.

His apartment suite is great. It is equipped with an automatic door open. The layout is open, and it is very easy to maneuver. If it hadn't been for the fact that the apartment is situated on the third floor of the building it would have been an ideal set up. However, because of the specifics of his injury, he is unable to use his hands to access the elevator. So, he was looking for a solution, contacted the Disability Alliance BC and ... now comes the village.

This was a very complex project. Initially I wasn't convinced that we would be able to source funding for his request. Usually this type of project is out of the scope of help provided by both BC Rehab, TIL and the Kinsmen Foundation of BC. But when they realized how many people were going to benefit from this installation, they didn't hesitate to join forces. We had managed to assemble three amazing organisations, each of them longstanding champions in supporting the disability community. Everyone was excited about the opportunity to be involved in this worthwhile effort.

The next hurdle to overcome was to obtain permissions. With the support of the Vancouver Resource Society we set up a meeting with the building's strata council to discuss the project. We explained what it would entail and who it would benefit. To our delight, this particular strata council was amazing to work with and they agreed after a very short discussion. Often, we encounter many difficulties with a project like this, and quite often it ends with a strata not giving permission. In my personal opinion, this strata council should be an example to others.

With permission and funding in place, I needed to ensure that the elevator company, Richmond Elevator, was ready to do the work. Several joint meetings took place between them, some biomed from TIL and myself. They were important to ensure everyone understood the scope of the work and all materials were available for Richmond Elevator to complete the job. Finally, TIL came to set up the remote control to operate the accessible elevator.

After many months of planning, the installation work was completed within two days.

The resident who had made the initial request is now able to call the elevator and select any floor using his sip 'n puff ... all thanks to the village.



Christopher Hamilton (r) moved into a building where he wasn't able to access the elevator. Now the system (l) has been upgraded and he is able to use his sip 'n puff to leave home at his convenience.



Kinsmen opening doors

Jim Watson & Philip Jewell

Jim Watson, a Life Member of the Kinsmen and CEO Emeritus with the Kinsmen Foundation of BC, remembers his parents taking him along to some of his first Kinsmen meetings in Flin Flon, Manitoba as a child. But it took a tongue-in-cheek sales pitch from a local insurance salesperson for him to become a member in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. The salesperson fibbed that Jim would get a discount on the life insurance he was about to buy if he were a member of the Kinsmen. Jim promptly joined in September 1963, even without ever getting any actual discounts, and has been a proud Kinsmen ever since.

Philip Jewell, currently the Volunteer CEO of the Kinsmen Foundation, moved with his family to Coquitlam, BC in 1990. Their new neighbours asked them to come along to a Kinsmen gathering and the Jewells never looked back. For them joining the Kinsmen opened a door to a special, valued community of likeminded folks.

Jim's connections with Technology for Living (TIL) began when the Kinsmen's offices were located at a building on West 12th in Vancouver. It was there that the Kinsmen established TIL. A team of committed technicians under the leadership of Steve Egerton was hired to work on technologies to help people with disabilities living at home. One exceptional technician, Simon Cox, took over the reins of TIL after Steve moved on.

"Simon was an amazing guy," recalls Jim. "He knew how to talk to anybody and had an amazing talent to build bridges between differently abled communities. Philip adds: "I remember a meeting where I asked him *how* the Kinsmen would know what people with disabilities may need in their home. 'Just ask people with disabilities what they need. It's as simple as that.' He was of course right and that stuck with me ever since." Jim and Philip both agree that Simon was not only warm-hearted and easy to talk to but also had a deep passion for his job.

Eventually TIL became an independent organisation when the Kinsmen closed down their building on West

12th. That didn't mean their collaboration ended. Far from it. One very specific, ongoing project that the Kinsmen and TIL continue to be very proud of is the automatic door opener program. "With that initiative we were giving potential donors something concrete to hang their hat on," recalls Philip.

Jim, considering the future, believes actual fundraising events will fizzle out: "We did well with them in the past but even our latest, big fundraising event, the annual

golf tournament needs to be re-evaluated and not just in the light of covid-19." He continues: "While there is no silver bullet, the 50th anniversary of TIL coming up this year in September is an opportunity to raise awareness of what TIL does amongst the younger generation of Kinsmen who may not know about our longstanding partnership."

Philip agrees: "Looking back on what we, the Kinsmen, have

achieved with TIL in the past makes me really proud. That's a great feeling and we need to keep that fresh. Maybe sending the Balance newsletter to the Kinsmen may be an idea to re-introduce TIL to our wider membership."

"Another really great way of showing everyone why this collaboration is so worthwhile is by re-imagining an ambassadorial type of program," Jim explains. "When we had TIL users speak at some of our past events, the outpouring of support from the Kinsmen was overwhelming afterwards. We need to use that type of connection to make people excited about giving again." Both men believe that investing some money in training 'ambassadors' and then sending them out to speak at events across the province will deliver a significant new impact on fundraising numbers.

Jim finishes with a call to action: "Give people a task, give the campaign a good name, fund the initiative properly and TIL will be moved into people's awareness as a thing they want to give their money to. This will become especially important coming this fall after the fallout of the covid-19 pandemic continues to be felt"



Jim Watson



Philip Jewell

Let's see what we can do to make this work ...

Heather Morrison

In 1981, Heather Morrison, had to have a tracheostomy due to muscular dystrophy (MD). To this day she can remember trying to get used to a ventilator, thinking every second breath was going to be her last. Forty years later, she is still an active member of the community, using both the services of PROP (Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program) and TIL (Technology for Independent Living), and a volunteer with Technology for Living.

She moved to 'Pearson' (the George Pearson Centre in Vancouver) after leaving the ICU in November 1981. Two things became clear very quickly.

One: Pearson could never be her home. Two: the woman in the bed next to her, Jeanette Andersen, was going to be a very good friend. "I lived at Pearson for two years, 10 days, an hour and 40 minutes," Heather chuckles before continuing in a serious tone. "Anybody who tries really hard for two years to get out of a place really doesn't have that great a time there." Heather clarifies that she doesn't hate Pearson: "Don't get me wrong, I love Pearson. I volunteer at Pearson. Even now I go about twice a week. I enjoy the people living there and the staff. But each time I go, I get to go home in the evening."

Trying to put her finger on what was not working for her when she was living at Pearson, she pinpoints the feeling of losing her identity: "I really think when I lived there, for those two years, I lost who I was. I was losing Heather. Of course, not everyone feels that that way, but I did. And then, when I actually left, I have to be honest: my life continued to be very much entangled with Pearson. I just do not sleep there anymore. My friends live there. I'm part of a program helping people find what they would like to do, what they'd like to be involved in. Basically, a support group for the Pearson residents."

Heather had some extraordinary challenges to overcome in order to be able to move into independent living accommodations especially considering the fact she is ventilator dependent with **no** independent breathing time: "A friend and I moved into a basement apartment in Ladner, but I soon realized I really needed some extra help to make living on our own more accessible. That's how we met Simon Cox,



a really unique guy. He was the Executive Director of TIL in those days, creating and installing environmental controls for users of the program. Simon considered improving our living situation to be an exciting challenge. There was no '*no, we can't do this or that*'. It was: '*Let's see what we can do to make this work.*'

Heather continues: "Having access to a program like TIL really changed my life. I didn't have to keep calling anyone to do things for me. I could answer the phone, change tv channels, turn on the light... Using environmental controls, I could do it myself. That made such a big difference. There were a range of environmental controls available. I never had a very big one. I didn't need one. But my friend Jeanette: her environmental control did 75 different things. She loved it. For her it was totally amazing."

Heather and her friend Jeanette started to volunteer for TIL: "We did *show and tell* sessions. People would come in and learn how to use new equipment and have a look at new, innovative devices. They would talk to us and our team. It was great to be part of that. We would usually meet in a room at Pearson." Much of the contact between Heather, Jeanette and the TIL members happened by phone though. "We would phone people after they had joined the program. I always found it strange that after we phoned them hardly anyone would ever call *us* back." She laughs: "Maybe it was because we were so darned good telling them all they needed to know during the first call? But people are always welcome to call!"

Heather still volunteers for TIL because she has seen the difference it can make talking to a peer. She also believes the need for both TIL and PROP services are as important as ever. She considers: "In some ways, TIL and PROP are still very grassroots. For example, 51% of the board of Technology for Living's directors have to be users of the program. That means it isn't run by some folks sitting in a high office sending down directives but by people that use and need the program. Of course, TIL has grown, and technology has certainly changed."

But listening to Heather it seems that the heart of TIL continues to be in the right place.

AGM 2020

Technology for Living's AGM will be held on

 **September 10**

 **4:00 – 5:00PM**

at **The Roundhouse
Community Centre**
(if gatherings are permitted)

Available online as well

Members are required to register and RSVP:
agm@technologyforliving.org

Further details will be sent to members in the post

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PATHWAYS TO INDEPENDENCE

VIRTUAL PEER GROUP MEETING

A collaboration between TFL and IFRC
COVID-19 updates & other hot topics facilitated by **Paul Gauthier**.
Hosted via Zoom as this is helpful due to the COVID-19 issue
and also allows greater participation across the entire province.

To RSVP and to register your email address for the Zoom notification contact us at:

 **604-777-7576** or  **604-326-0175** or

 **Pathways@technologyforliving.org**

If you require Technology for Living Tech Support for your tablets, smartphone or telephone please advise and we will schedule you for assistance before the meeting.

