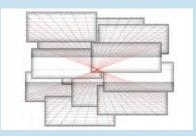
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Your Voice Matters

We are asking our peers to take our annual survey and help shape our programs

By Ruth Marzetti



elcome to the latest issue of our Balance newsletter, where we are excited to share Technology for Living's (TFL) annual survey with you. As a member of our organization who is using our services, your input is highly valued, and your participation in this survey is crucial for us to receive feedback on our programs and learn where we can improve our services.

Our goal at TFL is to increase independence in the home for our members, and we are doing this by providing innovative technology solutions and personalized home support to individuals with disabilities, breathing devices and respiratory therapy, and peer support services. Your feedback is fundamental to ensure that we continue to meet our mission and develop the best services possible. We invite you to shape and

develop our programs by providing us with as much information as you can on the areas where we are doing well and the areas where we need to improve.

Filling out this survey is one way for us to ensure that we are meeting your needs as a member of Technology for Living. Your insights will help us improve our services and tailor them to better suit your needs. The survey is available both online and in print, making it easy for you to participate in a way that is most convenient for you. We encourage you to take the time to complete this survey, as it is a valuable opportunity to shape the future of our organization.

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your essential feedback. We are committed to growing our relationship with you through our PROP, TIL, and Peer Programs, and we are always looking for ways to enhance our services. We look forward to working with you to provide excellent services to you, our members, today and tomorrow.

An online version of our survey can be completed here: https://forms.office.com/r/B98RCRhQAp



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Technology for Living round up

Rehab Equipment Expo (REE) 2023



This annual event for clinicians show-cases the latest developments in assistive technology. Alongside TIL you can also find community partners, such as CAYA BC, Neil Squire Foundation, and other home health companies. TIL uses the opportunity to educate clinicians about our services. The scope and range of our services often surprises attendees. The event also promotes knowledge exchange among stakeholders in assistive technology.



Film screening at the Black Box Theatre in Kelowna

We recently hosted a screening event for our documentary "The Evolution of Assistive Technology." The event was attended by approximately 30 people, including the Accessible Okanagan Coffee Group. In attendance were also Matthew (left), one of our TIL technicians, Ean (centre), our Peer Team Lead / Innovation Strategist, and Richard (R), Special Projects.

We are pleased to announce that the documentary was officially released on our YouTube channel on March 31st. We would like to express our gratitude to the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) for their grant funding, which made the creation of the documentary possible.

Aging in Place Workshop Series

Taylor Danielson, Community Coordinator for Technology for Living, and Joan Kluge, our Financial Officer, had the honor of attending the important 'Aging in Place Workshop Series' at Century House in New Westminster. The attendance was made possible thanks to the invaluable grant provided by New Horizons for Seniors

Taylor's and Joan's involvement centred on various technologies that have the potential to support seniors in leading independent lives, with the goal of empowering seniors to continue living in their homes for longer. Events will continue to be held across British Columbia, with the aim of making a lasting impact on the community.

Technology for Living remains dedicated to empowering seniors to lead self-sufficient lives. The workshop provided an excellent opportunity for Taylor and Joan to present to the community.



Taylor Danielson (left), Community Coordinator, and Joan Kluge (right), Technology for Living's Financial Officer.

BITS & BYTES FROM TIL

Many of our members already understand the importance of the Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program helping individuals achieve their independence goals. However, we want to reach out to more people in BC who would benefit from our services but may not know we exist. That's where we need your help! It's time to spread the word about TIL and the incredible support we offer. We often attend large events like the Abilities Expo and the Rehab Equipment Expo to showcase our services. But we also love connecting with smaller peer groups. If you're a part of a peer group and would like TIL to visit your group virtually or in person (if possible), please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

CONTACT US!

We are always happy to discuss any member's needs. Simply phone us at 2 604.326.0175 or send an email to

.

☐ info@technologyforliving.org

TIPS & TRICKS

Devices such as SMART locks, SMART doorbells, and SMART button pushers often rely on batteries. There is nothing more frustrating than discovering dead batteries when you need these devices the most. Do not wait for your devices to run out of power. Periodically check battery levels using their respective apps and proactively replace or recharge them.



element for any household for privacy, controlling lighting, and maintaining thermal comfort. However, manually operating them can be a hassle, especially for people with mobility issues. Thanks to advancements in technology, controlling window coverings with smart devices or voice commands is now a possibility. Here are three of the most popular smart window covering solutions TIL is currently working with.

