



University
of Victoria

CanAssist Impact Report 2020-21

Building Momentum: **Focusing on the Future**



CanAssist acknowledges and respects the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory our offices stand and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.



Victor using his custom steps and handrail See Victor's story on page 6

Vision

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

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.

Values

FOCUS ON CLIENTS

INCLUSION

EXCELLENCE

PASSION

ACCOUNTABILITY



Virtual Tour

In normal times, CanAssist offers tours of our offices and labs so members of the community can learn about the unique programs and technologies we offer. This year we created a video to virtually introduce CanAssist to the community and to bring current and potential partners into our facilities. The video is narrated by UVic Chancellor, Shelagh Rogers, QC, and can be viewed using the QR code.



Message from the Executive Director



The past year has been a challenge for everyone. Like so many others on campus and in the community, when our lives, our clients, and our workplace were affected by COVID-19 restrictions, we responded and adapted quickly.

Our priority was our vulnerable clients, who were particularly isolated during the pandemic. CanAssist's technologies supported clients to stay connected to family, caregivers and friends. We focused on virtual ways to overcome the

challenges of social distancing and increase safety and well-being. We also forged ahead with programs to support youth employment through TeenWork, and introduced new CanWork programming for students in collaboration with UVic Co-op and Career Services. CanAssist's partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development provided resources and technologies to support toilet learning in child care programs in BC.

We also assisted our own staff through the pandemic. We created regular opportunities to connect professionally and socially. We planned virtual coffees and continued our commitment to wellness and mental health through online fitness and meditation sessions. Our staff remains dedicated, passionate and innovative despite the challenges of the last year.

A reorganization at the University of Victoria moved our reporting structure from the Provost's office to the Vice President of Research and Innovation. This change demonstrates the university's commitment to enhancing CanAssist's capacity to partner on engaged research and develop and commercialize our practical, applied technological innovations.

It is with gratitude and optimism that we thank our clients, our staff, our partners and our supporters for their positivity and fortitude during the challenges of the last year. CanAssist is now focusing on the future and we are continuing to expand our reach and impact to allow more people living with cognitive and physical challenges to participate and contribute.

Robin Syme

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Syme". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Executive Director
CanAssist at the University of Victoria

Highlights

10,000+

Children in child care centres served

88

Youth & adults served

85

Technologies provided

3,964

Software downloads

80

Virtual TeenWork workshops held

88

TeenWork & CanWork participants

Technology Development

CanAssist's innovative technologies support people with a broad range of challenges, whether they face physical, cognitive, or mental health barriers. The technologies help our clients overcome challenges at home, at work and at leisure and allow them to focus on the future.



Toileting Initiative

In 2019 the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) provided CanAssist funding to address toileting as a barrier to accessing child care programs. After a period of research and stakeholder consultation, we developed a toilet learning position statement as well as a number of tools to support its implementation. The tools include the development of a Toilet Step Stool, a toileting resource evaluation tool, and a list of inclusive bathroom design considerations.

The Toilet Learning Position Statement is inclusive of all children including those with extra support needs and acknowledges the individual needs and capabilities of each child. The continuum of approaches ranges from child led or initiated to intervention strategies designed by experts supporting children with more complex challenges.

The Toileting Resource Evaluation Tool assists child care providers in assessing the quality of toileting resources from the plethora of books, videos and software apps available while the Inclusive Bathroom Design Considerations support the renovation or design of child friendly and accessible bathrooms.

We also developed a Toilet Step Stool to help children access adult toilets safely and confidently. More than 50 child care programs participated in testing early prototypes of the stool during the development process. By March 2021, over one thousand Toilet Step Stools were delivered to child care centres in BC serving over 10,000 children.

"One student used it more long term; he gained independence and success in his toileting routine through using the TSS. The timing was perfect in pushing him forward to gain independence in that self care task."

– Jenn Raabe, Occupational Therapist, Sunnyhill Health Centre for Children



"The new stool has created confidence, curiosity and independence. Because they love to do things themselves!"

– Helen Blair, Education Director,
Kamloops Child Development Centre

Kate and Marcus with the Toilet Step Stool

The Toilet Step Stool was manufactured by LaserCAM Fabrication Inc. Licensing agreements make it possible for many more people to access the technology. Commercialization ventures offer an opportunity to expand the impact of the technologies.

The Toileting Initiative is a tremendous success and demonstrates CanAssist's capacity to collaborate with the Province and key stakeholders to create practical, accessible, commercially viable resources and technologies to address unmet needs.

