



Developmental  
Disabilities Association

- SPRING 2023

# THE STAR



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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# WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

**BY: ALANNA HENDREN**  
DDA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I'm not sure if it's good news or bad news but the challenges facing people with developmental disabilities these days are the same challenges facing everyone else.

Housing is a huge obstacle to inclusion – for everyone. Finding affordable housing in a safe community is getting even more difficult since interest rates and rents went up dramatically post-COVID.

Accessing physicians, hospitals, specialists and community health care is a challenge for everyone these days, due to the pressures on the system related to COVID and Baby Boom retirements. Excess pressure on the system due to the ever-increasing number of seniors will continue for at least the next ten years, maybe longer.

Inflation has been a challenge for everyone since COVID ended because everyone wanted everything all at once when they could finally leave the house, but due to the staggered rates of re-opening in some countries like China, supply chains remain disrupted. Retirements by workers like truck drivers, pilots, longshoremen, and Port of Vancouver staff, along with severe weather in 2022 further slowed shipping, meaning that high demand and low supply causes inflation. The price of fuel also increased due to the war in Ukraine, which added more cost to any goods that needed to be shipped.

Costs have also increased because companies are starting to realize that the labour market is so tight these days that they have to pay their employees more. This further adds to the costs of goods but permits workers to keep up with the cost of living. So many workers are retiring and their replacements haven't learned their jobs yet so service has suffered. Lineups everywhere are growing longer and workers seem to know less and less about their duties. Everyone is paying more for less.

Government services are failing because their budgets have been cut for so many years in a climate of low taxation, especially for corporations and rich people. So many government services were privatized to companies who are in the game solely for profit, so most of us are left to fend for ourselves on our own. Government is also an unattractive employer for young people who have been raised with a more entrepreneurial mindset, making recruitment difficult.

Massive development in the Lower Mainland over the past 30 years has increased the need for more roads and rapid transit, yet SkyTrain does not reach many municipalities and no new roads were built to handle the influx of new residents anywhere, but especially in the Lower Mainland.



Substance abuse has gone out of control, with more people overdosing than ever before. This includes people with developmental disabilities, who can become addicted just like everyone else. Toxic supply is to blame in almost every case. There is no bigger tragedy than losing our citizens to a life of addiction and death but no solutions seem to be forthcoming. People continue to pile up on the streets of the Downtown Eastside. The 4 Pillars approach previously applied by the City of Vancouver excluded funding for the most important pillar - treatment, putting more pressure on emergency health care.

These challenges are not unique to Vancouver, B.C., or Canada. They are global and, like the challenge of climate change, will require global solutions. Wars and conflicts between nations benefit no one and hurt everyone. Same with spewing carbon into the air, trade disruptions, and government failures.

Of course, all these challenges cause stress for everyone. Humans today are bombarded with more stress-inducing signals than ever before. Just driving to work or taking transit can drive up blood pressure.

Twenty-five percent of Canadians are now suffering from mental health problems at any given time. This may be a natural reaction to the insanity of the world today, but the only thing we can do as individuals is get used to change, try not to take everything too seriously, replace electronics with nature, feel compassion for the stress everyone else is feeling, inhale, long exhale, inhale, sit quietly and calm your brain. We're all in this together. We need to take care of ourselves and each other if we are to survive on this beautiful, green-blue planet, glowing in the sun.





# - DDA's HOLIDAYS





# FUN AT THE DROP-IN

We have a lot of fun at the Drop In, especially when we go out with the friends we have known most of our lives. Many of our clients went to Oakridge School together, up until the mid-1970's. Then most of our clients worked at DDA workshops. Jerome really likes to make everyone laugh with his constant joking around, he is friendly to everyone and usually starts his conversations by saying something in French. At the Drop-In, individuals choose their activities, staff offer and explore activities and festivities put on in the community such as this picture taken at the Lunar New Year at the Metrotown Mall in Burnaby.



## - Celebrating **SUCCESS**

# ***HIS NAME IS NICHOLAS***

**INTERVIEW BY: EVAN KELLY**

In 2012, Veronika Kitzul's younger brother Nicholas experienced a traumatic brain injury. Still living with the effects of that injury, Nicholas has a life full of love and joy; a life that Veronika hopes will inspire children and adults to better understand living with a disability, and how we can all foster a more inclusive society. To that end, she and her mother have written and illustrated a free children's book, titled *His Name is Nicholas*. We got the chance to speak with Veronika for our podcast, and the following is a condensed version of that interview.

