

*Gerey and Brandon outside CanAssist's labs, just before she goes for a spin on her modified bike.*



## Reclaiming the simple pleasure of riding a bike

When Gerey Parker was 16, it must have felt as though life suddenly skipped forward several decades. It was at this young age that she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Early on, the condition forced her to stop riding a bicycle. Later, it meant a hip replacement and two knee reconstructions.

Today, Gerey and her boyfriend both live in Richmond, B.C., where there are extensive biking trails; but the two could never cycle together. This was hard for Gerey, an adventurous woman who loves the outdoors.

"My daughter has just turned 30, my son is 27 and I had never been on a bike ride with my kids," Gerey told us.

Then Ryan Truant – a former CanAssist employee who is now a member of Gerey's medical support team – encouraged her to contact us. Getting back on a bike suddenly seemed possible.

*(Continued on page 6.)*

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### What we do

CanAssist is dedicated to empowering those with disabilities to improve their quality of life. Our talented team develops customized technologies and innovative services for people with special needs where there is a gap in existing services. We accomplish our work in partnership with the exceptional people and resources at UVic as well as those in the wider community.

At CanAssist, we are passionate about increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of life. Join us in celebrating their achievements and in working together toward a fully inclusive society.



## Nigel's notes...

One of the key and critical ingredients to CanAssist's success is that we have been able to draw upon the incredible human and physical resources both within the University of Victoria and in the greater community. This connection to UVic has enabled us to take on projects that would be beyond the scope of organizations not based at a university or college. And that, of course, is part of what makes us so unique. What sets us apart from other university programs in Canada, and indeed across North America, is UVic's extraordinary commitment to community service in general and to our program in particular. The University has provided outstanding support to CanAssist since it started as a purely volunteer organization (UVATT) just over 11 years ago. Not only has the University provided ever-increasing amounts of space as our program has grown, but it funds a number of positions (including mine!). Beyond that, CanAssist has access to UVic's outstanding support systems, which range from accounting services and facilities management, to purchasing and research services. For all of this, we are extremely grateful.

*Nigel Livingston is CanAssist's Director.*

## Youth programs at CanAssist

CanAssist provides many services for young people. These include: **TeenWork**, a program that guides teens with special needs in finding paid, part-time employment; **VOCYL**, a youth leadership program in which young people with and without disabilities take the message of inclusion to area schools and beyond; and **Just for Kicks**, a free weekly soccer program for children of all abilities. For more information, please visit [www.canassist.ca](http://www.canassist.ca).

## Teen thrilled by increased autonomy



Grace Brulotte is a vivacious, fun-loving teenager who hopes to go to college someday and perhaps become a children's counsellor.

Grace lives with a condition that greatly limits her joint movement, including the ability to walk

or raise her arms in front of herself. As a result, she requires assistance with many things she'd much rather do by herself. Despite these challenges, Grace's extraordinarily independent spirit shines through.

Not long ago, the teen's mother, Janice, approached CanAssist to see if we could help further increase Grace's self-sufficiency in everyday life.

In response, Brandon Fry, a member of our engineering team, developed a special clamp that gives Grace more freedom in performing several daily tasks. The Multi-item Clamp securely grips several different items, including a hairbrush, a bowl for snacks, a sandwich holder and a washcloth. It also has a quick-release mechanism to make changing the items easy for Grace's family.

"The clamp was made with a one-inch hole, while all its attachments have one-inch posts," Brandon explains. "It was easier to make one mount that everything else clamps onto instead of making a separate mount for every item."

The sandwich holder and bowl will be used to provide Grace with independence in eating snacks, especially during frequent drives from the family's home in Fernie to the BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver.



"I use the hairbrush holder after I get out of the bathtub and it works great," says Grace. "Before I would have to put a facecloth on the side of my bathtub and bend down to wash my face. Now I use the facecloth holder every morning."

## Donation to CanAssist pays tribute to Prue Cunningham

CanAssist is deeply honoured to have received a very generous donation in memory of Prue Cunningham, a remarkable Victoria resident whose work continues to help many thousands of seniors across British Columbia.