"This product should be standard in all early childhood centres as it gives the child a lot of security and confidence."

– Andrea Doran-Jaeck,
Roberts Creek Childcare Society



Technology (continued)



"As soon as we brought Victor outside to try out his new steps he immediately grabbed the hand rail and climbed up. He went up and down the stairs several times with a huge grin on his face and was clapping with excitement."

– Miles Long-Alexander

Victor's Custom Steps and Handrail

Victor is a sweet, active four-year-old who was not able to independently and safely access the outdoor play area at his daycare. Having Down syndrome means his legs are shorter than his peers, resulting in a range of mobility and stability challenges. His mother, Felicia, hoped CanAssist could provide a safe solution to help Victor gain independence and participate with his friends.

Miles from CanAssist's engineering team designed a set of customized steps to accommodate all levels of Victor's mobility. The steps are low and feature a non-slip surface with handrails at the correct height for Victor's stature for added balance and stability. The steps are designed to be free standing and portable to allow them to be moved with minimal modification.

Technologies such as Victor's customized steps promote independence and engagement with peers and daily activities. They allow Victor and his family to look towards the future with optimism.



Emma's Wheelchair-Mounted Hockey Stick

Emma is a cheerful, outgoing 13-year-old with cerebral palsy, which means she is limited in the ways she can participate in sports. CanAssist designed and built a custom hockey stick blade and mounting frame for Emma's power wheelchair. The hockey stick blade has a clear guard designed to help Emma see the hockey ball; the device was designed with quick release knobs to make it easy to set up and remove.

"Emma is now able to participate in both floor and road hockey in a meaningful way. Any opportunity to get her involved in group or team activities is huge," said her father following the delivery. "The customized hockey stick and mount has given Emma the opportunity to be included and to be able to play with her friends. Without this adaptation she was merely a spectator. The smile on her face when she plays is awesome!"

Academic Engagement

One of CanAssist's primary goals is to increase awareness of disability issues through inclusion and education. A key step in achieving this goal is to provide students with outstanding experiential learning opportunities.

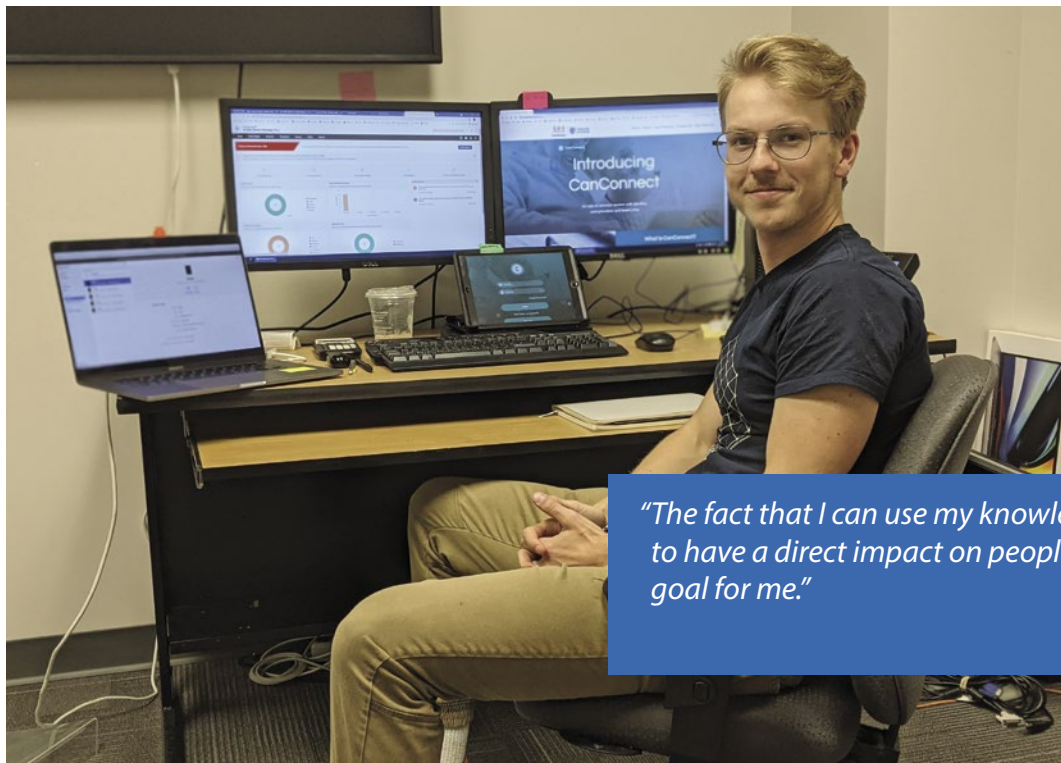
Will Lefebure is a third-year Electrical Engineering student at the University of Victoria. His interest in the field is divided among electrical, mechanical and software engineering so he decided to pursue a mechatronics specialization encompassing all three.