RYSE SmartShade

The RYSE SmartShade is a Canadian made device that enables users to control roller shades or any shade covering with a beaded chain using their smart device or voice commands. The installation process involves attaching an optional battery, connecting it to the RYSE app, and programming the opening and closing limits. Once installed, you can connect it to your preferred voice assistant as it works with both Google Home and Amazon Alexa. With the RYSE SmartShade, you can easily control the amount of light entering your room.

SUNSA Wand

The SUNSA Wand claims to be "The World's Simplest Smart Blind," and it might be true. This device replaces the twistable tilt wand on most blind systems and connects to an app to allow control of the blinds using a smartphone or voice commands. The

SUNSA Wand uses four AA batteries that last approximately six months. However, it can also be plugged into an AC outlet if you don't want to worry about replacing batteries. It works with both Google Home and Amazon Alexa, allowing voice control of how much you want your blinds open.

SwitchBot Curtain

The SwitchBot Curtain is a smart device that attaches to your curtain rod, allowing you to open and close your curtains using your smartphone or voice commands. It comes in different configurations, depending on the type of curtain rod you have installed in your home. After installation, you can connect it to the app, program it, and use it to control how much and when you want to open your curtains. Additionally, after connecting to the SwitchBot hub, you can control your curtains using Google Home or Amazon Alexa.

SMART window coverings are an excellent solution for anyone looking to control their blinds or curtains with ease and handsfree. These devices provide convenience, security, and energy efficiency, allowing you to control your window coverings from anywhere, anytime. Contact TIL to see how you might be able to take advantage of the RYSE SmartShade, SUNSA Wand, and SwitchBot Curtain to make your life more comfortable and efficient.

INHALE/ EXHALE

Spring Humidity Shifts

With the changing of seasons, the humidity output level of your bilevel machine may vary. If you are using an Aircurve ST, you can easily adjust the humidifier setting by entering the options menu. The humidifier settings can be adjusted from 0 to 9, with higher values delivering more humidity to the air in the system. If you notice excess condensation in the hoses, make sure that no fan is blowing on the hose, and if a window is open, move the bilevel hose away or under the sheets to prevent excessive exposure to temperature shifts. Additionally, be sure to clean and refill the humidifier chamber regularly to maintain optimal performance. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call the PROP team to discuss your humidity options. Happy humidifying!

CONTACT US!

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

INTRODUCING NEW STAFF

We are thrilled to introduce you to Mike and Alex, our two new Respiratory Therapists who have recently joined the PROP team! As a part of our growing team of 10 RTs, they bring a wealth of experience and expertise with them. If you have not had the pleasure of meeting them yet, we are confident that you will soon.

Introducing a Code of Conduct for Members and the TFL Team

The TFL Community Support Team members will be introduced to the Code of Conduct in team meetings and it will also be posted throughout the office.

We welcome all feedback and suggestions!

What members can expect

- To be treated with dignity and respect, without discrimination of any kind; to receive care and support that is courteous and considerate.
- To receive timely and competent care and support from qualified health and biomedical professionals.
- > To be offered the support of a TFL peer.
- > To be introduced to your TFL Community Support Team and to be informed of what we are going to do and why we are doing it.
- To receive the necessary information to make your own health care decisions, to ask questions and receive clear answers.
- To have the right to change your mind if you have already said 'yes' or 'no' to a course of therapy.
- To have us maintain your privacy and the confidentiality of your medical information.
- To be offered services that are accessible and appropriate should you have an impairment or disability.
- To have the right to make a complaint and receive a timely response, without fear that it will affect your care.
- That the TFL Community Support Team members are your allies.