### **When did you get your start in the art world?**

I started drawing in a junior high and learned about art through high school and university receiving a minor in fine arts with my science degree. Since graduating, I've been working part time as an artist as more of a side business than a full time profession. I hope to always find time for art in the future. But I also hope to go back to school for something healthcare related like dentistry or naturopathic medicine.

### **Is art something that drives you to make a change in the world?**

Oh, definitely. The beauty of being an artist means that you have the ability to reach a wider audience and communicate visually in ways that other people cannot. There's nothing wrong with doing art for fun or for the challenge. But when you focus on a subject or a message and get the chance to exhibit it, you can show people a perspective that they may have never considered before.

### **What can you tell us about your brother?**

Nicholas was always an active kid. He would rather go bike riding, play soccer or play with Lego instead of playing video games. He



was well behaved, received good grades in school. And yeah, he was overall just a great kid. When he was eight years old, he had an accident at school. So the teachers required him to wear a hall pass on a non breakaway lanyard when he went to the washroom. The floor had been slippery and he fell, the lanyard somehow got caught on the bathroom door latch. Unable to free himself and, for lack of a better term, he was essentially strangled until another classmate saw him in the bathroom stall and informed the teacher that something seemed wrong. So from that he received an anoxic brain injury because the oxygen was cut off to his brain. The doctors at the hospital didn't give us much hope. They said he'd be a vegetable in a bed on drugs for the rest of his life, they implied that cutting off life support and organ donation would be better than living with no quality of life. Thankfully, my parents did not take no for an answer, especially my mom, she would stay up late every night researching alternative treatments and eventually wean him off all medications. So for several years, she quit her job just to take care of Nicholas and take him to therapies and treatments. Today, he's still wheelchair bound, and has a bit of trouble communicating. But he can say some words. And he has surpassed every low expectation that the Canadian doctors have given him.

### How did you and your mom make the book?

I was doing a self led project with Special Olympics based on spreading the word on inclusion. So naturally, I took inspiration from my family. And the fact that it really bothered us when kids stared at Nicholas. Additionally, I took a literature for youth class at university and remembered learning about the CCBC diversity statistics on children's books. In 2019, they found that only 3.4% percent of books had a character with a disability when the population of people with disabilities is much higher. There's a huge under representation of that, and as well as a lack of exposure and integration in schools, which is why I want to create a tool that could help teach kids about inclusion.

This is a free tool that anyone may use to teach about inclusion and intellectual disabilities. At the back there is a discussion section for parents and teachers to use with their kids so that they can discuss the topic and think critically about it. Anyone is welcome to contact me for a digital copy and print or distribute it as they like.

You can listen to the full interview at <https://communicationsz8.podbean.com/>

To get a copy of Veronika's book, you can email her at [veronikakitzul@gmail.com](mailto:veronikakitzul@gmail.com)



# DRAW-A-DINOSAUR CONTEST



They once roamed the earth, but now they roam our art studios. Our draw-a-dinosaur contest was a smash hit, so thank you to everybody who made it happen. Our first place winner was Trevor (above) from the Main Street drop-in, while Meagan and Loekie (below) from Robinson took second place.

If ever dinosaurs return to life through cloning or time travel, we know exactly who to get to do their portraits!

As always, you can find other incredible artwork for sale at [develop.bc.ca](http://develop.bc.ca) made by our immensely talented clients.



## Andrew Sheret Donation

It was the season of giving in December 2022, and we couldn't be happier about it! One B.C.-based company knows that very well indeed. For the second year in a row, Richmond's branch of Andrew Sheret has raised money to support DDA clients and programs.

Andrew Sheret general manager Connor Alexander says they have a point system for their own clients who can then donate points for cash that goes toward the non-profit organization Andrew Sheret chooses to support.

"We contacted some of our long-standing accounts and asked if they were interested in donating a portion of their Andrew Sheret reward points, which Andrew Sheret matched the amount that they were willing to donate," says Alexander.

He says seven local business stepped up to the plate to donate. In all, they gave a cheque to DDA for over 35 hundred dollars!



"One hundred percent of donations go towards programs that support our clients to help them reach their potential," says DDA communications manager Evan Kelly. "We are extremely grateful that Connor and his team, and the Andrew Sheret company take this on to help make a difference in people's lives."

Andrew Sheret has 33 branches in B.C. and raises thousands of dollars every year for a variety of local charities and non-profits.

