

balance

... what it's all about

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Remembering Don Danbrook



Don Danbrook, TFL's recently retired Board Treasurer who passed away on September 11, 2023, had many qualifications. He was a CPA/CGA. He held both real estate and mortgage brokering licenses. He was the CEO of a real estate development company and a Stanford University certified leader in Chronic Disease Self Management. He sat on the Boards of SCI BC and the Neil Squire Society. When TFL was founded in 2006, Don was one of its first Board members and continued to serve until September 2022, when he retired.

Don had a passion for hard work and a passion for organizations supporting people with disabilities. He was a big believer in paying it forward and never forgot about all the support that he received in the 1980's to leave an institution and settle in the Creekview Housing Co-op. If Don believed that he had something to prove to a society that relegated people with disabilities to institutions, he more than succeeded. He studied, worked and volunteered at a pace and level of accomplishment that was remarkable.

During his tenure with TFL, no task was too small for Don. He pitched in with bookkeeping, represented TFL publicly, championed the Simon Cox Competition, read the fine print on contracts and rarely missed a Board or Finance Committee meeting. He was always kind, patient, generous and reliable. You could count on Don to follow through with whatever he undertook to do. He was deeply appreciated by everyone at TFL for his hands on approach to any challenge.

Along with Ken Kramer and Terry Leblanc, both of whom passed away recently, Don was one of our TFL pioneers. All three helped to build a strong values and member driven organization. We are in their debt. Let's do what Don did so many years ago and pay it forward by equaling their generosity and commitment.

Technology for Living round up



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Join the 2024 Simon Cox Student Design Competition!

Living as a person with a disability, do you have an idea for a device to help improve your independence at home?

Every peer idea that is accepted as a project by a student team will receive a \$100 gift card. Assistive technology ideas around sports, clothing, pets, gaming, household solutions and others are all welcome!

Contact info@technologyforliving.org

Congratulations, Lily!

TFL is thrilled to announce that Lily Cheung, a long-standing member of our PROP team, has been honoured by the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists for her exceptional contributions as a Respiratory Therapist (RT). With a vision to enhance independence and autonomy, she provides support to members and their caregivers in their homes. Lily's efforts consistently go beyond the call of duty, ensuring that the unique needs of every individual under her care are meticulously addressed. Please join us in congratulating Lily on this well-deserved recognition.



Victoria 'Tech for Seniors with Disabilities Roadshow'

In September our Peer Team was able to promote yet another of their Roadshows on location in Victoria

It was well attended and drew seniors and people with disabilities, engaging in insightful discussions on technology and community resources. Attendees shared personal stories about triumphs and challenges, while discussing insights on navigating daily obstacles. The event highlighted home automation and travelling with disabilities. As the day came to an end with a peer dinner at Brown's Craft House in Victoria, a sense of community, mutual support, and empowerment was apparent.



BITS & BYTES FROM TIL

Installation Approval

If you are a renter, or live in a strata, make sure your landlord/strata have approved any changes TIL will be making to your home. While TIL does require **written** approval for automatic door openers, we also will not install other devices in your home until you let us know explicitly that the changes are approved. Some devices to get approval for ahead of the installation are SMART doorbells (strata's don't often approve of cameras pointing at communal property), SMART locks, SMART light switches, SMART thermostats, and anything that requires drilling into walls (eg: some SMART window blind controls).

CONTACT US!

We are always happy to discuss any member's needs. Simply phone us at **604.326.0175** or send an email to info@technologyforliving.org

TIPS & TRICKS

Apple's iOS 17 refines Siri for a smoother user experience. The "Hey" in "Hey Siri" is now optional, simplifying activation. Another new feature is "Back-to-Back Requests," allowing multiple queries without reactivating Siri. This streamlines tasks like checking time and sending texts in one go, making Siri easier to use.

Future technologies are not that far off

By Benson Au

Major changes are taking place in the world of assistive technology. New, cutting-edge technology is attempting to build a more inclusive world for people with disabilities. It is changing the way we think about mobility, independence, and inclusivity. Technology for Living and specifically our Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program is constantly looking for new innovative ways to push the envelope when it comes to assistive technology. Here are some innovations that we believe might eventually make a difference in the daily lives of our peers.

