



Developmental
Disabilities Association



THE STAR

WINTER 2022



Developmental Disabilities Association is a community living agency that provides over 50 community-based programs and services to children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families in Vancouver and Richmond.



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AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE NOW!

BY: ALANNA HENDREN
DDA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DDA has provided childcare since the 1970s and participated in discussions with the early pioneers of affordable, safe, regulated childcare in Vancouver for longer than that. It's hard to believe now, but childcare was generally unavailable in the 1960s and 1970s because women were expected to stay home – many were terminated from their jobs once they showed the least sign of pregnancy. Some men “let” their wives work for “pin money” but in no way were they encouraged to have a career past nurse or teacher. After women entered the workforce in larger numbers in the late 1960s, many became the sole breadwinners of their families. Those who could not work due to child-minding responsibilities lived in poverty along with their children.

I was a single mother from the time my kids were aged 6 and 11 in the late 1990s, but paying for childcare was a burden from the time they were born. Once he lost custody, their father dropped out of their lives – no help with care or child support. Childcare was spotty and expensive and after-school care was non-existent. My life was split between work and kids 24/7. Families and single Moms who had kids with disabilities fared even worse since there was very little special needs childcare and inclusive childcare did not yet

exist.

Thankfully, the advocates at dedicated childcare organizations (and DDA) continued to demand accessible, affordable, regulated childcare as a reaction to privatized childcare fees that were higher than university tuition costs. Families just starting out and single mothers, particularly in a place like Vancouver, generally have the least amount of disposable income and the most amount of debt, so these costs were excessive. Because of these women – yes, these advocates were (are) virtually all women – fees are being reduced by 50% for regulated childcare by the end of 2022 and to \$10 per day by March 2026.

This is an unbelievable victory for all women of childbearing age that is unique among nations other than in Scandinavia, where countries also have high happiness ratings. The price tag for this national priority is over \$17 billion and for the first time, DDA is receiving larger cheques from the government so we can reduce childcare fees paid by families and single Moms. Since the childcare plan was introduced to get women back into the workforce after having a child so they can claim some of the jobs left vacant by retiring Baby Boomers, there will be a positive economic impact for large and small



businesses but the biggest benefit will be in the lives of children who will be learning during their most critical years of mental and physical development. Their improved social, communication and basic academic skills will form a foundation of success from K-12 and beyond. Learning disabilities, autism, and other developmental issues will also be identified earlier and early intervention services will be started earlier when the benefits are greatest. Ultimately, today's reduced childcare fees will produce a more vibrant, educated, well-adjusted population of young people who will be able to enjoy more opportunities and better contribute to Canada's future.

As of 2022, women in Canada make 90 cents for every \$1 men make, which is a huge improvement over days gone by but not full parity. Now that young women can access reliable, affordable child care, they can avoid

the career gaps due to childbirth that have reduced women's income for far too long. Now that governments are investing in care, the value of traditional "women's work" will also increase, offering DDA staff higher wages. Now that women can more easily stay in the workforce, they will be more likely to receive promotions into leadership roles and make the big decisions that will drive Canada into a prosperous future.

This all goes to show that governments can do great things for their citizens and that perseverance in advocacy does work – although results may take generations to achieve.

DDA'S

AUTUMN

THE CURZON FOOD DRIVE

BY: RATNAM MATHUR

Curzon Residents and staff have been following the CBC news frequently about the widening shortfalls in food supplies and donations at thousands of food banks all across Canada and in British Columbia in recent months. In fact, it has been reported that in B.C., the shortages are higher than even the national average. The most vulnerable members of our society - seniors, people with disabilities and the low-income student communities - are the hardest hit in the face of rising food costs and decreasing donations due to various squeezing factors currently in play. Many food banks have now decided to shut down banks altogether since they have not been receiving enough food items to stock up their shelves.

At our Curzon house, we decided to do something about it; a little bit of 'outside the box' thinking! We decided that this year, on Halloween, we would go out with all our residents to collect food cans instead of candies in our neighbourhood. Our goal was to spread awareness of this issue and to help support the local food bank. Our staff and clients printed slogans on the boards and displayed them on Curzon's van, so the people would notice and remember. Henrik, Charles, Michael, Alyssa and Aiden prepared big collection boxes for the cans. A week before the Halloween day, our residents went door-to-door and distributed flyers, printed in both English and Chinese languages, in our neighbourhood for the upcoming food collection.

The idea was warmly welcomed and the response we received was positively overwhelming. They encouraged

our clients by giving the cans right away and were looking forward to giving again on the Halloween evening!