Jo Campbell made the \$100,000 donation as a memorial to her dear friend Prue, who died in 2009 at age 94. Much of Prue's work for seniors focused on Sendial, a hugely successful program that she initiated and then administered with Thrifty Foods. Run mostly by volunteers, the program helps seniors and shut-ins maintain their independence by enabling them to order groceries by phone and have them delivered to their homes.

As a family, the Campbells are renowned for their exceptional philanthropic support of countless community groups and charities across Vancouver Island and beyond. Their remarkable contributions don't stop there. The Campbell family has a long history of personal leadership and community service to a multitude of community organizations.

"Jo's gift is extraordinarily generous and I am particularly touched that it is in memory of Prue Cunningham," said CanAssist Director Nigel Livingston.

"Volunteerism and community service are core to our activities, so I'd like to think that Prue would have appreciated our program."

Pernille Marie Cunningham was born in 1914 in Denmark and moved to Canada in 1920. She married Bob Cunningham in 1937 and the couple moved to



Victoria after the Second World War. In 1982, at an age when most people have retired, Prue began devoting much of her time to helping seniors. Five years later, at 72 years old, Prue approached Thrifty Foods with her proposal for Sendial (short for "Seniors Dial"). Today, more than 500 volunteers are dedicated to the success of the Sendial program. In the Victoria-area alone, more than 1,000 customers use the service each week.

Prue tended to the program's development right up until her passing in 2009, and had already started working on yet another initiative to support seniors in the community.

Clearly, Prue's life and work continue to touch others in very practical ways through Sendial and, now, through the donation made in her name to CanAssist.

"This donation will make a huge impact on our services, right across our programs – from developing technologies that increase quality of life, to employment and training programs," said Nigel, who founded CanAssist in 1999 as a small volunteer venture.

"We greatly appreciate Jo Campbell's generosity and her vision in honouring Prue Cunningham in this way."

## Variety and CanAssist team up to help youngsters

CanAssist is thrilled to have entered into a new partnership with Variety - The Children's Charity.

Variety will cover the cost of developing customized technologies for children who are eligible for its Variety Freedom fund in British Columbia. Variety Freedom provides financial assistance for devices that enhance a child's mobility, ability to communicate or overall independence.

"We're absolutely delighted that Variety recognizes the impact of the work we do and will again be supporting children in B.C. through our program," Associate Director Doug Tolson said. "With Variety's help, CanAssist will be able to help a larger number of

children with special needs across the province."

Variety – The Children's Charity has a long and distinguished history of disbursing much-needed funding to children with special needs and their families throughout B.C. Variety also provides grants to children's organizations for construction, renovations, equipment and program costs.

Variety and CanAssist have already worked together on a highly successful project. In 2009, Variety provided funding that enabled 125 children with very challenging disabilities to receive iPods tailored to meet their specific needs. The funding covered the cost of the iPod, a special CanAssist adapter, and each child's choice of speakers or earphones.



## Partnership provides innovative support following injury

Less than a year after CanAssist and WorkSafeBC joined forces, our partnership has begun having a remarkable impact on the lives of many people who were seriously injured on the job.

Under a service contract, CanAssist is developing customized technologies for B.C. workers who have been referred to us by case workers, occupational therapists and other WorkSafeBC employees. By this spring, 31 clients had been referred to CanAssist by the organization's Special Care Services department.

"Thanks to WorkSafeBC's vision and CanAssist's ability to create customized technologies, the goals of some very vulnerable clients are being met in ingenious new ways," says Doug Tolson, CanAssist's associate director.

"We really commend members of the WorkSafeBC leadership who had the vision to enter into this partnership – they recognize that with disabilities, one size doesn't fit all."

When WorkSafeBC refers a client, CanAssist sends a team of experts to meet with him, his caseworker, his occupational therapist and others. The group then works together to discover the client's most pressing needs and deepest wishes.

The articles on **pages 4 and 5** profile just a few of these workers and the technologies they have received as a result of our new partnership.