"Andrew Sheret is a family owned company, the company believes it is very important to give back to our local communities in which we operate out of," adds Alexander.



# VSB TRANSITION FAIR



In February, DDA attended the Vancouver School Board Transition Fair. This forum offers information and resources to students with disabilities and their families, who are preparing to make the transition into adult life. This was a great opportunity to highlight the variety of ways we can support youth and their families who are preparing for this big life change.

DDA offers a life skills program for youth, the Youth Transition program, which helps youth focus on goals they have for their transition to adult life. Goals are often around resume writing, applying for post-secondary education, money management, and bus training to name a few. This program requires a referral from MCFD. JobsWest is DDA's Supported Employment program, which works with youth and adults who need some extra support to find (and keep) meaningful employment. To learn more about JobsWest, you can call the program at 604-732-7776.

The Transition Fair also allowed us to highlight our Family Support Program, which can help families with many different areas of service planning, system navigation, and connecting to resources. If this sounds like something you would like help with, you can call us at 604-327-9111. It was a pleasure meeting with so many youth and their families, and we look forward to doing this again!

## DDA's Pierre Tardif Retires After 42 Years

We caught up with Pierre to ask him about his time at DDA and his plans for the future.

**42 years is a long time in one organization, what made you stay with DDA for so long?**

42 years is a long time; it makes you think how fast years go by. For me, the reward I got during those years, is knowing that I made a difference in people's life.

**What would you say to people who are thinking about this line of work?**

At DDA there is a lot of opportunity for growth and change. You can stay with the company but try different things. You can help people and make a difference in a lot of different ways. I have a sense of work-life balance and felt seen as a person.

**What are your plans for the future?**

First on the agenda is to enjoy life. I will enjoy going skiing for the next little while; maybe golfing too. Will have all the time now, to visit family in Montreal. I will definitely stay in touch with DDA. After 42 years, it's inevitable.

*Good Luck!*





# CANADA HOUSING BENEFIT

The Government of Canada has introduced a new affordability measure to help lower-income renters who are most affected by the rise of inflation and struggling with the cost of rent. The one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit provides eligible applicants with a one-time payment of \$500. It is estimated that roughly 1.8 million lower-income renters will be able to benefit from this targeted investment.

To make it as easy as possible for Canadians to get the financial support they need, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) is leveraging its experience administering essential benefits to Canadians, to deliver a smooth, secure, and user-friendly application process. The information below will help guide you through some of the important questions that you might have when it comes to eligibility, how to apply, and how you can get your payments faster.

## Who is eligible and how much money can I receive?

The one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit is a tax-free payment of \$500 to eligible applicants. To be eligible for the one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit, applicants must:

- have filed a 2021 tax return;
- be at least 15 years of age as of December 1, 2022;
- be a resident of Canada in 2022 for tax purposes;
- have a principal residence located in Canada on December 1, 2022
- have an adjusted family net income of \$20,000 or less for individuals, or \$35,000 or less for families;
- have paid at least 30% of their 2021 adjusted family net income on rent for their principal residence in the 2022 calendar year; and
- be able to provide their 2022 address(es) and landlord's contact information.

## How to apply

Applicants will be able to apply for the one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit on December 12, 2022, up until March 31, 2023, and are encouraged to apply online through CRA My Account, which is the quickest, easiest and most secure way to apply for the benefit. If you don't have a CRA My Account, register now. You do not need to wait for your security code in the mail. You can still access limited services in My Account to apply for this benefit immediately. Applicants can also sign in to their My Service Canada Account to securely access CRA's My Account without having to sign in again or revalidate their identity.

A web form will also be available to submit applications without having to sign in to My Account or My Service Canada Account. Address and direct deposit changes will not be permitted using the web form – if applicants haven't updated their personal and banking information, they should apply through the CRA My Account.

Applicants unable to apply for the benefit online can call 1-800-282-8079 to complete their application with an agent. If you apply through My Account or by phone, and are signed up for direct deposit, you can get your payment within five business days.

# JOBS WEST SUCCESS STORY

**BY: JASON DHATT**

In 2016, Lily joined Jobs West Employment Services after participating in DDA's Youth Transition Program, funded through MCFD. Throughout her time with Jobs West, she participated in many volunteer and work experiences. While gaining new skills and committing to her vocational goals, Lily obtained 2 paid part-time positions.

