

CanAssist Impact Report 2014–15



University
of Victoria

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



VISION
MISSION
VALUES

OUR VISION
In partnership with the disability and academic communities, CanAssist will be recognized as a global leader in developing technologies, programs and services that contribute to a truly inclusive society, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute.

OUR VALUES
Innovation
Client focus
Passion
Accountability

OUR MISSION
CanAssist collaborates with the community to develop and deliver innovative customized technologies, programs and services that improve the quality of life of people living with disabilities, while at the same time providing students and faculty at the University of Victoria with rich and meaningful opportunities for education and research.

CanAssist designed a bocchia ball holder that enables international competitor Hanif to select and grasp a ball independently during games. The new device is stable, adjustable and easy to transport.

TeenWork, CanAssist's youth employment program, helped Camille find and retain part-time employment while she was still in high school. The highly successful program helps youth with disabilities transition to adulthood by achieving success in the workplace.

COVER: Declan's condition prevents him from using standard bikes and trikes, so CanAssist modified a commercial push bike. Now Declan is riding alongside his sister and developing muscle strength.



"This ball holder has given Hanif confidence while competing in being able to pick up the ball himself rather than having it given to him by an assistant."

Hanif's father, Hussein



"Camille has come a long way since she first started with TeenWork and I'm so proud that she was recently promoted from courtesy clerk to cashier at Save-On-Foods!"

Job Coach Crystal James



"No longer is Declan restrained in the stroller like a 'baby.' Now he is able to physically participate in outdoor walks and bike rides just like the average preschooler."

Declan's mom, Tammy

CANASSIST

WHY WE DO IT

CanAssist's work is a reflection of UVic's commitment to: community service; meeting the unmet needs of people with disabilities; and raising awareness about disability issues.

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.

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.



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.

CARSA

CanAssist's
New Home in CARSA



In the spring of 2015, CanAssist staff packed up and moved to the Centre for Athletics, Recreation and Special Abilities – or CARSA – UVic’s high-profile new centre for healthy living.

The photo below was taken during the construction period at the end of 2014; the one above was taken later in 2015 following CARSA’s grand opening.



CHAIR

Message from the Chair of CanAssist's Advisory Board

The past year has been pivotal for CanAssist, as the organization prepared to move from its smaller space in E-Hut to take a central position in UVic's beautiful new Centre for Athletics, Recreation and Special Abilities (CARSA).

The move signifies UVic's confidence in CanAssist as an organization, as well as the university's ongoing commitment to values such as inclusion, community service and accessibility.

CanAssist's high-profile position inside CARSA's front doors increases awareness of the program and provides UVic students and faculty with even more opportunities for dynamic, experiential learning and meaningful research that make a vital impact.

Through CanAssist, and its extraordinary academic environment, UVic has become a leader in the



development and delivery of innovative new technologies – from customized devices to free software downloads – for people with disabilities on campus, in the community and around the world.

Dr. Catherine A. Mateer
Chair of CanAssist's Advisory Board and
UVic's Associate Vice-President Academic Planning

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Message from CanAssist's Executive Director

Everyone at CanAssist agrees that the most satisfying part of our job is the very tangible and immediate impact our program continues to have on people living with disabilities.

Each technology and service we provide has been created for individuals in our communities who live with a physical or cognitive disability. Through CanAssist, and with UVic's support, we have the opportunity to help people who face barriers increase their independence and ability to participate.

In many cases, the benefits realized by the delivery of a single device, software app or service ripple out to help family members, support workers, teachers, health-care professionals and society as a whole. It's a privilege for all of us to play a part in this incredibly important work.



Robin Syme
Executive Director
CanAssist at the University of Victoria

CanAssist's 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 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.

A new software app called **CanGo** is helping Vern use public transit independently. The app is especially useful for people with visual impairments like Vern and those with memory and other cognitive challenges.



"The CanGo software has provided my client with the opportunity to access bus routes and stops that he previously was unable to locate. In doing so, CanGo has provided him with more independence, giving him a stronger sense of self."

Lifeskills worker, Jennifer

102
technology projects
were undertaken
during fiscal 2014-15

5,353
software apps
were provided
through online
downloads



Danielle, who is blind, has difficulty distinguishing food in her cupboards, making it hard for her to prepare meals and make grocery lists. So CanAssist modified a bar-code scanner that reads aloud any item she scans.



