

# CanAssist Impact Report 2016–17

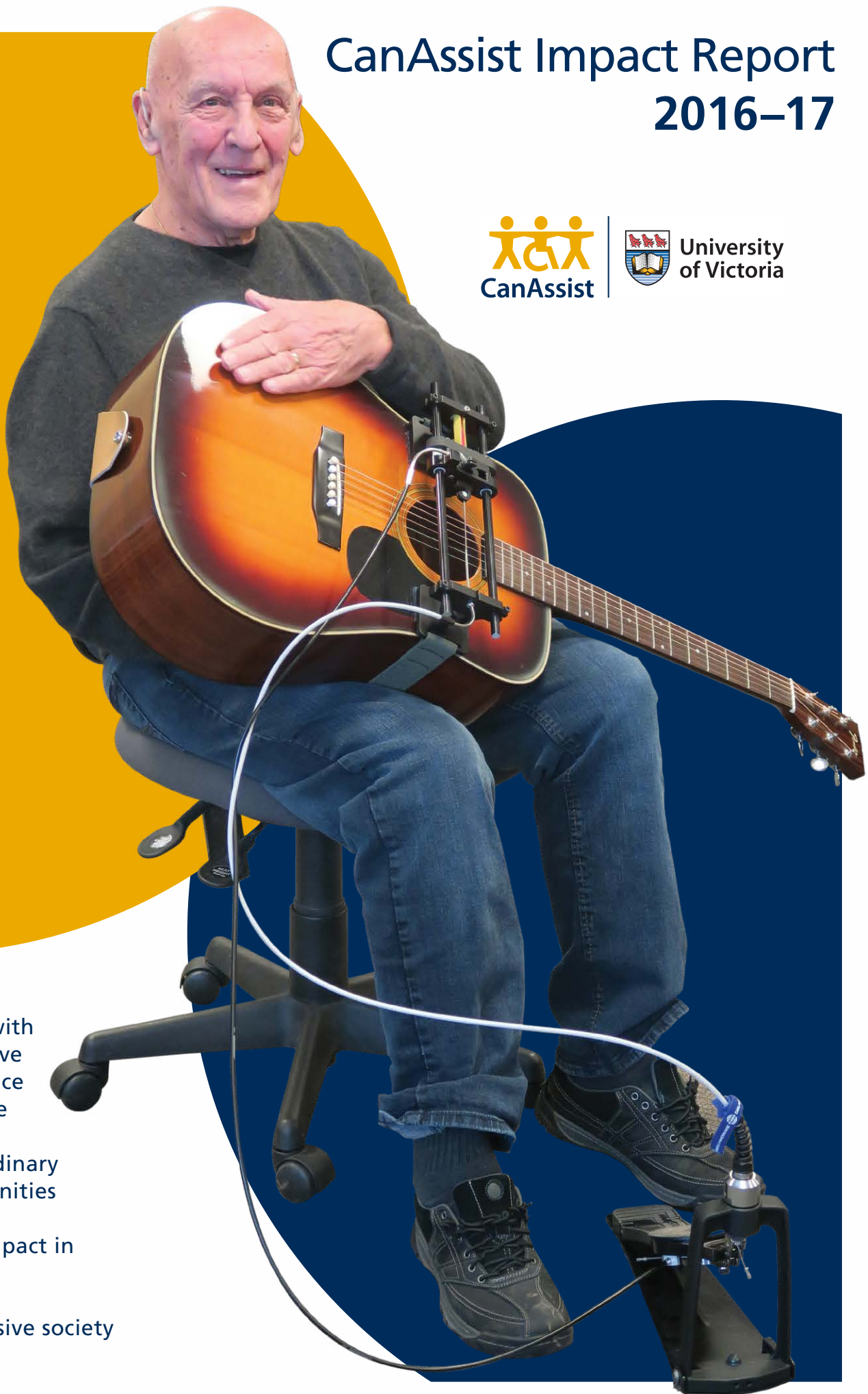


Helping people with disabilities improve their independence and quality of life

Creating extraordinary learning opportunities

Making a vital impact in the community

Building an inclusive society



## OUR VISION

CanAssist at the University of Victoria envisions a society where all people have the opportunity to participate, contribute and reach their full potential.