Viewing each job as a sequence of steps

**Jean Pierre Forest** was a skydiver, the co-founder of a highly successful surveillance system company, and an avid videographer before a plane crash in 2008 changed the course of his life.

While still physically strong and mobile, the Vancouver-area resident suffered a brain injury that has had a significant impact on his memory. J.P.'s support team at WorkSafeBC asked whether CanAssist could provide a software tool that would help him remember tasks that require a sequence of steps.

"Other applications may remind J.P. to go to work every Thursday, but they

won't remind him of all the steps he needs to take in order to actually get to work," explains Peter McGuire, of CanAssist's engineering team.

So Peter developed an application that includes this crucial sequencing feature, along with a standard scheduling component. The new app, called the *Task Manager*, was written to work on Apple's iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad and makes it possible to break down virtually any task into a series of photos and accompanying text.

"I am using the *Task Manager* every day" says J.P.

**Michael Forrest** very much wanted to contribute to the upkeep of his property in Cowichan Bay. He especially wanted to take on the work of mowing the lawn – he just needed to find a mower that would work for him.

Since an injury at a construction site, Michael has lost much of the fine motor control on the right side of his body, preventing him from doing many outdoor tasks.

So Michael's occupational therapist referred him as a candidate for the CanAssist - WorkSafeBC initiative.

Mike Lewis, a co-op student with CanAssist, modified a battery-powered lawnmower so that Michael could maneuver it with one hand without compromising safety.

"Mowing the lawn may not seem like a big deal to most of us, however for Michael it means so much," his wife, Deborah, told us when we delivered the mower.

"Now he can just go out there like the other guys on his street and take care of his own front yard. It's a big day for him."



**Satisfaction is a freshly mowed lawn**



**Redesigning tools for a designer**

**Gerry Price** is a great innovator. With his garage turned into a workshop and a large number of tools at his disposal, the Parksville resident spends hours designing and building practical devices for people with disabilities.

But Gerry's time and energy weren't always being used efficiently: he spent a great deal of effort trying to operate tools that were created for able-bodied people. So CanAssist adapted his drill press and a shop vac so both would be easier to use.

A large easy-grip handle was

created for the drill press by CanAssist's Brandon Fry. Another member of our engineering team, Mike Jackman, built a customized handle and brace that clamp onto the wand of the heavy-duty vacuum cleaner.

"Having the good grip handles that CanAssist made and installed on my drill press and shop vacuum has made a big improvement," says Gerry, who was injured in a fall in 1995. "I can now spend more time and have more energy to do tasks in my workshop and easily use the shop vac to clean up after myself."

**John Fernandes**, who suffered a brain injury following a fall at a construction site, spends much time living in a rehabilitation group home. While this warm, welcoming residence provides the high level of therapy and support he needs, John was missing regular interaction with his close-knit family.

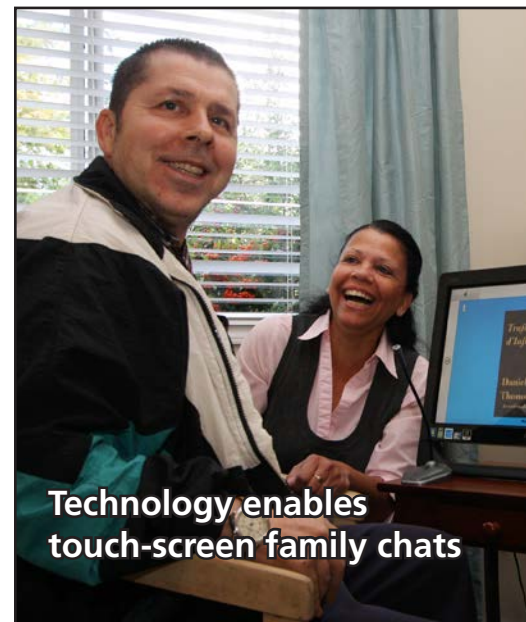
At the same time, John, who speaks Portuguese, has little English and no experience with computers.

