



# balance

... what it's all about

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## Welcome to the new and expanded edition of The Balance

By Ruth Marzetti

**T**echnology for Living and our community are growing, and so is the information we want to share. We've increased the page count from 12 to 16 pages, providing you with more information, education, and stories from your peers. If you're subscribed to the print version, you'll still receive four issues per year in the mail. Alternatively, if you prefer the digital experience, you can read **The Balance** online on our website.

Technology for Living is continually evolving, and we know that we play an important role in the lives of many of our members. In response, the Board of Directors at our Annual General Meeting addressed the question of expanding **The Balance** and the number of pages. David Hill, one of our peer writers, raised this issue, leading to the formation of an editorial committee. This committee is working to determine how to fill the additional pages with relevant and informative content for our readership.

The editorial committee understands that members are keen to read about technology, educational pieces, and shared life

stories. The goal is to create a **Balance** newsletter that not only informs but also educates. Thanks to a generous donation from Stuart Belkin, we were able to establish the "Stuart Belkin Educational Fund" which is helping to fund the increased page count. Some of this fund will contribute to the inclusion of more stories on new technology in **The Balance**. Moreover, it will also be utilized to purchase assistive technology, such as automatic door openers and home automation devices, for our Technology for Independent Living (TIL) program. These additions aim to enhance the independence of members who live in their own homes.

We are delighted about the positive changes in our programs and hope you share in our excitement. Take a moment to explore the back cover, featuring an announcement and invitation to join us for the 9<sup>th</sup> Simon Cox Student Design Competition. The event will take place live at the Blusson Icord Centre on Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>. Witness students from all corners of the province showcase their assistive technology entries, competing to be this year's winner.



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# TFL Round Up

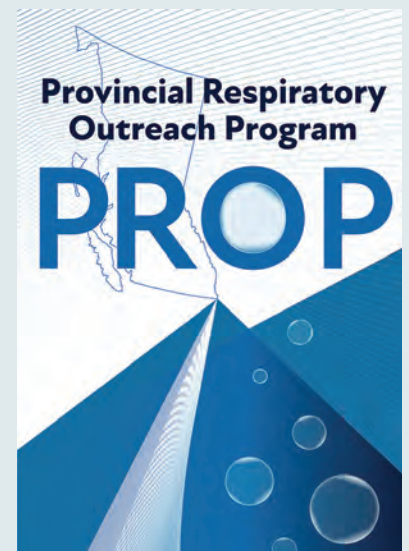
## Stuart Belkin's gift enhances Tfl's ability to turn ideas into solutions



The largest gift ever to Technology for Living will establish the Stuart Belkin Education Fund. The \$250,000 gift from BC philanthropist Stuart Belkin will provide equipment to reduce the barriers for people with mobility issues, enabling them to participate more fully in their homes and communities. On behalf of the Board of Directors, and the members of Technology for Living (TFL), we would like to express our deepest gratitude for this impactful gift. The fund will enable Technology for Living to expand its capabilities by purchasing technological equipment to increase the capacity, and the autonomy of TFL members, supporting the annual Simon Cox Student Design Competition and more.

## The PROP department is welcoming staff changes

Starting January 1, Krysten Polsky assumed the role of Team Lead at a time when the PROP membership continues to grow rapidly. We are allocating resources to explore changing demographics beyond our traditional focus. Anticipating a potential increase in PROP members, we are in the process of preparing for this change, including structural adjustments to the PROP team. Lily Cheung has taken on a newly created position as RT Educator. Additionally, we have Miranda Whitely in a third position as the Program Development Lead, focused on PROP's overall strategic development and growth. PROP's likely expansion will have a ripple effect across all of TFL—from biomed to the logistics team, member services, to finance & administrative support. Exciting times!



Terence Tsoi (r), RBC Community Manager, presented a \$15,000 cheque to Ruth Marzetti (l), Executive Director of TFL.

## Thank you to the RBC Foundation!

Technology for Living's signature event, the Simon Cox Student Design Competition, has, for the third year, been fortunate to be awarded a \$15,000 grant by The RBC Foundation. This partnership ensures that students from across the province of British Columbia are able to participate in designing and developing technological and biomedical devices in collaboration with their peers. To check out this year's exciting event, please join us on April 27, 2024, at the Blusson Icord Centre. Details are on the back page of this Balance newsletter. Lunch will be provided.



## BITS & BYTES FROM TIL

*With extensive experience developed over many years, TIL has been at the forefront in improving accessibility in BC. Our accessibility consulting expertise spans sectors like government, development, health, and individuals. Our commitment extends beyond home accessibility, covering solutions for access points like doors, elevators, garage doors, intercoms, and more.*

*Working closely with Technology for Living's Peer Support team, TIL ensures our solutions align with diverse BC residents' needs, contributing to the goal of increased accessibility for all.*

*If you or someone you know could benefit from TIL's accessibility consulting, please reach out to us.*

### 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](mailto:info@technologyforliving.org)*

## TIPS & TRICKS

*Are you exploring ways to have fun with Artificial Intelligence (AI)? Try out AI Image Generators like DALL-E by OpenAI or Artbreeder to craft images based on your imagination. Both offer free and paid subscriptions. Provide details (called 'prompts') about the subjects, the scene's context, and the preferred artistic style, and the artwork will be created for you.*



## Tech TLC

### Getting Your SMART devices ready for spring

By Wayne Pogue

**As** the days grow longer and brighter, many people turn their attention to spring cleaning. While tasks such as dusting the house, tidying up the balcony or yard, pressure washing various surfaces, and preparing for gardening are common priorities, often overlooked is the need to ensure that your technology is operating optimally for the upcoming season.