Autonomous wheelchairs

Overall, innovations in wheelchair-friendly tech are already improving life for many peers. But great strides are also being made in wheelchairs themselves. So called autonomous wheelchairs are SMART devices equipped with cameras, sensors and AI technology that assist users navigate tricky situations with ease, figuring out the best routes to take. Some chairs are connected to a central system that can provide various advantages, such as real-time monitoring, remote assistance, and the ability to receive software updates to keep things run smoothly.

The buzz about autonomous taxis

Companies like the Chinese aerospace company Ehang, or the German company Volocopter, are working on self-flying aircraft. Ehang is currently getting their EHang AAV certified to operate in Asian cities. For people with disabilities, the use of vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) aircraft to travel easily from one spot to another would be a game-changer in terms of mobility and overall freedom.

Exoskeletons

These are wearable devices that let people with mobility issues stand and walk by turning a user's thoughts into motion. An external frame can be donned to support the body, either to help a person overcome an injury or to enhance their biological capacities by using a brain-computer interfaces or simple gestures. Users can switch between sitting in their wheelchair and walking in their exoskeleton. This is a huge step forward for independence and reduces the physical limitations that wheelchair users often face.

Introducing SMART cities

Several cities around the world are making strides toward becoming "SMART cities." One aspect of a SMART city is building an infrastructure that is inclusive, no matter a resident's mobility challenges. Sidewalks would have ramps and tactile guidance systems to make it easier for people using wheelchairs. These sidewalks can be equipped with climate controls, so they're warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Buses and trains in SMART cities will be equipped with automated boarding systems to make boarding easier for wheelchair users.

Innovations like autonomous wheelchairs, self-driving cars, VTOL aircraft, exoskeletons, SMART urban planning, 3D printing, and communication devices are contributing to a more inclusive world and extend beyond physical mobility, positively impacting the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals with disabilities. The future holds numerous opportunities, promising increased accessibility, independence, and inclusiveness for all people.

INHALE / EXHALE

Have you been affected by the recall of respiratory devices?

In June 2021, Philips Respironics recalled a large number of positive airway pressure medical devices over concerns about potential health risks.

Researchers from the Universities of Ottawa and Calgary are conducting a survey of patients from across Canada who have been affected by this recall.

We want to hear how the recall has impacted you and gather feedback for future improvement.

The online survey will take about 15-20 minutes. Enter a prize draw for a gift card.

Survey link:

<https://tinyurl.com/mv7jsp2y>

**Philips Respironics
CPAP Recall**



CONTACT US!

If you need respiratory advice or support please contact the PROP team at
1.866.326.1245

From Hospital to Travel Adventure: Fillable Forms Empower Ventilator Users

By **Miranda Whiteley** and **Ean Price**

Hospital visits are stressful for everyone, but our members using mechanical ventilators often experience an even higher degree of anxiety. Altering ventilation settings, whether with a tracheostomy tube or face mask, is uncomfortable, leading many members to avoid necessary hospital trips.

Our Peer team has developed fillable PDF forms that allow you to enter your medical information, your ventilator or bilevel settings, your normal blood work values and other essential information that can be provided to medical staff if a hospital admission is necessary. These forms are also valuable to take with you on a vacation.

During a hospital stay, it's crucial to note that PROP Respiratory Therapists cannot provide their usual care or services. We can advocate for you and share detailed information about your ventilation needs, but we are unable to make any setting adjustments or provide counseling for any such changes while you're in the hospital. Once you are discharged back home, PROP services will promptly resume.



A Peer's perspective: Forms can provide peace of mind

As someone who is ventilator dependent, Ean cannot stress enough how invaluable these forms have been for him: "The first time I went to the hospital without them, the experience was a nightmare. The medical staff, despite their best intentions, were not familiar with my specific settings, leading to a lot of discomfort and anxiety.