"We focused on technologies that would improve John's sense of connection to his family while also introducing him to the world of computers in a fun and non-threatening way," says Leo Spalteholz, CanAssist's manager

of software. Leo provided two solutions: *The Visual Music Browser* is an interface for iTunes that allows people with a range of disabilities to manage their music independently. *CanConnect* is a simple program that lets people make free phone calls over the Internet with a live voice and video link.

Leo presented John with a touch-screen computer monitor that displays photos of loved ones. John eagerly placed a call to his wife, Lisette, simply by touching her photo.

"He is so happy – look how he smiles," said Lisette. "It is so much better to be able to visit like this at times when I can't go all the way over to see him."



**Technology enables touch-screen family chats**



### **Gerey's bicycle modification, continued from page 1...**

One of the main reasons Gerey had difficulty riding a bike was that she could not fully extend her legs, nor bend them as high as a regular bicycle demands. Brandon Fry, of CanAssist's mechanical engineering team, designed a simple pedal modification so Gerey could ride comfortably within her range of motion.

"In order to get rid of the bending motion, we changed the length of the crank," Brandon says, referring to the piece of metal to which a bicycle pedal attaches.

"I made the existing crank on her bike adjustable by

drilling holes along the length about every one inch," Brandon says. That way, as Gerey adjusts to riding, she will also be able to adjust the pedals on either side.

Because many of Gerey's other joints are affected by rheumatoid arthritis, she was accompanied by Sandra Hundza, a researcher and consultant in motor rehabilitation therapies at CanAssist, to pick out the most suitable parts for her new bike, such as the proper handlebars for her wrists and the most supportive seat.

This simple pedal modification has made cycling possible for Gerey, though getting on and off the bike is still a bit of a challenge. But Gerey keeps a sense of humour about herself.

"They say you never forget how to ride a bike, but it also seems you might forget how to stop and dismount!" she jokes.

For Gerey, life is definitely moving forward. And with a new customized bicycle, she's moving with the ease and speed of a 16-year-old again.

## **Making news at CanAssist**

### **Norgaard donation to help young people**

CanAssist is thrilled to have received \$50,000 from the the Norgaard Foundation. The funds will enable us to provide customized technologies to children, youth and young adults with challenging disabilities across Southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The late Kaare Norgaard established the Foundation in 1989 to help others enjoy a richer quality of life. In 2010, the Foundation funded 30 of CanAssist's adapted iPod units for young people. CanAssist deeply appreciates the Norgaard Foundation's ongoing generosity.

### **Vancouver Foundation funds program**

CanAssist is very grateful to the Vancouver Foundation for providing \$55,000 to support our *TechWork* program this year. *TechWork* helps people with special needs to enter the workforce or retain a job by providing them with practical customized technologies. The Vancouver Foundation, which has funded CanAssist's employment-related programs over several years, has been a wonderful supporter and partner.

### **100 attend Building Bridges Forum**

CanAssist, with help from several community partners, hosted a highly successful two-day forum that brought together families, educators, and health and social service providers to plan supports for children with special needs. About 100 people attended the event, which featured 23 workshops and a presentation by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth. CanAssist is grateful to Shaw Communications Inc. for generously funding this very worthwhile event.

Get updated on CanAssist activities and technologies!

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## Gala fundraiser wows a crowd of 500

CanAssist joined forces with the Vancouver Resource Society in February to hold a very special event to raise money and awareness for people with disabilities.

Called “Hearts for Hearts,” the sold-out evening included entertainment by Grammy Award winner Michael Bolton, a sumptuous gourmet dinner, a raffle and an exciting live auction. The event was sponsored by the Great Canadian Gaming Corporation, which very generously provided the evening’s entertainment at the River Rock Casino Resort in Richmond, B.C.

“The evening’s highlight was Michael Bolton’s amazing performance,” said Barbara Toller, CanAssist’s development officer. “It really was unforgettable.”

Bolton, who delighted the crowd of 500 with his singing prowess, sang many of his own pieces – such as How Am I

Supposed To Live Without You – as well as those performed by artists ranging from Frank Sinatra to Luciano Pavarotti.

The auction was expertly emceed by Howard Blank, who presented eight packages that included many opportunities to travel, ski and attend rock concerts. These gifts were donated by organizations from across Victoria and the Lower Mainland.