Spring provides an opportune moment to verify the functionality of your technology, recharge or replace batteries, and adjust winter smart home schedules to align with the extended daylight hours.

### Smart home schedules

Setting schedules for SMART home devices is beneficial year-round, but it's important to avoid a "set and forget" mentality, as this can lead to unnecessary energy consumption. For example, as daylight increases, adjusting SMART lights to illuminate later in the evening and programming SMART blinds or curtains to open earlier in the morning and close later in the day makes sense.

### Battery checks

In addition to checking the batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide

detectors, it's advisable to periodically inspect the batteries of all SMART home devices. Spring is a good time to perform these checks. Whether your devices use replaceable batteries (e.g., Sunsa Smart Wand, August Locks) or rechargeable ones (e.g., RYSE Smart Shades, Ring/Nest Smart Doorbells), regular inspections are crucial. SMART home device batteries can be monitored through the corresponding app on your phone or tablet. If the battery level is low, take the necessary steps to replace or recharge it to avoid disruptions when you need the device to function.

### Software updates

To ensure optimal performance and access the latest features, regularly update the software of your SMART home devices, and ensure that you are using the latest version of the app on your phone.

By keeping your devices and apps up to date, maintaining fully charged batteries, and adjusting spring and summer schedules within the apps, you can ensure that the SMART devices you rely on for accessibility will continue to function as seamlessly as possible throughout the summer months.

## INHALE / EXHALE

### Enhance mindfulness with Breath Awareness

Sit comfortably, close your eyes to minimize distractions, and focus on your breath without altering it. Notice the sensations as it enters and leaves your body. If thoughts arise, acknowledge them without judgment and return your focus to your breath.

Practice **Guided Imagery** for a mindful moment. Close your eyes, take deep breaths, and imagine a peaceful place. Engage all senses to make the scene vivid. Take a mental stroll, feeling relaxation with each breath. If your mind wanders, gently guide your focus back to the guided imagery.

### CONTACT US!

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

## IDEA CORNER

**Mindfulness** is linked to potential impacts on brain structure, suggesting regular practice induces changes, especially in memory, self-awareness, and compassion-related areas. While direct and universally positive effects on brain structure require further study, varying among individuals, it might contribute to positive adaptations in your brain's physical structure.

# Embracing Mindfulness to boost respiratory well-being

By Allie Struss

**L**iving with a neuromuscular disease brings a set of challenges, impacting physical health and emotional experiences. Explore how mindfulness techniques might provide benefits to ease pain and improve overall well-being.

### Stress reduction

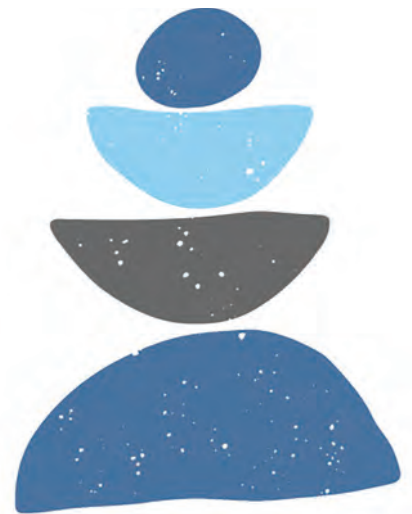
For those facing neuromuscular diseases, stress can worsen symptoms. Mindfulness, involving practices like deep breathing and meditation, helps in building strength to confront each day more easily.

### Pain management and comfort

People with neuromuscular diseases often grapple with pain. Mindfulness offers effective ways to manage pain, aiding people in handling discomfort and boosting their pain tolerance. Focusing on the present moment can ease the emotional burden of chronic pain.

### Emotional well-being and acceptance

Living with a neuromuscular disease can be emotionally draining. Mindfulness encourages acceptance of the present moment, fostering emotional well-being. Through guided meditations and mindful reflections, individuals can develop a positive mindset and navigate difficult emotions more easily.



### Improved sleep and restful nights

Mindfulness practices have been linked to improved sleep quality, providing potential relief for those struggling with restful nights. By incorporating mindfulness into daily routines, people may find solace in the quiet of the present moment, promoting better sleep.

### Enhances mind-body connection

Neuromuscular diseases can disrupt the intricate relationship between the mind and body. Mindfulness exercises, such as body scan meditations and gentle movements, help restore and improve this connection.

As healthcare undergoes changes, introducing mindfulness techniques into the lives of people with neuromuscular diseases emerges as an additional approach to holistic care. While not a cure, mindfulness brings numerous benefits, offering people strength, acceptance, and a renewed sense of well-being in their health journey. Adopting mindfulness can be a powerful tool, providing a sense of control and resilience in the face of neuromuscular struggles.

## ASK A PEER

*Trained service dogs can assist with everything from retrieving items to operating switches, thereby enhancing day-to-day living. Nicole Whitford, the Peer Team's Community Advisor, has 20 years of experience with service dogs, starting with her first dog from Pacific Assistance Dogs (PADS) in 2005.*

*Her expertise extends from the practical integration of these dogs into daily life to enhancing independence, as well as understanding the legal and social aspects of life with a service dog in Canada.*

*For advice on service dogs, contact Nicole at [peer@technologyforliving.org](mailto:peer@technologyforliving.org).*

*More information is available at [pads.ca](http://pads.ca) and [assisteddogsinternational.org](http://assisteddogsinternational.org).*

### 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](mailto:peer@technologyforliving.org)*

## NEWS FLASH

*GoPro's voice control opens new possibilities in photography. Commands like "GoPro, start recording" simplify camera operation, especially for those who find manual controls challenging. It's not just for videos—take photos, switch modes, and more, all hands-free. A valuable tool for accessible photography.*