Katie (seated) meets Sophie, the Countess of Wessex, during a visit to UVic. Katie has received CanAssist technologies that help her enjoy music independently and create greeting cards as part of a home business.



Tyler's new carving brace lets him take part in stone carving more safely and comfortably. The young man, who is quadriplegic, has joined a group of stone carvers in Victoria who have their own business.

Glenda received a new software app called **Speak Today** that provides voice readings of her daily schedule. She also uses the app for reading out grocery lists and compiling questions she has for doctors.



"I can now focus more on being in the moment versus worrying about what I will forget. My level of frustration has lessened. I am now able to focus on learning more about different pathways to help advance my own success."

Glenda



Mary-Anne, who lives in a residential care facility in Surrey, was delighted to receive two devices that increase her independence: a custom remote control and a zero-gravity arm support. Both devices will help her accomplish activities without having to ask for assistance.

Luke doesn't have the dexterity to operate a cellphone. Not surprisingly, this left the teen very much on the sidelines in terms of how he communicates with his peers and others. CanAssist developed a system that enables Luke to make calls, send text messages and access an electronic calendar independently by pressing large accessibility buttons.



"I can't describe the thrill I had as a parent the first time I received a text from Luke while he was at school!"

Luke's dad, Jim

Dustin loves to watch DVDs through the night, but was regularly disrupting his mother's sleep to get her to change movies. New software is allowing Dustin to change DVDs independently by pressing a large button with his fist.



"Dustin is now able to change his own movies by pressing a switch button connected to an arm close to his bed. He loves being in control of his movie choices and I love hearing him laughing while staying in my bed ALL night long!"

Dustin's mom, Cindy



Gordon demonstrates an adapted zero-gravity arm support during a funding announcement by Terry Lake, minister of health (centre), and Michelle Stilwell, minister of social development and social innovation (right). The device enables Gordon to eat independently.



Ethan (left) uses CanAssist's **Waveband** software app by attaching an iPod to any part of his body over which he has some control. By moving the device, Ethan can create music, converting motion into individual notes. The app is available as a free download.

CanAssist's Academic Engagement Program

PROGRAMS

UVic and CanAssist recognize the importance of giving students, faculty and staff the opportunity to support and interact with people with disabilities 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.

5,065

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

506

students engaged in CanAssist activities during fiscal 2014-15



Engineering co-op student Nathan Muller (left) worked on the Accessible Gaming Controller, a system that has enabled Tristan to return to video gaming after a long absence.

"It feels so good to finally get back to it!"

Tristan Knapp-Fisher (*right*)

For two years, Tristan's progressive muscle deterioration made it impossible to play video games. With CanAssist's Accessible Gaming Controller, Tristan has returned to playing independently, as well as with friends and family, whether they're in the same room or on the other side of the world. For a young man whose condition greatly limits his opportunities to access recreational activities, the technology is having a huge impact on his ability to interact with others.

PROGRAMS

CanAssist's TeenWork Youth Employment Program

32
youth assisted through TeenWork this fiscal year

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

New participants are coached for work readiness, enabling them to secure a job and bring their unique skill set to their new position. A TeenWork job coach then provides non-time-limited, on-site job coaching, and supports every teen in working towards complete workplace independence. TeenWork boasts a 93-per-cent success rate for participants finding paid employment.

"Sam is learning so much and clearly is becoming more responsible, which is spilling over into other areas of his life."

Sam's mom, Theresa

Sam has excelled in a job delivering flyers for local landscaping firm Costa Verde.



Cody works at Cora Restaurant and knows his job perfectly.



Melissa is a valued staff member at Old Navy.

"Cody is well-supported and successful in his work, and Cora's is highly satisfied with his performance."

Nick Ritter, Cora owner

"With TeenWork's support, Melissa has made the transition to adulthood feeling confident, well-connected and independent in her position at Old Navy."

Job Coach Brooke Parlby

FINANCIAL

CanAssist's Financial Information and Outlook

CanAssist's external funding for fiscal 2014-15 was \$1.6 million, which enabled the organization to cover its project costs, annual operating expenses and one-time costs associated with moving to its new home in CARSA, as well as achieve a balanced budget for the fiscal year. In terms of its technology development program, CanAssist had a highly productive year, completing 66 technology projects and initiating an additional 36 new ones, for a total of 102 projects. Some of these technologies are planned for broad distribution across B.C.