## OUR VALUES

Focus on clients  
Excellence  
Inclusion  
Accountability  
Passion

## OUR MISSION

CanAssist strives to be a highly respected national resource that collaborates with UVic researchers and students, as well as diverse external partners. We provide people who experience physical or cognitive barriers with innovative technologies, programs and services that address unmet needs and increase independence, inclusion and well-being.

TeenWork, CanAssist's youth employment program, helped Alison find part-time employment at Home Sense, while she's still in high school. TeenWork helps youth with disabilities transition to adulthood by achieving workplace success.

FRONT COVER: Chuck received a foot-operated Guitar Strummer, allowing him to play using only one hand.

CanAssist modified Isabelle's gait trainer so that it is more stable and can be used outdoors safely.



*"The modifications have made a big impact....Now she goes outside on the playground with her peers, which allows her to be more social. Expending energy in the gait trainer is critical for her weight management, overall health, and her ability to self-regulate."*

*Robyn Misovic, physiotherapist*



*"I have seen Alison gain so much confidence and a sense of independence through her time with TeenWork."*

*Emerald Pringle,  
TeenWork Program Manager*



*"Music was always a big part of my life. However, paralysis due to a stroke in 2003 left me unable to play my guitar. The Guitar Strummer has brought music into my life again. I look forward each day to playing my guitar and I have had several opportunities to enjoy playing with family and friends."*

*Chuck*

# CANASSIST

## WHO WE ARE

CanAssist is an organization at the University of Victoria with a core team of about 20 professionals, many of whom are engineers or software developers.

## WHAT WE DO

We develop customized technologies and programs for people with disabilities where there are gaps in existing services, while providing meaningful opportunities for student and faculty engagement.

## WHY WE DO IT

CanAssist's work is a reflection of UVic's commitment to making a vital impact in the community, creating extraordinary learning opportunities, promoting inclusion, and raising awareness about disability issues.



## WHO WE HELP

We assist people of all ages and from across the disability spectrum in improving their independence and quality of life, whether their challenge involves a physical, cognitive or mental health barrier.

## HOW WE DO IT

Being part of UVic is fundamental to our sustainability and success. UVic provides CanAssist with direct and indirect support, including the physical space where we work. We also have ready access to UVic's outstanding faculty, students, research facilities and administrative expertise.

## WHAT SETS US APART

CanAssist is unique in North America in being a university organization that develops customized technologies for clients with disabilities in the community. Clients and their families are not charged for technologies; instead, CanAssist seeks funding through charitable donations, grants and service agreements with other organizations.

Above: A new Robotic Grabber enables four-year-old Leif to pick up toys and other objects independently for the first time, and then place them where he wants.

# Three-year plan CanAssist



Over several months in 2016, CanAssist staff took part in the development of a new three-year strategic plan, which will take the organization through to 2019. The new plan – available on CanAssist’s website – received input from numerous community partners. Along with refined Vision and Mission statements (see earlier page), staff members developed the following five values, which will serve to guide everything we do:

## Focus on clients

Over the years, CanAssist has learned that fully understanding each client’s challenges and goals enables us to develop highly effective solutions that address unmet needs, make a meaningful impact and have the potential to help many other people facing similar barriers.

## Excellence

We strive to apply rigour and best practices to the planning, development and delivery of all our technologies and programs. Our dedicated team aspires to consistently exceed our partners’ and clients’ expectations, and to create extraordinary opportunities for research and hands-on learning.

## Inclusion

CanAssist leads by example, practising inclusion in all we do and working with others to eliminate barriers to participation. On campus and beyond, we provide a dynamic learning environment that increases awareness about the importance of accessibility, inclusion and respect for people of all abilities.

## Accountability

We are accountable to each other and work with our partners, donors and clients in a responsible and transparent way. We adhere to best practices in business operations, ensuring open and effective communication, reflecting UVic’s core values, and exemplifying integrity in all we do.