*Learn more at [GoPro.com](http://GoPro.com).*

# Say hello to AccessibilityMap.ca

By Zosia Ettenberg

**L**angley Pos-Abilities, founded in 2010, has a long history of "changing disabilities into possibilities" by supporting residents of Langley and other Lower Mainland communities. The organisation provides equipment to people with disabilities who do not qualify for government programs or private assistance through its 'Personal Assistive Device (PAD)' program. Additionally, the 'Try On A Disability (TOAD)' project offers a direct glimpse into the daily life of someone with a disability, allowing those without such experiences to better grasp the challenges that come from living as a person with disabilities. Improving awareness and empathy for the daily challenges experienced by people with disabilities is a crucial step towards the ultimate goal of making accessibility universal.

### The latest initiative

After several years of development, the AccessibilityMap.ca, is ready for prime time. The website is being released at the same time as mobile apps which are available on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

AccessibilityMap.ca was created with the intention of utilizing technology to enhance inclusivity in the community by offering a solution that will make an immediate practical impact. This tool was made to meet the diverse needs of people with various abilities trying to navigate physical spaces. The goal was

to design the widest-range solutions possible, supporting those with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments, as well as parents or guardians with strollers.

The website/app provide details on wheelchair accessibility, ramp availability, elevators, accessible restrooms, lighting, and signage. It offers real-time information about the accessibility status of locations such as businesses, public facilities, and transportation services. This information is collected directly from users, leading to a comprehensive overview of the "true" accessibility of a location.

Participating businesses and organizations can update accessibility information on the app, making them an active participant in the effort to create a more inclusive community. Langley Pos-Abilities is working with the Accessibility Advisory Committees of both Langley City and Township, urging business owners to assess their premises' accessibility while raising awareness among businesses, encouraging them to enhance accessibility and identify areas for improvement based on public and business audits.

The application's value is directly linked to the number of users viewing and submitting reports, offering the community a full overview of accessibility in the area.

Go to AccessibilityMap.ca or search for "AccessibilityMap" on the Google Play Store or Apple App Store.



**Accessibility**  
MAP





## 9<sup>th</sup> STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION

# Be a part of it!

By Richard Harrison

**T**echnology for Living (TFL) is gearing up for the 9<sup>th</sup> Simon Cox Student Design Competition (SCSDC) on April 27 at Vancouver's Blusson Spinal Cord Centre. Originating in 2014 as the *Student Engineering Design Competition*, the event evolved into the Simon Cox Student Design Competition in 2017 to honour Simon Cox, TFL's former Executive Director, while maintaining its core mission of collaborative problem-solving between students and individuals with disabilities.

The competition aims to enhance autonomy and inclusiveness for those with physical disabilities through innovative technologies. As TFL is experiencing year-on-year growth, we want to emphasize the crucial role of external support. Wayne Pogue, TIL Team lead, explains: "Supporters are integral for growing the event, attracting more students and schools, thereby increasing the range of assistive technology solutions." TFL is fortunate to have community members - individuals, families, businesses, and organizations - who recognize the value the competition brings to the provincial landscape and actively invest, once, annually, or periodically over a lifetime.

### Accessibility and Inclusion: Investing in BC Innovators and the Future

The reasons for partnering with us are as varied as our partners. Since inception, the **Kinsmen Foundation of BC** has supported the event. Executive Director Philip Jewell explains: "We have a long history with people with disabilities going all the way back to buying land for Dr. Strong, where G.F. Strong stands today. These ideas and assistive technology have revolutionized the lives of people with disabilities."

**BC Rehab Foundation** Chair Ian Muirhead notes: "Disability is all about adapting, and this is a really great event for highlighting that."

**KPMG** believes that the competition is "an opportunity to further encourage emerging talent in the technology industry, promote sustainable design practices, and showcase all the creative solutions that will lead to greater independence."

Terence Tsoi of **RBC** describes the competition as an "investment in our collective future which allows youth to develop their skills and make a difference in the community."

Debra Doucette of **Odlum Brown** says her company strives to partner with organizations like TFL that share a commitment to making an impact in the community now and for generations.

Our supporters include the **Morris & Helen Belkin Foundation, G&F Financial, AXIS Insurance, Lohn Foundation, Hamber Foundation, BC Hydro, Sunsa, Ryse**, all of them standing behind the principle of improving lives now and in the future. We are extremely pleased this year to welcome a new supporter, **Mr. Stuart Belkin**. With his generous financial support, we have been able to establish a new education fund at TFL.

Every foundation and corporate partnership with Technology for Living is unique. We will work with you to create the perfect opportunity for your company - from gifts to event support, our aim is to develop mutually beneficial relationships. Please get in touch today - we look forward to working with you to ensure more youth and adults can have autonomy in their homes and participate in the communities they live in. Be a part of it!

Contact [info@technologyforliving.org](mailto:info@technologyforliving.org) for more info.

# Exploring Alternative Wheelchair Drive Controls

By Taylor Danielson

A power wheelchair is often one of the most crucial pieces of equipment in the arsenal for many in the disability community, myself included. Power chairs restore mobility around the house, in the community, and for some globetrotters, around the world. The most important part of the power wheelchair is an appropriate control input that allows the user to operate it. Without this component, much of the promised freedom of a power wheelchair is severely reduced or completely canceled. Traditionally, most power wheelchairs are operated by one of three different control styles: joysticks, sip-and-puff systems, or an array of switches (often around the user's head and commonly called head arrays). These controls are fantastic, but there are situations where these solutions may not be helpful for users with very specific needs. Fortunately, power chair technology is a rapidly developing field.