What your PROP TFL community support team expects

- > The TFL Community Support Team be treated with dignity and respect, without discrimination of any kind and that efforts are made to ensure that all encounters are courteous and considerate.
- That you inform us of anything that could affect your present condition or how your therapy is supported.
- That you work with us to learn about your care and therapy and to accept responsibility for the decisions you make about your care.
- That you act in a safe and responsible manner during any home visits
- That you make plans to be appropriately represented if you are no longer able to actively participate in your care decisions.
- > That you appropriately maintain and care for your TFL loaned equipment
- That you be compliant with your therapy and if not, to return the loaned equipment so that someone else may benefit from it.
- That you are efficient, economical and environmentally sensitive with all supplies provided by TFL.
- That you make time and are available to speak/meet with us if you reach out for support or when we contact you for your annual assessment.

Northern Perspectives

Roadblocks to Receiving Proper Healthcare in the North

By Chloe Gratton

Northern Health Region in British Columbia covers a vast area from the Alberta border to Haida Gwai and from The Yukon border to Quesnel. This region is home to about 300,000 people. However, access to specialized healthcare services is a chronic challenge for many communities in this vast geographical area.

Uncovering barriers to healthcare

Even though the city of Prince George is home to *some* specialists, smaller communities within the Northern Health Region are frequently still so far away, that people must travel for hours to access these services in Prince George. For instance, patients coming from Prince Rupert must travel at least 8 hours by car, and those coming from Haida Gwai must fly or ferry to the mainland and then drive another 8 hours. Even towns considered geographically closer to Prince George often still have to drive at least an hour to access services.

When a child is born with a disability in the North, they are nearly always referred to the Lower Mainland, particularly to British Columbia Children's Hospital/Sunnyhill Hospitals, to receive specialized care. The distance from Vancouver to Prince George is over 750 km, which means driving is at least 9-10 hours, which can easily take longer during our northern winters.

The cost and burden of travelling to access services

Travelling south for healthcare puts a significant financial burden on families and causes separation from other family members. Flights are never cheap, often costing at least \$300 round trip, and if you need to make the trip multiple times, it can add up quickly. Furthermore, flying for a person with a disability is particularly challenging, especially when in a wheelchair. We require extra time to board, and need reliable transportation once we arrive at our destination. It is always a challenge having to wait for a wheelchair-accessible taxi.

Finding accommodations and board adds further hardship for families traveling long distances for healthcare services. Some people are lucky enough to get a room at Easter Seal (see *eastersealsbcy.ca*) or Ronald McDonald houses (see *rmhbc.ca*) which provide reduced rates to families.

When children with disabilities grow up, they lose access to their group of specialists at BC Children's and Sunnyhill Hospitals. The majority of pediatric specialists such as neurologists, optometrists, and surgeons are all located in Vancouver, which makes it challenging for adults to find similar specialists in their community.

Finding a doctor

The lack of family doctors across Canada is a chronic issue. In September 2022 the CBC published a special report reporting amongst many health care related problems that one in five Canadians have no family doctor (see the report at *tinyurl.com/v3b34rn2*).

Finding a family doctor is always important but for people with disabilities having access to one is essential. This problem becomes even bigger when moving to a new town. Without a GP, individuals are left to find a doctor anyhow they can, possibly at an ER or a walk-in clinic, and convince doctors with whom there is no previously established history to refer them to specialized care.

Specialists

Specialists such as neurologists and pain management doctors have lengthy waitlists in Prince George, managing the increasing patient load becomes more and more challenging. Furthermore, the city only has three neurologists with limited exposure to childhood disabilities. I use the pain clinic in Prince George and have personally been told that the waitlist for the clinic is up to 5 years long. Presently the waitlist has 966 people waiting for their appointment.

Leaving any person waiting for a long time when living with pain every day, is simply unacceptable.

Prince George has a wonderful child development centre (*cdcpg.org*) with specialized physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists. But, again, once a child reaches school age, access to most of these services is drastically reduced. Finding similar specialized therapists in

From the website of the College of Family Physicians of Canada: Canada is facing a shortage of family doctors. Fewer medical school graduates are choosing the specialty of family medicine after witnessing the rising expectations placed on family practices without appropriate resources and the resulting physician burnout. With insufficient administrative support and stagnant payment models, the costs to maintain a family practice are becoming unsustainable. Additionally, some physicians are choosing to retire from family medicine practice earlier than planned, partially related to the exhaustion resulting from working through the COVID-19 pandemic. Fewer family doctors means reduced access to care for people across Canada, worsening health outcomes, and a less efficient health care system.)

adulthood is nearly impossible especially because people from the North must overcome the enormous geographical divide to reach the closest option to see one of these therapists for adults at the GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre in Vancouver.