The 2014-15 funding was made possible through the support of numerous partners and donors, both organizations and individuals. CanAssist is deeply grateful for their contributions and its ongoing relationship with each of them. CanAssist's work is entirely dependent on these generous investments, in addition to in-kind support from the University of Victoria.

UVic's in-kind contribution includes providing CanAssist with a state-of-the-art facility and many overhead requirements, such as utilities, security, legal services, financial advice, janitorial services and specialized equipment – to name a few. UVic's tremendous support allows virtually all CanAssist revenue to be devoted to supporting clients with disabilities.

During the year, CanAssist received a \$3-million grant from the B.C. Ministry of Health, which will allow CanAssist to work with the health system on a specific initiative. The organization raised \$570,000 from philanthropic sources, which included support for a student endowment. CanAssist also secured funding from fee-for-service contracts and royalties.

result, CanAssist expects to break even or incur a modest positive balance for 2015-16.

CanAssist looks forward to the new fiscal year and the promise of enhancing existing partnerships and developing new ones, as well as providing staff with opportunities to develop new skills. This year will provide new learning opportunities as CanAssist implements technology identification and product development processes associated

with the design of generalizable technologies that have the potential to benefit many individuals. This is a new intentional plan adopted by CanAssist as part of its long-term sustainability strategy.

PHOTO:

Racers

representing

CanAssist and UVic

Vikes speed across the

finish line during the opening ceremonies of UVic's new CARSA facility. Alyshia Joinson, who uses a wheelchair, began her association with CanAssist as part of the TeenWork program. The young woman spent a summer working at CanAssist and today works at the Vikes' front desk in CARSA while attending university. CanAssist and Vikes are excited to be working together on a number of initiatives that promote increased inclusion for people of all abilities.



CanAssist and UVic Vikes are excited to be working together on several new initiatives.

Looking ahead to fiscal 2015-16

CanAssist began 2015-16 with a ready supply of technology projects for the first four months and anticipates having a project roster that allows the organization to operate at full capacity for the remainder of the fiscal year. As a

GIVING

Donor Spotlight

Three generations of philanthropists

In 1968, Ken and Ellen Mahon's four-year-old son, Andrew, died from spinal meningitis. After his death, the grieving parents did something quite unusual – they set aside the money they would have used raising Andrew to create a charitable foundation in his name.

Originally it was a humble fund that supported organizations benefitting children's health. Fortune was good to Ken and Ellen over the years and they continued to add to the fund. Now the Andrew Mahon Foundation is large both in size and scope. In its 50-year history, the foundation has given more than \$6 million to a broad range of charities, including UVic's CanAssist.

A family affair

Ken and Ellen involve the whole family when choosing how to distribute funds to organizations. "As soon as my brothers and I were old enough, we took part in the allocation process," says Andre Rowland, Ken and Ellen's daughter. Now her children are learning what it means to run a charitable foundation.

"The family sits around a table and jointly decides which causes we can help, and how much we can give each one," Andre says. They look at each request very carefully, which means Andre's son, Fraser, who just graduated from UVic with a BA in philosophy, often has extra homework to do. "Each family member does their research on certain organizations

Mahon family members sit around a table and jointly decide which causes they can help.



and brings their recommendations back to the group. So our kids learn about how philanthropy works and how they can help their community."

Multi-year pledge for CanAssist's TeenWork program

The foundation has just renewed its commitment to UVic with a pledge to support CanAssist's TeenWork youth employment program for five years. This makes a huge difference to the program's capacity to help youth with disabilities become more self-sufficient. "The fact that we know we can count on the foundation's support for five years means clients and their families can rely on this program for as long as they need it," says Anne-Lise Loomer, CanAssist's development officer.

Thanks to the vision and generosity of Ken and Ellen, a family has created a lasting legacy in memory of a small boy who lost his life far too soon. "Giving is just part of everyone in our family's lives," says Andre, "and I think we'll see that continue for many more generations to come."

Interested in learning more?
www.canassist.ca/donate

The following is a list of key partners and donors that provided support to CanAssist during fiscal 2014-15, whether through charitable donations, fee-for-service work or other means. CanAssist is grateful to these organizations for their generosity and vision.



**Norgaard
Foundation**



**May & Stanley Smith
Charitable Trust**



**Andrew Mahon
Foundation**

**Loyal Protestant
Foundation**

Anonymous

For a complete list of donors and partners, please visit www.canassist.ca.



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