Our neighbours are so amazing and awesome - they appreciated our work and the need to give back and support the community, which has been deeply affected during the pandemic and by all-time high inflation. Our staff & residents were very happy and made lots of new acquaintances in our surrounding community. It is always a great feeling to give something back; to help and support people who are growing hungry in increasing numbers. We returned home after food collections and ate lots of Halloween treats at home.



HALLOWEEN CONTESTS

This year we had some terrifically terrifying entries for our Halloween contests. The talent and effort that went into these costumes, pumpkins, and decor are positively frightening! Thank you to everyone that participated, and here are your winners for this year:

Costume Contest:

Winner - Mary (Robinson)
Runner Up - Socrates (Azure)

Site Decorating Contest:

Winner - Azure
Runner Up - East 47
Terrifyingly Delicious Award - Victoria

Pumpkin Contest:

Decorating Winner - Ramandeep (Victoria)
Carving Winners - Robinson



FALL PORTRAITS AT MAIN STREET

BY: HAILEY ARTHUR

Main St. Drop-In clients joined a fall photography class where we worked on new fall portraits. Each client picked favourite leaves while enjoying the lovely fall weather we had this year. They also showcased favourite fall activities such as pumpkin carving, baking and a much-loved activity at the Drop-In of many clients this fall has been hand-crafted tattoos using face paints from our newest team member-Katsiaryna.





CELEBRATING SUCCESS



Kevin at Superstore

Kevin has been working part-time at Real Canadian Superstore since June of 2022. Kevin was hired following a successful work experience placement through Jobs West. Some of his duties include compacting cardboards, organizing crates, and more. Kevin is very hard-working and demonstrates great time management skills. As well as working at Superstore, Kevin also attends Vancouver Community College.

Kevin's supervisor Chevy is impressed with how well he is doing in his role:

"Kevin is doing great. Initially we had a set role for him but he has expanded his knowledge in other areas so he can do multiple tasks each shift. Been amazed at how little direction and follow up Kevin needs. He is identifying what needs to be done each shift, and I have noticed he picks up new tasks quickly just by watching what his fellow co-workers are doing. Kevin has been awesome since joining the team and really happy we hired him on after his practicum was completed. I know the other colleagues enjoy working with Kevin as well"

-Chevy

Kevin's goal of finding paid employment was achieved as a result of his dedication and willingness to learn new skills. Congratulations Kevin!



JOB FAIRS

DDA is back at it!

Recruiting the best team members. Now that the pandemic is somewhat behind us, we can actively take part in job fairs. Thankfully, it's been busy getting our careers team out there. In 2022 we have done in-person job fairs with KPU Surrey, Langara, and UBC. We have also done 5 online job fairs with West Coast Job Fairs, UBC, SFU, and UVIC. A big thanks to all the DDA staff who take part in drumming up interest in DDA.



BCCFA AWARD

This year, DDA was proud to accept a community impact award given to us by the BC Centre for Ability (BCCFA).

The BCCFA hosted its Annual General Meeting and presented DDA with the recognition to honor organizations that significantly impact it and the broader community they serve.

"DDA was founded 70 years ago on the radical idea at the time, that people with disabilities should be cared for, nurtured, and included in communities. BCCFA was also founded on the same principles; however, DDA paved the way for us and others, by being one of the first organizations to push back against prevailing beliefs, and make it possible for organizations like ours to be established and work towards the same goal. For many years, BCCFA and DDA have worked collaboratively within the communities we serve. We are truly appreciative of this partnership!"
-BCCFA



RELEASE THE BUTTERFLIES

BY: WENDY MACLEAN

Usually an activity that is an anticipated part of the IDP Toddler Time group program for families, Kaslo staff celebrated spring by ordering butterfly larvae and creating a space in the main meeting room so everyone could be involved.

Over a number of weeks staff came together from IDP, Family Support, Leisure Challenge, Brock Junction, and Respite to observe the growth and transformation that took place. Staff came together and shared the tasks of preparing sugar water soaked in cotton balls, making sure fresh orange sections were available to the growing butterflies, and enjoyed watching their progress.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon in early June when Grandview staff and clients joined the 'Butterfly Release' among the flowers and greenery of the Kaslo garden. It was an opportunity to come together after 2 years of isolation, separation and darkness and represented the hope of new beginnings.



\$10 A DAY CHILDCARE

The Developmental Disabilities Association is happy to announce that three of its Child Development Centres are moving forward with the assistance of the provincial government to adopt \$10-a-day child care starting December 1st, 2022.

For now, only Creekside, Fraserview, and Riverside Child Development Centres will take part in the program as it gains momentum. The rest of our CDCs (5) will benefit from new fee reductions that were announced by the government earlier in the year and start on December 1st.