## Ability Drive

For example, *Ability Drive* by Tolt Technologies has designed a product for users of eye gaze systems, which seems to provide an exceptional solution. The *Ability Drive* works with a specially designed tablet mounted in front of the user, utilizing a forward-facing camera to display what is in front of the user. A simple, semi-transparent control interface with options for moving forward,

backward, left, right, and stop is overlaid on this real-time video. The operator then uses eyesight to "point" at these control elements, directing the power chair in the corresponding direction.

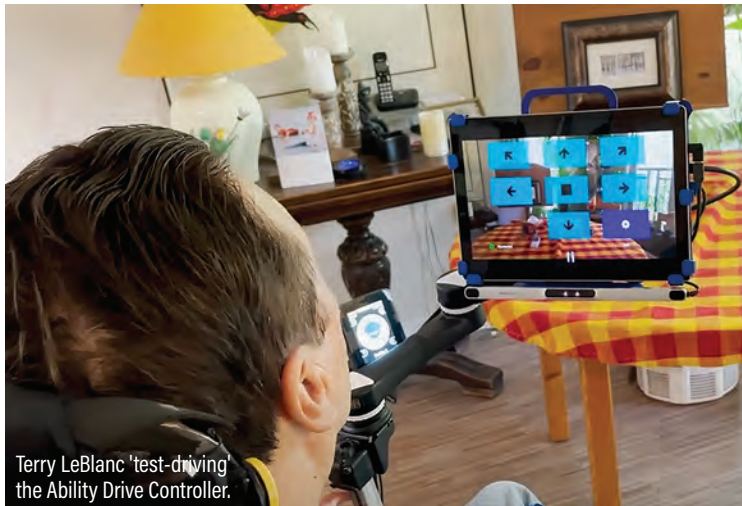
Testimonial videos show users of the *Ability Drive* navigate through their homes, grocery stores, and other public spaces by means of eye-gaze only. Technology for Living featured the *Ability Drive* on our YouTube channel in the video titled "FUTURE TECH". ([www.tinyurl.com/362yjnta](http://www.tinyurl.com/362yjnta)) Our late colleague and friend Terry LeBlanc 'test-drove' the *Ability Drive* for us and was impressed with its simplicity and usefulness, navigating his apartment with precision after only needing a few minutes to familiarize himself with the system. ([www.tolt.tech](http://www.tolt.tech))

## Naqi Logix Earbuds



Naqi Logix's control interface, in the form of wireless earbuds, created a lot of media buzz in BC when former MLA and Mayor of Vancouver Sam Sullivan used the device to operate his power wheelchair: "Right away I was able to turn in my wheelchair, go back and forth, and make all these fine adjustments and motions. It was easy, immediate, and intuitive."

This innovative control interface, resembling an everyday set of wireless earbuds, is loaded with high-tech sensors



Terry LeBlanc 'test-driving' the Ability Drive Controller.

that translate minute movements of the wearer into commands, allowing them to operate a whole host of devices, including computers, smartphones, and, of course, power wheelchairs.

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**Developed right here in Vancouver by Naqi Logix, this device could be a game-changer for people who only have movement above their neck, such as quadriplegics.**

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This technology is very exciting and is just beginning to explore the potential benefits of a truly hands-free interface for individuals with disabilities.

At the present the Naqi earbud is not yet commercially available but check out their website to stay up to date. ([www.naqilogix.com](http://www.naqilogix.com))

### **munevo DRIVE**

The munevo DRIVE, a similar device, is already widely available in the US and Europe. The munevo DRIVE, consists of a pair of 'smart glasses' worn by the user. By tilting and turning their head approximately 3°, users can control a variety of devices, including power wheelchairs from most major manufacturers (e.g., Permobil, Invacare, & Sunrise Medical). The device also controls many SMART home devices, and high-tech robotic arms

such as the Kinova Jaco. The munevo DRIVE is fully customizable to each user through a smartphone app and provides both visual and audio feedback through the glasses, making operation intuitive and easy to adapt to. ([www.munevo.com](http://www.munevo.com))

### **Evolving Assistive Technology**

These technologies, including the Ability Drive, Naqi Logix's earbud interface, and the munevo DRIVE, signify a significant shift in assistive technology, offering tangible, current-day innovations that are reshaping mobility experiences for many in the disability community.

Undoubtedly, these devices signify a significant departure from previous approaches. They address a crucial advancement by acknowledging and designing solutions tailored to the diversity of power wheelchair users. This transformative shift demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity, actively recognizing the varied challenges and preferences within this user demographic. Moving beyond traditional control methods and embracing personalized, adaptable solutions, we witness an evolution in assistive devices marked by a deeper understanding of user requirements and a practical commitment to improving quality of life through technology.

It's important to point out their immediate impact, right now in the present.

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**They are not just concepts or future possibilities; they are real tools being used today to enhance independence and facilitate day-to-day activities.**

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Their existence and ongoing development reflect a growing recognition within the tech community of the need for accessibility and user-centered design.

This progress in power wheelchair technology is a testament to the continuous efforts aimed at making technology more inclusive and adaptive. As these innovations become more widespread, they offer a promising outlook for enhanced mobility and independence, underlining the essential role of technology in solving real-world challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.