There are no easy solutions solving the issues facing the healthcare system in the Northern Health Region. Indeed, the

lack of doctors and specialists is not even just a provincial or federal Canadian problem but a global problem (see who.int/health-topics/health-workforce#tab=tab_1). However, there are some commendable, innovative initiatives that make a difference for people with disabilities in the North that in my opinion could be built upon.

Strategies for overcoming healthcare barriers

The Northern Health Connections' Bus (see *nhconnections.ca*) is such a program. Its medical bus service (NHC) makes a real difference, travelling to remote communities to transport people to larger centres like Prince George, Terrace, or Fort St. John.

Another suggestion that may help ease the desperate need for specialized medical support without having to travel to far away locations, is the idea of transporting specialists from larger centre like Vancouver up North and holding clinics on a regular schedule.

Of course, there is always the ultimate solution to increase funding for recruitment and retention of health care staff, an effective path to tackling the problem. But since this strategy involves political change and modifications to governmental health care funding policies, possibilities for change through this route are hobbled by realities that feel impossible to overcome any time soon.



The Power of Automatic Door Openers

By Mark Stockbrocks

name is Mark Stockbrocks, and I have an inspiring story to share. At the age of 31, just two weeks after completing my firefighter training with the Metis Nation of BC, I suffered a massive congenital AVM brain bleed stroke, leaving me triplegic with both legs and my left arm permanently paralyzed. Despite this lifealtering event, I am grateful to have retained my speech, which I use to advocate for wheelchair access throughout Vancouver and around the world.

While my stroke was an unexpected blow, I am thankful to have one functioning limb and the ability to speak. I am a vocal and assertive advocate for normalizing wheelchair accessibility everywhere I go, and simply bringing the topic to light has allowed countless premises to adapt for wheelchair access. One of the most significant challenges faced by wheelchair users on a daily basis is opening doors independently, which can be overwhelmingly difficult and even dangerous for people with mobility challenges.

Fortunately, I am a recipient of Technology for Living's Automatic Door Opener Program, which has significantly improved my quality of life in countless ways. With the press of a button, I can let people into my home and independently open the door for my family, staff members, visitors, delivery personnel, and more. The door opener has allowed me to live my life as safely, conveniently, and independently as possible under my exceptional circumstances.

Not only does the Automatic Door Opener Program provide access to the outside world, but it is also a critical lifesaving



device in the event of a fire emergency. It saves lives and opens our worlds to infinite opportunities that sometimes exist right outside our doors. I am forever grateful to TFL and its partner organizations, the Kinsmen Foundation of BC and BC Rehab Foundation, for making these freedoms a reality.

I strongly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to access physical locations and participate in their communities, regardless of their mobility impairments.

I continue to fight for accessibility and independence for all on a daily basis. Through my own independent wheelchair accessibility campaign (check out more at accessstickers. blogspot.com), I have scored major victories in my neighborhood, city, and even in other countries by speaking up and drawing attention to the lack of wheelchair accessibility.

TFL, and specifically their Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program, has been a driving force behind many of the positive upgrades and improvements in my life, utilizing assistive technologies.

In the face of adversity, I have learned that there is always hope and potential for positive change in our local communities. The Automatic Door Opener program and my advocacy work have shown me that we can create positive change in the world, one door at a time. I encourage everyone to speak up and never shy away from being an agent for change in your local communities.

Cambie Gardens Part 2

By Benson Au & Nicole Whitford

community inclusion can help improve the lives of individuals who require specialized care. The project is centred around empowering the people who live there by providing fully accessible apartments and personalized care that allows them to thrive. Many residents of Cambie Gardens have made the transition from George Pearson, an institutionalized care facility that is in the process of closing down. The move to Cambie Gardens represents a significant step towards independence for these individuals. The design of each apartment is built around accessibility, with individual bedrooms and washrooms that give residents greater autonomy and privacy.