## Passion

We care deeply about our clients, the students we engage, the programs we run, and the technologies we develop. Motivated by the opportunity to make a positive impact, we take pride in knowing that our expertise and energy help to promote awareness, build partnerships and transform lives.

## Message from CanAssist's Advisory Board Chair

One of CanAssist's great strengths has always been the very positive impact it has on campus. Every year, hundreds of UVic students learn about CanAssist and disability issues through classroom presentations, career fairs and open houses, while a dozen or more work directly onsite in co-op, work study, international and volunteer positions. CanAssist has also established many successful relationships with UVic faculties and programs.

This year, CanAssist reaffirmed its commitment to increasing campus engagement, listing it as one of the organization's key goals in its new strategic plan. In the year ahead, CanAssist will undertake activities such as: establishing a new fellowship program that enables one or two UVic faculty members to conduct research related to assistive technologies; introducing a formal exit survey for students who work at CanAssist; and creating at least one new inclusive recreation program in partnership with UVic Vikes.



UVic is very proud of CanAssist; by providing essential services to people with disabilities and their families, CanAssist makes unique and meaningful contributions on campus and in our communities.

**Dr. Nancy Wright**  
Chair of CanAssist's Advisory Board and  
UVic's Associate Vice-President Academic Planning

## Message from CanAssist's Executive Director

Over the course of several months this year, all staff members were involved in creating a new strategic plan to guide CanAssist's activities until April 2019. We're delighted with the plan, which outlines CanAssist's goals, strategies and approach in a very concise and concrete way.

While it was hard work to get the plan just right, the effort has paid off. We are now able to keep its components "front of mind" as we implement our annual work plans, undertake new projects and establish new partnerships.

Our five values – shown on the opposite page – are literally written on the walls of our office space, as are our new vision and mission statements. Our four new goals address a balance of crucial external and internal activities: increasing impact and awareness; boosting campus engagement; driving financial sustainability; and building a healthy organization.



I'm grateful for staff members' commitment and passion in developing and implementing the strategic plan. It's a clear demonstration of our collective commitment to CanAssist's important work.

**Robin Syme**  
Executive Director  
CanAssist at the University of Victoria

# CanAssist's Technology Development Program PROGRAMS

## CanAssist's Technology Development Program



Dick was unable to go out in the community without a family member or friend to help him get his scooter in and out of his vehicle. So CanAssist provided him with the Hitch Lift, a battery-operated device that enables individuals to independently load a manual wheelchair, lightweight scooter or other mobility aid into a vehicle with very little physical effort or bending. Now, Dick is out on his own every day.

*"It's been great. It's going to bring me so much independence in being able to go out without having someone come with me."*