The munevo DRIVE, consists of a pair of 'smart glasses' worn by the user



# Disability-Friendly Dining: Tips for Enjoyable Meals

By Marnie Essery

## Eating In

For those who enjoy cooking, dining at home can be just as delightful as going out to a restaurant. For many it is important that meals be both tasty and visually appealing. For others maintaining a focus on healthy eating is a common goal as is “quick and simple.” With proper planning, a home-cooked meal can meet all these criteria, even in the face of rising grocery prices.



Planning is the key. Make a list of ingredients and shop for the correct amounts. A printed copy of the recipe is very handy in case your electronic devices are acting up. The kitchen should be set up in a way that makes it easy for the chef to move around bearing in mind your disabilities. Apart from having the ingredients ready ensure that all the equipment needed to assemble the meal is ready to use. It may be helpful to have someone assist with cutting. Cooking together with friends and family can add some fun.

Safety tips: Put heat pads on the counter and use oven mitts. Never leave the stove/oven unattended. Use a timer to help alert you should a distraction occur like a phone call or the doorbell rings. This will also prevent a situation where suddenly you smell smoke and now your meal is cajun.

Cooking, like any skill, improves with practice and experimentation. Even those without prior interest can become enthusiastic chefs.

Eating at home provides additional benefits, such as having an accessible washroom and control over ambient factors like loud music or unwanted sensory stimulation. Dressing up can make dining at home a special occasion.

If fatigued or not in the mood for cooking, consider ordering prepared food kits or opting for takeout. However, be mindful of your monthly budget.

## Eating Out

Dining out presents unique challenges for people with disabilities. Allergies or gastrointestinal issues may lead to severe reactions. Concerns about washroom accessibility and loud noises from the stomach can also significantly impact the dining experience. Despite these challenges, everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy a night out.

Creating a checklist based on your needs will help ensure a positive meal out. Contacting the restaurant manager in advance is a proactive step. Inquire about accessible parking, unisex accessible bathrooms, and menu options for allergies or dietary restrictions. Seating can be challenging for wheelchair users, so ask about wheelchair-friendly options. If your assigned table is unsuitable, don't hesitate to request a move.

Some restaurants lack automatic doors, which may pose difficulties. Ask for assistance if required.

When dining alone without a caregiver, specify precisely how you want your food prepared. Share positive experiences about inclusive restaurants to encourage support.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES:

### Cooking with a Disability

> [www.theabilitytoolbox.com/disability-cooking-hacks](http://www.theabilitytoolbox.com/disability-cooking-hacks)

Collection of free visual recipes and other resources for people with disabilities at home

> [www.accessiblechef.com](http://www.accessiblechef.com)

### All you need is 5 ingredients

> [www.eatingwell.com/gallery/8027811/healthy-5-ingredient-dinners-in-30-minutes/](http://www.eatingwell.com/gallery/8027811/healthy-5-ingredient-dinners-in-30-minutes/)

AccessNow: a worldwide accessibility information including restaurants

> [www.accessnow.com](http://www.accessnow.com)

# Navigating Yoga and Healing

By Mary-Jo Fetterly

**D**uring my time in a hospital bed, ventilated and immobile from the neck down, many wondered about my future with yoga. Known as a yoga teacher and entrepreneur, I was uncertain about what lay ahead, but I was committed to continuing my practice.

Yoga, an ancient science, is accessible and integral to daily life. The principle “If you can breathe, you can do yoga,” underscores its inclusivity. Grounded in profound philosophical principles, yoga delves into the laws of nature, psychology, sociology, physics, and physiology, exploring the interconnectedness of the human experience.

The Sanskrit term ‘yug’ in yoga implies joining together, emphasizing the practice’s aim to unite our everyday self (Prakriti) with a cosmic Self (Purusha). This unity, disrupted by separation, is seen as the root of dis-ease, fragmentation, and suffering.

Yoga provides tools to transcend thought patterns and connect with the nonphysical aspects of reality. Through affirmative experiences with the Life-Force, one gains the strength to navigate life’s challenges.

## Presence and Awareness

Presence and awareness form the bedrock of any healing journey, fostering a symbiotic relationship between body, mind, and spirit. A lack of awareness reflects a cultural divide between science and spirituality. Recognizing the body as a resource is liberating, especially for those with disabilities, counteracting the sense of betrayal often felt by people living with a disability.

Understanding the body as an experiential aspect of consciousness is vital. Viewing the body as separate limits our understanding of our role in creation. This shift in the relationship with body, mind, and spirit is a transformative process facilitated by yoga.

## Embracing Wholeness

*Adaptive Yoga* strives to remind individuals that their wholeness transcends physical expression. Movement, integral to life, is enhanced through breath, intention, and relationship in *Adaptive Yoga*. By introducing simple movement patterns, even those with limited mobility can benefit.



Mary-Jo Fetterly and her assistance dog Angel.

*Accessible and Adaptive Yoga* involves modified postures and techniques, utilizing the essence of yoga to facilitate pain management, health, and wholeness. The adaptability of yoga poses ensures that anyone can engage in *Adaptive Yoga*, promoting circulation, independence, and an improved quality of life.

## Physical System of Yoga: The Six Movements of the Spine

Asana, the postures of yoga, comprise the third limb of the eight limbs of yoga. These postures, when practiced with dedication, bring about relaxation, steadiness, health, and lightness of limb. *Yoga Therapy* and *Adaptive Yoga* focus on major postures, adapting them to accommodate diverse physical abilities.

The spine, considered the lifeline of the body, is pivotal in yoga practice. The six movements of the spine—flexion, extension, lateral flexion, lateral extension, spinal twist left, and spinal twist right—form the foundation of postures.

All of these movements can be done as micro movements lying in bed or even with the head. That is the beauty of understanding movement originating from the spine.