Technology for Living (TFL) is proud to be a vital component of the care provided at Cambie Gardens. TFL is all about empowering individuals with disabilities, and as such we play an integral role in assisting residents at Cambie Gardens. For example, our team members set up remote TV operation, switch bots for computers, and other services that allow residents to maintain their independence. Although these may seem like small acts, they can have a profound impact on a person's sense of autonomy and overall quality of life.

Cambie Gardens provides a welcoming and inclusive environment where residents can engage in social activities and events. For many, this represents a significant shift from the institutionalized setting they were used to at George Pearson. Here, in their new environment, residents can now make choices about how they want to spend their time and participate in activities that align with their interests and values. The overall feeling of the community is welcoming and inclusive, allowing residents to interact with their peers and form new connections.

One of the most significant benefits of living at Cambie Gardens is the ability to make everyday life choices that many of us take for granted.

Residents can now choose what they want to eat, when they want to eat, and how they want to spend their time. Being

able to make these choices has a profound impact on their overall quality of life, and residents are often happier and engaged than they were in the institutionalized setting of George Pearson. The individualized care provided at Cambie Gardens, along with the fully accessible apartments, empowers residents to lead fulfilling lives.

This concept is hopefully setting an example for others to follow by prioritizing community inclusion and individual autonomy by helping to improve the lives of its residents and creating a model for other care facilities to follow. With a dedicated team, a supportive community, and a focus on empowerment, Cambie Gardens is providing a positive and inclusive environment.



Lydia, a resident, and her mom, enjoying the Vancouver sunshine on the communal patio at Cambie Gardens.

Reflecting on the 8th Simon Cox Student Design Competition

By Taylor Danielson

a world where technology is evolving rapidly, the Simon Cox Student Design Competition has been championing innovation and collaboration since its inception in 2014. The annual event brings together talented students from diverse fields and colleges/universities across BC to develop assistive technologies and solutions that improve the quality of life and independence for individuals with disabilities. Fostering critical thinking and user-centered designs, the competition serves as a catalyst for ground-breaking solutions that address real-world challenges faced by people with disabilities.

This year's competition took place on April 29, 2023, at the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre in Vancouver, BC. Marking the first in-person event since the pandemic and the largest ever organized by the hosting committee, the competition boasted 13 entries from four postsecondary institutions—UBC, UBC Okanagan, BCIT, and Simon Fraser University. The event showcased a diverse range of projects, from cutting-edge engineering research and prototypes to fully functional products designed to make an immediate impact on end-users' lives.

At its core, the Simon Cox Student Design Competition is about connecting students and people with disabilities to work together on developing assistive technologies. Teams are formed by pairing students with peers who have disabilities, ensuring that the projects are built with the end-users' needs in mind. This approach has led to numerous innovative solutions that address barriers faced by people with disabilities, demonstrating the power of collaboration and synergy when creating new design solutions.

This year's top five finalists displayed extraordinary ingenuity and dedication to their projects. The first Simon Cox Principal Award winning entry, the 'Assistive Shoe Tying Device', was designed by a team from UBC Okanagan. It is a prime example of a simple yet impactful solution that addresses the challenge of tying shoelaces for people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Meanwhile, the 'Proximeter' from BCIT students, winner of both the Achievement Award and Peers' Choice Award, is a







proximity system for power wheelchairs and addresses the common issue of wheelchair blind spots, showcasing how technology can enhance user safety and confidence.

In addition to these outstanding projects, the 'Tremor Stabilizer', a wearable device designed by a UBC student team, combines electromyography (EMG) with spatial sensors and Al-based software algorithms to detect and mitigate tremors caused by essential tremor (ET), a neurological condition that affects fine motor control. This unique project earned the Don Danbrook Innovation Award and demonstrated the potential for wearable technology to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

The unique opportunity offered to students when participating in the Simon Cox Student Design Competition is a testament to the importance of inclusive design and accessibility in our rapidly changing world. As the competition continues to grow and evolve, new are all looking forward to seeing how coming technological developments will be explored in future competitions.

The competition provided the organizing committee with a valuable learning experience, as they had to overcome a variety of challenges while setting up the first in-person event since the pandemic began. Despite grappling with technical difficulties related to the A/V system and coordinating the largest competition to date, the committee managed to successfully host an impressive contest that left attendees feeling inspired and looking forward to future events.