Now, I have all my essential information in one place and ready to hand over to the medical team. The way I see it, these forms are not just some pieces of paper. They are a tool that empowers me to advocate for my healthcare needs providing control in situations where I'd otherwise feel vulnerable.

These forms have also been a lifesaver during my travels. Knowing that I have all the necessary information at my fingertips gives me the confidence to explore the world without constantly worrying about 'what if' scenarios.

If you haven't already, I strongly recommend taking the time to fill out these forms. It's a small step that can make a big difference in your healthcare experience. You can find the forms on the TFL website at <https://tinyurl.com/ynh5x9un>

INTRODUCING ROBIN WHYTE



The Peer Team is pleased to announce Robin Whyte Grist has joined us as the Community Advisor for Vancouver Island. Hailing from Victoria herself, she is deeply connected to the region and its people. Robin was recently certified as a 'Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility' professional which highlights her commitment to enhancing accessibility for all. While her close-knit family and friends are at the centre of her life, she is very much looking forward to creating a meaningful impact for our members.

CONTACT US!

We are always happy to discuss any member's needs. Simply phone us at **604.301.4208** or send an email to peer@technologyforliving.org

NEWS FLASH

Easter Seals **Canada's Access 2 Card** program provides individuals with disabilities a card, allowing a companion free entry at over 500 participating venues nationwide. Many major entertainment hubs, from movie theatres to museums, support this initiative. This program reduces financial barriers and promotes inclusivity. Go to access2card.ca

The Peer Hub in action

By Taylor Danielson

In July, the Technology for Living's Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program (PROP) and the Peer Team jointly organized an insightful Peer Hub Zoom meeting. The session covered key updates on the PROP program, a discussion on the complexities of the ongoing Philips class-action lawsuit, and a heartfelt acknowledgment of the retirement of our long-serving medical advisor, Dr. Jeremy Road.

We also warmly welcomed Dr. Aditi Shah as Dr. Road's successor, recognizing her extensive experience in respiratory care. Dr. Shah's alignment with PROP's community care model underscores our continued commitment to prioritizing the voices of our members.

The Philips Respironics recall and class-action case

Anthony Leoni, lawyer and partner at Rice Harbut Elliott LLP, joined our meeting and answered questions about the national class action related to defective Philips respiratory devices: "The claim concerns sleep, and respiratory care devices manufactured, marketed, and sold by the Defendants, particularly Philips Respironics branded *Continuous Positive Airway Pressure* (CPAP), *Bi-Level Positive Airway Pressure* (BIPAP), and *Mechanical Ventilators*. The devices are manufactured with a Polyester-Based Polyurethane (PE-PUR) sound abatement foam, which degrades over time and under certain conditions into toxic particles which may be inhaled or ingested by the user. The toxic particles may cause cancer, respiratory damage or irritation, inflammation, irritation,

nausea/vomiting, hypersensitivity, and/or headache."



Leoni's confirmation that both PROP and our membership qualify for the class action came as a relief, especially given the considerable costs in equipment and personnel hours that PROP has incurred to ensure our members' safety. He encourages members to sign up at: www.rhelaw.com/class-action/philips-cpap-class-action/

In regard to the reimbursement plan, Leoni emphasized the priority of focusing on immediate "out of pocket" expenses for class members before addressing long-term health concerns. As for the claims about injuries among the class members, the list of potential caused by foam toxins is extensive, harms as mentioned above, ranging from conditions like asthma to even cancer. The certification hearing is set for December 9th-13th, 2024, but if there's a settlement in the U.S., it might speed up things in Canada.

From struggles to strength

A multi-faceted journey to mental wellness

By Gabe Harris

I've been a quadriplegic for 15 years, and the importance of prioritizing mental well-being as a person living with disabilities has been an integral part of my journey. Challenges include depression, anxiety, body image issues, self-isolation, relationship difficulties, adjustment and acceptance, and post-traumatic stress disorder. I've faced all of these challenges at some point, and some of them I am still battling. Of course, everyone's experience is unique, and the psychological hurdles faced by people living with quadriplegia differ. However, I believe that no matter what challenges people are struggling with, a comprehensive approach involving psychological support, counseling, rehabilitation, and social integration is essential.