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### **The tongue, the head and neck are actually, for most of our adaptive participants considered to be a very important limb.**

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Teaching clients about their own spine and particularly about the six ranges of movement of the spine, can be very enlightening and empowering, especially if movement is limited. It is entirely possible to teach an entire class based on the six movements of the spine, never needing to venture into more complex postures. The whole range of movement can be completed with as much effectiveness either by lying in bed, sitting in a wheelchair, or visualizing it. It is quite possible that someone who has no arm or leg movements, can derive great benefits from moving the spine in these ways.

Another wonderful thing about yoga is anybody can do it and generally not much equipment is needed.

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### **In Adaptive Yoga and Yoga Therapy we are striving to create the most safe and supportive environment possible in order for the system to regulate, integrate and feel relief from pain or physical limitations.**

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As such you will notice in *Yoga Therapy* and *Adaptive Yoga* multitudes of bolsters, blankets, blocks, or straps. We are trying to create safety and space on the way to freedom. When the body and the nervous system feel safe, then the possibilities for pain, relief, and the experience of integration are achievable maybe even limitless.

### **Integration**

Harmony of mind, body, and spirit integration involves balancing various aspects of life, including the body, breath, mind, and environment. Yoga addresses psychological, social, structural, and functional integration. A holistic approach considers an individual's unique relationship with these factors, fostering a state of peace and harmony.

### **Things to experience with your breath**

- > Notice your present breath
- > Notice where your breath moves in the body
- > Be aware of any qualities you notice about your breath right now
- > When you feel ready let yourself have a breath in and then let it out with a big sigh or sound (vagal nerve toning)
- > Notice what's happening with your breath, sensations and or qualities, and let that be a first way of informing you about what it's like to be in your human body, experiencing your human life today
- > Invite your breath to gradually, and gently, lengthen and deepen
- > Remember we are simply making suggestions to the breath.

My time spent with manual therapists and my own inward exploration revealed the depth of internal awareness even after paralysis. 'Interoception', or self-awareness, allowed me to feel and communicate internally. Dr. Norman Doidge's research emphasizes the use of energy to modify brain patterns, showing the potential for healing through thought and energy. ('The Brain's Way of Healing' by Norman Doidge)

The body's adaptability, witnessed through my personal experiences, indicates that diversity fosters adaptability and healing potential. A holistic approach to health, incorporating yoga, manual therapies, and mindful practices, will redefine the healthcare model in the future.

I believe we stand on the cusp of a healing renaissance. Integrating ancient wisdom with modern understanding, may lead us to learn to care for our bodies and embrace the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. Our relationship with ourselves is paramount, and through yoga and healing practices, we can find peace, integration, and joy in life.

*Read about Mary-Jo's new book  
**Where Science Meets Spirit**  
on her website at [www.mary-jo.com](http://www.mary-jo.com)*



# Birdwatchers: there's a new app in town!

By Robin Whyte

**M**any people who live in beautiful British Columbia appreciate nature, and especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, it seems even more people are enjoying what the outdoors have to offer.

I live in Victoria, BC, and I feel fortunate to be only a 20-minute drive from Goldstream Provincial Park, a beautiful old-growth forest renowned for its stunning nature and annual salmon run. For me, this was the perfect place to explore the new BC Bird Trail app. After all, where spawning salmon are, hungry bald eagles are too. But what other bird species would I be likely to see, and how would the BC Bird Trail app enhance my experience?

I am not particularly technically inclined, so I was pleased that after registering for an account, the BC Bird Trail app is quite straightforward to use. The app divides the province into six distinct regions: Central Vancouver Island, Vancouver Island North, Columbia Valley, Fraser Valley, Sea to Sky, and South Fraser, as well as what is called *Outposts*. *Outposts* are described as standalone trails in individual communities in the province and you can use the 'Explore' function. I entered 'Goldstream' into the search bar next to the magnifying glass, and up came Goldstream Provincial Park.

Given the time of the year that I visited (January), I was thrilled to see eagles, herons, woodpeckers, ducks, and a raven. As the app confirmed, many birds were away in their winter locations far south, but I was pleased with the number of birds I did see. I used the app to read up on the various birds by again using the 'Explore' feature. To read this information while being in the outdoors, looking at the birds in their natural habitat, made for a really informative and enjoyable albeit chilly outing!

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## One thing I found curious is that the South Island is not part of the BC Bird Trail.

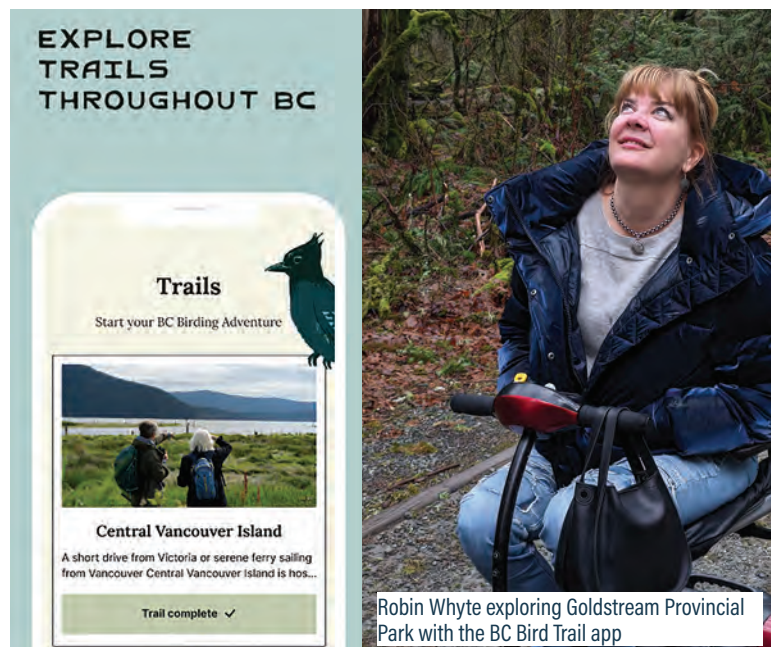
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To further enhance the app experience, I suggest reading the FAQ section of the BC Bird Trail app, which you'll find in *Settings* (gear icon, far right on the bottom of the homepage). Here, I learned that the app allows you to check-in at various places all over BC, where you can earn points and share rewards with your fellow enthusiasts of the birdwatching variety. It also includes interesting suggestions for nearby places to pop into for coffee, snacks, or dinner, plus other bird-related and outdoor activity shopping. I found this to be a very well-thought-out feature on the app because being outdoors always works up an appetite.