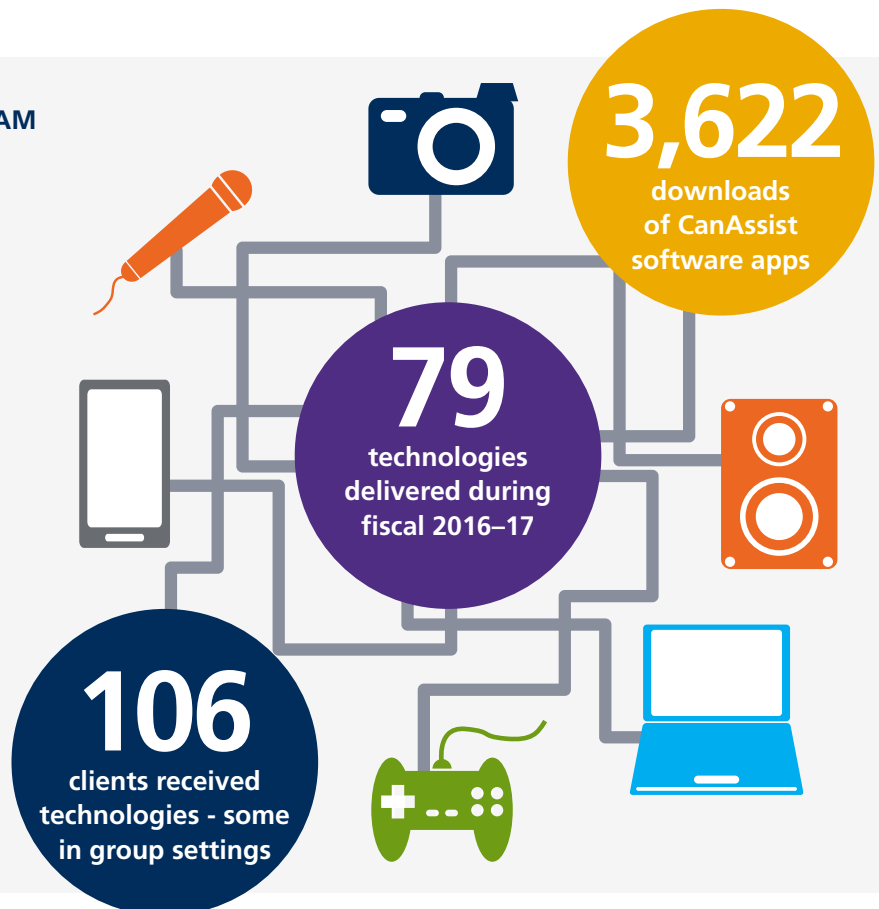
Dick

### TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

CanAssist's primary activity is the development of innovative yet practical customized technologies for people with disabilities.

Our team of engineers and software developers takes on projects in response to requests from individuals and organizations where no viable commercial solution exists.

Sometimes a device that has been developed for an individual has the potential to help many more people with similar needs. Such technologies provide excellent opportunities for CanAssist to ensure ongoing sustainability, while meeting our goal to reach ever-larger numbers of people.



No commercial stroller could accommodate Rylan and Kiarra, two teenage siblings who are unable to operate their wheelchairs independently. This meant outings always required two adults.



*"We have a new freedom with the double jogger stroller, which allows the opportunity and flexibility for outings when only one parent is available."*

*Fiona, the teens' mother*

Inge received the Captive Knife Cutting Board, which allows people to safely and easily use a variety of kitchen knives with only one hand.



*"It is easier now to prepare my meals. I can even slice a bagel! I love the extra bit of independence of being able to slice an apple, cheese or veggies. I am putting my new appliance to good use every day."*

*Inge*

Vanessa received a customized mount that attaches to her wheelchair. The device securely holds a tablet or camera and is easy for caregivers to remove and reattach.



*Very grateful to CanAssist. The mount helps me do my work with my iPad and camera. Thank you.*

*Vanessa, written out on her communication grid*

The Wandering Redirect System was provided to Terry, whose wife lives with Alzheimer's and is at risk of wandering from the home at unsafe times. The system uses motion sensors and personalized messages to encourage her to stay home at night.



*"My wife really likes the tablet, and I'm really looking forward to a good night's rest."*

*Terry*

Alyshia, a 20-year-old UVic student, recently received the Wii Board for Wheelchair Users. The device allows individuals to safely enjoy Wii games and Wii Fit while seated in their wheelchairs. Users exercise by shifting their bodies to navigate games.



*"The accessible Wii board will allow me to game along with my friends and will give me another means of exercising and staying active."*

*Alyshia*

The Motivational Cycle encourages people to exercise by providing engaging virtual environments through which to pedal – whether by hand or by foot. The device was originally designed for frail elderly clients who needed a safe and engaging way to exercise indoors.



*"They loved it! One fellow arm-pedaled five kilometres in 15 minutes, slowing down for the sheep (in a Scottish virtual environment)."*

*Debbie, occupational therapist*

## CanAssist's Academic Engagement Program

# PROGRAMS

**4,489**

hours worked by co-op, work study, volunteer and international students

**663**

students engaged in CanAssist activities during fiscal 2016-17

UVic and CanAssist recognize the importance of giving students, faculty and staff opportunities to support and interact with people who face a wide range of barriers and to learn about disability issues. As students, in particular, assume leadership positions in society, those who have had such experiences are likely to support increased inclusion and accessibility.

To date, several thousand students from virtually every discipline have been provided with rewarding learning opportunities through their participation in CanAssist activities. Likewise, many UVic faculty members, representing numerous departments, have connected with CanAssist through research partnerships, classroom activities, and an ongoing sharing of ideas and expertise.

### CanAssist and Vikes

Athletics and Recreation continue to work together to increase opportunities for inclusive sports and recreation for students, faculty and staff, as well as those in the wider community. Activities to date include: hosting national teams for training camps; providing inclusion training to UVic staff; and offering inclusive recreation programming such as blind soccer, wheelchair basketball, adapted strength and conditioning and adapted climbing.



*"I was paired with a shy boy who was non-verbal and had absolutely no interest in climbing."*

*"Last week, he climbed for the first time ever. He didn't go very high, probably no more than four holds above the ground, but he was climbing. I stood below on the mats, looking up at him and feeling overwhelmed with emotion. To passers-by this small act would seem insignificant, but for us this was the victorious result of five weeks of trust-building, coaxing, friendship and learning."*

*Excerpt from student blog:  
The Best Experience I've had at UVic by Emily,  
a 5th-year Recreation and Health Education student who  
volunteered for the Adapted Climbing Program*





# PROGRAMS

## CanAssist's TeenWork Youth Employment Program

TeenWork is CanAssist's innovative youth employment program, which is designed to help youth with disabilities find and retain meaningful, part-time paid employment while they attend high school. TeenWork was developed with the aim of filling a gap in the employment field for youth with disabilities as they begin to transition to adulthood.

Each participant is screened for work readiness and brings a unique skill set and the potential for growth to his or her workplace. A TeenWork job coach provides non-time-limited, on-site job coaching, and supports every teen in working toward complete workplace independence. As of March 31, 2017, TeenWork reported a 93-per-cent success rate for participants finding paid employment during their time in the program.

**36**  
youth assisted through TeenWork this fiscal year



Sam has a part-time job at Starbucks, where he has made many positive connections with customers and coworkers.

*"TeenWork has helped us find a dedicated, motivated, and positive employee with ease and confidence."*

**Kaylee Horneland,  
Starbucks Manager**



Vancity's customized administrative position, developed with TeenWork for Emma, has helped ensure the smooth running of the branch and allows other employees to focus on their primary duties.

*"My experience with Vancity is amazing. It has made me more independent and confident."*

**Emma, TeenWork participant**



Jeff's self-esteem has soared through work and the realization that he is self-financing and saving money for post-secondary school.

*"From the beginning, (Jeff's job coach) treated and interacted with Jeff with the assumption that he was a responsible young adult....It has been such a positive experience."*

**Joel, parent of TeenWork participant**

# FINANCIAL

## CanAssist's Financial Information and Outlook 2016–17

CanAssist began 2016-17 with \$4.4 million in secured project funding, which enabled the organization to cover annual project expenses and operating costs totalling \$2.1 million, achieving a modest positive balance for the fiscal year.

During the year, CanAssist raised \$907,000 from philanthropic sources, which included grants and donations for technologies, the TeenWork program and a co-op endowment, and overall was an increase of just over \$100,000 from the previous fiscal year. Fee-for-service contracts and royalties also brought in a modest amount of revenue.

In March, CanAssist secured an additional \$4.5 million in year-end funding from the Province of British Columbia for two initiatives: one will enable CanAssist to continue building its expertise in providing broad-impact technologies to vulnerable seniors; the other involves delivering technology kits to Child Development Centres across BC.

CanAssist is deeply grateful for the contributions of its numerous partners and donors. CanAssist's work is entirely dependent on these generous investments.

UVic's ongoing in-kind contribution is critical to CanAssist's success and includes providing a state-of-the-art facility and many overhead requirements, such as utilities,

security, specialized equipment, and legal, financial and janitorial services – to name just a few. UVic's tremendous support makes it possible for CanAssist to maximize the impact of investments from donors and other contributors to benefit clients with disabilities.



CanAssist provided Melissa with a customized mount for her accessibility switch. The switch (a big purple button Melissa pushes with her head) controls communication software on her iPad.

In terms of its technology development program, CanAssist had a productive year, with 79 technologies delivered, more than 3,600 software apps downloaded, and many projects in progress and scheduled for completion during 2017–18. Some of these technologies are planned for broader distribution across British Columbia.

### Looking ahead to fiscal 2017–18

CanAssist began 2017–18 with \$7.5 million in secured project funding. For the 2017–18 fiscal year, based on an approved budget of \$2.6 million, CanAssist's goal again is to break even or incur a positive balance.

CanAssist began the new fiscal year strengthening its existing partnerships in BC and developing new ones both provincially and federally. Internally, CanAssist continues its work on building a healthy organization.

In addition, CanAssist is identifying opportunities to produce and market its most promising new technologies, an important undertaking intended to ensure that the benefits of these solutions are made available to many more people across BC.

*PHOTO: "Thanks to CanAssist for its professionalism, incredible rapport when working with students and families, and for assisting us to use this technology to increase (Melissa's) participation in the home, school and community environments."*

Julie Southward, OT

# GIVING

## Donor Spotlight

Visitors to CanAssist often remark on the passion of our staff, who believe so strongly in their work. An additional reason the CanAssist team is so enthusiastic year after year is an ongoing succession of students who work onsite.

Each year, CanAssist provides about a dozen new students – through co-op, work study, volunteer or international student positions – with valuable hands-on experience and mentoring. The students, in return, bring a constant stream of energy and creativity to CanAssist.

This perfect, symbiotic relationship is made possible in part by an **endowment fund** that was set up in 2013 to ensure that CanAssist has funding – in perpetuity – to pay the salaries of approximately four co-op students each year. To date, an anonymous donor has matched all

contributions to the endowment, dollar for dollar, helping it grow to more than \$1.2 million.

“I love supporting the co-op endowment because students gain valuable lessons and experience as they are exposed to an area they might not otherwise have been aware of,” says **Jean Horowitz**, a steadfast donor to CanAssist. Jean, a nurse by training and mother of four, was keen to support an organization that encouraged students to look for creative solutions outside the typical ways of learning and working in order to meet critical needs in the community.

Thanks to Jean and other generous donors, during 2016-17, the co-op endowment fund enabled CanAssist to hire students with backgrounds



in commerce and psychology. “The opportunity for students to work at CanAssist gives them insight into the difficult, daily challenges people living with disabilities face,” Jean says. “It’s a full circle, where everyone benefits: the students pursue their dreams of building their careers and learning new skills, but more important, clients are provided with technologies that help them pursue their life dreams as well.”

# SUPPORT

## Partner Spotlight

In March 2017, the Province of British Columbia provided CanAssist with \$3 million to continue its CanStayHome initiative, which involves developing technologies for vulnerable seniors that enable them to remain living at home for as long as safely possible.

This latest grant – the third since 2014 for CanStayHome – will allow CanAssist to focus specifically on technologies for seniors with dementia and to launch a new web service called Ability411.

The new website will be dedicated to providing seniors and their care providers with personalized information on assistive technologies.

Recurrent provincial funding for CanStayHome has been critical to increasing CanAssist’s impact across BC, building our expertise in technologies for seniors, developing ongoing partnerships with regional health authorities, among other key stakeholders, and increasing overall capacity.

Technologies developed as part of the CanStayHome initiative are designed to contribute to one or more of the following outcomes: increased independence and well-being for seniors; reduced time spent on caregiving, as well as reduced stress for family members; and cost avoidance for the health sector as a whole.

CanAssist is most grateful for the province’s ongoing support for this innovative initiative.

The following is a list of key partners and donors that provided support to CanAssist during fiscal 2016–17, whether through charitable donations, fee-for-service work, an in-kind contribution or other means. CanAssist is grateful to these organizations, as well as to our individual supporters, for their generosity and vision.



Fung and Duen Au-Yeung Foundation



Kiwanis Club of Oak Bay

Loyal Protestant Association

May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust

Norgaard Foundation

NRS Foundation through the Victoria Foundation



Tony and Mignon Fenton Trust



University of Victoria

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