Will has completed two co-op terms at CanAssist and continues to work part time while in full-time classes. What drew him to the position was the organization itself. "The mission statement of CanAssist really hit home to me and I could empathize with the work they are doing. I have a personal

connection to the world of disability and accessibility through my family which has shown me the value that our services provide to clients," said Will.

His work has involved three major projects: developing a data management platform for CanAssist, facilitating a mobile device management program for CanConnect, and maintaining CanAssist's website. The variety of projects has given him the opportunity to work with many departments within CanAssist and to get a strong sense of the organization overall. He appreciates serving clients directly through customized technologies developed in the engineering department.

Working at CanAssist has given Will the opportunity to make his co-op term a positive experience helping people with their independence and supporting their future.



"The fact that I can use my knowledge and skill set to have a direct impact on people's lives: that is the goal for me."

– Will Lefebure

TeenWork & CanWork

TeenWork is an innovative youth employment program, designed to help youth with challenges find and retain meaningful, part-time paid employment while they attend high school. The program further enables teens to acquire practical skills, optimism about their futures, and a sense of confidence serving them throughout their lives.

CanWork is an employment program supporting UVic students who identify as having a disability or mental health challenges as they engage in meaningful, paid, degree-related work experience and develop tools for long-term success.

Chase

Chase is a 19-year-old who just graduated from Royal Bay High School. His favourite courses were cooking, gym and science. In his free time, he enjoys music, game shows, swimming lessons and going in the hot tub. He spent his summer riding his bike around his community and going fishing at the lake with his dad.



He joined CanAssist's first youth employment cohort funded by the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund. He became interested in the program because several of his school friends had also participated in TeenWork. Chase's group began in May 2021 and meets virtually. "Chase was one of the people who always had the camera on and was always volunteering information," said his father, Troy. "He is definitely the most active participant in our group workshops; everyone else is a bit more shy," said his TeenWork Coach, Sylvia.

"All the TeenWork courses Chase is taking are setting him up for success."

– Troy

Some of the courses he has taken include cashier training, Foodsafe, and Coffee 101: barista training hosted by Discovery Coffee. Chase has been developing work responsibilities at home by taking coffee and tea orders for his family, and helping with chores around the house.

From his father's perspective, CanAssist's program means that the parents of youth with disabilities can get the support they need to help their children gain independence. Without a specialized employment program to help youth with barriers, many would not be able to find and secure a job.



Montana

Montana-Sky is in Grade 11 at Parkland Secondary School. He joined CanAssist's employment program, and after completing the virtual workshops, began meeting regularly with his job coach, Melissa.

Montana wanted support in disclosing his need for accommodations with an employer; he has difficulty reading. He has an impressive memory, is polite, well spoken, a hard worker, and is passionate about woodworking and musicals. Montana and his job coach worked to create a resume and cover letter.

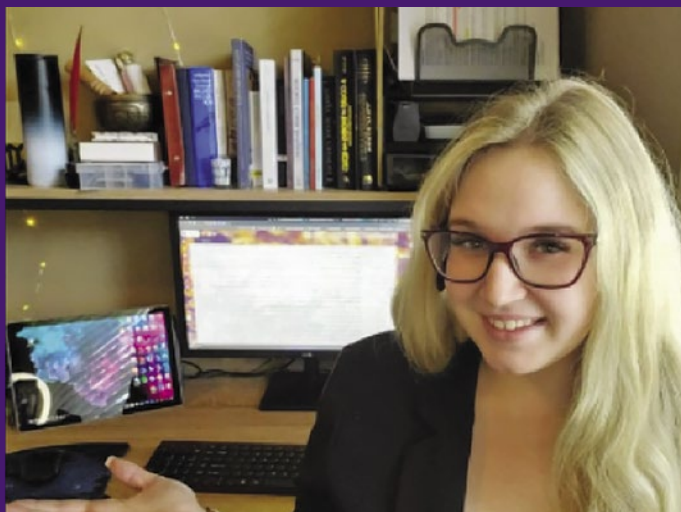
When Montana saw a job posting for a cabinet helper at Ceanesse Kitchens, he was excited. Montana had previous experience as a general labourer, and had taken woodworking classes, which made him think this employment opportunity was a great fit. In his application, Montana included photos of his own woodworking projects.