The one drawback in my opinion: there isn't any mention of whether trails are wheelchair accessible, nor information regarding restroom facilities.

But overall, I think the app is easy to use, and I would recommend it. I found the layout to be accessible, offering simple to use features. I recommend bringing a pair of binoculars and don't forget a camera, if you have one.

So, get outdoors and check the BC Bird Trail app out because it greatly ups the enjoyment factor of a walk or stroll in nature, whether you're a birder watcher or not.



Download the free  
**BC Bird Trail Mobile Experience**  
 from the Apple App Store or Google Play.



# Taxes and Disability Trusts

By Cynthia Minh

**F**or people with disabilities, filing taxes can be a daunting task. How to apply for and claim available supports on a yearly basis can feel overwhelming. The good news is people with disabilities and their caregivers may be eligible for different tax credits and deductions that provide financial relief, including the

- › **Disability Tax Credit**  
(<http://tinyurl.com/4dddczs2>)
- › **Child Disability Benefit**  
(<http://tinyurl.com/yyp4zn8z>)
- › **Disability Supports Deduction**  
(<http://tinyurl.com/y2n9zh7m>).

At Disability Alliance BC (DABC), our Tax AID partnership offers free personal income tax support to people with disabilities who live on modest incomes across British Columbia.

For many people financial planning may include more than just personal income. People with different assets such as trusts, for example, face additional tax filing responsibilities. This tax season, the CRA has introduced new rules that will impact people with different kinds of trusts.

While DABC does not provide direct support with trust taxes, in this article, we will walk through what to look out for when filing taxes on disability trusts.

## What is a Disability Trust?

A trust is a legal relationship in which someone (the trustee) helps to hold the assets of another person (the beneficiary). Trusts can have more than one trustee and multiple beneficiaries depending on the type and purpose of the trust.

There are various types of trusts (<http://tinyurl.com/yf82xc82>). They can play an important role in financial planning because of their role as a secure repository for holding money. For people with disabilities, disability trusts are very important because they are not counted as assets and will not impact the amount of provincial disability assistance they receive.

## Inter vivos vs. Testamentary

Trusts can be either *testamentary* or *inter vivos*.

*Testamentary trusts* help to protect someone's assets in life so that they can determine how to distribute their wealth after death. Benefits of this trust begin after a person's passing.

*Inter vivos trusts* are set up so that beneficiaries can benefit from the trust during their lifetime. For instance, caregivers of people with disabilities may create an inter vivos trust to ensure that funds are available to support their loved ones' future expenses.

## Discretionary vs. non-discretionary

A trust can be set up in a way that affects how much access someone has to the funds within it.

In a *discretionary trust*, the trustees have full control over how the money in the trust is distributed. This means that the person who the trust is for cannot access the funds on their own. One common type of discretionary trust, the Henson Trust, is often used by families of people with disabilities to protect their loved one's assets and government benefits.

*Non-discretionary trusts* offer people a little more agency. With a non-discretionary trust, the trustee will make spending decisions according to requests made by the beneficiary. Money from a trust can be spent on caregiver services, education or training, accessible home renovations, home maintenance repairs, medical aids, and any other expense that contributes to someone's overall independence, without affecting their provincial disability assistance payments.

While there is no limit to the amount of funds that can be placed in a discretionary trust, non-discretionary trusts have a lifetime limit of \$200,000, unless otherwise approved by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

### Paying taxes for trusts

Trusts can be a useful way to protect someone's assets and still receive disability benefits, but it is still necessary to bear in mind the potential tax implications of having a trust. The trust is treated as a separate individual and is responsible for filing a T3 tax return, 90 days after the trust's "year-end" date. Any distributions made to a beneficiary is considered taxable income. If you are a beneficiary of a trust, you will receive a tax slip (T3) from the trust that lists the taxable income you received throughout the calendar year which you can use to report on your income tax return.

### New tax filing requirements

Before December 30, 2023, trusts would have to file a tax return only if the trust had any tax to pay; if the trust disposed of capital property (e.g. a principal residence); or if all or part of the income from the trust was given to the beneficiary. Since December 30, 2023, most trusts will now have to file an annual T3 trust return, regardless of whether or not the trust has any tax liabilities.

These rules also apply to "bare trusts"—any arrangement wherein someone (a trustee) can be reasonably considered to be acting in accordance with the wishes of a beneficiary. Many people may be in a bare trust without even knowing; for example, parents who are listed on a property that their child lives in would have established a bare trust.

In addition to filing annuals, trusts must also report information about all parties involved in a trust. This additional information must be filled out using *Schedule 15, Beneficial Ownership Information of a Trust* (<http://tinyurl.com/yvhu8vyj>).

