



# Impact Report

2022 – 2023



CanAssist at the University of Victoria is committed to helping people who experience physical or cognitive barriers improve their quality of life, with a focus on promoting inclusion and accessibility.

Our talented team develops innovative technologies and other programs and services to address gaps and unmet needs. We care deeply about our clients, the students we engage, the programs and services 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 about accessibility and inclusion, build partnerships, and transform lives.



University  
of Victoria



# Vision, Mission, and Values

## 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
- Excellence
- Accountability
- Inclusion
- Passion





# Message from the Executive Director

Reflecting on this past year at CanAssist, we have had successes and challenges. We have new funding partnerships with the Government of Canada and the Province of BC for technology development and continue to exceed expectations with our provincially funded consulting initiatives.

Our employment program served more youth and adults than ever, a tremendous achievement, and yet CanAssist put these employment services on pause at the close of the fiscal year because of a significant reduction in program funding. This reduction has been a stark reminder of what can happen when an organization is reliant on project funding.

Through these challenges and successes, CanAssist has remained strong, nimble, and committed to addressing unmet needs. We have maintained a focus on impact, whether at the individual client, community, provincial, or national level.

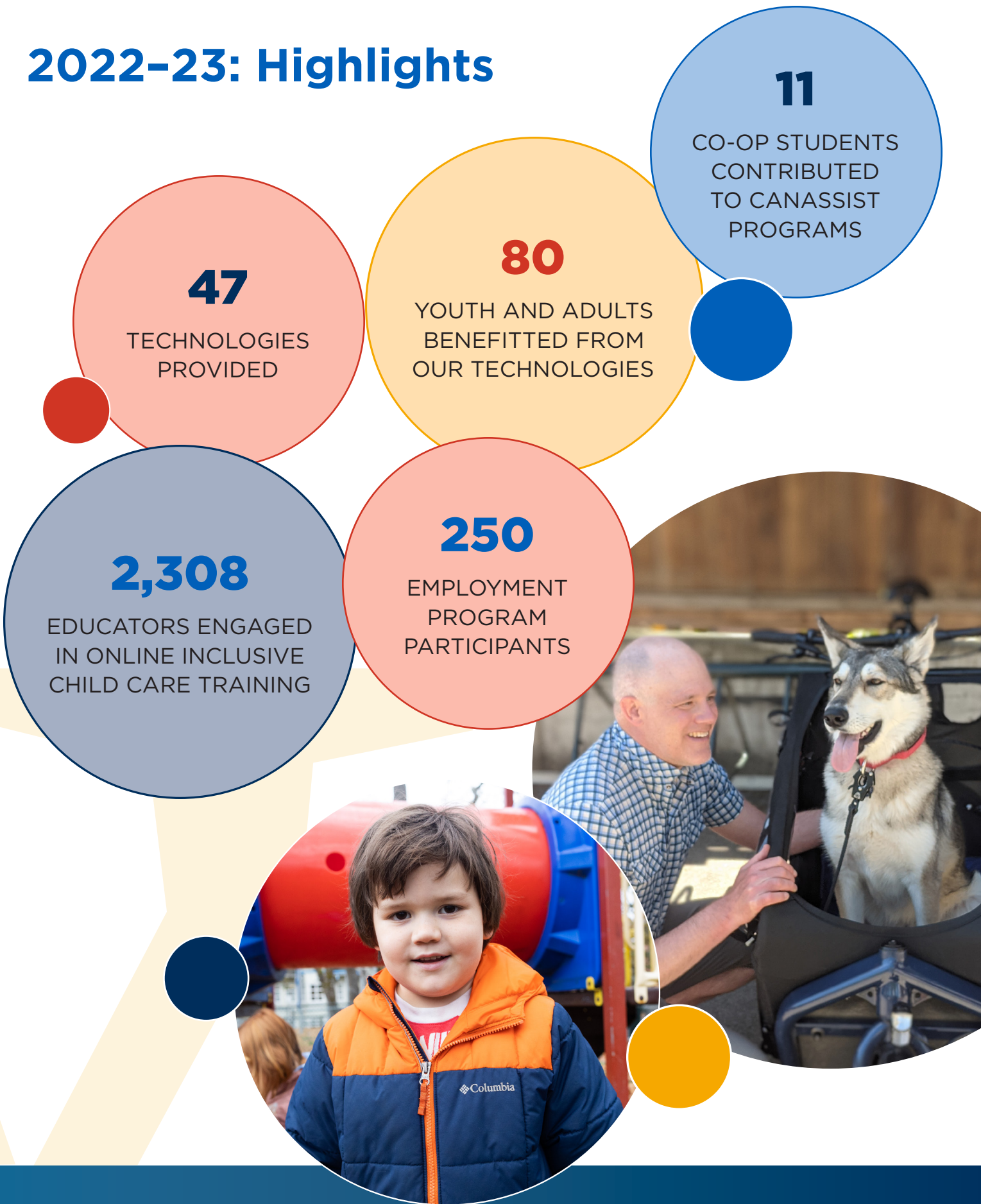
CanAssist is committed to increasing and diversifying the number and types of partnerships we have, as well as nurturing and strengthening existing relationships. Partners are essential to fueling CanAssist’s capacity to support individuals living with cognitive, physical, and mental health challenges and other self-declared challenges to realize their goals for independence, quality of life, and the ability to contribute to their families and communities.