New savings on child care

	Infant/toddler under 3	3-5 years old	Kindergarten
Group	\$550 per month	\$445 per month	\$220 per month
Family & In-home	\$400 per month	\$440 per month	\$260 per month

These are additional savings, on top of the up to \$350 families have saved monthly since 2018. Savings start December 1, 2022 and are calculated per month and per child.

StrongerBC
for everyone

Currently, families pay in the range of \$375 to \$615 a month for full-time care, depending on the age group. In addition, those who qualify for the Affordable Child Care Benefit could see their fees reduced further, perhaps even to zero. DDA looks forward to working closely with the provincial government as the \$10-a-day program progresses to include all childcare centres and families.



TOM EASON

Tom Eason from our East 55th group home reached a big milestone this year, yet continues to be “forever young”. Tom turned 90 on October 14, 2020, but his big celebration had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. When the restrictions were getting relaxed in early 2022 we tried again to celebrate Tom’s big birthday, but then his home had to be under quarantine, postponing his celebration again.

Finally, in October this year, we managed to get together at Whitespot for a celebratory lunch on his 93rd birthday. He is officially the oldest resident that DDA supports! A milestone indeed.

Tom was born in Vancouver in 1929 and remembers the east side having more fields, green areas, and fewer homes. He went to Sexsmith elementary school and



grew up in a happy home with his parents and three sisters, him being the youngest in the family. Tom remembers attending Florence Nightingale Special School and then Kitsilano High school where he graduated.

In the late 1940s, he began working as a caddy carrying golf bags for hotshot golfers at the Shaughnessy golf course. Shortly after, Tom met his lovely wife Louise and was happily married for six years. They lived independently in an apartment on East 10th Avenue in Vancouver. Sadly, Louise would leave this world far too soon.

Tom then moved to Garry House, a DDA group home in Richmond that supported 12 other residents. In the early 1970s, he worked at VARCO, one of DDA’s first forays into supported employment. While living in Garry House, he took various janitorial duties at VARCO until his retirement at the age of 60.

After he retired, Tom moved to our Arlington group home where friends introduced him to golfing. He became a good shot and enjoyed Pitch and Putt. Tom was also involved with the Seniors Citizen Bowling league and the Carpet Bowling group at Hillcrest Community Centre. Now, in his free time, he watches M.A.S.H. and enjoys watching old western movies.

Today, Tom lives in our East 55th supported living house with eight wonderful, loving housemates. Happy birthday Tom!

MUSIC THERAPY WITH ESTHER THANE

BY: ALEX ANTROBUS

The ubiquity of musical expression in human societies has been well documented and holds firm throughout our history. We've found ways to express ourselves through rhythm, melody, and prose with any and all instruments we've managed to create or find, including our own voices. It has remained a consistent and diverse language for centuries, and now, with the help of people like Esther Thane, it has found its way into the field of therapy.

ET Music Therapy, founded by Esther Thane, has been using music therapy successfully for 26 years. On their website, they express their goal and purpose: ET Music Therapy is based on one simple principle: Music is one of the most motivating and effective mediums for building strong connections with individuals with Autism and diverse needs.

We were thrilled to be able to have a conversation with Esther about the work she does, and why she does it. She recalls a time when she took a year off university that brought it all into focus.

"I took the year off, and I was living in Germany. My sister at the time was also in Germany, studying music. And at the end of the year, I was supposed to, of course, find myself in that year's time and decide what I wanted to do for a career. But that hadn't really happened. And a few months before I was leaving to come back home, I was going for a walk with my sister and she said, well, what about music therapy? And I just, something inside me went, that sounds good. I had no idea what it was. But I just kind of took a leap of faith and thought that's probably what I want to do. So I did all my prerequisites. I got into the music therapy bachelor program at Capilano. And that first day I remember sitting in class and all of my classmates were telling stories about in the summer time how they volunteered with this music therapist and did this then that. And I still had no clue what music therapy was. But my gut told me this is where I'm supposed to be."

Thane's leap of faith paid off. Now, with a team of 10 music therapists, her organization has opened up the language of music for countless clients. The focus of the organization is therapy for children, particularly those on the autism spectrum, or who otherwise have difficulty communicating.

"When we're talking about kids, I always say, a child will integrate new information at a deeper level, new skill sets at a deeper level, if it's coming from a place of inner motivation," says Thane. "So instead of being taught and told what to do to explore and experience it on their own, and they will integrate that new learning differently. So for me, I think we are really lucky, and we're blessed. And we kind of have this extra thing called music as our partner in therapy that other therapies don't have. Because for most kids, not all but for the majority of children and individuals in the world, all adults of all walks of life, music is motivating. Music is something that helps us pass the time, it makes time go faster, you know, I'm a runner, if I don't have my music with me in my earbuds, I can't run a block. That's why we listen to music on long trips, you know, it warps the perception of time. And I think for kids, they come into the music therapy space feeling like it is more effortless, that they're just having a good time."

Thane has plenty more to say about her field and the ways in which it can help kids develop their ability to communicate and express themselves. If you'd like to hear it all, you can find our full episode for free wherever you get your podcasts; just search for Encouraging Abilities.



DDA SUPPORTS ITS BCGEU STAFF MEMBERS

DDA is very proud of its BCGEU members. They work very hard to support and care for our clients and their families. But it's not just about hard work. It's about compassion, caring, understanding, and empathy. They truly have it all.

While the union and the government work towards a new contract, we held a lunch in Richmond to support their tireless efforts that meet every demand the job requires. Without them, DDA would not be able to accomplish all that it does.

The November 18th event was attended by the local singing group Re:Sisters, known for their acapella songs about people, community, and the rights of workers. BCGEU Union rep Shirley Shiagetz was also on hand to say a few supportive words to our staff. She told DDA management that in all her years as a union representative, she has never seen an event in support of staff like this.





TECH REVIEWS

BY: KEEGAN NEWBERRY
FINCH

PRODUCT: *Finch: Self Care Widget Pet* **PRODUCER:** *Finch Care INC* **COST:** *Free with optional in-app purchases* **COMPATABILITY:** *iOS/Android*

Finch is advertised as a daily journal and habit tracker with focus on self care activities. The developers of Finch have gamified self care by using a virtual bird to motivate users to complete daily goals. The user earns in-game currency and gains energy by completing various built-in tasks which help their bird grow, go on adventures, and even buy new outfits. The app offers journaling prompts, yoga and stretching routines, relaxing soundscapes, breathing exercises, ideas for daily goals, and a number of other related wellness features. This app is available on iOS and Android as a free download, with additional features accessible through a monthly subscription (\$7.99).

HIGHLIGHTS

- *Finch has a smart prompting feature: different exercises will be suggested based on your mood check-in and the time of day;*
- *The free version of the app still offers excellent access to all app features, with the subscription version simply expanding the range of choice available to the user;*
- *Visual symbols are paired with written text making it easier for users with low literacy levels to navigate within the app;*
- *Highly personalizable for both the motivational gamified aspects as well as the range of activities available for the user.*

LOWLIGHTS

- Difficult to hide features for users who may be overwhelmed by the number choices available on the screen at one time;
- For those motivated to use the app based on the gamified features only, progress can be too slow as their bird 'grows' and may not support long term use;
- Initial set-up can take significant time as the user must manually enter their daily routines (known as journeys); though there are goal prompts included to make this process easier;
- Though possible to use at varying literacy levels, many of the activities have written instructions that would not be suitable for early language learners.

STAR RATINGS

Ease of Use: Simple Instructions Helpful ★★★★★☆

Adaptability: Complete User Control ★★★★★★

Accessibility: Broad Range of Users Served ★★★★★★

Cost vs. Value: Free ★★★★★★

Overall Rating ★★★★★☆



FINAL WORD

Finch is a unique take on self care. The developers have avoided many of the pitfalls of similar gamified habit trackers by having in-game currency only earnable through completing tasks (rather than available for purchase) and using a virtual friend that develops its unique personality based directly off of user input – making no 2 finches the same. Finch Care Inc is dedicated to keeping Finch free and accessible to its users, and recently introduced a guardian program through which paid subscription users can donate a monthly subscription to other users who may not be able to afford it. It is absolutely not necessary to have a subscription to use the app, but there are a number of bonus features available for users who do choose to purchase a subscription.

The number of features included with Finch are what makes it stand out as an all-in-one wellness app, but this also acts as a potential barrier for users with differing ability levels. For those with high literacy, Finch is an excellent option for a daily scheduler, self care reminder, emotional regulation tool, and goal tracker. For those with limited written literacy, support teams should plan for additional set-up time before introducing Finch to the user and may want to consider pairing this app with built-in accessibility features such as, talk to text or voice over.

Overall, Finch is an app that has the potential to meet a wide range of needs for a diverse demographic of users. The development team releases regular updates that aim to make this app as inclusive and accessible as possible – recently released were accessibility tools, such as canes and glasses, so that users could style their bird in a way that gives positive representation of the disability community. Though there is still room for growth, this app is in its early days and is definitely one to keep your eye on as a potential support resource.

NEWSLETTER

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