Melissa supported him in disclosing to the manager his challenge with reading. The employer assured Montana this would not be a problem as they could have an employee work alongside Montana until he memorized the instructions. After the interview, Montana was offered a summer job as a shop hand building cabinets. His experience with TeenWork gave him the confidence and support he needed to pursue his dream job.

Shayla

Shayla is a Political Science student at the University of Victoria who was eager to sign up for CanAssist's employment program for UVic students in the fall of 2020. At the time, CanWork was in its initial pilot and Shayla did not know what to expect. She hoped to learn new skills and obtain some work experience. Shayla did just that and more. She is currently on her second, four-month work term with Bongarde Media, a company based out of Penticton, BC, working as an executive assistant.

Shayla has surpassed the job coach's expectations and had a full circle moment when disclosing her disability to her employer, and discovering that they, too, face similar barriers. Shayla demonstrates every day that hard work and determination are key elements to succeeding in the workplace.



"This program has helped me understand the challenges and hurdles people will be facing when they are going into the job force, I really appreciated going into the program and knowing what the job search is going to look like."

– Shayla

Our Supporters

Tanner Oleksiuk is a fourth year engineering student and the most recent recipient of the Ross McLeod Legacy Award, an endowed gift to CanAssist. Endowed gifts contribute to CanAssist's long-term sustainability and reduce administrative overhead, supporting those who need it most.

Tanner came to work at CanAssist as an engineering co-op student and continued with a work-study through the year. "I was impressed by the variety of projects that CanAssist has worked on and the impact they had. There were a couple of testimonial videos on the CanAssist website. I remember watching those and thinking that to be able to design stuff that was so targeted, even for one person or group of people...that was what sealed the deal for me," said Tanner.

During his time at CanAssist he was impressed by the amount a small team was able to accomplish. Tanner worked on two projects: an accessibility remote for a video camera and a wireless accessibility switch for a wide range of devices. "The switch was for a client who didn't have fine motor control and, as a result, wasn't able to



participate in a lot of school activities. We learned that he is now able to engage in his cooking class because he can operate the appliances using the switch...that was really cool."

"Financial concerns are running around in your mind and you're thinking 'what job am I going to get after graduation?' and 'will I be able to get through this?' Receiving the scholarship really took a load of stress off of me and let me focus on my studies."

– Tanner Oleksiuk

This year we are excited to welcome Randy Gelling to the CanAssist team as our new Development Officer.

Randy is a native of Victoria and got his start in the non-profit world at the UVic campus radio station where he oversaw an award-winning volunteer program for people with disabilities. Randy is a graduate of the University of Victoria Department of writing (BA '00) and has more than a decade of experience in fundraising having worked at the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity and the Royal British Columbia Museum.



"I have been a long-time admirer of CanAssist's work and I look forward to meeting our supporters, whose gifts make it possible for us to not only sustain, but to grow. Your generosity makes a real difference in the future of people with disabilities."

– Randy Gelling

Financial Information & Outlook

CanAssist began 2020–21 with \$3.7 million in project funding, enabling the organization to cover annual project expenses and operating costs of \$2.1 million. We achieved a modest positive balance for the fiscal year. We raised approximately \$400,000 from philanthropic sources, including grants and donations for technologies, TeenWork and CARSA's inclusive programming.

Fee-for-service contracts and royalties also brought in revenue. CanAssist continues to develop our relationship with WorkSafeBC and fee-for-service revenue is increasing. CanAssist has also continued to access federal funding for its youth employment program, TeenWork. With investments from the Province, we had the opportunity to produce broad-based technologies and develop private sector partnerships. We were also able to expand our consulting services and pilot a work experience opportunity for UVic students with self-declared challenges in partnership with UVic Co-op and Career Services.

CanAssist strives to exceed our funders' expectations and to achieve outcomes that make a difference in the lives of individuals and groups of people who can benefit from similar solutions and strategies. We will continue to make it a priority to engage existing and new funders as we strive to diversify revenue sources in support of our mission as we build momentum and make an impact.



The CanAssist team connecting virtually

Partners & Donors

Thank you to CanAssist's 2020-21 supporters and partners whose grants, charitable donations, and in-kind contributions helped us build momentum to enable our clients, their families and the community to focus on the future.

Canada 

Funded in part by the Government
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for Persons with Disabilities



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children's
HEALTH FOUNDATION
OF VANCOUVER ISLAND



Shaw)



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McAdams Foundation

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