We look forward to engaging our partners in creating a new strategic plan for CanAssist in the coming year and solidifying CanAssist’s vision, mission, values, and goals for future impact.

*Robin Syme*



# 2022-23: Highlights





# Our Supporters

The CKNW Kids' Fund has been supporting CanAssist with customized assistive technologies for children and young people since 2012. Their generosity stretches all the way back to the holiday season of 1944. Today, after many changes and growth, the CKNW Kids' Fund continues in its mission to support children with a wide range of barriers and challenges throughout British Columbia.

*“Our mission statement sounds so simple,” says Sara Dubois-Phillips, the Executive Director of the CKNW Kids' Fund. “We just want to provide timely support to the most vulnerable children in British Columbia. We want to be inclusive and increase children’s independence and their overall well-being.”*

The CKNW Kids' Fund recognizes that every child with disabilities is different, and their needs are unique. They are flexible in what they fund, including specialized therapies, medical equipment, respite care, and transportation.

*“I love the work that CanAssist does! We can always try to improve the lives of children with disabilities, and I love that there’s a whole team at CanAssist that is dedicated to this work.”*



# Technology Development

CanAssist’s innovative technologies support people of all ages who experience a broad range of challenges, including 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.

Assistive technologies like talking switches can help children living with language barriers communicate with others. Therapists often teach ‘cause-and-effect’ to help children with disabilities use accessibility switches. CanAssist’s Talking Switch Interface makes that training easy and fun, creating a positive way for individuals to learn and develop their abilities with switch-accessible devices.

The Talking Switch Interface is an interactive system that combines switch access for toys and devices with custom audio message recording and playback. Users can record their own custom message to accompany each switch, then set a time delay. When the user taps a switch, they hear that message, and the device is activated.

*“We are so grateful for CanAssist, and the expertise provided by the team to support our ability to provide therapy to our clients. The Talking Switch Interface has allowed us to support goals around access and communication while ensuring the child’s interests are considered.” Derek Lew, Speech Language Therapist, BC Centre for Ability*





# Consulting Initiatives

CanAssist takes on health and social sector consulting projects that address unmet needs and challenges that necessitate inclusive, practical solutions that align with our funders’ priorities. To date, these initiatives have been provincial in scope and include policy and program development, best practices resources, and program and service delivery reviews, in addition to professional development and training. We bring key members of subject area experts and communities together to address the needs of individuals across the spectrum of ability, including those from equity-deserving groups, and ensure that every individual, whether children, youth, or adults, can see themselves or their loved ones reflected in the resources we create.

## Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities

The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) has funded CanAssist to develop a Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities. This strategy will provide the framework for a consistent approach to supporting the specific needs of youth with disabilities who are on their employment journey. The definition of disability for this initiative is broad and inclusive of those living with mental health and substance use challenges.

Our Youth Advisory Committee includes youth (in and out of school) who self-identify as experiencing disability, as well as youth with formal diagnoses. The Youth Advisory Committee is key to ensuring that strategy work aligns with the needs and priorities of youth with disabilities.

Marika shared with us that being a Youth Advisory Committee member has “helped her connect with other youth who have similar and different struggles from her own.” Marika also mentioned that “members grow as professionals from working as a group.” Together, they bring diverse perspectives and share valuable input and recommendations on the strategy, tools, and resources for the Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities.



## The Foundations of Inclusive Child Care

The Foundations of Inclusive Child Care Training provides an introduction to inclusion. This training frames inclusion as a broad and multi-dimensional concept that influences every aspect of a child care program. It includes information about what inclusion means and its benefits, along with practical strategies for putting inclusive practices into action. When more children with support needs and disabilities are included in community child care, everyone benefits!

This on-line training was launched in April 2022 and has since seen steady monthly enrollment, which is expected to continue. As of March 2023, it had over 1595 learners enrolled, with a completion rate over five times higher than the average for similar online self-paced trainings. The training has really resonated with the child care community.

“I definitely loved this training; it sure opened up more tools to use, and brainstorming with the team has been much stronger.”





# Academic Engagement

CanAssist strives to increase awareness through inclusion and education in a variety of ways, one of which is providing University of Victoria students with hands-on learning that enables them to connect directly with people living with disabilities and other challenges.

Jordyn is a UVic Psychology undergraduate who completed two co-op terms with CanAssist, working on the Special Projects team. In her role, Jordyn has assisted with the development of a complex consultation project funded by the government of BC. She is passionate about creating an inclusive world that values diversity.

: “CanAssist has allowed me to thrive by providing room to extend my skillset, knowledge, and experience while working on a project I am passionate about. It’s a great feeling to contribute to something that will support the community and make a difference in people’s lives. It’s incredibly fulfilling work.” Jordyn Zilkie, Special Projects Co-op



# Employment Program

CanAssist’s Employment Program supports youth and adult job seekers who are 15 and older, who self-identify as having a disability or mental health challenge, in finding work in Greater Victoria, BC.

Our job coaches work 1:1 or in a group setting with participants to prepare them for their employment journey. The program offers workshops and certificate training (e.g., first aid) and helps participants find meaningful and sustainable paid employment. Our program supports our participants on-site at their jobs until they gain independence to do the job on their own.

: “The Job Coach was so patient, kind, and understanding of Noah’s anxiety, and because of this, together they were able to find Noah the perfect job. Because of this program, he now feels confident about himself (which he hadn’t for so long) and feels like he is a part of society, and most of his anxiety is gone. This program was a game changer for Noah and the best thing that could have happened to us as a family.” Mandela, Noah’s mom





# Financial Information and Outlook

CanAssist began 2022-23 with \$6.76 million in multi-year project funding, enabling the organization to cover annual project expenses and operating costs of \$2.47 million. We achieved a modest positive balance for the fiscal year. Just over \$269,014 was raised through philanthropy, including grants and donations for technologies, the employment program, and inclusive sports programming.

Fee-for-service contracts with organizations such as WorkSafeBC and royalties from CanAssist-created assistive technologies provided revenue, and we also expanded our consulting 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.



# Thank you to Our Supporters

The following is a list of key partners and donors that provided support to CanAssist during our 2022-23 fiscal year through charitable donations, fee-for-service work, in-kind contributions, or other means. CanAssist is grateful to these organizations, as well as to our individual supporters who prefer to remain anonymous, for their generosity and vision.

Funded in part by the  
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