With technology advancing at an exponential pace, we firmly believe that the Simon Cox Student Design Competition will remain at the forefront of promoting innovation and collaboration in assistive technologies. The competition brings together brilliant minds and encourages empathy-driven design to ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are not only acknowledged but also addressed with ingenuity and compassion.











Leaving on a jet plane? Not necessarily



By Marnie Essery

a passionate traveler with a disability, I know that embarking on a vacation can be a Herculean task. Not only do you need to ensure that you can afford the expense, but you also need to have a valid passport, a caregiver, family member or friend to assist you, accessible transportation, and accommodations, along with additional medical supplies, insurance, and very specific packing requirements. It is a lot to consider.

Recently, while talking to a friend who was unable to travel at the time, I discovered a new way to satisfy my wanderlust - hosting 'traveling the world viewing parties'! With a plethora of travel shows available on Knowledge Network, PBS, YouTube, Prime, and Netflix, along with countless resources on Pinterest, the possibilities for armchair travel are endless, and the experience can be shared with friends and family.

You can make these parties as lively and entertaining as you want. Plan a themed party where everyone dresses up like a tacky tourist, or celebrate a holiday associated with the country you're "visiting," such as Chinese New Year for China or Mardi Gras for New Orleans and plenty more options. You can even ask your guests to bring an appetizer that complements the theme or whip up non-alcoholic drinks to go with your viewing choices.

If someone in your group has actually visited the country you're exploring, ask them to share their top five things to do, favorite foods to eat, or tips on accessibility. You might even discover a few new destinations to add to your bucket list! These parties are an excellent opportunity to learn from 'experts' who have visited a place and most people love to share their experiences.

You can take these parties to the next level by having different friends host them a few times a year, focusing on different locations and cuisines each time. With a little imagination and creativity, you can transform your living room into a tropical paradise, a European café, or an Asian bazaar. You don't have to break the bank to create an atmosphere; items from the dollar store can add just the right touch of ambiance.

For many people with disabilities, who spend much of their time dealing with health issues, these parties can offer a much-needed break from the stresses of daily life. Dress up, explore new destinations, taste new foods, and learn a few words in a different language – take this opportunity to 'escape' on a mini-vacation without leaving your home.

How to Throw a Travel Themed Party https://tinyurl.com/5ex8r5yk

Knowledge Network https://tinyurl.com/mrxnsrcb

Accessible Travel Videos - Spinal Cord Injury BC https://tinyurl.com/37ktmxdx

Accessible Travel - Wheel the World https://tinyurl.com/4m7cjh4y

8 Inspiring Disability Travel Blogs To Follow Today https://tinyurl.com/3x3tw9ew

🖈 MAKE A DIFFERENCE! 🖈

YOU have the power to change a life. After you've taken care of your family, consider a gift in your will and change the life of a child or adult with a physical disability.

Consider including Technology for Living in your will and bestow the gift of independence.

Our innovative use of technology fosters inclusivity and independence for those with physical disabilities in BC.

Contact Richard at rharrison@technologyforliving.org

Or change lives NOW and visit us at technologyforliving.org to donate!

te@hnol⇔gy for liviag

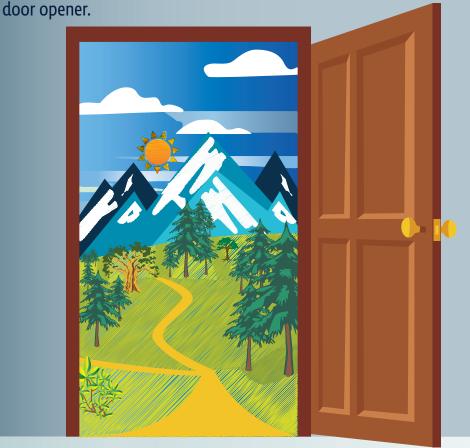
Automatic Door Opener Program

This unique program has provided a sense of security, safety and increased independence to many individuals after having received door openers over the last few years.

We would like to thank BC Rehab Foundation and

The Kinsmen Foundation of BC for their province-wide leadership in support of people with disabilities and partnering with us in this amazing initiative.

Contact rharrison@technologyforliving.org if you are interested in supporting this program or would like to apply for an automatic



Generous supporters:



