



balance

... what it's all about

IN THIS ISSUE



Winner of this
year's competition

• 6 •



Fashion for
everyone

• 9 •



Fearless on
the road

• 14 •

Balance newsletter celebrates 17 years of member connections

By Taylor Danielson

As we celebrate this June 2025 issue, Balance turns 17 years old. What began in June 2008 as a thoughtful “megaletter” envisioned by Simon Cox, then Executive Director, has grown into something truly powerful—a platform where Technology for Living members connect with one another, sharing valuable experiences and practical knowledge. Simon’s original vision for Balance to be “entertaining, informative, thought-provoking and challenging” has naturally evolved into our renewed mission statement:

“Motivated by Technology for Living’s strong and supportive collaborative relationship with its members, the Balance newsletter champions independence and equality by offering a platform for members to share their resilience, advocacy, and vitality. Through personal insights, lived experiences and forward-thinking technology resources, we share how our members find the support they need to live life on their own terms.”

Your recent survey responses have been invaluable in shaping our path forward. The message was clear—

many of you treasure the printed Balance arriving in your mailbox, while others appreciate digital accessibility.

We’re responding to both needs: the print edition you know and love will continue unchanged, while we gradually expand our digital presence.

Look for the QR code in this issue to easily subscribe to our new online offerings.

Your contributions are vital to maintaining the “Balance” that Simon described in our first issue—“equality and symmetry; and even harmony among different things.” Have a story or experience you’d like to share that might help or resonate with others? We’d love to hear from you. Contact us at peer@technologyforliving.org to share your ideas. Thank you for being part of this continuing journey.



**BALANCE NEWSLETTER IS
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY
TECHNOLOGY FOR LIVING**

📍 #103-366 East Kent Ave. South
Vancouver, BC V5X 4N6

📞 604.326.0175 📠 604.326.0176

✉ info@technologyforliving.org

🌐 technologyforliving.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ruth Marzetti

DESIGN / EDITOR

Britt Permien

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Marnie Essery • Taylor Danielson
Brittany Garneau • James Hektner
David Hill • Jocelyn Maffin
Wayne Pogue • Joanne Smith
Teri Thorson • Bryden Veinot

Technology for Living does not research, endorse or guarantee any of the products or services within the newsletter. We strongly recommend investigating products and companies before purchasing or using them.

Permission to reproduce: All Balance articles are copyrighted. Non-commercial reproduction is welcomed. For permission to reprint articles, either in part or in whole, please email info@technologyforliving.org

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

© 2025 Technology for Living

Technology for Living round up



Annual Kinsmen Golf Tournament

Our community partners, the Kinsmen Foundation of BC, are hosting their 11th Golf Tournament in 2025. This annual event has been a tremendous success over the years, raising funds to support important programs for people with disabilities in BC. Check out: www.kinsmenfoundationofbc.ca/golf-classic/. Anyone can participate, donate and/or volunteer. Not only will your participation make an important difference in people's lives, but you will also have a chance to enjoy a great day out on the Green.

Staff BBQ

Join us for the Technology for Living annual staff BBQ where you can meet our team informally and connect with other members in our community. We'll serve burgers (including vegetarian options) and refreshments around noon on **Wednesday, July 16**, outside our riverfront offices at **103-366 East Kent Avenue South, Vancouver V5X 4N6**. The event runs until around **3:00 PM**. If you're a member of Technology for Living and would like to attend, **RSVP to info@technologyforliving.org**. Please let us know about any dietary requirements and whether you'll be bringing family, friends, or care attendants. We look forward to seeing you there!



Zosia Ettenberg Obituary

Zosia Ettenberg was a remarkable lady who led a remarkable life. She built an extensive career as a physiotherapist, including serving as Director of Rehabilitation Services at Langley Memorial Hospital. She was a Board member at Technology for Living (2009-2013), and as a post-polio survivor, understood the importance of breathing devices provided by TfL. Her most significant impact came through founding Langley Pos-Abilities Society in 2010, providing assistive technology and advocacy for people with disabilities. Zosia passed away peacefully on April 5, 2025. She will be remembered for her tireless advocacy, steadfast resilience, and unforgettable presence — always with a warm smile, immaculate hair, and perfect nails.



BITS & BYTES FROM TIL

On June 9, 2025, TfL will, once again, be participating in ConnecTra's Abilities Expo. This year's theme is "How to Thrive in 2025: Your Wellness, Your Way". TIL is excited to reengage with members, and prospective members, with solutions and services geared towards assisting people looking to gain more independence at home.

ConnecTra's Abilities Expo provides an opportunity for people with disabilities, their families, caregivers, seniors, and healthcare professionals to learn about local resources and connect with others in the community.

For more information, visit <https://connectra.org/abilities-expo>.

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

We expect voice assistants like Google Home, Amazon Alexa, and Siri to work consistently, but they can sometimes become unresponsive or inconsistent. If this happens, try power cycling the device. If that doesn't help, reset your Wi-Fi router.

Still not working? If you're a TIL member, give us a call—we're happy to help!

The importance of smart blind controls for people with physical disabilities

By Wayne Pogue

For people with physical disabilities, everyday tasks that many take for granted can pose significant challenges. Adjusting blinds to control light, maintain privacy, or regulate indoor temperatures is one such task. Smart blind control systems like the Sunsa Wand, SwitchBot Tilt, Ryse SmartShade, and Leafi Nova offer innovative solutions tailored to diverse needs. Technology for Independent Living (TIL) provides these four systems to their members, ensuring access to cutting-edge tools that enhance independence.

Smart blind controls provide a critical boost in accessibility for people with physical disabilities. Traditional blinds often require fine motor skills, strength, or reach that may be difficult for some people. Smart systems eliminate these barriers by enabling users to control their blinds through smart phones, voice commands, or automated schedules. Retrofit devices can transform existing blinds into smart blinds, allowing users to control them via an app or voice assistant. These solutions are non-invasive and ensure that people can maintain their existing décor while enjoying the benefits of smart technology.

In addition to accessibility, smart blind controls contribute to energy efficiency and comfort. By automating blinds to adjust based on sunlight, temperature, or time of day, these systems help regulate indoor temperatures. For people with disabilities, maintaining an optimal indoor climate is crucial. Smart blinds can be programmed to let in natural light during the day or to close during peak sunlight hours to prevent



overheating. Such features improve quality of life while supporting sustainability goals.

TIL has installed smart blind control systems that integrate seamlessly with smart home ecosystems, including platforms like Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant. This level of integration reduces the need for manual intervention and streamlines daily routines.

Smart blind controls are more than just convenient gadgets; they're essential tools for empowering people with physical disabilities. By enhancing accessibility, promoting energy efficiency, and integrating seamlessly into smart home ecosystems, these systems enable users to maintain greater independence and improve their quality of life. As technology continues to evolve, the future looks even brighter for smart solutions that prioritize inclusivity and ease of use.

INHALE / EXHALE

Cleaning your BiPAP mask weekly is essential for proper equipment function, and prevents skin irritation or infections.

1. **Disassemble mask:** Separate all components (mask, headgear, cushion, and hose) to clean thoroughly.
2. **Wash with soap and water:** Use warm water and fragrance-free, non-anti-bacterial soap. Gently swish cushion back and forth. Rinse.
3. **Clean hose:** Fill the hose with soapy water and agitate. Do not use hose brush to prevent puncturing hose. Rinse.
4. **Drying:** Let everything air dry, preferably on a clean towel. Hose can be hung on a doorknob or towel rack to drip dry.

CONTACT US!

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

IDEA CORNER

AirCurve 10 ST-A BiPAP Error 022: Power Cord Issue

To resolve this issue unplug the power cord from the device and then reinsert the plug firmly. Check that the power adapter and wall connections are secure and functioning. Finally, turn the device back on. If the issue persists, call PROP at 1-866-326-1245.



What is a respiratory therapist?

By Brittany Garneau

If you've met one of us before, you already know that Respiratory Therapists (RTs) are here to support you with your breathing needs. But you might not know just how much training and experience we bring to our work—or the many different places RTs work before joining the PROP team!

Respiratory Therapists are highly trained healthcare professionals who specialize in assessing, treating, and managing breathing conditions. In hospitals, we work in intensive care units (ICU, Cardiac ICU, Cardiac Surgery ICU, NICU, PICU), emergency departments, and general wards, helping people of all ages. We also support patients in bronchoscopy suites, pulmonary function labs, sleep clinics, community programs, home oxygen programs, and support people in non-profit organizations like TfL.

Becoming an RT takes years of education and hands-on experience. In most of Canada, we complete two years of intense university-level coursework followed by a full-time rigorous hospital-based clinical year. Many RTs also have additional post-secondary education. Our role gained widespread recognition during the COVID 19 pandemic due to our expertise in ventilators and BiPAPs—key life-support devices. But our skills go far beyond ventilation. In a hospital setting, Respiratory

Therapists perform arterial blood gas tests, place arterial lines, extubate, provide tracheostomy care, manage high-flow oxygen therapy, and respond to every Code Blue and Code Pink. We also assist with bronchoscopies, percutaneous tracheostomies, intubations, coach pulmonary function testing, and administer breathing treatments.

At PROP, we use all this experience to provide the best care possible to our members.

We support over 900 people across BC, bringing ventilators, BiPAPs, cough assist devices, suction units, and nebulizers right to your homes. Whether we're setting up new equipment, troubleshooting a device, or just answering questions, we're here to help!

Being part of your care journey is a privilege. We're committed to making sure you feel supported, comfortable, and confident in managing your respiratory health and equipment—every step of the way.

MEET MONICA GÄRTNER



Monica Gärtner's passion is the performing arts. Her first time on stage was in Grade 12, when she participated in a vaudeville show, which she found exhilarating yet nerve-racking at the same time. Years later, she joined Theatre Terrific, where she performed in different venues across British Columbia. In 2010, she danced during the Paralympic Torch ceremonies. In 2019, Monica appeared in a TV show called "The Now," directed by Oscar winners Peter and Bobby Farrelly. She has an online demo tape and was contacted by four agencies. Monica is now signed with a forward-thinking agent.

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

TIPS & MORE

Summer's here, and that means traveling, and traveling with a disability means being prepared. Good news for Air Canada flyers: mobility aids and medical equipment travel FREE and don't count toward baggage limits!

Notify Air Canada about your travel needs and arrive early!

For details:

aircanada.com/accessibility or call 1.800.667.4732

Drink Up!



By Joanne Smith

Summer is here, bringing sunshine and heat—but also the risk of dehydration. For those of us with disabilities, staying hydrated is even more important to support overall health. Here's why staying hydrated matters:

1. Improves energy: A small 5% loss of body fluids can reduce energy levels by up to 25%, affecting both physical and cognitive function.

2. Protects skin: Wheelchair users are at risk of pressure sores. Water makes up 81% of our blood, which carries nutrients to the skin and helps with repair. Drinking 2 litres of water daily can help wounds heal faster and prevent skin breakdown.

3. Regulates body temperature: Hot summer days can affect body temperature. For people with cervical or high thoracic spinal cord injuries, regulating temperature becomes more difficult, increasing the risk of hyperthermia (heat exhaustion). Staying hydrated helps reduce this risk.

4. Supports bowel function: For people with neurogenic bowel, dehydration can worsen constipation and slow the move-

ment of waste. Staying hydrated helps keep the digestive system moving.

5. Supports the immune system:

Some disabilities compromise immune function. Hydration is key for the lymphatic system, which transports protective white blood cells and helps remove toxins and pathogens. Adequate fluid intake allows lymph to flow freely, supporting the immune system in fighting infections.

6. Supports liver function: The liver performs over 500 vital functions, including detoxifying the body and regulating blood sugar. Prescription medications, while necessary, often place extra strain on the liver. Hydration is essential for the liver to perform these tasks effectively.

Stay hydrated and stay healthy!

I encourage you to drink 2-3 litres a day, but avoid sugary drinks like pop, energy and sports drinks. These are loaded with refined sugars and additives. Instead, drink water, tea, black coffee, coconut water and/or kombucha. Plain water can be boring or, for some with pill fatigue, cause gagging. Try adding fresh fruit or herbs to boost flavor and increase fluid intake.

REFRESHING HERB-INFUSED RECIPES:

Basil Limeade

1 cup fresh basil leaves

½ cup fresh lime juice

4 cups water (or sparkling water)

Cilantro Lemonade

1 cup fresh cilantro leaves

½ cup fresh lemon juice

4 cups water (or sparkling water)

Combine ingredients in a pitcher, refrigerate, and enjoy!

The Simon Cox

10th STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION

A decade of innovation

By Taylor Danielson

Looking back on ten years of the Simon Cox Student Design Competition, I'm amazed at how far we've come. What started as a small competition at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) has grown into a province-wide event drawing applicants from universities across BC. This year's competition wrapped up on April 26, 2025 at the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre in Vancouver, featuring five finalist teams representing four post-secondary institutions: University of British Columbia (UBC), BCIT, Simon Fraser University (SFU), and UBC Okanagan.

What makes this competition work is how it brings students together with people with disabilities. Each project idea comes from peers in our community, so teams focus on solving real problems people face every day, not just theoretical exercises. When students combine their technical skills with the practical knowledge of someone living with a disability, they create solutions that actually work in real life.

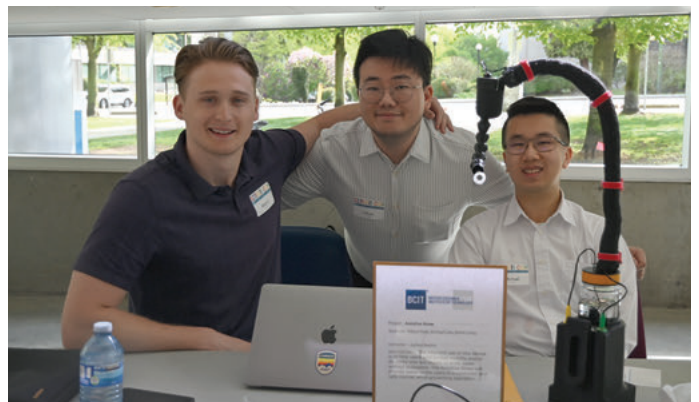
This Year's Finalists

After thorough evaluation, these five projects emerged as our finalists:

1. **Table-2-Go** (SFU): A motorized table designed to navigate autonomously around a home carrying items like plates and drinks. I was particularly impressed by how this team transformed a straightforward concept into an innovative solution that significantly enhances independence for people with mobility limitations.
2. **Automatic Cabinet Opener** (UBC Okanagan): A device that helps people with mobility limitations open kitchen cabinets independently. The team created a solution that integrates with existing cabinetry without requiring expensive renovations—a thoughtful consideration of real-world implementation challenges.
3. **Assistive Straw** (BCIT): A solution that helps users with limited mobility drink water independently in a controlled manner. Though it might appear simple at first glance, this device addresses one of the most fundamental aspects of daily independence—being able to hydrate without assistance.
4. **Locking Caster Wheel System** (UBC): An automatic mechanism that locks office chair wheels, making the transition between wheelchairs and office chairs significantly safer. This project tackles a specific challenge that's rarely addressed by commercial products but has substantial impact on workplace accessibility and safety.
5. **ReelEZ** (BCIT): A modified fishing reel designed for one-handed operation, enabling people with limited mobility to fish independently. This project stood out by focusing on recreational activities—recognizing that quality of life extends well beyond essential tasks to include hobbies and interests that bring joy and fulfillment.

Award Recipients

The Simon Cox Principal Award (\$3,000) went to BCIT's **Assistive Straw** team.



What impressed the judges about this project was its completeness—it was essentially ready for real-world application with little additional development needed. The team developed their solution in response to a design challenge from the Neil Squire Society, who sought a way for individuals to drink independently with minimal risk of aspiration (accidentally inhaling liquid into the lungs). Their two-stage system brings water up from a large reservoir and positions it closer to the user's mouth, allowing them to safely consume about a mouthful of water at a time without assistance.

UBC's **Locking Caster Wheel System** received the Achievement Award in honour of Zosia Ettenberg (\$2,000).



This project highlights the value of direct stakeholder involvement throughout the design process. The team collaborated extensively with a UBC professor who uses a power wheelchair and needs to transfer to an office chair daily. Through repeated testing sessions and ongoing feedback, they refined their design to address the specific challenges he faced, creating a solution that genuinely improves his daily routine.

BCIT's **ReelEZ** earned both the Innovation Award in honour of Elizabeth Rathbun (\$1,000) and the Peers' Choice Award in honour of Robb Dunfield (\$1,000).



What set this project apart was its focus on recreation rather than activities of daily living. While most competition entries typically address fundamental needs like eating or mobility, the ReelEZ team recognized the importance of making leisure activities accessible too. Their modified fishing reel enables people with limited mobility to participate in a popular outdoor activity that brings enjoyment and fulfills interests beyond essential daily tasks.

Looking Forward

These winning projects show how much our competition has grown and evolved over the past decade. When we started, we had just a handful of entries. Now we're a province-wide event drawing teams from across BC. Throughout this growth, our purpose has stayed the same: bringing students and peers together to create practical solutions that help people with disabilities live more independently.

Get involved, stay informed!

If you have an idea for next year's competition or would like to participate as a student, peer partner, or volunteer, please reach out and contact:
tdanielson@technologyforliving.org.

We're also looking for your feedback on the competition itself - what worked well, what could be improved, and how we can make the experience better for everyone involved.

Your input and involvement keep the Simon Cox Student Design Competition moving forward with meaningful innovation for years to come.

Accessible Okanagan

A community of support

By James Hektner

As president of *Accessible Okanagan*, it has been my pleasure and honour to lead this society since its unofficial inception in 2009. What began as a simple coffee gathering between two friends has organically grown into a thriving network of over 800 members, fostering a sense of belonging and meaningful opportunities for peer support, outdoor recreation, and social connection.

The origins of our community date back to the fall of 2008 when Anand Kannan and I met at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre in Vancouver. Anand had recently sustained a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) from an ATV accident, and I was rehabilitating a shoulder surgery. After returning home to Kelowna in early 2009, we started meeting up for coffee in Orchard Park Mall or for a plate of nachos on a patio. Within a few months, our casual weekly gatherings grew, from two people to four, to ten, and now span over 800.

During this time, one of our community members, Mark Peeren, had created a private Facebook group called *Accessible Okanagan* to promote table tennis, badminton and coffee groups. We began utilizing this social media group as a platform to inform and engage our community members in local events. Our Facebook group has been the key asset that eventually expanded to the vibrant and engaged community that *Accessible Okanagan* is today.

Accessible Okanagan was officially incorporated as a not-for-profit in 2016 with the suggestion from Brad Jacobsen, a well-respected peer leader in the SCI community. Unfortunately, Brad left us during Covid, but he would be pleased to see that his legacy prevails. Our society has been solely governed by people with physical disabilities, including a board of directors consisting of 12 dedicated volunteers. Our board members span the greater Okanagan region from Osoyoos to Kamloops (over 300 km).

One of our society's most valued initiatives is our weekly coffee groups, which remain a cornerstone of our organization. Held every Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. at Blenz Coffee in Orchard Park Mall, these gatherings offer a welcoming and supportive space where people can share advice, discuss challenges, or simply enjoy each other's company. We are grateful to have many community partners sponsor and support our coffee groups, such as Spinal Cord Injury BC, ICORD Okanagan, Technology for Living and our local adaptive equipment providers. With an average of 25 attendees per week, our ongoing event promotes peer connections and encourages everyone to attend.

Beyond the coffee groups, our organization's private Facebook group serves as a key communication tool, allowing

members to stay informed about upcoming activities, share information, and engage in discussions. With over 800 members, our online space connects people locally and internationally, strengthening the network of support beyond the Okanagan.

We recognize the importance of outdoor recreation and adaptive activities, dedicating significant effort to ensuring that our community has opportunities to explore nature and participate in exciting outdoor experiences. We host and promote annual events like camping and fishing in Osoyoos at a private lake, providing an inclusive and accessible setting where individuals can come together and enjoy accessible fishing, camping opportunities, BBQs, and the serenity of nature.

Additionally, our society organizes a yearly camping event at Scotch Creek Provincial Park, featuring a community BBQ picnic and a perfect area to use adaptive recreation equipment. This event fosters community connection in a natural outdoor setting, limiting the barriers that often make such experiences challenging.

We operate on a modest annual budget ranging between \$2,000 and \$4,000 and maximize our funding/donations to create a significant impact within our community. We are extremely thankful to our donors and the dedication of our volunteers and volunteer-led board. One of *Accessible Okanagan's* greatest strengths lies in its ability to foster collaboration with other non-profits, serving as a valuable hub for information and resource-sharing.

As *Accessible Okanagan* continues to grow, we are committed to fostering peer support, outdoor activities, and community engagement. Whether through a coffee group, an accessible camping adventure, or an online discussion that connects individuals across the globe, *Accessible Okanagan Society* exemplifies the power of community and is a testament to what we can achieve when people come together with a shared vision of inclusivity, support, and empowerment.

For those looking to join, participate, or support our organization, please don't hesitate to reach out and get connected: james@accessibleokanagan.org



Bold fashion for every body

Dressing with power, personality, and possibility

By Teri Thorson

I've always loved fashion—not just the clothes themselves as a model, but the joy of getting dressed. The creativity. Fashion has always been how I express confidence, playfulness, strength, softness—whatever I'm feeling. It's how I show up in the world.

After my spinal cord injury left me a complete C6 tetraplegic, that relationship changed. I was told I needed to be functional, not fashionable. Track pants and runners. I refused that, but getting dressed wasn't so simple anymore. What once took five minutes might take twenty—or an hour. Cute tops with tiny buttons were out. Pants didn't fit properly: too low in the back, too high in the front, and never long enough for my 5'11" frame. And the fashion industry? It didn't seem to notice people like me at all.

That's how I fell into adaptive fashion—not just as a consumer but as an advocate, collaborator, researcher, and designer with a lived understanding of what works, what doesn't, and why this matters.

What is adaptive fashion?

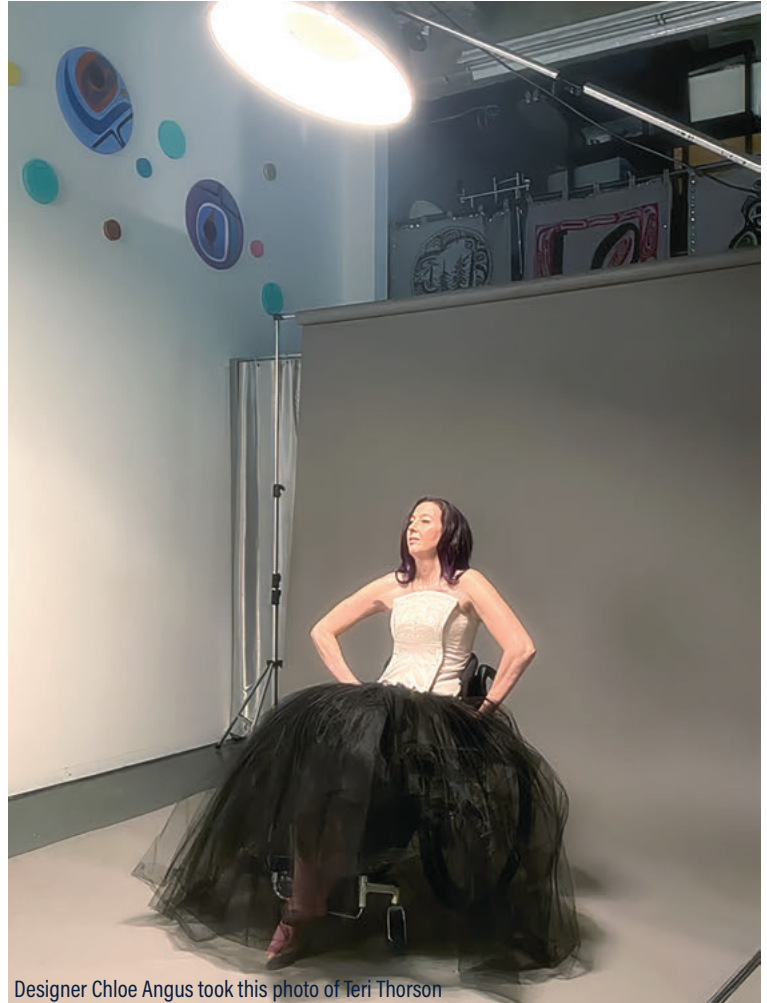
Adaptive fashion is clothing designed with accessibility, comfort, and function in mind—without compromising style. It's not a special category off in a corner; it's what happens when clothing is created for all kinds of bodies. Most of all, it's about choice: the ability to dress in a way that reflects who you are—not just what your body can or can't do.

Once limited to oversized basics or medical garments, adaptive fashion is now showing up in stylish designs from major brands and disability-led creators. Fashion is finally starting to recognize people with disabilities as consumers with real style.

Choosing what works for you

Over time, I've learned what really matters to me in clothing. It used to be just about how I looked, now it is about how I can wear fashionable clothing and be as independent in my dressing as possible. Start by asking yourself some questions to find out what you need and want:

- › Do you want to dress independently?
- › Is comfort your priority?
- › Do you need assistance in dressing?
- › What feels good on your body?
- › What's your personal vibe... classic, bold, cozy?



Designer Chloe Angus took this photo of Teri Thorson

Key features of adaptive clothing

Adapting the clothes you already love

You don't need to ditch your entire closet to embrace adaptive fashion! Some of my favourite pieces were just one alteration away from perfect using some simple DIY fixes. Here are some game-changers for me—small tweaks that make dressing way less frustrating while keeping the style I love:

- › Swap buttons for magnets or snaps
- › Add fun zipper pulls
- › Use Velcro or hem tape

It's also important to remember different abilities call for different fashion solutions.

A good rule of thumb when you do go shopping: stretch fabrics, longer hems, and looser fits go a long way—even from mainstream brands.

Easy closures

I found an off-the-rack blouse with Velcro tabs that I loved—and the Velcro actually didn't get stuck on everything! Once I started creating my own clothing, I added "fake" buttons—they look like regular buttons but have Velcro underneath. Other ideas:

- > Magnetic snaps
- > Zippers with loops or rings
- > Elastic waistbands
- > Front-closing bras

Ideas especially for people with limited hand function

- > Use magnets, Velcro, or pull-on styles
- > Try dressing tools like button hooks
- > Avoid anything requiring fine finger work



Model: Teri Thorson

Seated fit

I can't count the number of times I've tugged at the back of my pants after transferring, only to end up with a waistband halfway down. A proper seated fit—higher in the back and lower in the front—changed that and gave me back confidence I didn't realize I'd lost. Other things to consider are:

- > Longer inseams
- > Smooth, slide-friendly fabrics with a bit of stretch
- > Avoid back pockets or thick seams
- > Tailor pants to prevent gaping

Sensory comfort

Especially important for people with sensory sensitivities:

- > Seamless or flat seams
- > Tagless garments or soft linings sewn into the fabric
- > Choose soft, stretchy natural fabrics like bamboo or cotton
- > Pre-wash clothes

Mobility-friendly design

A friend shared a tip that completely transformed my quality of life. Since I use intermittent catheters, pulling up my pants used to take forever—until I added a zipper along the inseam.

You can also extend the fly of a zipper for easier access. Another friend who uses an indwelling catheter feeds the tubing through a small hole into their pocket and keeps the bag there. Other peers use:

- > Capes or wrap jackets
- > Tear-away pants
- > Wider leg or rear openings

Work with a tailor

Not every tailor understands adaptive fashion, but when you find one who does—it's gold! I started creating adaptive fashion by working with a costume designer because they could think much more outside the box. Now I have patterns that I can bring to anyone.

What a good tailor can do:

- > Adjust pant rise
- > Add access panels or zippers
- > Remove uncomfortable details

Styling tips for adaptive clothing

Mix it up

One of my go-to looks? Sleek adaptive jeans, a bold-printed $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve-length blouse, and a chunky statement necklace—I feel powerful, polished, and totally myself.

Accessorize your style

Scarves, hats, bags, or jewellery add flair.

Dress for different occasions

Build a wardrobe that flexes with your life—comfy staples, smart layers, and a few statement pieces you love.

MORE INFO

- > Find adaptive fashion from brands like IZ Adaptive, MagnaReady, Silvert's, Billy Footwear, or Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive.
- > Explore local tailors, Etsy makers, or peer networks for custom modifications.
- > Community organizations, OTs (occupational therapists), and rehab centres may also offer referrals or support.

Adaptive music studio hits all the right notes

By Bryden Veinot

The Vancouver Adaptive Music Society (VAMS) is a non-profit organization, founded in 1988 by Dave Symington and Sam Sullivan, known for its innovative approach to music-making by using adaptive instruments and technology to support the unique needs of its participants. The accessible music studio is in Vancouver at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre, open 10am-5pm on weekdays. VAMS staff are trained in audio engineering and music production, finding new ways to support our community with professional studio sessions.

At the studio, our three-tiered programs are inclusive of all abilities, ages, and free of charge.

The first tier of programs is music lessons. Participants can book weekly, one-hour lessons to learn piano, guitar, drums, bass, ukulele, music production, theory, and recording techniques. Lessons are also offered virtually with a volunteer instructor, which can include instruments beyond what are taught in the studio.

The second tier is in-studio recording sessions. Artists can book a weekly, two-hour session to write, record, and produce their music. Book a time online here: <https://disabilityfoundation.checkfront.com/reserve/>

The third tier, live performance opportunities, takes place around the Lower Mainland at various venues. VAMS finds accessible spaces for events like our flagship concert "The Strong Sessions", featuring artists playing their original music with support from local talent. The VAMS Strong X Series features specific VAMS artists performing original sets.



The late Dave Symington on octapads

learn from and connect to in these conversations! Check out all content on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@ReImagineRadioVAMS>

A crucial element of our work is the use of adaptive musical instruments, all of which are made by volunteers at the Tetra Society of North America. They're specifically designed to accommodate a wide range of disabilities, allowing people with limited mobility or dexterity to play in a new way. The VAMS studio has a guitar strummer, drumstick grips, modified piano stand, guitar table, and other electronic instruments that are programmed to bypass most barriers.

VAMS and the broader field of accessible music are clear examples of how inclusive practices are reshaping the music industry. These efforts not only help musicians with disabilities express themselves creatively but also challenge society's idea of what it means to be a musician.

Stay tuned in this summer for a unique electronic music performance by VAMS artist Turner Churchill, A.K.A. "CRITTR".

VAMS also hosts a podcast series called "Discover Stories". This podcast goes beyond music and focuses on the stories of people in our community. There's so much to

FOR MORE INFO

Visit www.vams.org or email them at info@vams.org

E-bikes shift gears for disabled riders

By Jocelyn Maffin



Handcycles – adaptive trikes for people with disabilities, driven by arm cranks instead of pedals – have been available since the 1980s. Not until electric “e-bikes” became available, offering a kick of extra power from a hub-mounted or mid-drive motor, did handcycling become accessible for a much wider audience. These relatively inexpensive motors have also spawned a whole new range of bike-like 3 and 4-wheel electric rides from companies like Bowhead, Quadrix, Exotek, and Outrider, allowing riders with less arm function like Chantelle Grafton to find their own way to the outdoors. In this interview, Jocelyn Maffin – an avid adaptive mountain biker who works at Spinal Cord Injury BC – chats with Chantelle about rediscovering trail riding on four wheels.

Chantelle Grafton, from Prince George, BC, lives with C3 quadriplegia from a mountain biking accident. She rides a Quadrix Axxess E3, a 4-wheel 1500W off-road vehicle. Her favourite trails to ride are the Forests for the World trails. In this interview, she talks about adapting her ride to suit her needs and getting back outdoors.

Jocelyn Maffin (JM): When did you start riding?

Chantelle Grafton (CG): I got the “bike” in 2022. We got it halfway through the summer and then had to figure out how to use it.

(JM): Did it come already set up for you?

(CG): No. It’s just been constant customization since we got it. It had a joystick mounted to the right armrest and the seat was a large racing-style bucket seat. I have a smaller frame and no arm function so the first thing we did was try and figure out how I can use it.

(JM): So how did you find your ride?

(CG): I found videos of Petey Lloyd and his Quadrix on Instagram with a modified chin control. I asked around on Facebook forums about it, and a fellow from Calgary offered to sell me his. It was pretty hard to get one from the manufacturer. We tried to re-create Pete’s [chin control] and built a custom harness for it. We played with a lot of different mods, grips, and ways to do a chin control.

We took the bucket seat off and installed a custom wheelchair backrest just to make my body fit better. Petey already uses the chin control on his chair. It was a bit more of a struggle for me but now it’s pretty fun.

(JM): This gets you to your most recent summer. Sounds like you finally got it dialled?

(CG): Yeah, a lot of it’s just been getting the seat to fit me and keep me in place because I don’t have any core or arm control. Everything’s flailing around as soon as you start hitting bumps, so we developed ways to strap down my arms with first aid elastic straps and a harness, the customized seat, and then strapping my legs.

So now I’m stable enough that I can go full tilt in it and not rattle out of it, which is way more fun.

(JM): What about suspension?

(CG): It has full [independent] suspension, front and back. It has great shock absorption. It’s very smooth.

(JM): Have you had any spills or mishaps?

(CG): Some trees for sure, but no spills yet! It’s quite



stable. There's a bar in front, feet first, so when I hit something, I haven't been injured at all... And it doesn't go that fast. It still only clocks out at maybe 15 kilometers an hour, which I prefer especially while I'm just getting it dialed in. A little bit goes a long way when you touch that joystick.

(JM): How long do you ride for?

(CG): I've been kind of working up to see what my skin can handle. I use a Roho cushion with it, but I'm always worried about my tailbone. I think the longest I've spent in it is 3 hours and it's been fine. I'll go out on a couple [of] hours ride and keep wanting to push it further.

(JM): Do you get very far from home? Or drive somewhere and bring your bike?

(CG): Both. I'll take it around neighborhood rides for an hour. We've got a really beautiful park around my house; that's an easy ride with a dog. I've also loaded [it] up, taken it to Mackenzie in the back of my truck. We have taken it on trips too, and I have run out of battery a couple times. It's still limited to 20 km, kind of like a chair, so the battery is definitely a limitation. That's where you need your support team.

(JM): They had to push you back?

(CG): 100%! When we took it to Mackenzie, I took a group of friends and found out that it can only do about 20km and then ran out of battery. But luckily, I had a couple of people to pull me out. That was an exciting trust exercise, 4 km back on a scree slope like that! I have ambitious friends which helps.

(JM): Yeah, it totally does. That's something I found too – it's a sweet spot, finding your people who are game and enjoy riding with you, not just to help you.

(CG): It's a good way to put it - I always feel like people aren't going to want to go out with me because I'm slower, but they do actually enjoy seeing what we can haul me into and out of.

(JM): When you were injured, did you even see yourself riding again?

(CG): I had no idea, and it was one of the first things I started to look for once I got home and settled, like, "How do I get back out to do the things I really love doing with the people that I love doing it with?" Everything I could find required handlebars like a bike, so it wasn't going to work for me. So, I went looking [for people like me] on Facebook and Instagram.

(JM): Any advice for someone interested? Where would you suggest they start?

(CG): Look at what's out there and imagine yourself in it. Find a place to try some of these things first. Up in Prince George we have a Bowhead Reach [adaptive bike] that people can borrow. If it's what you want to do, there's a way to get there somehow.

And pressure these companies into making a joystick! That'd be my other thing. I keep reaching out to these companies, like [Calgary based aMTB builder] Bowhead [telling them]: "You're pretty close, just make a joystick, one with four wheels and then you'd expand to a very large demographic of people who can use it! I'd love more of these companies to see the market [for rides with joystick control]."



Photos by Warren Grafton

For more info check out:

sci-bc.ca/tryadaptivebikes

sci-bc.ca/buyadaptivebikes

<https://www.instagram.com/peatylloyd/>



What I've learned about life with hearing loss

By David Hill

I first noticed my hearing loss in Grade 1. That's when I underwent my first hearing test and was fitted for my first pair of hearing aids. At first, the process was frustrating—especially the hearing tests—but eventually, I got used to it.

Hearing aids became an essential part of my life. Like many dwarves who rely on tools to navigate physical challenges, I learned to embrace them as part of my routine. Over time, I realized that patience and acceptance were key—not just for me but for others like me facing similar situations.

Achondroplasia is one of the most common forms of dwarfism, occurring in approximately 1 in 26,000 to 1 in 40,000 births. Its characteristic features include distinct facial features, disproportionate short stature, and shortening of the upper limbs (rhizomelic shortening). Hearing impairment is a common issue for people with achondroplasia due to anatomical differences that affect ear structure and function. Most people with achondroplasia have full cognitive abilities, though they may experience motor delays during infancy or childhood.

One of the people I interviewed recently was my best friend, Kevin Berry. He started noticing his hearing loss at age five and needed hearing aids soon after. Adjusting to them wasn't easy for him at first. He told me: "Now looking back, while I don't necessarily wish I had hearing loss, accepting it as part of my life has given me opportunities for empathy and compassion for others who face challenges." His perspective reminded me how shared experiences can create connections across communities.

I also wanted to ask my mom about her experience with hearing loss, but she suggested that I talk to my grandma instead since she would remember more details. According to my grandma, my mom's hearing loss was noticeable when she was a toddler and became more apparent as she started school. My mom got her first pair of hearing aids in Grade 7 but adapted smoothly—her ability to adjust has always stood out to me.

Navigating life with patience and support

Living with hearing loss requires patience and creativity. As a toddler, I used sign language before starting school. Later on, writing things down or typing on devices became helpful strategies when my hearing aids weren't available.

Support systems have been vital throughout my journey. My family and friends have always been there for me, but professional help has been just as important—ENT doctors, audiologists, and hearing centre staff have guided me every step of the way. Technology like FM systems and tools provided by organizations such as Technology for Living (TfL) has also made communication easier.

Hearing loss adds another layer of complexity to life as a little person who is already navigating physical differences. Social interactions can be particularly challenging—missing dialogue or needing extra time for communication can be frustrating for everyone involved.

But as with many other aspects of dwarfism, I learned to adapt over time.

Personally, patience has been key in communicating with others—especially when relying on tools like Lightwriters or when my hearing aids aren't available.

Hearing loss is just part of the journey

Living with hearing loss as a dwarf has taught me practical lessons about adaptation and patience. While the journey hasn't always been easy, it's shaped how I approach challenges and how I interact with support systems like family, friends, and technology.

By sharing my story, I hope others can better understand the experiences little people face—and recognize that navigating these situations is simply part of our everyday lives.

Have van, will travel

By Marnie Essery

In winter 2019, Lisa Franks from Saskatchewan became a snowbird, wanting to escape -20°C temperatures. She is adventurous, loves the outdoors and nature, and calls herself an adrenaline junkie. Lisa has been disabled for 30 years.

Researching online to find what she needed for her travel adventures; she ordered a cargo van with two front seats. With her engineering background, she designed a layout with enough room for her surfboard, a mountain bike to fit under her bed, and space for her wheelchair so she could reach everything easy enough.

It took planning and finding someone familiar with van conversions to help. The build was completed in six weeks within her budget and included a *Super Arm* wheelchair lift, which allows her to get in and out of her van independently. The lift doesn't take up much space and is easy to fix. She also installed an actuator, which allows her to get in and out of bed on her own.

Lisa started by relocating to warmer destinations, such as California State Parks. Since then she has become a bonafide nomad, moving from one place to another, searching for adventure such as surfing, adaptive mountain biking, or hiking. Her adapted mountain bike has allowed her to explore places that she wouldn't have been able to get to ten years ago.

She is grateful that she has the means to be independent and that everything she needs is in the van, her home on wheels.

There is a lot to consider when travelling with a disability. Lisa brings backups for her wheelchair tyres, brakes, axles, and bearings, as well as travel insurance in what she calls her 'be prepared' toolkit, just in case they are needed. She also coordinates pick-ups of supplies at scheduled stops to arrive at a location when she gets there.

Of course, some days, things don't go as planned. Some challenges are harder to cope with. She recommends thinking on it a bit. Problem-solving and adapting are the way forward. Sometimes, when she arrives at a destination that isn't accessible, she can at least park, stay in the van, check out the views, and then move on. She emphasises: "You will get through this!"

People with disabilities face many barriers, and taking risks or trying something new can be daunting. She believes it is important not to live in fear, as people are often



very willing to help. She has found that having the van, the independence it provides, has boosted her confidence, brought many adventures, and added a lot of fun to her life. She has never regretted taking the leap.

Her advice to other people with disabilities is to pick a location that you would like to visit. Then, do some research online about weather, accessible locations, events, or activities that might interest you and don't be afraid to reach out and ask questions. Start small by taking a short trip, build up your comfort and confidence levels, and expand on this for your next trip. Go for it! Be open to having experiences and trust that things will work out.

With a big smile, the wind in her hair, and the beach behind her, she shares how being in nature has helped her feel happier and healthier. She explains that choosing this lifestyle has removed many distractions and taught her what truly matters. She feels more confident and able to handle whatever comes her way.

Some of her favorite places so far are California, British Columbia, Japan, and Australia. Iceland and New Zealand are still on her bucket list. Looking ahead, she hopes to stay happy and healthy, continue being a good person, and grow her YouTube channel.

Lisa is keen to connect with others who have questions or who are pursuing their own travel adventures.

Follow along with Lisa's adventures on her YouTube channel *Keepin It Wheel 306* or on Instagram *@keepinitwheel306*

Some of Lisa's equipment

SuperArm: <https://tinyurl.com/Lift-Arm>

Actuator: <https://tinyurl.com/Lift-Column>

★ Donate to TFL ★

Supporting individuals with disabilities fosters a sense of belonging. Play a role by providing autonomy, respect, dismantling barriers, and instilling confidence.

Become an essential part of building a society where everyone, regardless of their abilities, is accepted and given the space to flourish. Join us in shaping a future where inclusivity is not just a goal but a lived reality.

Your donation to TFL can become a catalyst for creating a more inclusive and accessible future for those facing mobility challenges.

Scan the QR code to make a meaningful impact.



technology for living



DIVERSE DESTINATIONS

Diverse Destinations is a free summer presentation series for people with disabilities—especially those who use wheelchairs, scooters, or other mobility aids. Hosted by Technology For Living and supported by the Victoria Foundation, it features accessible travel tips, real-life stories from disabled adventurers, and highlights like the new Hullo ferry service.

13
JUNE
FRI

Langford Legion, 761 Station Ave, Victoria, BC

Speakers: Robin Whyte, Ean Price, Tanelle Bolt

18
JULY
FRI

Power To Be, 4633 Prospect Lake Rd, Victoria, BC

Speakers: Robin Whyte, Ean Price, Monica Gartner

19
JULY
SAT

SHOAL Community Centre, 10030 Resthaven Dr, Sidney, BC

Speakers: Robin Whyte, Ean Price, TBD

For more info please contact: peer@technologyforliving.org

technology for living