Nurturing our emotional health provides people with disabilities with numerous benefits. For me, my emotional well-being directly influences my perception of and ability to navigate circumstances, relationships, and daily interactions. To maintain a strong and healthy emotional state, it's important to regularly reinforce it with positive thoughts and feelings. This way, you'll have a reserve to draw from when you face difficult times.

After my accident, I needed to adapt to a different way of life. I had to address physical limitations and approach relationships and social connections differently. Physical health is closely tied to emotional well-being and vice versa. I find that having a strong emotional foundation also equips me better to advocate for myself. It fosters self-confidence, assertiveness, and enhances my ability to communicate effectively with others, including healthcare professionals, employers, and policymakers.

When I find myself getting overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness and futility, positive reinforcements really help me to get through those moments: "I am worth it! I am strong! I am successful! I am beautiful!"

In the end, it doesn't matter what the actual words are; just be positive! There are other techniques and resources to explore and utilize.

A healthy mind supports a healthy body

As I mentioned previously, emotional well-being can have an impact on someone's physical health. Chronic stress, anxiety, in short, negative emotions can affect the immune system and overall functioning of the body. Taking care of your emotional health by reducing stress can support your physical health. Also, nurturing your emotional health has an impact on finding personal fulfillment and furthering self-actualization. Cultivating a resilient mindset is fundamental for people with disabilities, as it empowers us to thrive, overcome challenges, and lead fulfilling lives.

Empower your emotional well-being with these tools

I have used several support systems and technologies to help me with my mental well-being, including mindfulness and meditation practices, exercise/physical activities, cognitive-behavioral techniques, and self-care activities. I found them to be very effective.

Mindfulness apps

For example, *Headspace* and *Calm* are two apps I have used (both available on iOS and Android) that provide guided meditation and breathing exercises to reduce anxiety. Other similar apps are *Othership*, *Simply Being*, and *iBreathe*. You don't need to necessarily get an app as you can simply use a timer on your phone to guide you through breathing exercises.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a method that helps people feel better by changing how they think and what they do, using various techniques to promote positive behavior changes. Some key techniques are self-monitoring, positive self-talk, behavioral modification, self-regulation, and active self-reinforcement.



Assistive technology

Here are some examples of technology I use on a regular basis:

> Voice Recognition

Programs like *Dragon Naturally Speaking* or Apple's voice control allow people to control their devices, dictate text, and navigate applications using voice commands.

> Home Automation

Devices such as Amazon Echo and *Google Home* can be integrated with home automation systems to control lights, temperature, environment devices, and controlled through voice commands.

Technology plays an important role in my life. The independence I regain by using assistive technology has a direct impact on my mental well-being.

Virtual Reality Therapy

A newer development to work on mental health issues is called 'virtual reality therapy'. *VirtualAbility*, a nonprofit organization, offers virtual support groups, educational sessions, and recreational activities within a virtual environment to promote social interaction and mental well-being for individuals with disabilities; other similar companies are *KarunaVR* and *RelieVRx*, which provide immersive experiences for pain management, relaxation, and stress reduction.

Online networking groups and organisations

Numerous online platforms are available for connecting with other peers, where the focus revolves around sharing

experiences and offering mutual support. They're easy to find and connect to. For example:

- > Spinal Cord Injury BC Peer Support
- > Disability Alliance BC (DABC)
- > Peer Support Canada
- > CareCure Community
- > SPINALpedia

On Facebook, I am a member of various groups:

- > Quadriplegic Rehab Life
- > Spinal Cord Peer Support Worldwide
- > Accessible Okanagan
- > Here and Now- Washington Paralysis Network.

There are a couple of other disability organizations I want to mention. This newsletter, the Balance, is published by Technology for Living (TFL). Their programming includes Zoom meetings to foster informative and supportive peer networking, is setting up people with disabilities of all age groups with assistive technology and has an excellent peer team that facilitates connections between peers.

There is also the Tetra Society of North America which builds innovative solutions for people with physical disabilities to overcome environmental barriers and the Neil Squire Society offering assistive technology services and employment programs.

I believe that technological progress and a growing understanding of the emotional struggles experienced by quadriplegics have ushered in a new era, one with enhanced resources and initiatives aimed at bolstering mental well-being. For me the resounding message is this: nobody has to face these challenges alone.

• Tis the season 'not' to be a couch potato

Christmas ideas for peers living in Victoria

By Marnie Essery

The holiday season has arrived, filling the air with festive cheer and anticipation. I am no Grinch, but eating chips and watching Hallmark movies while lazing about will not help anyone's physical or mental health. Why not try a different approach to holiday gatherings this year? Instead of the usual cookie exchanges, gather with friends and family to prepare and share healthy meals. This not only saves time but also reduces stress, as you'll have prepared meals in the freezer ready to enjoy. Who knows, you might even discover a new favorite recipe in the process?

Get into the holiday spirit at home by listening to seasonal tunes while doing some pre-guest-hosting cleaning. It's a perfect time to purge items you no longer use and donate them to a charity.

When it comes to Christmas shopping, consider visiting your local malls. They provide an opportunity to get in some extra exercise as you move around the warm environment. Maybe purchase an extra gift to donate to one of the charities with drop-off locations in the malls, spreading the holiday spirit to those in need?

Holiday parties often involve sitting around, but you can keep the energy up by playing games in teams like "Holiday Pictionary" or charades using popular Christmas carols or movies for some lively and interactive fun.

For those who find large holiday gatherings overwhelming, especially if you have autism or sensory processing disorder, take a break by going outside for some fresh

air. Explore scenic locations like Westsong Walkway, Dallas Road, and Island View Beach, which accommodate most ability levels. And if you're up for a challenge, you can register for longer walks that also support charities. [www.alltrails.com/canada/british-columbia/victoria/ada]

Enjoy the festive lights in your neighborhood by taking a leisurely stroll or embark on a Christmas

light tour by car. In Victoria, Butchart Gardens, with its enchanting "The Magic of Christmas" display, is another excellent destination to enjoy. [www.butchartgardens.com/christmas/]

Looking to burn off extra holiday calories?

Explore the Gingerbread Showcase at the Parkside Hotel [810 Humboldt Street]. While admiring the gingerbread houses, remember that all donations go to support Habitat for Humanity. Continue the festive experience and visit the Festival of Trees at the downtown Bay Centre, where you can vote for your favorite tree and support the BC Children's Hospital Foundation.

If you're interested in connecting with peers while staying active, non-profit organizations like Spinal Cord Injury BC and ConnecTra offer weekly virtual exercise classes and seasonal events that you can participate in. Also, check out your local recreation centers for some fun and affordable activities. They offer a variety of classes, from card making to dancing and cooking. Additionally, consider the LIFE program, Leisure Involvement for Everyone [www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/facilities/life-program.html], which provides credits and free drop-in visits to low-income individuals and families.

Traveling over the holidays?

If you're not staying home during the holidays, plan simple workouts that don't require much space or equipment. Bring resistance bands, do some stretching exercises, or have your favorite workout app handy to use whenever you have some free time. Remember to practice some self-care during the holiday season: stay hydrated, get enough sleep, and maintain a flexible mindset. Start your New Year's resolutions early by focusing on your health and well-being. Make a difference in your life and set the tone for a healthier year ahead.



Breaking into the world of Virtual Reality

By Benson Au and Nicole Whitford

Imagine a world where physical limitations can nearly fade into the background. Virtual Reality (VR) can serve as a tool to open a door to this world for people with disabilities who are often isolated or unable to leave their homes due to mobility challenges. VR can provide a new level of immersive possibilities for exploring distant places or engaging in activities that are often beyond the reach of people with mobility issues.

Today's world continues to present physical obstacles for people living with physical disabilities. VR has the potential to become a substantial tool, attempting to bridge the gap between physical limitations and providing virtual access to otherwise inaccessible experiences—a unique opportunity to temporarily leave the confines of one's home.

At Technology for Living, we are always on the lookout for innovative ways to enrich the lives of our members. We are looking at VR as yet another tool to break down another set of barriers for our members.

What do you need to explore the world of VR?

Entering the immersive technology of virtual reality (VR) involves a series of steps, considerations, and financial investment. First and foremost, you need to acquire the necessary hardware. Users must purchase specialized VR hardware, which currently includes a headset and hand controllers. (Contact our TIL program at til@technologyforliving.org to work with you on setting up adaptive switches that can be activated with different motor functions, such as 'sip and puff,' 'head switches,' etc.).

If you've never used VR before and you're not particularly tech-savvy, the Oculus Quest (from Meta/Facebook) is a good choice. Other players on the market include HTC, Sony, Apple and more. Each offers its own VR headset models, catering to varying budgets and preferences. Be aware that the financial implications to enter the VR market can vary significantly and even the lowest-priced entry-level headset, like the Oculus Quest 2, is still fairly expensive. However, as technology advances and more players enter the market, hopefully, the barriers to purchasing the necessary equipment will decrease, making it more affordable to a broader audience.



We have briefly mentioned the remarkable way VR provides the ability to immerse users in lifelike environments. The technology displays graphics that genuinely make users feel as though they are stepping into another world. Whether you're exploring a dense forest, embarking on an epic adventure in a game, or trying skydiving from the comfort of your home, the sensation can feel incredibly real. VR worlds allow you to move with ease in these virtual environments, momentarily suspending the limitations of your physical surroundings.

It doesn't have to be just escapism

VR can also be a helpful tool in other ways. For example, for our peers living with physical disabilities, it offers an opportunity to enhance hand-eye coordination and arm strength. Whether playing an exciting game or using motion controllers to navigate a virtual world, every interaction contributes to improved motor skills. It is possible that someone with limited mobility may find that VR games, which require precise hand movements, can be a form of physical therapy. This fusion of entertainment and rehabilitation can be an innovative way to help people practice control over their bodies.

The therapeutic benefits of nature are well-documented, but not everyone can easily access the great outdoors. Using VR, however, makes it possible to provide a virtual connection to nature that can be beneficial. The Japanese mindful, meditative practice of "forest bathing" which involves immersing oneself in nature, is now accessible through VR. So even if someone is unable to leave their home, they can experience the tranquility of a forest, complete with the sights and sounds that are said to promote emotional and physical well-being.

To explore the impact of using VR, specifically with our members in mind, we asked our Peer Team Community Advisor, Nicole Whitford, to take her first steps into the virtual world and share her thoughts with us.



Nicole trying out the virtual world.

The Pros and Cons of VR

While virtual reality holds immense promise for individuals with physical disabilities, it's important to acknowledge the practical aspects, both positive and negative.

Nicole, who lives with a physical disability, discovered several noteworthy advantages during her experience: "For me, one of the most significant benefits of VR is its obvious capacity to provide an escape for people who are confined to their homes due to mobility issues. Virtual reality offers a pathway to explore alternate worlds and environments, granting a sense of temporary liberation from isolation. I am also impressed by the high-quality graphics and immersive nature of VR experiences. The realistic visuals contribute to a heightened sense of being *there*, making me feel as though I am genuinely inhabiting another world."

Nicole also highlighted the potential for VR to enhance motor skills, improving hand-eye coordination and arm strength, which, as we noted above, can be particularly beneficial for those who are seeking to improve their physical capabilities.

Nicole pointed out the therapeutic aspect of VR: "Particularly the ability to connect people with the healing power of nature. Virtual reality allows people to immerse themselves in natural environments, fostering emotional and physical well-being by providing a unique and accessible way to experience the beauty and serenity of the natural world. Nicole has had the opportunity to experience a real-world forest bathing workshop: "Engaging in real-world forest bathing provides the opportunity to fully immerse yourself in the real natural environment. I was able to experience it with all my senses—seeing, touching, and smelling it in real time. I was able to reach out to touch the trees and breathe in the fresh air, truly connecting with nature. On the other hand, virtual reality technology offers the freedom to explore the wonders of nature at your convenience and location of choice. It grants people the chance to virtually visit and experience many places, even if their physical mobility is restricted."

Other more critical observations came up around the hardware. Nicole was concerned about the necessity for setup assistance: "Depending on their physical capabilities, some people may require a lot of help in configuring the VR device, which may pose challenges for those who do not have easy access to tech support, potentially limiting their ability to enjoy VR experiences independently."

Another drawback that Nicole pointed out is the physical requirements for VR usage: "To fully immerse myself in virtual reality, it's essential to have a certain level of arm mobility and dexterity. This requirement might pose limitations for people with physical disabilities, potentially excluding them from the benefits of VR." This limitation will most likely change in the near future. Even now, there are ways to use gaze-based controls with some models. Nicole believes that a hands-free version could be a game-changer, significantly enhancing accessibility for users with physical disabilities. Such innovations will make VR a more inclusive and versatile tool for a broader range of users of all abilities. Cost is another aspect that Nicole brought up as a potential barrier. VR technology can be expensive, which will restrict access for people who may find it financially challenging to acquire the necessary equipment.

A Groundbreaking Technology

VR has the potential to significantly enhance the lives of individuals with physical disabilities. It offers them the chance to explore new worlds, increase their physical abilities, and connect with nature in ways that were once thought impossible. While there are certainly challenges to overcome, the benefits of VR for those of us living with physical disabilities are undeniable.

Yeah, I can do this!

By Richard Harrison



Caleb is your average kind of teenager. He enjoys playing *Grand Theft Auto* and is happy to share an excellent spot where you can temporarily evade the police while planning your next move in the game. His favorite Transformer is *Optimus Prime* because Caleb has a fondness for big vehicles and trucks. He can tell you all about them. He also has a couple of dogs – Frank and Nori, a brother and sister, who enjoy pulling their toys away from each other.

Caleb has been living with cerebral palsy – a motor disability – since childhood. Recently, he received an automatic door opener through the Youth Assistive Technology (YAT) Initiative from Technology for Living. The timing was perfect, as he had just acquired a new wheelchair, the *M Corpus VS* from Permobil. “I have been in a wheelchair for

16 years and managed quite well. But with this wheelchair and the electric door opener you guys installed, I basically feel unstoppable, as if my disability isn't even there... the fact that I can enter and exit my home by myself is amazing.”

For Caleb, the most astonishing feature of his new wheelchair is that, like a Transformer, it can transform into an upright, standing position. During our conversation with Caleb, his dad strapped him in, and Caleb demonstrated how he can now ‘stand tall’ at the touch of a button: “I am all secured, I won't fall over! I can even drive in this standing mode.” The chair has various signaling lights that Caleb can control with the joystick. It is customizable with fully programmable standing sequences, allowing Caleb to find the perfect position. Another incredible feature of this chair is that if something were to go wrong, technicians can log in wirelessly and troubleshoot. Caleb is the first person in BC to receive this chair.

Caleb has a second chair, which he uses in different terrains and adverse weather conditions, the *Extreme X8 All Terrain Power Wheelchair*. A third chair, the *WHILL C2*, looks like a space-age chair. It can be taken apart into three pieces for travel. “Bigger chairs are not as maneuverable, and it's harder to get on a school bus, but I can do it; it just takes me longer. One of the things I am planning to do in the future is to help design power wheelchairs that make people forget they have a disability.” He continues: “You don't know what it's like to live with a disability until you live with one. If I have a muscle spasm, I can't control it. I can't get out of the chair on my own. I feel embarrassed that I need help using Assistive Technology when everyone else in the world doesn't need it. I don't want people to think I can't do something when I can because, yeah, I can do this! I just need some help putting some extra gear on my chair. I have knee braces and chest supports for when I stand. My *M Corpus VS chair*? It's going from sitting to standing in 35 seconds.” That's not a long time for a friend to wait. Caleb wishes his friends would understand that his wheelchair is like his legs, and the batteries are like the chair's fuel. “When my friends want to hang out, they need to know I may not be able to go to all the places they can go.”