### Paying less taxes with a *Qualified Disability Trust*

The taxes that you may have to pay on your trust can be quite costly. Income that you make within a trust will be taxed at the highest marginal rate. Trusts that are deemed a *Qualified Disability Trust* (QDT), however, are taxed at

a lower rate. In order for your trust to be considered a QDT, the trust must be in Canada; be testamentary—that is, arise after someone's passing; and the beneficiary of the trust must qualify for the *Disability Tax Credit* (DTC) (<http://tinyurl.com/mwh346ws>). Unlike other trusts, QDTs are not subject to the new taxation rules and do not have to file a T3 annually.

You can also reduce the amount of trust taxes you must pay with the preferred beneficiary election, where the income that a trust generates in taxes is taxed on the income of the beneficiary with disabilities. This can be beneficial if the beneficiary is not liable to pay income tax.

### Plan Ahead

No matter what the type of trust, it's important to plan ahead. Understanding the different types of disability trusts can help you choose the best option for your assets. Proper estate and will planning can help mitigate fees and tax liabilities after death. In preparation for this tax season, finding out if you are part of any trust-like agreement will help you file your taxes properly and avoid any unnecessary penalties.

We advise that you consult with a tax professional or legal expert who specializes in trusts and taxation to ensure compliance with current laws and to optimize tax planning based on individual circumstances.

#### For more information on Wills, Trusts, and Estate planning, the Plan Institute has a helpful webinar:

- [www.planinstitute.ca/learning-centre/wills-trusts-and-estate-planning](http://www.planinstitute.ca/learning-centre/wills-trusts-and-estate-planning)

#### List of lawyers:

- [www.planinstitute.ca/resources/lawyers-list](http://www.planinstitute.ca/resources/lawyers-list)

#### Resources:

- [www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/092115/how-set-trust-fund-canada.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/092115/how-set-trust-fund-canada.asp)
- [www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/it406r2/archived-tax-payable-inter-vivos-trust.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/it406r2/archived-tax-payable-inter-vivos-trust.html)
- [www.osujismith.ca/types-of-trust-in-canada/](http://www.osujismith.ca/types-of-trust-in-canada/)
- [www.policyadvisor.com/magazine/how-to-create-a-trust-in-canada/](http://www.policyadvisor.com/magazine/how-to-create-a-trust-in-canada/)
- [www.npw.ca/family-trusts-101-everything-you-need-to-know-and-more/](http://www.npw.ca/family-trusts-101-everything-you-need-to-know-and-more/)



# Little people in the entertainment industry

By David Hill

**W**ith roots going back to figures like Tom Thumb and notable actors of the 20th century such as Billy Barty, Hervé Villechaize, and Warwick Davis, I would like to shine a spotlight, pun intended, onto my community of little people in the entertainment industry. Little people or dwarves play a remarkable role in the world of show business. For me, it's also personal as I come from a family of little people with a long involvement in the world of entertainment.

During the Victorian Era, a dwarf known as Tom Thumb marked the earliest instance that I am personally aware of, with little people becoming involved in the show business industry. Tom Thumb was associated with the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England. Three famous dwarf actors I grew up with were Billy Barty, Warwick Davis and, Hervé Villechaize. Billy and Warwick, among many movies and TV shows, ended up working together on the movie 'Willow' (1988). Hervé Villechaize, someone many people will remember as the Bond villain *Nick Nack* in 'The Man with the Golden Gun' (1974), portrayed a much more lovable character as *Tattoo* in the television series 'Fantasy Island,' which aired from 1977 to 1984.

Something that viewers may often forget is that it takes quite a bit of effort for dwarves to put themselves out there in front of a camera, in both physical and emotional ways, whether it's doing TV commercials or being in movies or TV shows. It can be extremely stressful and can cause great moments of anxiety. It depends greatly on what the filmmakers in the studio are looking for and what they intend to do with a role. For example, in the 2013 movie 'The Wolf of Wall Street,' there is a scene where a group of businessmen is tossing a dwarf around an office. While this scene is meant to show the excessive and unethical behavior of the characters in the movie, the cruelty of this part of the movie only serves to perpetuate demeaning stereotypes, leaving me to wonder how the dwarf actor must have felt.

My parents have been involved in show-business opportunities since the late '90s. Their work began with a commercial for an early digital video recording device-system called TiVo in 2000. Together, they found work as

background extras in an episode of the TV show 'Jeremiah' in the early 2000s. My parents were also cast as Santa's elves in a Christmas TV movie called 'The Christmas Secret: Flight of the Reindeer.'

In the 200<sup>th</sup> episode of the sci-fi series 'Stargate SG-1,' filmed in Vancouver, adorable furry aliens called 'Furlings' (similar to 'Ewoks' from 'Star Wars: Return of the Jedi') were prominently featured.



My father had many other TV & movie opportunities during his acting days, but there is one I would like to especially mention. He was offered to play the title role in a drama biopic about Hervé Villechaize, 'My Dinner with Hervé.' My father decided he did not feel he could portray a character like Hervé, a little person who struggled with the limitations placed on him by others and lived a life filled with addictions. My father was proud of who he was, the opposite of what he saw in Hervé. So, he turned down the role in the end.

So far, I have not been in a movie. But back in 2004, I came very close. I was approached to be in a film made for TV called 'The Five People You Meet in Heaven.' I was incredibly excited to have that opportunity, even more so when I realized that I would be working with Jon Voight, Angelina Jolie's father. It didn't pan out, as my parents' agent was adamant for me to decline for the sake of my health, as my scene involved dry ice and generally a cold environment. So, I am still waiting for my personal shot at screen time.

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