We would like to congratulate Lily on making a positive impact in her new paid position at This World's Ours Centre, an inclusive centre in the heart of Vancouver that offers a variety of programs for neurodiverse children and families. Lily first attended regular programming at the center prior to her coming on as staff. Through Lily's own connections, a paid position was created and customized based on Lily's skillset and the center's needs. Lily started at This World's Ours Centre in October and has quickly become an invaluable member of the staff. Her duties include cleaning the center, assisting with after-school programming, and greeting members.

"It has been a pleasure having Lily work at This World's Ours Centre as she is a hard worker, a calm presence, and always willing to jump in and help where needed. We hope to continue having Lily be a part of our team for a long time to come as the staff and participants really enjoy having her at the center." – Koryn Heisler, Owner, This World's Ours Centre.

Lily has worked very hard over the past 4 months to maintain the position and bring a great attitude to her shifts. Lily has done this while maintaining her other job at Winners where she has worked since 2019. Way to go Lily!





## - Tech REVIEWS

**BY: KEEGAN NEWBERRY**

### Skullcandy Hesh ANC

**PRODUCT:** Skullcandy Hesh ANC Noise Cancelling Wireless Headphones **PRODUCER:** Skullcandy **COST:** ~\$149.99 CND (Varies by vendor)  
**COMPATABILITY:** iOS/Android

Skullcandy's Hesh ANC Noise Cancelling Wireless Headphones are advertised as providing quality audio with an exceptional noise cancelling experience at a significantly lower cost than other similar products on the market. Hesh ANC Headphones use active noise cancelling technology with 4 microphones designated to read and filter out extraneous noise in your surroundings with or without music playing. These headphones offer an additional ambient mode to allow all sounds to be heard when needed.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Wireless, Bluetooth connection – offers built in tile technology to ensure you can easily locate your headphones;
- Noise cancelling can be used without needing to connect to a device, with excellent performance for consistent or uniform background noise;
- Up to 22 hours of use and rapid recharge giving 3 hours of use for every 10 minutes of charging;
- Very user friendly, quick to connect and switch between ambient and ANC modes.



## LOWLIGHTS

- Can only be paired with one device at a time, which can be a set-up challenge for those who regularly switch between phone/tablet;
- Does not perform as well with varied or unexpected sounds – though the ear pads do offer basic noise blocking that helps for any sounds the ANC system cannot catch;
- Recorded voice announces aloud when headphones move between modes, making these less ideal for discrete adjustments;
- Foldable for easy stowing, but may not standup long- term to heavy use by less-delicate users.

## STAR RATINGS

*Ease of Use:* Easy with practice ★★★★★☆

*Adaptability:* Wide variety of settings available ★★★★★☆

*Accessibility:* Suitable for most users ★★★★★☆

*Cost vs. Value:* Worthwhile expense ★★★★★☆

*Overall Rating* ★★★★★☆



## FINAL WORD

Skullcandy's Hesh ANC Headphones performed well under testing. They were able to block out nearly all natural background noise (i.e. humming of lights, electricity, outdoor traffic sounds, etc.) with or without the use of music. When tested against live instruments, the ANC activated to reduce distortion associated with indoor performances while giving the user a clean sound experience to enjoy the music. ANC mode did significantly muffle speech, but ambient mode was handy to quickly allow sound through when needed.

The ability to use noise cancelling independently allows this device to act as a discrete sensory tool, and it is available in multiple colours to suit personal preferences. The headphones are well priced – significantly outperforming lower cost models which rely on dense ear pads to muffle sound, while providing a clean audio experience nearly on par with its much costlier competitors.

# LEISURE FAIR 2023

## JOIN US AT OUR UPCOMING LEISURE FAIR 2023!

Explore Lower Mainland recreation activities for children and youth with disabilities.




Children are welcome to attend!

SUNSET COMMUNITY CENTRE (GYM)  
6810 Main Street, Vancouver, BC, V5X 0A1

Tuesday, April 4, 2023  
5:30PM - 7:30PM

FREE  
EVENT



-  3 MAIN (Main Street and 51st Ave bus stop)
-  3 DOWNTOWN (Main Street and 51st Ave bus stop)
-  Sunset Community Centre (2 minute walk from the stops)

For more information, contact Shixin Gao at [sgao@develop.bc.ca](mailto:sgao@develop.bc.ca) or 604 301 2831 or visit us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/leisurefair](https://www.facebook.com/leisurefair)



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# NEWSLETTER

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