Earlier, audience members were moved by an inspirational speech by Trevor Greene, a CanAssist client who served in Afghanistan, and by the piano playing of Sky Mundell, a very talented young musician who faces significant physical challenges.

CanAssist and the Vancouver Resource Society each received \$30,000 from the fundraiser.

## Barbara’s Ways to Give



*This regular column explores the many ways you can contribute to CanAssist so that we can continue helping people with special needs.*

A memorial or tribute gift is a lovely way to remember or honour a person who has touched your life. Such donations make it possible for CanAssist to provide many of our technologies and services freely to people with

special needs and are hugely appreciated.

### In Memoriam

A memorial gift is a thoughtful way of expressing your condolences when a loved one has passed away and

letting family members know that you are thinking of them. A sympathy card will be sent to the family or friends you designate, identifying you but not the amount of your gift. A receipt is issued to you for income tax purposes.

### In Honour

A tribute gift celebrates a special occasion in the life of a friend, family member or colleague. Such donations are a wonderful way to mark an event such as an anniversary, wedding, birthday, professional achievement or new birth. CanAssist will send a personalized card to the honoree on your behalf acknowledging your gift but not your gift amount. An official tax receipt will be issued to you.

### How to set up your gift

Call me at 250-853-3948 and I will be delighted to assist you in setting up an In Memoriam or In Honour gift. Or, if you prefer, you may visit [www.canassist.ca/donate](http://www.canassist.ca/donate) to send your gift by mail, fax or online.

*Barbara Toller is CanAssist’s Development Officer.*

## Making giving her goal

When you make a donation to CanAssist, you make a huge difference in someone's life. In this issue, we profile Tanya Switucka.

As CanAssist's Client Relations Coordinator, Tanya Switucka provides a crucial point of connection between people with disabilities who need customized technologies and the team that creates solutions for them.

When new clients make a request, Tanya helps pinpoint their needs and goals and then takes part in any meetings they have with our development team. Her presence means there is always someone who can help "translate" technical language for the client while also being deeply aware of each client's unique needs as the team suggests solutions.

"One of the things I love about my job is that I get to spend a lot of time with our clients – I really get to know them, their families and the challenges they face," says Tanya, who holds a Master's degree in Educational Psychology and formerly worked in child and youth care.

"It's amazing to accompany them on a journey in which they reach an important goal with the help of technology."

Being at the centre of the relationship between CanAssist and its clients has given Tanya the opportunity to see just how life-changing our programs can be, and how integral donations are to our success.

Two years ago, she decided to donate to CanAssist through payroll deductions.

"I've seen first-hand what donations can do," Tanya says. "And I think it's important to contribute to helping some of society's most vulnerable people reach their goals."



Tanya working with Samuel, who received CanAssist's Visual Music Browser software.



## YES! I want to support CanAssist.

\$50    \$100    \$200    \$500    \$1000    Other amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

One-time donation OR    Monthly OR    Quarterly (Start date: \_\_\_\_\_ End date: \_\_\_\_\_)

I would like to charge my donation to:    VISA    MasterCard    American Express

CARD NO: \_\_\_\_\_ EXP: \_\_\_\_\_ (MM/YY)

SIGNATURE (required for credit card): \_\_\_\_\_

I have enclosed my cheque(s) payable to: CanAssist, University of Victoria

(if you prefer, you may also give online at <http://development.uvic.ca>)

I would like information on bequests and other legacy gifts

I wish to remain anonymous    I would like information on gifts of publicly traded securities

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ PROV: \_\_\_\_\_ POSTAL CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form and your payment to: CanAssist, University of Victoria, PO Box 1700, STN CSC, Victoria BC, V8W 2Y2.

For assistance, please contact Barbara J. Toller, CFRE, Development Officer for CanAssist, at 250-853-3948 or [btoller@uvic.ca](mailto:btoller@uvic.ca)

Tax receipts will be issued for all contributions. Thank you for your support! [www.canassist.ca](http://www.canassist.ca).

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