If you want to be an ally to someone with a disability, here's Caleb's advice: “Don't look at them as someone with a disability; just look at them as a person.”

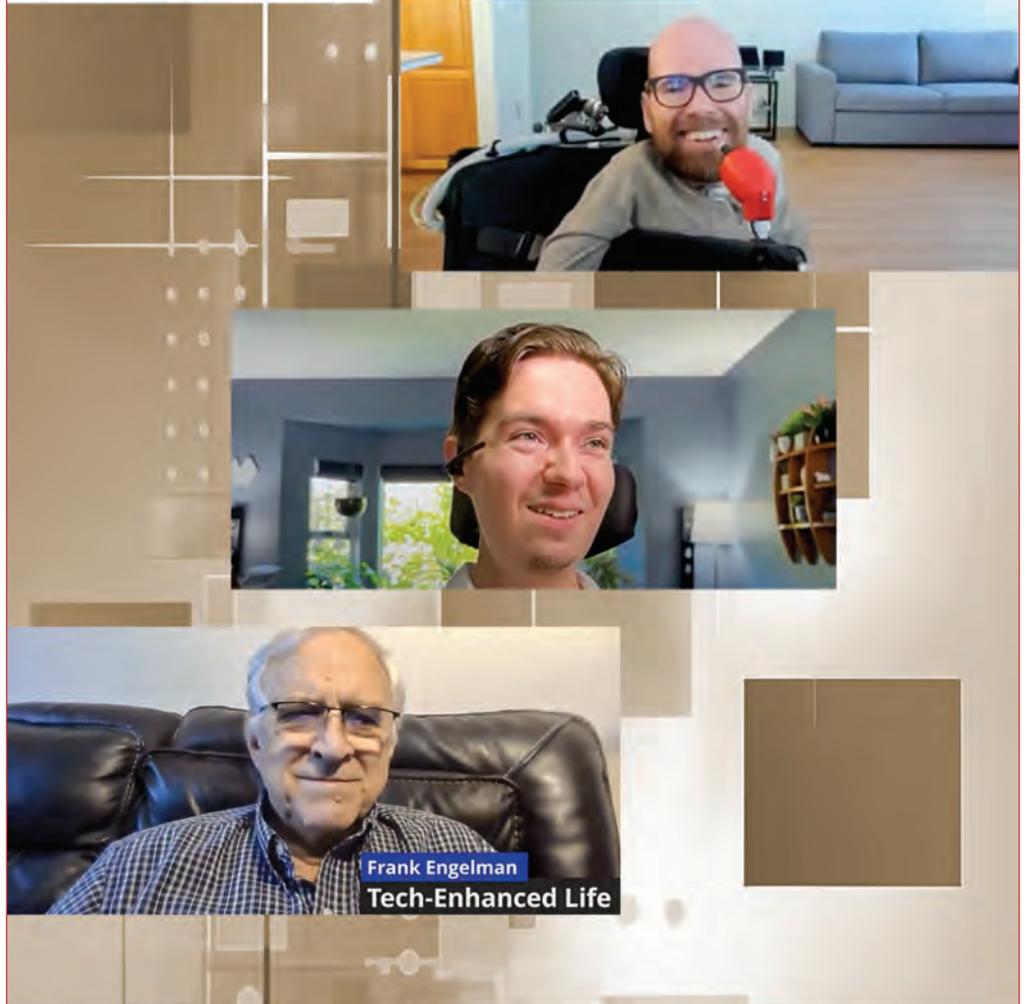
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It really is an all-around win. Here's why:

- You can make a major contribution to Technology for Living
- You won't use any of the money you need now
- You'll still support your loved ones and inheritors in the future

We all want to help where we can, while still protecting your finances and family's future. Contact rharrison@technologyforliving.org or visit WillPower.ca



Check out the special double YouTube episodes of 'We Talk Tech: Seniors' where Ean Price & Taylor Danielson chat with Frank Engelman from Tech-Enhanced Life about tech solutions for seniors' homes, promoting independence with minimal setup.

youtu.be/Tvd_dA0z_4k

youtu.be/kjD86vhnBw4

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